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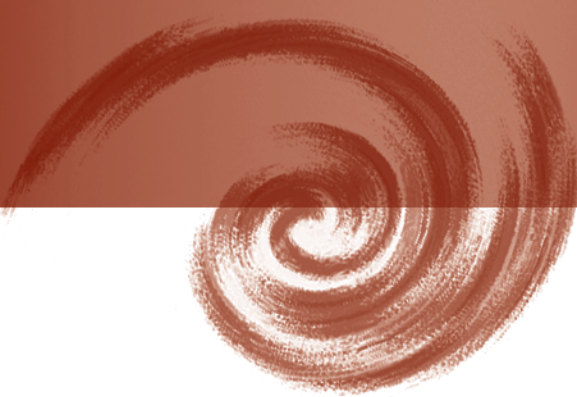
# Research Bulletin

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*Waldorf*  
EDUCATION



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# Editor's Introduction

**Ilan Safit**

**A**lmost a full year has passed since the publication of the previous issue of the *Research Bulletin*, and with the current issue, we are launching our new schedule of publication, in which the *Bulletin*, for a variety of practical reasons, is now an annual journal. We hope that a single, bulkier issue would be even more helpful to practicing Waldorf educators in remaining informed and inspired by the ideas, research, and initiatives arising from the work conducted in and around Waldorf schools throughout North America and beyond.

With this goal in mind, we turn in this issue to a topic we have brushed against in previous volumes, specifically those that surveyed current and emerging directions in Waldorf education. In one such volume, the post-COVID Fall/Winter 2022 issue, we read the words of Megan Sullivan, of the Sacramento Waldorf School, who wrote: “If you are teaching today, you are teaching children who have experienced trauma.” An unofficial, fully anecdotal survey to check the accuracy of this statement confirmed, at the very least, that teachers throughout the grades agree that their students today seem to be facing greater challenges than before in their social lives and certainly with their emotional struggles. Social Emotional Learning, the topic of Sullivan’s 2022 article and the subject of her teaching for the past 15 years, is clearly very much in need. For this reason, we invited Megan Sullivan to expand the scope on the kind of Social Emotional Learning, or SEL, she practices with middle and high school students, as we dedicate this issue of the *Bulletin* to the theme of Social Emotional Learning.

Some of the articles included here directly address social and emotional aspects of education and use the SEL phrases often. Others describe aspects of Waldorf education or specific practices from the classroom that clearly aim at the social and emotional development of the students, across a variety of grades and ages, without reverting to the language of SEL. This is because for many Waldorf teachers, everything in their pedagogy is intentionally directed at the emotional—and thereby social—development of children and adolescents. By setting side-by-side these two approaches—the one that explicitly learns and borrows from the separately developed terminology and awareness of SEL, and the one that underscores the social and emotional aspects inherent to Waldorf education—we hope that readers will be able to benefit from both.

In Megan Sullivan’s opening article, we note a clear connection between the ideas underpinning the SEL approach and those motivating current thinking on teaching social justice. These two issues—Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)—will continue to cross paths, or intersect, as the lingo goes, in other articles. Here it would be good to note Sullivan’s clarity on the shared basis of the two.

Sullivan writes: “Just as the antiracist movement is agitating, fighting, and advocating for equity and justice, a non-pathologizing view of mental health and psychological distress is centered on human dignity and looking to a larger context that holds human suffering beyond the responsibility of an individual.” This point, repeated in several other articles collected here, contends that social and emotional “disorders” are indications of systemic flaws in society rather than in the individuals whose experiences and sometimes skills are different from what is considered the norm. It calls for a shift from diagnosing and treating individuals as abnormal to focusing on the problematic structures of social systems and their standards of normalcy and divergence.

Vivian Jones-Schmidt, an experienced class teacher, administrator, and a new member of the Research Institute’s Board of Trustees, reviews the diagnoses of trauma in children and offers a systematic set of classroom activities that address, through rhythm and movement, the deficits created by childhood trauma.

Veteran early childhood educator, and educator of early childhood educators, Nancy Blanning, takes us back to the beginning – both of Waldorf education in Steiner’s guiding indications and of the educational journey in nurseries and early grade classrooms – to describe the ways early-age Waldorf pedagogy is focused on emotional and social development. In her article, which is also included in a new collection of essays on early childhood education coming from the WECAN’s Early Childhood Research Group, Blanning explains the role of classroom activities in supporting the development of the various senses described in Steiner’s lectures.

Corinna Rezzelle-Pennypacker focuses on puppetry work with young children and draws on both Steiner’s indications and the academic work that informs the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional

Learning (CASEL). However, Rezzelle-Pennypacker, who has been using puppetry in her various classrooms for quite a while, eventually seems to learn the most from her own students. “Puppetry has not ‘saved’ my students as of yet,” she writes. “However, it has put them on the right path of personal growth and unleashed their creativity in ways that the typical drama class and the standardized SEL curriculum was not able to do for them.” Specific descriptions of the kind of pedagogical work made possible through puppetry are offered in her article, “Hands that Learn: Using Puppetry to Engage Students in Social-Emotional Learning.”

Defne Caldwell, of Green Meadow Waldorf School, shares her work with high school students, where literature serves as a crucial tool in the emotional and social development of adolescents. Caldwell’s article neatly exemplifies a description of the kind of social and emotional pedagogy practiced in the Waldorf high school without drawing from the SEL cookbook, so to speak, or alluding to its underlying set of principles.

Brian Scannell explores here the biography and teachings of the third century mystic and prophet Mani. Scannell sees pedagogical-therapeutic value in the Manichean view in which opposites complement each other to form a reconciled whole and offers here a Mani-inspired contemporary curriculum addressing adolescent trauma. The article then takes a turn to address what the author sees as a dividing practice in current Waldorf communities: the approaches to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, or DEI, as currently practiced in various progressive and Waldorf schools across the country. According to Scannell, DEI in its current model has become more an agent of division than inclusion. The solution to adult drama, he suggests, is the same one as to adolescent trauma: learning from Mani how to integrate fragmenting, oppositional forces into a complementary, healing wholeness.

Brad Kershner, Dean of the Kimberton Waldorf School, follows suit with another call to review and revise the DEI curriculum. Kershner’s article is focused more on DEI than SEL, but his entry point is located precisely at the paths-crossing of the two. His wide scope, “Big History” foray into our cultural and spiritual moment notes that “our children are becoming increasingly confused and distressed, in part because we are not providing adequate clarity and reassurance regarding what it means to be human. They are getting mixed messages, to say the least.” Aiming to set the messaging straight, Kershner offers to replace the DEI categories of “Diversity,” “Equity,” and “Inclusion,” with “Diversity,” “Empathy,” and “Integration,” a substitution he advances through an impassioned critique of DEI run amok and an extensive tour through a contemporary

mode of spirituality that is un-divorced from science, technology, politics, and social trends. The article’s broad-stroke and all-inclusive approach is also highly informative of a new kind of voice or inquisitive genre in which the question of human evolution is picked up in a different and intriguing mode.

Finally, to note the *Research Bulletin’s* earlier awareness to the issues of SEL, we are reprinting here an essay by the celebrated Waldorf educator David Mitchell. Mitchell not only left his mark on several Waldorf schools across the country through years of teaching, he also founded our Waldorf Online Library and the first iteration of Waldorf Publications. In his essay, originally published 15 years ago (Autumn 2009), Mitchell starts out by reviewing the ways contemporary neuroscience has been catching up to the idea that one’s emotional life takes various critical roles in one’s education, leading to the implication that education has a crucial role in supporting and guiding children and adolescents’ social and emotional lives. He then continues to describe some of the ways Waldorf education addresses this task and offers a Waldorf social-emotional skills curriculum for high school (p. 78). We hope that between David Mitchell’s earlier suggestions and the contemporary collection offered here, teachers and researchers would find sufficient beginnings for the task of tweaking curricula to meet the needs of the current generation.

To wrap up the theme of this issue, we take a turn to what can be perceived as social and emotional aspects in the life of faculty. Otherwise said, we conclude with personal reflections on the experiences of a life-long Waldorf teacher. John Anderson, whose teaching career spans five countries and four decades, offers here a set of anecdotes and insights from his long journey along the Waldorf routes that lead to the rediscovery of anthroposophy in the classroom experience – a social, emotional, and highly recommended read!

Our issue concludes with our regular reports from the Research Institute for Waldorf Education and the Waldorf Online Library, a recognition of our donors and supporters, as well as an index of all articles published in the *Research Bulletin* so far. You should be able to access all these articles online through the “Journals” tab on the Waldorf Online Library website.

As we wish you pleasant readings, we are also inviting you to review the Call for Submissions included on the last page and to consider sharing your work, research, and thoughts with the wider community in our next annual issue of the *Research Bulletin*.

# Getting Started with Teaching Social and Emotional Learning

Megan Sullivan



**I** am writing this article for any current teacher who is Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curious or leaning. I taught an introduction to teaching SEL class this past summer at the Sacramento Waldorf School. The class was an hour-and-a-half long and it gave an overview of the basic shape of the SEL classes that I teach in middle school and high school. I did my best to highlight the capacities I aim to develop in my students and to introduce some entry-level activities that all teachers can incorporate in their classrooms in support of their students' social and emotional learning needs. Preparing for and then teaching teachers this material over the summer has prompted me to consider what is important and how does a teacher step more into this work. This article is a road map or a traveler's guide to the journey I have been on. I will be including below a list of books, chapters, articles, and other resources that have been important for me on my journey and development as a social and emotional learning teacher.

I want you to know that I am a teacher first. I know how to teach and how to hold a classroom full of students. I am not writing about this general practice here. I am going to assume you know how to teach or you will find that support somewhere else. The current article is about teaching social and emotional learning if your aim is to support your students in this way.

For more about what I mean by social and emotional learning, or my own journey in teaching it, I refer you back to an earlier article I've published in the *Research Bulletin*: "Teaching Social Emotional Learning in a Waldorf School".<sup>1</sup>

## Preconditions

I think there are preconditions for teaching. You should like children, that's an important one. You should like learning, even if it is hard won through your own struggles. You should have an engaged and enthusiastic relationship with the material you are teaching.

I think there are preconditions for being a Waldorf teacher, too. You should have an interest, even if it is an emerging interest, in the deeper underpinnings of

Waldorf education. These should resonate with you, even if you can't quite articulate why yet. You know you are on a path. There is something deep inside of you that has committed to something that maybe you can't quite name.

I want to share with you what I consider to be essential preconditions to social and emotional learning teaching. It does not mean that one has them all sorted, all neatly tied up, accomplished, or checked off on a list. These are preconditions for a commitment to a path, to a way of showing up, to a way of knowing that you are a work in progress, but you are doing the work bravely and honestly.

The first thing I want to highlight has to do with you as a human being and how you stand in front of young people. Are you developing, growing, and reflecting? Are you self-aware? Are you doing your work to become the person you want to be? Children, especially teens, will feel the dissonance if you are not. To be more exact: if you are teaching about social and emotional capacities and values that you yourself are not inwardly focusing on in your own development and growth, it does not work. Again, this does not mean that you are expected to be finished, polished, and done. It means you are actively working on the same capacities you are teaching your students. Do you have a daily practice of slowing down and of inner reflection? This, dear teacher, needs to be part of the preparation work you do for each class.

How are you self-attentive? From this primary foundation of inner work, you can stand in front of your students knowing you are not asking them to do anything that you yourself are not doing. Who you are and how you are is as important as what you directly teach in a lesson. Orland Bishop, author of *The Seventh Shrine: Meditations on the African Spiritual Journey*, is someone I am turning to right now for inner work, inspiration, and guidance. In his book, Bishop explains that inner work as an initiation path "brings the human being constantly towards the threshold of asking: How must I be so that you can be free? How do I host the freedom of the other, the development of the other,

<sup>1</sup> *Research Bulletin*, Fall/Winter 2022, Volume 27-1, 42-49.  
[https://www.waldorflibrary.org/images/RB27\\_1sullivan.pdf](https://www.waldorflibrary.org/images/RB27_1sullivan.pdf)

and the greater truth of the other?"<sup>2</sup> I can think of no greater task of a teacher than this.

### Questions for precondition #1:

- What is your inner work practice?
- How are you slowing down and turning inward?
- What is your daily practice for stress relief and grounding?

The second precondition is a commitment to creating a safe classroom for all of your students. Such a classroom takes into account the students' lived experiences, their stories – both what you know and don't know, their culture, their identities, and their need as human beings to be seen, treated with care, and to belong. At its best, a classroom that centers SEL this way becomes a place of support and growth. Without an emphasis on these things, SEL can become a class where we erase or hurt our students.

Dena Simmons, a leader in equity and liberatory-centered SEL, states, "What's the point of teaching children about conflict resolution skills if we're not talking about the conflicts that exist because of racism or white supremacy?" Without this nuance, she says, SEL risks turning into "white supremacy with a hug."<sup>3</sup> If this quote stirs a charge in you, if you've become reactive or had some feelings, then this section is for you for two reasons.

The first is that unless you can enter conversations, which currently are very divisive in the U.S., with openness and a commitment to engage with discomfort and your edge of learning, including accountability, you will not be able to support your students to do so themselves – and they need to learn how to do this. We are doing our children a disservice if we are not modeling and teaching how to enter and engage in conversations about diversity, equity, and justice.

The second is that there is a potential for harm when you are not doing the work of understanding social injustices while there are children in your classroom who have a different background than yours in any way—race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, first language, ability, neurotype, gender, sex, sexual identity,

and socioeconomic status. And I know that you, dear teacher, hate the idea of unintentionally harming your students. Because I do, too. I hate it; it makes me sick to my stomach and fills me with anxiety. And yet, I have done it. The privilege I hold through my different identities has allowed me to maintain ignorance. This privilege and ignorance has resulted in my teaching from my own lived experience, without taking into account who else was in the room. This has led to making some of my students feel isolated, lonely, and like they do not belong. Ouch. I hate that. And so, I work hard every day to see beyond my own borders. I read, I watch, I follow, and I face myself. And I grow. For my students, I grow.

To understand the importance of teaching SEL from an equity and culturally responsive framework, I recommend reading this study: "'Not Try to Save Them or Ask Them to Breathe through Their Oppression': Educator Perceptions and the Need for a Human-Centered, Liberatory Approach to Social and Emotional Learning." The following excerpt demonstrates what is meant by culturally responsive:

For example, a white, straight, cisgender, female teacher, who lacks self-awareness about her positionality and who has no exposure to culturally responsive pedagogy, may teach SEL through her worldview without consideration of how her lens does not reflect the reality of her students, especially those who have been systemically marginalized. She might include content relevant to her lived experiences but fail to add content that is relevant to her students'

**If you are teaching about social and emotional capacities and values that you yourself are not inwardly focusing on in your own development and growth, it does not work.**

lives, contributing to students' feeling like they do not belong. She might even teach a particular skill that is inconsistent with students' cultures such as demanding eye contact as a sign of respect when, in many Asian, Latinx, and African cultures, eye contact could be regarded as a sign of defiance and disrespect (Wages, 2015). That is, culture plays a role in how SEL competencies are developed and expressed (Hecht and Shin, 2015) and thus needs specific attention. In contrast, that same teacher can build awareness of how to implement SEL in ways that honors students for their identities and experiences rather than restricting them to a narrow view of what is "acceptable" or "appropriate." She would welcome and teach multiple expressions of respect (and other emotions) instead of ostracizing students, who lower and avert their eyes as a sign of respect. Through practicing

2 Orland Bishop, *The Seventh Shrine: Meditations on the African Spiritual Journey: From the Middle Passage to the Mountaintop* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2017), 167.

3 Mary Jo Madda, "Dena Simmons: Without Context, Social-Emotional Learning Can Backfire," EdSurge News, May 15, 2019, <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2019-05-15-dena-simmons-without-context-social-emotional-learning-can-backfire>.

self-reflection and self-awareness, developing cultural humility, and gaining exposure to culturally responsive pedagogy, educators can expand their knowledge of how to use SEL to humanize and honor all students.<sup>4</sup>

The first part of this excerpt is me! Before I knew better, I

- told biographies that were mostly white European;
- always said ‘mum’ and ‘dad’ or other expressions that reflected my families’ constellation;
- taught sex education referring to one type of sex leaving out my queer and gay students;
- celebrated my own religious holidays while not even knowing some of my students;

This is not an exhaustive list! I wish that while writing this I could report I am on the other side of my learning edge, but I am not. I am still learning to see what I don’t know yet, and I find it painful. Recently I had a middle school class point out to me another one of my blind spots, and I went into my usual spin—the spin where there is shame and a tendency to defend, hide, run, or blame. I am proud that this past spin only lasted a couple of days and then I had a frank talk with myself, rolled up my sleeves, and faced my shortcomings with love for my courageous students who trusted me enough to let me know where I still needed to work to support them. This work is not comfortable for me, but growth rarely is.

The following resources have helped me grow:

I appreciate the questions below taken from Abolitionist Teaching Network’s “Guide for Racial Justice and Abolitionist Social and Emotional Learning”:<sup>5</sup>

### Questions Abolitionist Teachers Can Ask to Build Relationships with Students:

1. What can you tell me that helps me better understand you as a person?
2. How can I be the best teacher for you?
3. How can your school be a place where you feel seen, valued, and excited to learn?
4. What matters most to you (i.e., in life, at school, in your community)?
5. How can I support you mentally, emotionally, and in your community?

In my development as a culturally responsive teacher, I have worked with chapter 4 from *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, by Zaretta Hammond (Corwin, 2015).

In understanding culture rules of emotional expression, I have turned to *Between Us: How Cultures Create Emotions*, by Batja Mesquita (W. W. Norton, 2022).

I follow Dena Simmons from LiberatED<sup>6</sup> on Instagram and then I follow people she follows. In other words, I find people who are leaders in equity and justice work for ongoing recalibration and thought seeds, so that daily I am seeing beyond my own small world. And I do this for the many ways that we are as human beings. I try to broaden the scope of what I grew up with, what stories I know, who I surround myself with, and what I think I know.

The California Department of Education has developed a framework for social and emotional capacities for students K-12 that highlights the importance of a transformative approach to SEL that features all students’ belonging and dignity. The California T-SEL Competencies is a great place to turn to outline the capacities, which you are supporting your students to develop.<sup>7</sup>

Part of my work in unpacking who I am in the world and what I know and don’t know has led me to understand that I have had a limited and narrow understanding of human beings and their experiences in the world, and that this limited understanding does not align with my values. I hold as an intrinsic value that there are so many ways to be a human being. There is no right way. We are all ok. As part of my values and my work of unpacking what I know and don’t know, I have shifted away from pathologizing language that is deficit-based, that tells a human being that they are broken and disordered. You can recognize a pathology-based view by terms such as “disorder,” “symptoms,” “condition,” “treatment,” and “epidemic.” A pathology lens is based on the idea that there is one “normal” way to be. Language matters. To understand more about pathologizing language watch Jonathan Mooney’s talk on embracing difference that he gave to educators in 2013.<sup>8</sup> Mooney advocates for a paradigm shift from a deficit model to an asset model. This is the neurodiversity paradigm.

4 Meiko Lin et al., “‘Not Try to Save Them or Ask Them to Breathe through Their Oppression’: Educator Perceptions and the Need for a Human-Centered, Liberatory Approach to Social and Emotional Learning,” *Frontiers in Education* 7 (2023), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/educ.2022.1044730>.

5 <https://abolitionistteachingnetwork.org/guide>

6 “LiberatED (@liberated\_sel) [https://www.instagram.com/liberated\\_sel/](https://www.instagram.com/liberated_sel/)

7 <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/se/tsselcompetencies.asp>

8 Jonathan Mooney Inspires New Perspectives And Laughter At The 2013 YAI International Conference, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLBGyNPHnys>.

I had the great fortune of studying with Dr. Nick Walker<sup>9</sup> and I highly recommend her work if you want to understand more about the neurodiversity movement. Walker writes with authority about the pathology paradigm when she challenges the deficit and disordered language that dominates discourse around autism. Walker advocates for a neurodivergence paradigm and welcomes and celebrates diversity of human minds and neurocognitive functioning.

What this means to me as a teacher: I am neurotypical (NT). My sensory and cognitive functions are considered typical. I am rarely overwhelmed by my sensory experiences. I can process quickly. I can respond in ways that are deemed appropriate by the norms of our society. But not all of my students have my experience. I teach students who have a different sensory experience and cognitive function than me. This is not wrong, or something that needs to be fixed. It is just a different experience. Here is an example from Nick Walker of a sensory experience that is different to what I experience:

It's a bright cool Sunday in Berkeley, and when I step into my aikido dojo the sun is singing through the skylights, suffusing the big airy space and making shiny hot pools of white on the rich vibrant blue of the mat. That vibrant expanse of blue makes a low soft thrumming and gives me a feeling of warm wide open spaces behind me and in the lower part of my lungs. The sunlight sounds like a choir of angels, and together with the pleasantly humming mint-flavored whiteness of walls makes my skin tingle and opens luminous sky in my chest and all around my head. I inhale into that space and the cool air fills my head with exhilarating white blue and brings new, higher harmonies into the choir.<sup>10</sup>

**I have shifted away from pathologizing language that is deficit-based, that tells a human being that they are broken and disordered.**

My sensory experiences, in contrast to what Walker shares here, are so bland. I wish I knew what it was to experience sunlight in this way. It is vital for me, as a teacher, to know that my students might be seeing, hearing, feeling, perceiving the world around them, and in particular, in my classroom, in a more complex way than I do. Autistic people, for example, take in more than me, and while it may be overwhelming or chaotic, it is not wrong. As a teacher, I have until

recently set up my classroom and my presentations and lessons with my sensory lens. Having an understanding for sensory experiences that are different than mine can make my classroom more accessible and inclusive. Because autistic people have historically been (and still are) treated in a pathology paradigm as having deficits, some autistic activists have turned the table by suggesting that it is the neurotypicals (NTs) who have deficits. What if NTs were the ones who are lacking? Steve Silberman, in a TedTalk called *The Forgotten History of Autism*, says, “by autistic standards, the normal brain is easily distractible, obsessively social, and suffers from deficit of attention to detail.”<sup>11</sup> This is a good reversal and it helped me begin to see my blind-spots and assumptions. Just as being white has shielded me from whiteness and from being fully awake to racial injustice, my NT has protected me from seeing the world from a neurodivergent experience.

A part of equity and justice based SEL that resonates strongly with me is the directive to look beyond the quick and surface level tendency of locating a problem or issue with the individual and instead looking at broader contexts for understanding. For example, if we are teaching emotional regulation without pointing out that sometimes stress, worry, grief, hardship, and trauma, are impacted by systemic issues, we are then placing the burden on the individual rather than on where the problem really lives: the environment and

the conditions and systems that created such issues. This is an important distinction and orientation when it comes to psychological distress. In *The Myth of Normal*, Gabor Maté asks “Why are we diagnosing children with disorder, instead of “diagnosing” – and treating – their families, communities, schools,

and society?”<sup>12</sup> Because mental health is an important component of SEL we need to investigate the stories we know about mental health and mental illness.

I have deeply felt a calling to address a fundamental question that I have seen so many of my students hold—“Am I OK?” It started for me in 1997, when a seventh grade student cried in front of his classmates: “I thought something was wrong with me!” This statement, blurted in my classroom, heralded in my work. Now, my gesture to the students who find their way to my classroom is: You are not broken. There is nothing

<sup>9</sup> Nick Walker, “NEUROQUEER,” July 31, 2021, <https://neuroqueer.com/academia/>

<sup>10</sup> Nick Walker, *The Real Experts: Readings for Parents of Autistic Children*, ed. Michelle Sutton (Fort Worth, TX: Autonomous Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Steve Silberman, “Steve Silberman: The Forgotten History of Autism | TED Talk,” accessed August 27, 2023, [https://www.ted.com/talks/steve\\_silberman\\_the\\_forgotten\\_history\\_of\\_autism?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/steve_silberman_the_forgotten_history_of_autism?language=en)

<sup>12</sup> Gabor Maté MD and Daniel Maté, *The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness, and Healing in a Toxic Culture* (New York: Avery, 2022).

wrong with you. You might be feeling appropriate feelings for the situation. It is ok to feel those feelings. You are not always going to be comfortable or happy. You are OK. You are not broken. It is not you. I believe that it is vital to consider where our ideas of mental health and mental illness come from in a time when anxiety and depression are a fixture in our classrooms and homes. Just as the antiracist movement is agitating, fighting, and advocating for equity and justice, a non-pathologizing view of mental health and psychological distress is centered on human dignity and looking to a larger context that holds human suffering beyond the responsibility of an individual.

The following two quotes capture this paradigm: “Maybe there is nothing wrong with you. Maybe it’s just really difficult to exist within a system that was not designed to support a spirit like yours,”<sup>13</sup> and “It is no measure of good health to be well adjusted to a sick society.”<sup>14</sup> Can you feel the difference between the thought that your anxiety is a disorder that originates in you and the one that suggests that your anxiety is a symptom of something bigger than you? Just starting to hold this difference creates a space where you will hold your students differently. For my students, my inward holding is: ‘You, beautiful child, are not broken, you are beautifully, exquisitely awake and alive in a time that is vibrating with change and crisis.’ Of this time, Orland Bishop writes:

The cultural time in which we find ourselves is a time of radical transition. Major changes are occurring in every system – cultural, economic, ecological, and spiritual. We humans are being brought to a threshold not just to fix the systems but also to create a sustainable future.<sup>15</sup>

This is the larger context for considering mental health and psychological distress. There are many good reasons to be distressed right now. Let’s stop calling distress a disorder of the individual and consider them a disorder of the place. Rather than fix the disorder in the child, let us bolster the child with resources to meet the threshold of this time. That is the larger context of SEL capacity building. Our task as educators is not to fix the child but to build capacities to meet this time.

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13 @conscious conversations

14 <https://kfoundation.org/it-is-no-measure-of-health-to-be-well-adjusted-to-a-profoundly-sick-society/>

15 Orland Bishop, *The Seventh Shrine: Meditations on the African Spiritual Journey: From the Middle Passage to the Mountaintop* (Hudson, NY: SteinerBooks/Lindisfarne Books, 2017).

## Healing Centered Engagement

In the developing field of trauma literacy, there has been a movement in questions aimed at understanding behavior. “What is wrong with you?” has been replaced with “What happened to you?” Shawn Ginwright, in his article, “The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement”, introduces a further development by adding, “What is right with you?” Ginwright highlights the importance of

what we see in our children and what we focus on. He advocates for an approach that combines the many parts I have discussed so far. Ginwright writes:

Healing centered engagement is akin to the South African term “Ubuntu,” meaning that humanness is found through our inter-

dependence, collective engagement and service to others. Additionally, healing centered engagement offers an asset driven approach aimed at the holistic restoration of young peoples’ well-being. The healing centered approach comes from the idea that people are not harmed in a vacuum, and well-being comes from participating in transforming the root causes of the harm within institutions. Healing centered engagement also advances the move to “strengths-based” care and away from the deficit-based mental health models that drives therapeutic interventions.<sup>16</sup>

In my perfect world, when I am teaching SEL from a conscious and striving place, this means that I am slowing down and trying to see my students. It means that I am broadening my lens to see my students beyond my own lived experience, and I am building my and my students’ capacities for a transformative approach to SEL. And it means I am trauma informed but not trauma focused. In my work to be more trauma informed, I have turned to Peter Levine’s work. If you want to know more about trauma, start with *Trauma-Proofing Your Kids: A Parents’ Guide for Instilling Confidence, Joy, and Resilience*, by Peter A. Levine and Maggie Kline (North Atlantic Books, 2008). If you want an Anthroposophical understanding of trauma read *Educating Traumatized Children: Waldorf Education in Crisis Intervention* by Bernd Ruf (SteinerBooks/Lindisfarne Books, 2012). If you are going to do any mindfulness or grounding type activities with students read *Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing* by David A. Treleaven (W. W. Norton, 2018).

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16 Shawn Ginwright, “The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement,” Medium, March 28, 2019, <https://medium.com/@ginwright/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c>.

Take a training with Trauma Literacy<sup>17</sup> who do an outstanding job of addressing trauma in a larger context of social injustice and give educators resources to enter this work thoughtfully.

## Resources for Teaching Social and Emotional Learning

Perhaps the most simplified description of what I aim to do in an SEL class would state that I try to help students learn to connect meaningfully to other people. A recent book that I think is an important read for folks in private Waldorf schools in North America is called *Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic and What We Can Do About It*, by Jennifer Breheny Wallace (Portfolio, 2023). The author investigates the pressure our young people are experiencing and, through extensive research, comes away with a clear message: *mat-tering*—that is feeling like you belong, are valued, and feel connected to others—is the remedy and the secret sauce to wellness and thriving. In *The Myth of Normal*, Gabor Maté quotes Dr. Bruce Perry saying: “Adverse childhood experiences—of the big-ticket kind that merit the official ACE designation—are of consequence, but not as determinative as your history in relationships... The most powerful predictor of your functioning in the present is your current relational connectedness, and then the second most powerful component that we see is your history of connectedness.”<sup>18</sup> Dr. Perry, in *What Happened to You?*, outlines that all successful models and programs (including in schools) that support healing “have one thing in common: they emphasize regulation and connection.”<sup>19</sup>

In my classes I see my main task as providing time and space for children to regulate themselves and to connect meaningfully. I explicitly teach these things.

Regulation means emotional literacy. It means being able to notice and name how you are feeling and then using resources to regulate yourself. The noticing work consists of learning to pay attention to how feelings show up in the body. It is learning to pay attention to sensations in the body and then naming what that is for you. For the language of sensations used in noticing work, I refer you back to Peter Levine’s work and in particular *Trauma Proofing*

*Your Kids*.<sup>20</sup> For learning to name feelings and develop emotional literacy, Karla McLaren’s<sup>21</sup> work provides a helpful framework.

The very best advice I can give for finding ways for your students to connect meaningfully is for teachers to get trained in circle work. “Restorative Practices” is a framework and process that centers dignity, belonging, care, and responsibility. Take a look at the resources listed below. They will walk you through how to build a classroom culture that supports mattering and connectedness.

- Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles<sup>22</sup>
- Justice Leaders Collaborative: The Relationships Initiative K-12<sup>23</sup>
- *Race Dialogues: A Facilitator’s Guide to Tackling the Elephant in the Classroom*, by Donna Rich Kaplowitz, Shayla Reese Griffin, and Sheri Seyka (New York: Teachers College Press, 2019)

## Real Talk

It is so easy to write an article (actually it is painful and hard – writing is not easy for me!), to outline what is important, and to give direction to teachers. However, what you need to know is that I am still working out this stuff. If you want to teach SEL in your classroom, either as a stand-alone topic or by weaving SEL content into your subject area, just start. Don’t be overwhelmed by all of the preconditions I write about above. I am sharing resources with you that have supported me, but it has taken me years to get there! I feel competent now, but please know that I still fumble, have bad classes, make mistakes, and many times I just don’t know what to do. Be brave! Take up one thing that stands out to you and start there. If you start

with love, bravery, and an openness to growth, you are in your place. In *The Myth of Normal*, Gabor Maté states, “When I speak of healing, I am referring to nothing more or less than a natural movement towards wholeness.” And that “Healing is a direction not a destination.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, teaching SEL is a direction, not

**Steve Silberman: “By autistic standards, the normal brain is easily distractible, obsessively social, and suffers from deficit of attention to detail.”**

17 <https://traumaliteracy.com/>

18 Maté and Maté, *The Myth of Normal*, 249.

19 Bruce D. Perry and Oprah Winfrey, *What Happened to You: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2021), 227.

20 Peter A. Levine and Maggie Kline, *Trauma-Proofing Your Kids: A Parents’ Guide for Instilling Confidence, Joy, and Resilience* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2008).

21 <https://karlamclaren.com>

22 [https://dignityinschools.org/toolkit\\_resources/center-for-restorative-practices-teaching-restorative-practices-with-classroom-circles/](https://dignityinschools.org/toolkit_resources/center-for-restorative-practices-teaching-restorative-practices-with-classroom-circles/)

23 <https://www.justiceleaderscollaborative.com/the-relationships-initiative>

24 Maté and Maté, *The Myth of Normal*, 361.

a destination. Take one step, one thing that resonates with you, and follow it for a bit. Read about it, sleep on it, take it for a walk, play with it, digest it, and bring this process to those lovely little people under your care. They will notice your bravery, authenticity, and care, and they will honor it for you.

**Megan Sullivan** *has been teaching in Waldorf schools for over 25 years. Currently, Megan teaches Social Emotional Learning and Health to middle and high school students at the Sacramento Waldorf School, where she co-founded the Social Emotional Learning program in 2008. You can connect with Megan through her website: [megansullivan.net](http://megansullivan.net)*



# Supporting Stressed and Traumatized Children in the Classroom

Vivian Jones-Schmidt

**I**n July 2022, I attended an introductory course in “emergency education,” sponsored by the Kairos Institute in New Hampshire. This particular course was led by Bernd Ruf, who co-founded and still teaches at a school for children with special needs in Karlsruhe, Germany. “Kairos” means “the right time,” and our time does seem like “the right time” to recognize that our children are experiencing situations far beyond their capacities to work through and resolve. Emergency Education is one program designed to help.

## Stress and Trauma

Life is unpredictable, and unexpected events can happen to anyone, any time: a car accident, falling down stairs, being yelled at, witnessing a violent act, a house fire, a deer running in front of a car, a child falling off a climbing structure. Any one of these events, not to mention earthquakes, floods, living in poverty, or being forced to leave one’s home country, can be stressful or traumatic. Even without knowing specific details, teachers know that some of the children they teach are experiencing events that might be stressful or traumatic.

Stress or trauma can arise from similar events, and they exist on a continuum. As teachers know, stress in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. We all need a certain amount of stress in order to grow, change, develop, and mature. For example, I remember very well the stress I felt the first time I got on a school bus. That stress was very real to me, and I felt it for several weeks until I finally felt comfortable enough to move past it. This was an important learning situation for me. Once I had conquered my concern, I felt more competent and mature.

Stress reactions can progress through several stages, just like trauma reactions. If an initial feeling of stress is not resolved, it can develop into a feeling of anxiety, which, though uncomfortable, would be tolerable. If still unresolved, stress can develop into a constant, unmanageable fearfulness. And if nothing changes, a traumatic response can result. Trauma and its effects will linger for weeks or months. Why do some people respond to an event with symptoms of stress, while others are traumatized?

We know that each person is unique, possessing his or her own biography, biology, and family/social situation. Gender, age, personality, temperament, individual methods of responding and coping with challenges, even one’s trust in oneself—all affect the way a person will respond to an event. Events themselves differ in duration, severity, and intensity. In addition, each person carries an individual array of risk/protective factors, as listed below. Please note the influence of relationships in both columns.

### Risk Factors

stressful childhood event  
traumatic experiences  
reduced intelligence  
lack of social support  
lack of self-esteem  
drug consumption  
poverty

### Protective Factors

healthy childhood  
secure relational behavior  
above average intelligence  
social support  
self-esteem  
stress tolerance  
spiritual/religious outlook

The same event can evoke a stress response or a trauma response, or perhaps neither, depending on the person who experiences the event. In other words, events themselves are more or less objective, but how we respond to an event as individuals is unique and can be modified.

## Descriptions of Trauma

Trauma has been described as a subjective experience of perceived danger, for which one might not have the necessary resilience or resources. This *sense of powerlessness* is the seed of trauma.

We can describe trauma from several different directions. For example, we can describe trauma as being like a wound: it hurts. With proper care, a wound can heal itself. A wound can also be some sort of blockage

or cramp. Until that cramp is released, there will be no healing. Trauma often appears as a paralyzation, related to the amygdala's response as fight, flight, or freeze.

Trauma can also be seen as a relationship dysfunction. Our relationships with one another depend upon a rhythm of in-breath, when one withdraws into oneself, and out-breath, when one experiences other people. Trauma is often a huge in-breath, much like what happens when one falls flat and "is knocked out of breath." If healing is to take place, the frozenness of the in-breath must be released and the rhythm of the relationship restored.

Finally, trauma can appear as a dissociation of the self from reality.

## Effects of Trauma on the Child

It is helpful to think of the human being in four areas, all of which are attacked by trauma: physical, metabolic, social/emotional, and sense of self.

Children who experience *trauma in the physical* can display this in unusually pale skin and/or dark circles under the eyes. They might seem to have lost their normal orientation in space. They might neglect personal hygiene, clothing, and/or belongings. (Child abuse—physical, sexual, verbal, or psychological—is of course a source of trauma for a child. However, as all teachers are required to study the signs of child abuse, I won't go into these signs here.)

Children who experience *trauma in their metabolic, life-supporting systems*, can exhibit a range of symptoms, e.g., headaches, stomachaches, sleep and/or eating disorders. Their behavior can regress to an earlier stage of development. They may lag in brain maturity, or have memory or learning challenges. Physical wounds might be slow to heal. These children might have lost their normal orientation to time and/or to bodily rhythms.

Children who experience *trauma in their social-emotional lives* often display this in their behavior. They can have a low tolerance to frustration or seem to be oppositional or emotionally unstable. These children might lack the capacity to form positive relationships or to sufficiently bond with adults or other children. Reactions to situations might seem more appropriate for a younger child. They might be excessively alert; on the other hand, they might seem to be numb to pain. Their behavior can be overly egocentric or sexualized. Their ability to learn might be compromised.

Finally, how does trauma attack one's *sense of self*? Here we can see a lack of self-esteem, a lack of trust in others, and/or a poor self-image. Attachment to others might be compromised, as well as the ability to bond.

Memory can be impaired, as can one's moral development and ability to self-regulate. Dissociation can also become apparent. (Trauma responses also differ according to the age of the child.)

## The Importance of Rhythm

Perhaps the strongest effect of trauma on the human being is its attack on the rhythmic systems of the body. Here are some of the bodily systems that, in a healthy individual, work in a rhythmic fashion. Each rhythm is unique in its pattern and within the individual.

- circadian rhythm of core body temperature
- waking and sleeping
- sleep cycle (REM and NREM, during which memories are integrated into the brain)
- glymphatic system (which removes contaminants from the brain)
- eating and drinking
- urination
- heartbeat and circulation
- liver function
- breathing
- release of hormones, including
  - melatonin and adenosine, both regulate sleepiness
  - insulin
  - growth hormone, which also helps maintain health

Our biological rhythmic systems take time to develop, and surrounding children with a predictable environment, in space and especially in time, supports this development. Every example of a healthy rhythm includes three phases, which can be thought of as: in-breath, pause, out-breath.

Jumping rope is a very clear example of this pattern. As teachers know, children flourish when they live in a well-ordered, predictable environment, in which rhythm is critical: rhythmic activities, a daily rhythm, and a weekly rhythm. The adult's inclusion of rhythm in planning activities and schedules supports the healthy development of the biological rhythms, as well as supporting children in regulating emotions and actions, in feeling confidence in their surroundings, and in developing their own sense of competency. Stated simply, without rhythm, there is no life.

## Course of Trauma

A traumatic response to a crisis event can proceed in predictable stages.

1. Acute: This is the immediate stage of response, lasting at most for a few days.
2. Post-traumatic stress reaction: This stage will last for up to eight weeks.
3. Post-traumatic stress disorder: This stage can last for up to several years.
4. Lasting personality disorder: There is no time limit for this stage.

Stages III and IV—PTSD and the lasting personality disorder—are stages that require professional, psychological/medical therapeutic interventions. In the current article, we are concerned only with stages I and II. These two stages of trauma response can be met with what we'll call "educational intervention." Educational (rather than therapeutic) intervention makes use of activities and approaches that are often already part of normal classroom work. The difference is that, as interventions, these activities and approaches are applied intentionally and predictably. We cannot assume that any child, regardless of what that child might have experienced, is living in a stage of trauma response. However, these educational interventions will support every child as they gain the strength and maturity to regulate their own behaviors, make reasonable decisions, and, in general, develop a strong self-esteem and trust in others.

## School as a Safe Place

Children need a safe place in which they can relax, engage in meaningful activities, take risks, and grow. Often, school is this safe place. School offers dependable relationships, the encouragement of others, and a predictable approach to space and time. As teachers know, relationship is key. We are social beings; we live in community. However, we are all born as individuals, which means we must learn how to become social. This is why so much emphasis in school is placed on learning and practicing the skills of speaking and listening respectfully, creating compromise in order to work together, and looking for the good in every other person. School can be just such a place, for adults in school both teach and model these essential behaviors. Children learn behavior by watching other people.

Likewise, school is an encouraging place, where supportive and caring adults look for and reinforce positive behaviors such as helpfulness, inclusion, courage, and responsibility. And, as emphasized earlier, the predictable schedules and rhythmic activities offered in school strongly support the healthy development of the child's physical body, emotions, and self-control.

## Classroom Interventions: Overview

As stated earlier, many of these interventions are already present in classrooms. *Teachers are familiar with the activities and can easily implement them as intentional educational interventions, knowing, for example, that they will support the child's ability to relax and self-regulate, whether or not the child is experiencing stress or trauma.*

Again, the importance of rhythm cannot be stressed strongly enough. For example, many teachers have morning meetings with their classes. Teachers intuitively start and end meetings in the same way each day, as children thrive when they are given dependable signals. A teacher might choose a short song as a beginning and a short poem as an ending, and every time the children hear the song or poem, they know exactly what is going to happen. This builds trust and confidence in one's sense of time.

Keeping to the theme of rhythm, within the meeting itself, the teacher might create a mental schedule of types of activities. The activities themselves will change throughout the year, but the type of activity will remain the same. Here is one example of a meeting scheduled with this in mind:

- morning song
- greeting game in which children greet each other by name
- clapping game
- whole body movement
- clapping game
- discussion of day's schedule
- ending poem

## Some Classroom Interventions

1. **Allow children to verbalize their experiences and emotions.** In general, it is better if the child initiates the conversation, while the teacher practices active listening. If the child starts to talk at an inopportune time, set up an appointment for a time when you'll be able to meet. Again, we can't assume that a child is affected in a certain way by what the child might have experienced. So we have to tread carefully. We can also reach out to school mental health professionals for guidance in our own responses. Teachers are not trained therapists.
2. **Creative Expression:** Children might not be able to talk about their feelings, but they might be able to *draw* their experience. Setting aside classroom

time for drawing, painting, sculpting, kneading dough, making music, writing, etc., is so important, even if it is only possible for 20 minutes once or twice a week.

3. **Incorporate Ritual:** A ritual does not have to be complicated, nor does it require bells and candles. A ritual is simply doing the same things, in the same order, at the same time, every day. If every time the class comes into circle, the students sit in an assigned space and say the same poem (preferably with motions), that's a ritual. Saying a simple "thank you" grace before eating is a ritual. Rituals and rhythms are very settling to a child.
4. **Incorporate daily and weekly rhythms:** Here are some activities you can use to support rhythm: rhythmic songs, poems, games, drumming, clapping. When selecting your material, try to choose songs and musical activities that you are comfortable leading. Many teachers use YouTube videos as musical leaders, but resorting to this platform means separation between the children and the teacher. Children need social connection and relationship. They need their teacher to be making eye contact and displaying engagement.
5. **Movement:** Take the class on a walk, run, or hike. This can be a 5-minute lap around the playground. Have the children jump rope or count out loud while they jump on a mini-trampoline. Play games, like "Simon Says," "In and Out the Window," or "Duck, Duck, Goose." Walk a balance beam. Movement supports body-brain integration and strengthens the child's sense of self/body.
6. These activities will **strengthen the child's memory and ability to concentrate:** I-Spy, puzzles, pick-up sticks, memory games (like Go Fish, Concentration), arts and crafts, string games, group exercises.
7. **Create room for unstructured play:** Young children, especially, will sometimes reenact disturbing experiences in their play. Often, this will help them resolve their unsettled feelings. If the play seems "stuck," however, let a school mental health professional know about it, as the child might need professional help to move past the trauma.
8. **Ensure relaxation:** Tell or read stories; teach breathing techniques; allow for brief rest periods when possible. (Rhythm also applies here—can they have 5 minutes of quiet time after recess every day? Can you tell or read them a short story every day before lunch, or every Friday afternoon?)
9. **Increase experiences of competence:** Engaging the child in experiences in which they can be successful will strengthen the child's self-esteem and sense of self. For example, a child can be tasked with watering a plant, taking a message to another teacher, straightening the lunchboxes, etc. When the child is finished, thank the child and point out something that was done especially well.
10. **Engage the child in planning for future activities:** This engagement also strengthens the child's sense of self as agent, as having some control over their time and perhaps even their life. For example, if Friday in your classroom often includes a special activity, engage the children in planning for what that might be.
11. Whenever possible, **reinforce the importance of balanced nutrition and uninterrupted sleep.** Research has shown that young children require 10 hours of sleep/night, while older children require less. However, everyone needs a full 8 hours of sleep in order to support health and learning. (See Matthew Walker, *Why We Sleep: Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams* (New York & London: Scribner, 2017).)
12. **Spiritual/religious feelings:** Of course teachers cannot and do not desire to include spiritual/religious practices in the classroom. However, if a child talks about non-material subjects (Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus, private prayer), teachers respond respectfully and expect that of the other children. Create and recognize space for joy: Joy heals.

## Some Resources

Hannaford, Carla. *Smart Moves: Why Learning Is Not All in Your Head*. Salt Lake City, UT: Great River Books, 2005.

Levine, Peter and Maggie Kline. *Trauma Through a Child's Eyes: Awakening the Ordinary Miracle of Healing*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2007.

Peterson, Karen L. *Helping Them Heal: How Teachers Can Support Young Children who Experience Stress and Trauma*. Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House, 2014.

Ruf, Bernd. *Educating Traumatized Children: Waldorf Education in Crisis Intervention*. Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks/Lindisfarne Books, 2012.

Child Trauma Academy: [www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org)

National Association of School Psychologists School Safety and Crisis Resources:  
[www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis\\_safety](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety)

National Center for Trauma-Informed Care:  
[www.samhsa.gov/nctic/](http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network:  
[www.nctsnet.org](http://www.nctsnet.org)

Centers for Disease Control:  
[www.cdc.gov/NCCDPHP/ACE/publications.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/NCCDPHP/ACE/publications.htm)

**Vivian Jones-Schmidt** encountered anthroposophy when her daughter entered the kindergarten at the Charlottesville Waldorf School, Virginia—and she never looked back. Soon she was teaching at CWS, first as the handwork teacher and then as a Class Teacher. Her time at CWS included 23 years as a teacher and five as Admissions Director. She served the school in many capacities, chairing committees (including the College and the Faculty), teaching specialty classes, and representing the school in AWSNA. Vivian also taught at the Richmond Waldorf School for two years, and she now teaches first grade with an online, Waldorf-inspired home school program. Vivian served on the Editorial Board of *Renewal* almost since its inception. She has been a member of the Anthroposophical Society since 1993 and is honored to serve as a member of its nominating committee. She joined the Board of Trustees of Research Institute for Waldorf Education in 2023.

# Sensory Development as the Foundation for Healthy Social-Emotional Life<sup>1</sup>

Nancy Blanning

**W**hen casual observers look into a Waldorf early childhood classroom, they encounter an environment with beautiful aesthetics formed by soft and inviting colors and natural materials. If children are in the room, they are playing if not otherwise engaged by circle-time movement and imagination, story-telling, and different sorts of practical and artistic activities. The scene appears sweet and nurturing—which it is. These activities are not an end in themselves, however. Each is a stepping stone to support human development toward building strong, healthy social and emotional lives for each individual student and the class as a whole. This commitment is one of the profound intentions that undergirds Waldorf education throughout the entire curriculum. In subtle and obvious ways, the curriculum focuses on building relationship in multiple dimensions—relationship of oneself to the physical body, relationship to the natural world, and relationship to other human beings.

The beginning of Waldorf education was planted in a moment of strife, when so much of political, economic, moral, and social life was in shambles, in the aftermath of World War I. Emil Molt, a student of Rudolf Steiner familiar with the ideas of the Three-fold Social Order, asked the long-awaited question: Did Steiner have ideas of an education that would encourage humanity toward a healing, healthy social life with more respectful and caring, tolerant, empathetic, and justice-filled creative thinking to guide how we live with one another? Waldorf education is the answer to that question.

Educational circles are currently buzzing with conversation about social and emotional education. One sees curricula for purchase offering early childhood educators discrete lessons for teaching social-emotional growth. *Waldorf early education from its inception has intrinsically offered opportunities to develop these capacities in each day.*

Steiner perceived that children come to earthly life with anticipation of being recognized as beings of body,

soul, and spirit. Understanding this was one of the first principles that Rudolf Steiner articulated in the 1919 pedagogical lectures given to the soon-to-be teachers of the first Waldorf School (Steiner, 2019, translator M. Saar). He emphasized that the developing human being is an entity with this three-fold nature. Anatomy and physiology describe and “explain” the body. Psychology explores emotional life—a step toward acknowledgment of soul—but too often from a cold, clinical perspective. Steiner’s understanding of the human being opens a wider picture. Steiner spoke to teachers as follows:

*When we perceive the children with our physical eyes once they are born, we need to remember that their earthly life, too, is a continuation [; . . .] our physical earthly existence is the continuation of a former spiritual life; and that as educators we continue the work higher beings previously did without our help. Our teaching will be imbued with the right mood if we bear this in mind: in working with [these children] I am continuing the work done by higher beings before [they were] born. (Steiner, 2019, pp. 21-22)*

*If . . . we realize that our tasks as teachers are connected to a human soul that steps into earthly existence and, from hour-to-hour and week-to-week, increasingly develops its inner capacities, and if we stand before a growing human being as before a sacred riddle to be solved, a being who has come to us from the endless distances of the cosmos so that we can give that being the possibility to unfold and develop, then many new tasks, outlooks, and possibilities will arise for all of human life. (Steiner, 1911, p. 12)*

The individuality newly-born into physical life comes with a biography carried along from the spiritual world. There, previous experiences have been reviewed, sorted, pondered upon, digested, and then carried with insight into an incarnation with a new life plan. It is said that each human being comes into earthly life with intentions and resolves that can only be fulfilled in this time, place, physical body, culture, and *social circumstances*. There are people to meet and things to do. Individuals return in a new incarnation to fulfill a

1 This article is adapted from a chapter included in a new collection of essays entitled *Becoming and Belonging* and written by members of the WECAN Early Childhood Research Group. The book is a resource for supporting healthy social-emotional development in young children and will be available in the spring of 2024. More information can be found on the WECAN website, [waldorfearlychildhood.org](http://waldorfearlychildhood.org).

new life plan in interactions with other human beings, to enter into human social encounter. Fostering healthy social life is one of Waldorf education's intentions. The social encounter with the teacher can be positive and encouraging when the teacher appreciates that these children come with a long story behind them. The child is, indeed, a "sacred riddle" to be accepted and respected.

The child takes on a physical body with inherited aspects and physical inclinations. With this inherited part we are all familiar. There are also aspects brought from the spiritual world, carried by the unseen spirit-soul body, that need to join harmoniously with the physical-life body we can see.

However, these two parts do not automatically or easily integrate with each other.

*An unbiased observer will notice, as the children grow into the world, that their spirit-soul is not yet fully connected with the bodily organism. Spiritually speaking, it is the task of education to bring the two together into a harmonious whole, because, when the child is first born into the physical body, the two are to some extent not yet attuned to one another. As teachers we have to facilitate this process. (Steiner, 2019, p. 23)*

This union has never been easy, but in our current times it is becoming harder and harder for the soul-spirit to come into harmonious, cooperative relationship with the physical-life-body. The phenomena of restless, fidgety nervousness and anxiety displayed in children by disharmonious movement and dysregulated behavior has been growing and growing. The pandemic years intensified the challenges children display in finding comfort in their bodies and peacefulness in mind and heart. More than ever, the child is a "sacred riddle" or mystery standing before us. Where do we begin to carry on the work that higher beings guided before the children were born? When do we escort them into social life?

This is where the role of the senses steps into the forefront of our attention and appreciation. It is through the senses, primarily the foundational four senses of touch, well-being, self-movement, and balance, that the soul-spirit and the life-bodily contributions are integrated.

The spiritual world has sent to us the blessing of these children. And, fortunately, it has also sent each human being with twelve senses as gifts carried by the physical body. These senses are gateways to finding one's way into earthly life. When they work together in reliable, mutually supportive ways, they tell us about our own bodies; about the external, created world; and about other people.

Understanding these twelve senses allows us as educators to better behold the child. When we learn to appreciate the importance of each sense and observe how each sense serves the child, we have twelve new windows allowing us to look into the child's personal experience of the world and sense of comfort and security in living in the physical body. It is well known that feeling secure, comfortable, competent and confident in the physical body is a prerequisite for healthy social and emotional life. The strength of the four foundational senses are the corner stones for this secure, happily inhabited physical body.

**In subtle and obvious ways, the curriculum focuses on building relationship in multiple dimensions—relationship of oneself to the physical body, relationship to the natural world, and relationship to other human beings.**

A general description from anthroposophical perspectives of the influence and experience each sense provides is helpful here. Steiner has pondered the physical, social, and spiritual importance of each sense over decades and arrived at this listing of the twelve, starting with *touch, life or well-being, self-movement, balance, smell, taste, sight, warmth, and hearing*. These first nine are more or less familiar to us. But the sensory list goes further to include three more. There is also a sense through which we recognize and

understand language named *word or speech*. Another sense enables us to grasp the *thought* of the other person. And the crowning sense is one by which we can recognize and acknowledge *the I-being of another person*. The list below shows how Steiner presented the senses to the first teachers according to an order in which recognizing *the I-being of the other* is at the top as the highest spiritual sense, while the sense of touch, at the bottom of the list, appears as the first foundational sense.

### **Highest / Social / Spiritual Senses**

- **I-being**—sensing the humanity and individuality of another; sensing the I-being of another person

- **Thought**—recognizing that words expressed by other people are sequenced to convey thoughts; perceiving the thoughts of other people
- **Word / Language / Speech**—sensing that sounds, hand movement, or gestures in particular sequences convey meaning. Sense of word takes sound (or hand movement) and gives it meaning
- **Hearing**—experiencing sound through the mechanism of the ear. Attentively focused hearing is listening

### Middle / Feeling Senses

- **Warmth**—sensing temperature as warmer or cooler in comparison to our own body temperature
- **Sight**—taking in visual impressions through the eyes; connected to light
- **Taste**—experiencing sweet, bitter, salty, and sour by taking in substances through the mouth with help of watery element (saliva)
- **Smell**—experiencing outer world through airy element in smells, aromas

### Foundational / Will Senses

- **Balance / Equilibrium**—sensing uprightness and body position in relation to the earth and gravity
- **Self-movement / Proprioception**—sensing the cooperative movement of one's limbs and coordination, learning body geography
- **Life or Well-Being**—sensing the health and balance of inner organic life
- **Touch**—experiencing boundary between self and world

Through the first *Foundational / Will senses of touch, life or well-being, self-movement, and balance*, we experience over-all well-being and stability, reliability of posture and coordination of our own physical bodies as we relate to the earth's gravity.

The *Middle / Feeling senses—smell, taste, sight, and warmth*—give us information about the nature and qualities of things external to ourselves in the world. Experiences through these senses often result in feelings of sympathy or antipathy toward what we encounter—do I like it or not?

The third section of senses, called the *Social, Highest*, and even *Spiritual* senses, stand as new identifications of subtle sensing capacities born to each human being.

Through these, we can recognize and come into relationship with other human beings. These senses are the familiar sense of *hearing* and newly described senses of recognizing meaning through *word* and *gesture*, recognizing meaning in the *thought* of another, and *sensing the I-being of other human beings*.

Young children from birth to the change-of-teeth are working to form, grow and strengthen their physical bodies. Waldorf education sees this as the fundamental task of the first seven years as children strive to claim ownership of and find comfort in their bodies through posture, movement, coordination, and speech, for example. During these years, Children also make the first steps into social life, using their senses to encounter others who are also on their own sensing journeys to find their place and purposefulness in the world.

Supporting healthy development of the Foundational Senses is a primary educational responsibility for Waldorf early childhood. These senses engage movement. Current neurological research is now confirming that physical gross and fine motor movement and building of neurological pathways are related. What is accomplished in neurological development through movement (especially well-ordered, purposeful, rhythmically repeated movement) and opportunity to explore the environment in the first seven years prepares the foundation for future cognitive, emotional, and social life.

The importance of these senses cannot be overemphasized. As we understand and appreciate how vital these are to the child's immediate and long-term development, observing each sensory domain opens up a new window through which we can behold and appreciate the child.

First of all comes *touch* or the *tactile sense*, the first to be awakened in the birth process. The strong uterine contractions massage the baby and awaken and tone up the sense of touch. When touch is understimulated, sometimes through a C-section delivery, or from lying naked in an incubator as a "premie," the child may be touch sensitive. What is normal touch experience for most of us can feel as an assault to this child. The

child will avoid typical exploration of the world through touch. He or she is often fussy and finicky about clothes, textures, and temperature. On the other extreme, if the tactile sense is over taxed, the child's touch may shut down in a gesture of self-protection. Such a child may be unaware that he has touched another child, that his

**Supporting healthy development of the Foundational Senses is a primary educational responsibility for Waldorf early childhood.**

hands are crusted with sand and mud, or that his shoes are on the wrong feet. One often hears complaints from other children, such as, “She is holding my hand too tight,” while the child who is doing this it is not aware of her friend’s experience. Steiner explains that touch gives us our experience of boundary, telling us where we stop and where the rest of the world begins. A healthy sense of touch lays the foundation for a sense of social boundaries as well.

We support and educate the sense of touch in the early childhood classroom through kneading bread dough, washing dishes and cloths, digging in the sand box, touching different textures and natural materials, and so on. In circle work we also strengthen the sense of touch, encouraging more touch tolerance, for the too-sensitive extreme, and awaking at the opposite under-responsive pole. Holding hands with other children, crawling on the floor with an open palm, feeling the length of the body when rolling or tummy crawling on the floor, and walking in soft soles over uneven river stones are all strengthening and integrating the sense of touch.

Through the *sense of life* we experience our organic well-being. We become aware of this general sense when the body is disturbed by feeling unwell or out-of-sorts. Our awareness of this sense is usually asleep when all is calm and tranquil. Disturbances in the life sense demonstrate themselves in the child’s rhythmic life of waking and sleeping, eating and elimination. In the classroom, we encounter difficulties here with food allergies and narrow, restricted dietary choices. Children with a diminished or disturbed life sense may lack vitality and cannot participate with true enthusiasm in many of life’s activities. The strong rhythms we maintain in the kindergarten through each day and week are essential in supporting the life sense.

The life sense is supported in movement work as well. Improved sense of balance helps to heighten a sense of well-being. Some children with hyper-sensitive balance may actually feel vaguely motion-sick all the time. Since it is how they always feel, however, they do not know that this is unusual. Strengthening balance gives the child an experience of standing on the earth more securely and confidently. When balance works harmoniously with the other senses, an improved sense of well-being results. Feeling more secure in this realm, the child develops better tolerance for other things in life. This may include becoming more venturesome in

trying new foods and expanding one’s diet. Supported by improved nutrition, the life sense is further fostered.

*The sense of self-movement or proprioceptive sense* gives us awareness of body position. It informs where the body parts are in relation to one another. It also gives us the framework for developing body geography. Information about the body’s position is provided by the contracting, stretching, and compression of muscles and tendons in the joints. Without a healthy sense of proprioception, the child may truly be unaware of where the limbs are in space, sincerely incredulous that an arm has just “struck” another child or

knocked down a classmate’s house. Healthy proprioception provides the ability to begin and arrest movement with control. Holding appropriate muscle tension in a task, such as lifting up a glass of water with the right force, comes from this sense. Sustaining upright posture is also a function of proprioception. With difficulty here, often a child would collapse onto the floor at circle time, as standing upright is such a chore. Children who often bump into objects and other people, or who seem a little clumsy, or who slump or collapse may have difficulty with self-movement/proprioception.

Children find support for this sense whenever they experience tension or pressure in the joints and limbs. Carrying a heavy stump, pulling a wagon loaded with classmates, hanging from a bar, swinging on a trapeze, pushing or pulling something heavy, jumping, hopping, being on the bottom of a pile of other children all stimulate and satisfy the need for proprioceptive input. The child whose sense is weak will crave these kinds of activities. In movement work, starting and stopping with control (galloping horses then whoa!), kicking up heels like a donkey, wheeling on hands as a wheelbarrow, holding up the feet and legs of another child to wheel him as a wheelbarrow, jumping, hopping, jumping off a table or tree stump, or touching and naming body parts in an imagination (to strengthen an experience of body geography) all strengthen self-movement.

*Balance* or the *vestibular sense* gives the experience of stability and security in relation to gravity. Working along with proprioception, the vestibular sense tells where the body is in space. The vestibular sensory organs, the semicircular canals, lie within the complex of the inner ear. Chronic ear infections have placed auditory and vestibular health under attack. This may be one reason why we see many children with vestibular insecurity in our classes. Children are also commonly

**Observing the health or distress of sensory systems gives clues to what children need in order to feel secure and confident in their bodies, a basic requirement for social-emotional health.**

deprived of chances to move freely to experience the body in space because of adult fearfulness about injury. Children with vestibular weakness can be of two extremes. They can be very movement sensitive, avoiding spinning, swinging, inverting the head, all of which stimulate the vestibular system. In short, such children avoid movement.

On the other extreme are children who crave movement at all times. They spin on the tire swing and never get dizzy. They fidget and rock in their chairs. They may be daredevils who lack appropriate sense of caution. The vestibular sense of these children is under-responsive, requiring a constant stream of stimulus to keep informed of where the body's center of balance lies. The importance of this sense cannot be over emphasized. A. Jean Ayres in *Sensory Integration and the Child* (Ayres, 1995, p. 37) states that the vestibular is the unifying system and provides a framework for other aspects of our experience. It seems to "prime" the entire nervous system to function effectively.

A kindergarten equipped with swings, a tire swing, landscaping timers or logs to walk along and balance on, rocks and stumps of uneven heights to climb over, trees or play structures to climb, hills for sledding or rolling, and slides to whiz down offers healthy possibilities for vestibular stimulation. In general, balance is simulated whenever anyone swings, spins, slides quickly down an incline, lowers or inverts the head, or goes round and round in a circle. Walking on a beam, whether leveled on the floor or inclined, challenges the balance, as does walking on uneven river stones. Circling in a ring, spinning by oneself or with a partner, turning and twisting also provide the right kind of stimulation. These you will all see used extensively in the movement experiences designed to emphasize strengthening of the foundational senses (Blanning and Clark, 2016, pp. 8-10).

Healthy sensory development has been increasingly challenged in recent decades, particularly by the prevalence of screens and other distractions that keep children from knowing the world through movement and free, child-directed exploration. These restrictions deprive children the opportunity to develop themselves. When we now see children's restlessness, agitation, and anxiety, a study of the senses opens our eyes to more compassionate understanding of what children are dealing with. Observing the health or distress of sensory systems gives clues to what children need in order to feel secure and confident in their bodies, a basic requirement for social-emotional health.

### The first four senses provide the foundation upon which not only physical but social life is formed.

Regarding social-emotional development, the anthroposophical view of the Foundational Senses reaches even deeper and more profoundly into aspects beyond physical life. In his study and spiritual research into human twelve-ness, Rudolf Steiner also recognized that there are direct connections between pairs of senses. Specifically, he noted that the four basic senses of touch, life, self-movement, and balance have individual relationship to the four highest senses of ego, thought, speech/word, and hearing (these upper four are deliberately reversed in this listing, as will be explained). The four basic senses establish the foundation for the rest of development. Through these basic four, we are able to come

to uprightness, speech, and thinking (Steiner, *Child's Changing Consciousness*, lectures 1-4). These accomplishments are essential for being able to enter into social life as well. Through movement, listening, speaking and acknowledging the being of the other person, we become social beings. *The first four senses provide the foundation upon which not only physical but social life is formed.* Each of the highest senses is a transformation and a non-physical metamorphosis of a foundational sense. The pairs are:

- **Sensing the I-being of another** is a metamorphosis of **Touch**
- **Sensing the Thought of another** is a metamorphosis of **Life/well being**
- **Sensing the Word of another** is a metamorphosis of **Self-movement**
- **Directed Hearing** expands itself to become listening as a metamorphosis of **Balance**

The important implication here is that the health and strength of each of these highest senses depends directly upon how fully and reliably its partner foundational sense has developed. (This is described in many lectures and by other authors, notably Willi Aeppli, *Care and Development of the Human Senses*.) Strongly developed foundational senses are a prerequisite for the possibility of healthy, sensitive, adept social senses. Deliberate, intentional, aware attention to the foundational sense in the child's first seven years becomes even more crucial as a pedagogical priority when we can appreciate this long-term view.

These alone are big guidelines to consider. Yet there is one more step we can suggest into this human structure of body, soul, and spirit. From time to time we experience that our response to sensory stimuli affects our

emotional and psychological state. If our body systems are working in balanced ways, we tend to feel optimistic and tolerant. If we don't feel well, we may withdraw and feel "touchy," sensitive, irritable. If we feel overwhelmed by too much noise, crowding, demands for our attention and energies, we may find ourselves feeling self-defensive, intolerant of daily ups and down, and lacking in an attitude of generosity to life and to other people. Rudolf Steiner and other researchers after him, particularly Henning Köhler, have looked deeply to the correlation between sensory health and states of soul—our feelings and states of mind.

Köhler, in his book *Working with Anxious, Nervous, and Depressed Children*, describes the virtues and positive outlook that accompany a healthy foundational sense. He also observes accompanying states of distress when the basic sense has not unfolded in a healthy, reliable way that serves the child. Köhler develops a full picture of these relationships in his study. Below is a summary of these correlations. The positive virtues of a healthily developed sense are a joy to see. And the counter-pole of emotional distress is an inclination commonly seen in our times. Köhler sees the senses of self-movement and balance so intimately connected that he treats them as an indivisible pair when considering the virtues. While noting the particular virtues of each one, he sees that the child with a "brooding" disposition will benefit from attention to both senses at the same time.

that difficult, perplexing behaviors often arise out of stalled, "stuck" or insufficient sensory development. Children are looking to their care-givers to offer a pathway toward health because their current environments are not providing what they need.

Here is Köhler in his own words:

[A] compassionate approach should be the prevailing one all through children's schooling! It too often happens that an awkward, timid, or confused child is taken to task, in a moralizing tone, for being lazy or for being deliberately obstructive or ill-behaved.

There is no such thing as a deliberately mean, lazy, or rebellious child! Every one of them longs from the bottom of his heart to do well and to be praised for it. It is we who turn them into lazy bones and rebels by reproaching them in their need. (Köhler 2000, p. 122)

If we picture that healthy foundational senses metamorphize in healthy social senses, we can picture that the positive virtues accompany the actual sensory capacities. Trust, tolerance, compassion, and a sense for justice and equanimity are available as social virtues. Working with children in these ways through movement is working foundationally and subtly to develop trust, tolerance, compassion, and a sense for justice and equanimity in social encounters.

| Henning Köhler— <i>Working with Anxious, Nervous, and Depressed Children</i> |                                                 |                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Sensory domain                                                               | Virtue if Well-developed                        | Emotional Distress if Under-developed |
| BALANCE                                                                      | EQUANIMITY<br>JUSTICE                           | BROODING, DEPRESSION                  |
| SELF-MOVEMENT                                                                | COMPASSION<br>TACTFULNESS                       |                                       |
| LIFE/WELL-BEING                                                              | TOLERANCE<br>PATIENCE<br>REVERENCE              | NERVOUSNESS                           |
| TOUCH                                                                        | TRUST<br>SELFLESSNESS<br>TRUE CARING FOR OTHERS | ANXIETY                               |

Henning Köhler was an advocate for children. He saw that there was no "bad" or difficult child. All children want to be healthy and happy. He did not see children as malicious or intending to harm. Rather, he observed

Yet Köhler also observes that, to the contrary, when the senses are insufficiently developed, negative qualities of anxiousness and timidity, nervousness, broodingness, depression, disappointment, and cynicism arise.

These anti-social expressions of suspicion, distrust, fearfulness, defensiveness, restlessness, and intolerance are a world-wide phenomenon of our time. In considering these associations, a door opens to what we can offer pedagogically to support healthy social life through work with the senses.

Waldorf education is based upon this unique picture of child development. Experience comes first through the physical body. When this is sufficiently mature, the human being ventures out into the world and begins the development of a conscious feeling life. And, finally, trust and security in the world achieved through the body senses becomes social and emotional virtues and capacities in wider human encounter. A Steiner aphorism (whose source has not been discovered to cite here) is that we cannot understand anything conceptually that we have not experienced through the bodily and feeling senses first. Children sense their way into uprightness through touch, self-movement, and balance. The life sense experiences ease and comfort in regular body rhythms and when these other three senses give the child feelings of security in the physical body.

We can also understand that the first three great accomplishments—standing, speaking, and thinking—are socially dependent. These can *only* be achieved when there is a human imitative model. These first achievements are literally the first steps toward social life. A healthy social life is the ultimate destination for humanity. We want to make each step strong. What comes first physically prepares the way for the subtle and superior goals of social life, as this unique understanding shared by Steiner reveals. Physical security, emotional stability, and social harmony begin with the young child's movement. Healthy development of the foundational senses lay the groundwork for what is possible in emotional inner stability and equanimity and social tolerance for the whole of life. We are working to support humanity's social future every time we hop, skip, dance, spin, sing, and jump for joy.

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# Hands That Learn

## Using Puppetry to Engage Students in Social-Emotional Learning

Corinna Rezzelle-Pennypacker

**T**he mood is calm, as the early childhood teacher lifts the veil that covers the table-top puppet show that she has labored over for her students. The children are filled with glee as the teacher brings the simple, doll-like puppets to life in a seasonal story that they will later retell and act out. The art of storytelling through puppetry is one that has been seen for countless generations, since ancient times (Hanford, 1976, p.13). In Waldorf schools, this gift of puppetry still remains a crucial part of the curriculum, but why must it be sequestered to the early grades? (McKay, 1998, p.10)

Throughout this paper, I will explore the uses of puppetry in and outside of Waldorf schools across the grade levels, as well as inquire into the skills our students can learn by actively engaging in puppetry. From its early days, puppetry has had a place in Waldorf education and in anthroposophical circles. According to Rudolf Steiner, “the marionette theatre was a remedy for civilization’s damages” (Vermehren, 1965, as cited in von Kügelgen, 1993, p.199). Though Steiner was speaking of the psychological damages bestowed onto children after the horrors of World War I, I believe that his words are still relevant to our 21<sup>st</sup> century children.

Although our recent COVID-19 crisis is nowhere as significant as global violence, this generation’s children have experienced something that has not happened on a world-wide scale since the Spanish Influenza pandemic in the early 1900s. School and business closures, lost lives, world-wide lockdowns, and massive supply issues have changed how our world operates now and for many years to come. Our children need healing now more than ever as they leave their online classrooms, step out into the world, and engage with other children and adults in person, some for the first time. These children need to learn skills to help them speak to others, engage in communal play, and to reflect upon themselves and others. I believe that puppetry is one way that we can reach children in order to engage them in all of these aspects of humanness (Downs, 2005, p.17).

In our age of instant gratification and stories on-demand, the act of watching a live puppet show is not as common

as in centuries past. Basil Twist, a puppeteer, said in an interview with NPR, “It’s (puppetry) not of this time. It’s not of the world we live in now” (Eschner, 2017). However, children do have access to puppetry and some could argue that they have more access to this art form than they ever had before. Due to the accessibility of television and the internet, most children in the United States and around the world have come into contact with some sort of puppetry during their early years through the media. *Lamb Chop’s Playalong* (O’Kun et al., 1992-1995), *Sesame Street* (Connell et al., 1969-present), *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood* (Rogers, 1968-2001), and *The Muppets* (Burns et al., 1976-1981), just to name a few, are all beloved television shows that engage puppetry to educate and reach the young child. These shows are easily accessible to today’s audiences through countless streaming services, the internet, and public access television.

Surprisingly, although puppetry is widely accessible—and many articles and books were written about why puppetry is engaging to young children (McKay, 1998, p.10)—there is still a gap in the amount of discussion, from a research standpoint, on the importance of engaging children themselves in the act of creating *live* puppetry. This is especially true about puppetry and its connection to developing social-emotional skills. I aim to research, and then do something about why puppetry is not used to reach older children, when we have all been touched by the joys of puppetry in some way.

Dr. Helmut von Kügelgen ends his article, “The Marionette Theatre: Posing a Task for Socially Oriented Education” (1993), with the following invitation to educators and puppeteers alike: “There is here a concrete task for all who want not merely to discuss pre-school education, but to do something about it with full consciousness” (p. 201). This statement reads as a call to action for educators to consider puppetry as more than just an entertainment for toddlers. He, like Rudolf Steiner, saw the benefit of puppetry for children of all ages by utilizing the art form for education, inspiration, and most of all, healing.

## Origins of Research

As the world entered the second full year of pandemic teaching, I wanted to bring the healing nature of puppetry to one particular second grade class with whom I work. This class is a large cohort of 27 students from varying ethnic backgrounds, family structures, temperaments, and socio-economic levels. Although most of the students had been together since kindergarten, they had not bonded over the previous year of online learning. Instead of banding together as a team, they were fighting, name-calling, and stealing from each other. As their drama teacher, I wanted to bring these students together in a positive way that would give them a creative experience (and outlet) of which they could be proud. My anxious hope was that this experience, whatever it might end up being, would encourage them to form an ensemble and to find a common ground. I tried the usual ensemble-focused theatre games, creative drama experiences, and even the boxed social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum that our school is mandated to use by our privatized, umbrella network. Nothing was working to bring this class together until I threw caution to the wind, and in a complete about-face in terms of curriculum planning, I turned to my passion: puppetry. This experience has inspired the current research paper.

I have to admit that puppetry has not “saved” my students as of yet. However, it has put them on the right path of personal growth and unleashed their creativity in ways that the typical drama class and the standardized SEL curriculum was not able to do for them. This experience has made gains in balancing my students’ temperaments in a way that has allowed them to band together and create. Through puppetry, they have been able to find latent confidence and harness it; they have learned how to work together and to express their opinions without quarreling. These outcomes have given me hope about the prospects of such work being done with other classes, both in and outside of the Waldorf school setting. Though this method may not work for every classroom, I would like to offer this as a new outlook on the uses of puppetry in the classroom, in the hopes that by sharing it with others it will be beneficial to future student groups.

## Puppetry in Education and its Benefits

Educational puppetry has a long history across the globe (McKay, 1998, p. 10). In his book, *The Complete*

*Book of Puppets and Puppeteering*, Robert Ten Eyck Hanford makes the claim that puppetry was used for education even in ancient times: “The ancient shadow shows taught popular folk tales to the illiterate masses. Even rowdy Mr. Punch made his audience think about social and political ills of the day” (1976, p. 23). Though the two references made by Hanford still involve puppetry as a perceived performance, I believe that puppetry can and should be used to educate through students interacting with puppets themselves.

Because puppets are naturally engaging objects for children (Whittier, 2017), children are very willing to speak to the puppets as though they were real, living creatures. Students want to listen to these creatures, even if the puppet is just an old sock with googly eyes! Fred Rogers once said that, “Pretending through puppets is often a safe way for children to talk about things that really concern them” (Sharapan, 2016). This idea has directed not only teachers but also therapists to employ puppets as a means to encourage a child to speak. Because the puppet is made to say what is

in fact bothering the child, the puppet acts like a mediator that allows the child to feel safe speaking his or her mind (McIlroy, 2021). This is an excellent tool for children who may be shy and are not confident in letting their own voice be heard (Whittier, 2017).

This means of providing the child with a voice lends itself to so many developmental areas. By engaging with and speaking to a puppet, the child can begin to expand their language development in a safe way (McIlroy, 2021). By using a puppet in the classroom, students can engage in a deeper understanding of literature and storytelling, allowing the puppets to retell stories that they may have heard before or even stories that the child has created herself (Whittier, 2017). This act of performing with a puppet also builds children’s self-confidence, as they perform before an audience of their peers or their families (McIlroy, 2021).

From a physical development perspective, by engaging in puppetry, a student can make large gains in the development of fine motor skills. Beginning with the creation of the puppets themselves, students engage in folding, cutting, drawing, and even sewing. These activities require a strong pincer grasp, nimble fingers, keen eyes, and the use of tools (scissors, needles, etc.). By using finger puppets, hand puppets, or even simple marionettes, students’ finger dexterity will increase as

they make the puppets come alive. Rudolf Steiner recommended that marionette puppets' strings should be tied directly onto the puppeteer's hands rather than attached to a control for manipulation (Vermehren, 1965, as cited in von Kügelgen, 1993, p. 199). Having the puppet strings so integrated into the child's own being would be a wonderful way to increase their dexterity and also strengthen the bond between puppet and child-puppeteer.

### *Puppetry in Waldorf Schools*

One can find puppetry to this very day in Waldorf early childhood classrooms around the world. Most popularly, puppetry is used in early childhood classrooms as a performance by the teacher for the students. Depending on the comfort level of the teacher, puppetry can take many forms from table-top puppet shows, to simple marionettes, to story aprons. Puppet shows are generally used as a method to convey or retell a seasonal story, but sometimes these puppet shows are created as events open to the public and performed at community gatherings.

Schools that embrace such models sometimes have puppetry companies that operate out of them, such as the San Francisco Waldorf School's Magic Lantern Marionette Troupe (2018). Unfortunately, this company is no longer in operation. It was made up of the Early Childhood teachers of the school, along with volunteers, which is reminiscent of the puppet shows discussed by von Kügelgen in "The Marionette Theatre" (1993). Like those original puppeteers, the puppeteers of the Magic Lantern Marionette Troupe performed for the school community at large (in order to provide thoughtful entertainment for local children and their families).

Some Waldorf schools have taken the lead from the founding years of the Rudolf Steiner School in New York (Livingston & Mitchell, 2016, pp. 61-62) by employing puppetry within their curriculum across the grades. One such example is the Sierra Waldorf School in Jamestown, California, where each grade level has a puppetry block wherein the students learn about a different form of puppetry, craft their own puppets, and present a play based on one of their curriculum tales (Sierra Waldorf School, 2018). These performances are geared towards their families and are performed before the whole school. Needless to say, seeing this program gave me hope that the acceptance of puppetry as a

tool to educate across the grade levels is beginning to take root within the Waldorf movement. Whatever the method of puppet interaction, I believe that both settings are following the original intent that Rudolf Steiner had when it came to puppetry: to engender within the students a love for stories, creativity, and a sense of wonder (Harwood, 2001, p. 68).

### **What is Social-Emotional Learning?**

This sense of wonder and creativity also supports a child's well-being far beyond the satisfaction in watching an "entertainment." Through being creatively stimulated, children ignite many of their emotional and cognitive intelligences. Through the communal activity—of watching or participating in puppet play—they are strengthening their social intelligence as well. In the second half of this research paper, we will explore the topic of social-emotional learning (SEL), its role in education, and how it relates to modern educational theories and the Waldorf curriculum.

Although the idea that humans are both social and emotional beings is well known, it did not gain real grounds in traditional education until the 1980s, with the publication of Howard Gardner's revolutionary book, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (2011 [originally published 1983]). Gardner detailed seven "autonomous" cognitive intelligences that a single person utilizes on a daily basis (Gardner, 2011). These intelligences are: "linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences" (Smerechansky-Metzger, 1995, p. 12). Through inter- and intrapersonal intelligences, we experience what we now call social and emotional intelligences (Mayer & Salovey, 1993).

Much like Rudolf Steiner, Gardner believed that although all humans have the same faculties or "intelligences," some people are more fluent in certain areas than others (Smerechansky-Metzger, 1995, p. 13). He also believed that the education of children should consider all of the intelligences that are within the individual (Blythe & Gardner, 1990). Gardner suggested that teachers should be encouraged to include a variety of educational strategies to reach each child according to their intellectual strengths and weaknesses, particularly through experiential education methods utilizing the arts (Blythe & Gardner, 1990). Though these ideas were known to Rudolf Steiner and his colleagues in the early 1900s

**CASEL has been spreading the word about social-emotional learning since 1994, while Waldorf schools have been focused on students' social and emotional growth since the first Waldorf School was founded in 1919.**

(Sloan, 2001, p. ix), when Gardner made these claims they were groundbreaking in mainstream academia!

Even though this research is widely available, intelligence-based curriculum has been slow to catch on in mainstream education. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, educators, administrators, and politicians in the United States are now beginning to take notice of such alternative concepts once more. As students were visibly struggling with their own mental health throughout the pandemic, educators and administrators have made the connection that a student's mental and social well-being directly affects their academic

life, as has been well-known in Waldorf education from its inception (see Mitchell, 2009, p. 36), and they are eager to solve these issues. This has sparked a re-emergence of conversation about promoting social-emotional learning curriculum in schools. However, there are many misconceptions of what SEL education is and what role schools have in perpetuating its values to their communities.

According to Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the five social-emotional competencies are: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2021b). These "soft skills" (Claxton, Costa, & Kallick, 2016) are broken down into subcategories that fit within each competence. Skills such as empathy, assertiveness, self-regulation, communication abilities, and intrapersonal awareness are all nestled within these categories (CASEL, 2021b). CASEL has been spreading the word about social-emotional learning since 1994 (CASEL, 2021a), while Waldorf schools have been focused on students' social and emotional growth since the first Waldorf School was founded in 1919 (Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, 2021).

AWSNA, the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, states the first Core Principle of Waldorf education as "The image of the human being as a spiritual being informs every aspect of the school" (AWSNA, 2021). The AWSNA platform further notes that, "Waldorf education enlivens the physical, emotional, intellectual, social, artistic, and spiritual capacities of the human being as the individual moves through the phases of this life" (AWSNA, 2021). Because of its foundational view that human beings need to be nurtured spiritually, socially, and intellectually, Waldorf

education has been making social-emotional learning integral to its curriculum from the start.

Rudolf Steiner instructed the original Waldorf teachers to appeal to a child's social, emotional, and spiritual capacities from their beginning days in Waldorf schools (Schmitt-Stegmann, 2000). By experiencing an education that appeals to the whole child, students, so Steiner believed, would experience a greater sense of freedom, not only in their educational lives, but also in their future lives as adults (Schmitt-Stegmann, 2000). These indications have led educators in Waldorf schools to utilize the arts in all curriculum areas in order to make sure

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that the child is learning in a developmentally appropriate method and also in a way that "draws out the child's inherent capacities" (Syringa Mountain School, 2021).

Though many psychologists and educational practitioners know that social and emotional intelligences should be supported in schools, there are major players that oppose integrating SEL curriculum. Aristotle himself said in his treatise, *The Politics*, that "not all people have the same opinion about what youth should learn in order to develop a good character or to enable them to lead the best life" (1981). Though Aristotle made this remark over 2,300 years ago, this could not be more accurate in regards to integrating SEL curriculum in classrooms. According to Evie Bland, a writer for *Education Week*, the greatest complaints that schools receive when they begin implementing an SEL curriculum are that such skills should be taught by the students' families and not by their school districts (Bland, 2020). Their great worry is that a student will receive indications that do not align with the student's family values. In addition, some argue that schools should not be put in the position to teach children "values" or character-based teaching at all (Greene, 2019). Still, who will teach the new generation these skills if they do not have a strong family unit or community to encourage them towards personal growth? (Mitchell, 2009, p. 35)

Critics of SEL claim the field is vaguely defined and the applications are not entirely clear. Finally, they ask, where does the curriculum come from and who generates it? In his article, "Does Social and Emotional Learning Belong in the Classroom?" Peter Greene asks the question: "Can the teachable moment about human emotions, empathy, or self-awareness be formally constructed?" (Greene, 2019). He alludes to

the idea that SEL needs to happen “on the job,” in an individualized manner, not in a written, prescribed curriculum. Like Greene, I, too, ask whether a one-size-fits-all curriculum is the best solution to social-emotional learning in our schools. However, I do see the benefit of getting these systems into the hands of educators or community leaders that need a guide or may not have resources to invest in individualized plans.

No matter one’s view on social-emotional learning, one thing remains clear: without a knowledge of self, empathy for others, the ability to regulate emotions, and the capacity for thoughtful decision-making, the children of today will not be able to become the great leaders of tomorrow that we need them to be. It is a moot point discussing whether social-emotional learning should come from the parent or a school-based program if the children of today are left without having the life skills they need in order to lead fulfilling lives in and beyond the classroom.

## Puppetry and Social-Emotional Learning

With these thoughts on social-emotional learning in and outside of the Waldorf education setting, and the history sketch on educational puppetry, you may clearly see the connection between puppetry and SEL. Through puppetry, students hit all four zones of social and emotional areas as set out by CASEL and many of the intelligences discussed by Howard Gardner (2011). Hedda Sharapan, a Senior fellow with PNC Bank’s “Grow Up Great” programming, which collaborates with Fred Rogers Productions and the Sesame Workshop, states that children “readily... identify with puppets, so they’re more open to learning social-emotional skills from them. That’s why many teachers use puppet stories” (Sharapan, 2016). The utilization of puppet stories could not be more integral to Waldorf education, as we have discussed. However, let’s now peel back the veneer of the performance and really look into social and emotional skills a student can learn when they engage with puppetry.

## Self-Management

When students are participating in the act of watching a puppet show, they are engaged with the story behind a “fourth wall.” This theatrical term means that there is an invisible, imagined “wall” that separates the audience from the performance, allowing the

audience to serve as a spectator (Merriam-Webster, 2021). In dramatic education and before most field trips in elementary school, we spend time discussing audience behavior with our students. They learn that to be a “good” audience member they need to sit still in their seats as best as they can. Their feet need to be on the floor and not on the backs or tops of the chair in front of them. They also need to refrain from speaking while the performance is taking place. This act of audience education is harder than one would think when children are not used to attending live performances. Most of their audience preparation happens at home with their families, typically in front of the television. At home parents are able to talk over the entertainment, get up and move around, sit with their feet up on the couch, or even eat a meal during the show. These activities are not proper audience behavior during a live show, so children are asked to manage their behavior while attending a live performance.

## Self-Awareness

If you take it a step further and consider the idea of the students creating their own puppet show, the bonds between human development and puppetry are further strengthened. Rudolf Steiner says in *Practical Advice to Teachers* that “children should not just know that they have hands but become aware of their hands” (2000, Lecture 4). In creating a puppet show, students will not only become aware of their hands, they will do this by building both fine and gross motor skills through the act of creating, sewing, and manipulating their own puppet.

In their book, *Will-Developed Intelligence: Handwork and Practical Arts in the Waldorf School Elementary through High School* (2016 [1999]), Patricia Livingston and David Mitchell write, “The brain discovers what the fingers explore” (p. 10). This dedicated “will work” is even acknowledged by the California Department of Education in their Arts Education Framework. The CDE states in their chapter on theatre education:

Utilizing puppets or masks can be a useful strategy for students to create through an external means, rather than with their body. Students often find new and different ways to express themselves when they create characters using masks or puppets. (CDE, 2020, p. 81)

My students quickly figured out after our first rehearsal that one cannot just stand in front of an audience, move

**In the exploration of emotion through the puppet, the child is able to learn how to distinguish the different ways to move the puppet to make it show a certain emotion.**

a puppet around, and call this a puppet show! As Hobey Ford says in his article, “Teacher Education Through the Kennedy Center,” published in the book, *Puppetry in Education and Therapy*, “The heart of puppetry is action and animation” (2005, p. 22). Learning how to convey emotion through a simple piece of material is a difficult task even for adults, but for children this skill comes with greater rewards. In the exploration of emotion through the puppet, the child is able to learn how to distinguish the different ways to move the puppet to make it show a certain emotion. This emotion experimentation teaches the child about his or her own body language and how to read the body language of others. Both of these concepts unlock self- and social awareness according to the CASEL Framework (CASEL, 2021b).

### **Social Awareness**

Watching a puppet show, a child sees the puppet go through a variety of trials and conflicts. This journey can inspire the child to make connections to her own life, thereby strengthening her social awareness. Social awareness primarily has to do with how one relates to others. Empathy is one of the main skills that CASEL’s SEL Framework discusses and one that is integral to Waldorf education as well. A. C. Harwood states: “to enter into the experience of others requires not only understanding but imaginative sympathy as well” (2001 [1958], p. 4).

Through puppetry, students are able to have more than the empathetic experience of the spectator when they participate in the show also as its creators. In addition, the child is also learning how to work with others when creating the show—taking into consideration how their teammates feel and what they bring to the project. Even in writing the script for the show, the child has an opportunity to explore the different characters in the play. This allows children to explore characters that have different perspectives from their own, showing them that it is acceptable for others to see things differently and employ different perspectives, thereby widening the children’s world view.

### **Responsible Decision-Making**

Decision-making guides a human’s life from its early days. Though some studies by cognitive psychologists show the child’s ability to make informed decisions directly relates to brain development and its successive

stages (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012), it is important for children to see from a very young age that their decisions have consequences. Through the telling of a story, children are able to learn that every action has consequences as demonstrated by the trials that characters face within the tale. In addition, when engaging in the creation of a puppet show, the child learns that there are steps to creating a performance and that each step is reliant on the one before it.

### **Puppetry, SEL, and the Temperaments**

The more I explored the relationship between SEL and puppetry, the more I became aware of the relevance of another topic to this relationship: the temperaments. I wondered how puppetry could be healing for each of the four temperaments: the choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic, and melancholic (Harwood, 2001, p. 154). To my surprise, very little had been written about puppetry and the temperaments so far.

One interesting study by a company called INSIGHTS Intervention revealed itself through my research. The practitioners at INSIGHTS led a program that used four adorable and accessible puppets to help children understand their own temperament, strengthening their self-awareness (Insights Intervention, 2019). It seems that this is the only official study of this issue conducted so far. I decided, therefore, to explore on my own the relationship between puppetry, SEL, and the temperaments, as the latter are described by Rudolf Steiner and A. C. Harwood.

### **The Sanguine**

Described by Harwood as someone who has “much interest in many things,” and who is generally eager (2001, pp. 155-156) and cheerful (Heibel, 1941), the sanguine child would greatly benefit from creating a puppet show. Because the sanguine enjoys a variety of tasks, playmaking and creating is an ideal pastime. From set creation, puppet making, to writing the stories to be performed, the sanguine would be able to dabble in a variety of activities that require not only the use of the hands, but also the intellect and a vast amount of creativity.

In terms of social and emotional learning, creating a puppet show would teach the sanguine child about responsible decision-making and time management. Because the sanguine would have to focus on getting all of the elements finished, this would force sanguine

**In terms of SEL, the choleric child would make the most gains in self-regulation in learning to work with other people while managing his or her own emotions.**

children to pace themselves and to see tasks through to completion. They would also be natural at teamwork due to their disposition and would probably be able to create a pleasant work environment for the group.

### **The Choleric**

Always the bold one, the choleric child would do well being front and center (Harwood, 2001, p. 156) as the director of the puppet play or the lead player of the puppeteers. Known to be a good leader, the choleric is always ready to lead the group by slaying any dragon or saving any princess in distress. Harwood suggests that the teacher should give this child a “very active and magnificent part [in a play], and in general he should be given difficult work and left to cope with the difficulties himself” (p. 155). This would not only show the choleric child that he can do the tasks set before him, but give him pride of a job well done. Harwood says that this sense of achievement is the one thing that the choleric wants most in life (p. 156).

In terms of SEL, the choleric child would make the most gains in self-regulation in learning to work with other people while managing his or her own emotions. Because the choleric children typically get frustrated when things do not go their way, working in a group would help them understand how to balance those strong emotions while working with others. This would also increase their understanding of how to maintain a good relationship with their peers and a healthy process of decision-making. One can hope that the choleric child would also come to understand a deeper social awareness through this experience.

### **The Melancholic**

Described as the teacher’s favorite student (Harwood, 2001, p. 157), the melancholic child is shy and cautious. This student would benefit from writing and seeing puppet plays that are tales of individuals overcoming trying situations (p. 158). Actually playing the role of the lead character could be a cathartic experience for melancholic students, as they would be actively engaged in the storyline that unfolds through obstacles and triumphs.

Emotional intelligence gains would come into play for melancholic students. They would gain a greater understanding of how to cope with their own emotions by seeing the triumphs of the characters in the puppet plays. They would also experience a “drawing out” through

the process of creating the play, as they would need to utilize the skills that they keep so insular in order to create a product with the group. This group work would be an ideal way to teach the melancholic student how to create and maintain friendships with others, which could be a life-saving lesson later on in life.

### **The Phlegmatic**

The phlegmatic child would probably receive the most healing experience by seeing the show come together in front of them. I think it would be best to assign to such a child the role of a stage manager, an assistant director, or even as an audience member. Harwood describes the phlegmatic student as one that cares deeply for the other students in the class and that can behave almost like a “mother hen” to the group (Harwood, 2001, p. 159).

The nurturing qualities of the phlegmatic would do very well in the advisory position of the stage manager or assistant director, as the student would be actively in charge of organizing the group under the guiding force of the teacher-director. In this role, the phlegmatic student is also removed enough from the show that he or she can watch the action and enjoy the whole class experience (p. 158).

Taking initiative and motivation will be a big theme for the phlegmatic student when it comes to social-emotional learning. This aligns with the CASEL Framework competence named Responsible Decision-Making (CASEL, 2021b). Because the phlegmatic wants to be comfortable (Harwood, 2001, p. 154), stepping out of their comfort zone is a scary, yet important step for the phlegmatic to take. Having a role that is both integral and advisory in nature would help the phlegmatic both cross the bridge into leadership and offer comfort in the role of spectator.

### **Conclusion**

Let us now return to the scene that began our journey through this topic of puppetry and social-emotional learning. We are back in the early childhood classroom with twenty youngsters seated in front of a simple puppet stage. They are raptly watching a performance that is based on the seasonal story that they are exploring this month. However, this show is different; this show has been created and is being performed by students in their own school’s upper grade level.

Through the act of storytelling, the students involved in both the giving and receiving of the tale are gaining

**Utilizing puppetry to learn these skills, children will be able to experience the type of education that Rudolf Steiner espoused.**

so much more than just the sharing of a story. Not only are the students experiencing a communal activity, strengthening their sense of community and belonging to their class and to the school as a whole, the students are also strengthening social-emotional skills that will be with them far past their time in elementary school. They are participating in an empathetic experience where they are subconsciously learning that all people have emotions and can triumph over the obstacles in their path. They might even make connections to themselves and see themselves reflected in the characters in front of them. The students watching the show, by following the rules of the classroom and of respectful spectatorship are also establishing a strong understanding of social norms and reverence for the spoken word of others.

The young puppeteers presenting the show are experiencing the cyclical nature of a live performance. They are giving content and receiving feedback through the laughter, gasps, and hushed whispers of the students in the audience. By experiencing this feedback loop, these young performers are understanding what it means to communicate positively with others. The students that created the puppet show can be proud that they were able to use their thinking, feeling, and willing lives to create something that they are now able to give back to their school community.

This image of social-emotional learning taking place through puppetry is one that I hope can be achieved not only in my own classroom, but in the classrooms of other educators that are committed to providing an experiential, art-filled learning environment for their students to learn fundamental social and emotional life skills. By engaging in social-emotional learning, a student will be prepared to positively engage with others long past their time in primary and secondary school. Utilizing puppetry to learn these skills, children will be able to experience the type of education that Rudolf Steiner espoused: one that is “imaginative, living, colorful... engaging” (Schmitt-Stegmann, 2000).

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# Identity Development through Literature

## Working with High School Students

Defne Caldwell

**“It would have been impossible for me to have told anyone what I derived from these novels, for it was nothing less than a sense of life itself.”**

**Richard Wright, *Black Boy***

I have spent 27 years exploring stories with young people. While most of this experience unfolded at Green Meadow Waldorf School, in Chestnut Ridge, NY, I have also spent seven years in public education and four years teaching at the college level. The variety of this experience still confirms for me that Waldorf education has a unique strength by working on the relationship of learning and being. I can see this in my classmates (I, myself, was a lifelong Waldorf student), in my own children and their friends, and in my students – that Waldorf students have a being that has unique qualities. Waldorf students can recognize these in each other. The other day, my daughter said, “Well, I met some Waldorf students at college last night. I was at a party and I just knew.” Our students are recognized for something I could only call presence, ease, poise, self-reliance, curiosity, enjoyment of multiple aspects of life, as well as by the level of their discourse and by a kind of independent spirit.

The role that working with stories or with literature in general plays in the students’ lives is one of building a sense of self and a connection to the world. You may call this connection *empathy*. In preparing for writing this piece, I asked one of my students what she thought literature does for people; she replied, “It helps you in the process of empathy, and it helps you find ways to explain what you are feeling and what role you want to play in this world.” This is not so different than what I would say. My own wording would state: When you read literature, when you work it out and really listen, you are experiencing something that is larger than yourself but also just about you. In this act, you become larger, richer than you were. Your identity is built from something that reaches far and wide, and into the past and future, filtered through and fostering the development of your own unique self.

The fact that Waldorf education is so mindfully dedicated to the development of each individual is also what sets our schooling apart when it comes to working with literature. The personal growth of each of my students is my goal. For high schoolers, finding meaning in stories is the means to that goal, and students work towards it eagerly, because they are naturally driven to make connections and to find meaning wherever they can.

People are meaning makers, really. I’m thinking of the unborn child listening to voices, the infant making sense of light and shape, the baby connecting sound and sense. We are just desperate to make connections between everything. We are just as desperate to make connections with each other. It is common to think that we are individuals, each their own person with their own feelings and thoughts. That is true. But each of us is at the center of a larger being, which we might call humanity. Stories are what allow us to live inside the experience of people who lead us into the world, people who face situations we do not face, people who are different in terms of age, gender, race, sexuality, religion, culture, and history; any difference can be bridged with a story.

The art of the story is also the way that we recognize form and meaning in what would otherwise be life ongoing, an endless string of moments. With the art of the story, events become plot, recurrences build up as themes, people can be understood like characters, anything, anything can be a metaphor or symbol. Art in general, but writing and reading literature, specifically, is one way we take hold of life. I can imagine the earliest human beings retelling or previewing the hunt on the walls of a cave or singing the stories of great heroes like Beowulf and Odysseus to each other. From the moment the mind begins to navigate a story, it is looking for a parallel life. The relationship of my life to the parallel lives I live through literature is where the meanings grow. In working on that relationship of self with an other self, and life with an other life, I change. Incredibly, the story changes too! Stories that used to move us, *The Giving Tree*, for example, change as we change. So many of us grew up with that story, a metaphor for good parenting. Now, how awful that the tree is destroyed by giving. That is no longer a healthy

metaphor. Characters in novels and stories change too. Just think about the once exemplary character of Uncle Tom, today seen as servile and self-loathing, and the once near and dear Huck Finn, today seen as inadvertently racist, but racist all the same. It is important to hold the picture that readers create the reality or meaning of the stories they read as much, if not more, than writers. In *The American Scholar*, Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “There is then creative reading as well as creative writing. When the mind is braced by labor and invention, the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion. Every sentence is doubly significant, and the sense of our author is as broad as the world.” The reader builds the meaning of the story.

I would like to give you a taste of the way in which at Green Meadow we work to support the development of each student through literature. Because we are mindful of child development, the way we work with literature changes in the four years of high school. In the samples I bring, you will see, for example, that it is not healthy for ninth graders to be told that they are alone in the world. Seniors, on the other hand, do need to explore being alone.

Ninth grade students, who are 13 or 14-years old, are boldly brazen and still unsure at the same time. They vacillate from conviction to doubt and from loving things to hating them at the drop of a hat. A deep feeling lives within them and also a new tendency to judge, though without what we would call true judgement. As much as a two-year-old’s tantrums signal the birth of her will, these signs in the 14 year-old signal the birth of an intellect. Now, if we tried to engage them at the level of the mature, free-thinking individual that they will one day become, we would be faced with their uncertainty or with convictions that come out of gut feelings, which, unschooled, can actually become an obstacle to powerful thinking and a strong sense of self. So we draw ninth graders out into the fantastic truths and mysteries of the world and into pondering opposites, so that they can practice their natural swinging thoughts and feelings in positive ways.

Melville’s novel, *Moby-Dick*, is perhaps the most formative text I use with ninth graders. They are immersed in a world without borders, where nothing is certain, and yet one that mirrors their new consciousness of how huge the universe is, how beyond understanding truth is. This is the world of the sea, where every place you

**Waldorf students have a being that has unique qualities. Waldorf students can recognize these in each other.**

look, there is only the ring of a horizon. In contrast to that immensity is the world of the ship, also a familiar experience to ninth graders. This is the world of family, or school, maybe in some cases of a town or city. On the ship, named the Pequod, they are presented with sailors from many different places on earth, from Nantucket to the Pacific Islands, from the vast continent of Africa to the Isle of Mann. It isn’t a stretch to see how a ship, or a family, or New York resembles a collection of humanity, like the whalers on board the Pequod. Ishmael, the narrator, tells us that the voyage of the Pequod is fated.

Well, ninth graders do not choose their lives or families. Even if they don’t believe in fate, they can relate to the feeling that there are life situations they can’t control. However, along that fated voyage, all of the opportunities for Ishmael to make free-will choices about his behavior are there, just as it is for our students. And we spend a good deal of time talking about what free will is.

Individuals on the Pequod are richly varied archetypes, and while each character is unlike the others, students can understand them in terms of polarities – the opposite qualities that they have: the immovable, obsessed, proud and tyrannical Captain Ahab in contrast to the innocent, frightened, ready to please cabin boy, Pip; the crass and explosive third mate, Flask, in contrast to the noble, perfectly able to act harpooner, Daggoo. As I said before, thinking about opposites is natural to ninth graders. In fact, one often has to remind them that the world isn’t made up from or to be mapped out as good and bad, and that they don’t have to either love or hate a thing. But pondering opposites yields a good deal of meaning, too, when used in the right way. The willfulness of Ahab, who is consumed with self, is intensified when compared to the temerity and selflessness of Pip. A rich series of contrasts between characters helps students to see the specific qualities of each. Working with contrasts also keeps their minds and hearts moving well in an intellectual space they naturally inhabit, the space of opposites. Their first introduction to thinking in terms of polarities is made in the sweetest and most relatable way by Ishmael, when he tries to explain why it is so wonderful to be under warm covers in his cold room. He says, “To truly enjoy bodily warmth, some small part of you must be cold, for there is no quality in this world that is not what it is merely by contrast. Nothing exists in itself.” Every student knows what this means. And then, the act of comparison ends up yielding so much insight.

At the same time, the novel provides students with a series of dualities – Pairs rather than opposites. Queequeg, the Pacific Islander tattooed from head to toe who eats steak with his harpoon may seem to be Ishmael's opposite. Queequeg is not a Christian and Ishmael is, Queequeg is a prince from Kokovoko in the Pacific and Ishmael is down and out North American from New England. But they are both drawn toward one another, both spiritual in their own way, both possessed of a balanced sense of self and other, both generous. And so they become a pair, and an example to students that what may seem like an opposing force in life can also be a companion force when one finds common ground. In this case, no one is ever ultimately alone. This speaks to ninth graders who are newly conscious of being unique unto themselves and just as newly in need of true friendship. You could say that this is a lesson in feeling. Initially, Ishmael was afraid of Queequeg and disgusted that he smoked in the bed they had to share in the inn. Once they become best friends, suddenly Ishmael loves nothing more than to lie in bed with Queequeg and pass the pipe back and forth. Ishmael remarks, "See how elastic our stiff prejudices grow when love once comes to bend them."

The novel is also rich in metaphor and symbol, often pondered by our narrator and guide, Ishmael. The Pequod itself, decked out in the bones and teeth of whales, is a symbol of self-destruction. Ishmael calls it a "cannibal of a craft," the light of the fire beneath the try pots, which makes the sailor's look like devils in hell, to Ishmael, is a symbol of unfounded fears at night; the Catskill Eagle that flies through dark mountain gorges, yet is always higher than the other birds of the woods and plains, is, in his mind, a symbol of deep thinking. Our love of the sea, Ishmael says, is related to Narcissus, who, "because he could not grasp the tormenting mild image he saw of himself plunged in and was drowned. But that same image we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life." In class, we spend many minutes discussing what that is, the ungraspable phantom of life. Students say it is the meaning of life, or it is who you are, or it is what your life should be. This is the work of building meaning and self at the same time.

There is really so much more to say about this novel and its capacity as a builder of self. Still, I can't move on without honoring the role of a hero in literature. Ishmael is one of the best. He, our narrator and guide,

is perhaps the most constant influence on the ninth graders. It is no mistake that we know nothing of what he looks like or of his past. He can fit anyone. His warm introduction, *Call me Ishmael*, is the world-famous first line of the novel. Within the first two chapters, students have climbed up inside of him and are on a journey that proceeds from within his thinking.

Because of the intensity of his role of an intimate thoughtful narrator, Ishmael is the armor that the students wear as they navigate the dangers of the story. Through him, they practice presence, honesty, flexibility, and deep thinking.

Ishmael provides students with presence through his powers of observation. We focus a great deal on this power with ninth graders as it gives them the power of sight and of objective discernment that is the foundation of clear thought. Ishmael reports and reports and reports, and in this way, he builds the world that becomes, for a time, their reality.

The second superpower he employs, which comes as great service to ninth graders, is honesty. He shares his feelings truthfully, especially when he, early on, shares his doubts and fears. In this way, he is not only an example of a way to be, but an example of a good guide, one who does not pretend to be what he is not.

Within the confines of the fated voyage, and caught in a web of intense relationships, Ishmael is able to change in order to bond with others. Understanding how to

find common ground, how to seek company, and how to be intimate is as important for a young individual as learning the art of solitude will be later in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

Finally, Ishmael's greatest gift is his deep thinking. Because he is thoughtful and through the narration of his thoughts, the ship, its special attributes, the people on it,

their relationships, events, storms and swells at sea, all become symbols and full of meaning.

The beauty of language, its power to create worlds, inspire thought, and move feelings, takes root in students. Every year, in a closing circle in which we review the main lesson, a few of the ninth grade students comment on the beauty of Melville's writing.

Towards the end of the novel, Melville describes a beautiful day; it is beautiful enough to move Ahab to a rare moment of self-realization and tears. Even in this description, the power of polarities and dualities

**Working with contrasts also keeps ninth-graders' minds and hearts moving well in an intellectual space they naturally inhabit, the space of opposites.**

is evident. Mostly, it offers an example of the power of language to move us:

*It was a clear steel-blue day. The firmaments of air and sea were hardly separable in that all-pervading azure; only, the pensive air was transparently pure and soft, with a woman's look, and the robust and man-like sea heaved with long, strong, lingering swells, as Samson's chest in his sleep...*

*That glad, happy air, that winsome sky, did at last stroke and caress Ahab; the step-mother world, so long cruel—forbidding—now threw affectionate arms round his stubborn neck, and did seem to joyously sob over him, as if over one, that however willful and erring, she could yet find it in her heart to save and to bless. From beneath his slouched hat Ahab dropped a tear into the sea; nor did all the Pacific contain such wealth as that one wee drop.*

In the tenth grade, students step outside of their guides and heroes. They can watch *over the shoulder* of Odysseus or Richard Wright, for example, but they are also *watching* Odysseus and Richard Wright. This is an important step in the students' construction of their own perspectives. In the tenth grade, stories are mined not for archetypes, polarities and dualities, and timeless truths, but more for process. How can a person *learn from experiences*? *The Odyssey* is a perfect example of a series of situations made up of cause and effect. Because he is easily tempted and cannot control his crew, Odysseus spends many years lost in the world. Then, finally, he is saved by the slow process not of controlling his men actually, but of learning to control himself. The obstacles Richard Wright faces and described in *Black Boy* are the harshness of his childhood and the iron fist of racism. Like Odysseus, he can't change the world. His challenge is to be true to himself and survive. In both pieces, a hero is at first beset by the world, tested physically, psychologically, and morally, again and again. In both cases, the hero fails, yet he learns from mistakes and develops clear thinking and inner fortitude, which allows each hero to find a home in the world and within himself. Inwardly, these heroes build a positive, moral self who, in the end, does feel a connection to the world despite the painful road traveled to reach this point. In his autobiography, Wright describes his childhood and adolescence: "My days and nights were one long, quiet, continuously contained dream of terror, tension, and anxiety. I wondered how long I could bear it." But then, through a long process of study and inner development, he is able to speak out of a sense of wholeness

in himself and unity with others. He writes, "If you possess enough courage to speak out what you are, you will find you are not alone."

In the eleventh grade, students need experiences of a deeper kind of navigation. These are experiences that do not provide clear tests or lessons, and situations that cannot be controlled by clear thinking and inner fortitude. This is the year in which students practice developing an inner resolve around personal perspectives that may or may not jive with one's surroundings. They work with texts that involve characters who find themselves in situations that can only be met by inward growth. Here, interactions, planning, behavior are secondary to what can only be called a higher perspective.

In *Inferno*, Dante finds himself in hell. In his autobiography, Malcolm X finds himself in a world that bars him from true progress because of the color of his skin and then due to his incarceration. Hamlet loses father, mother and, worst of all, his trust in everyone around him, as anyone may or may not be conspiring against him. Working with these texts, students experience a wide range of initial emotions, Dante's extreme terror and pity for sinners suffering in hell, Malcolm X's blind efforts to get by, no matter what, even if this involves crimes against himself and others, and Hamlet's disorientation, depression and madness. You could say that none of these characters can find a healthy footing in the world. Through these characters, eleventh graders begin to understand that there are some things about the world that they cannot change or control, and that they need to develop a sense of personal responsibility and their own point of view to have a world that

**Formative texts involve what we would call voice – one's own language, one's own truth and one's own causes or dreams.**

lives *inside* them. That they will soon be going out alone into the big world of college and beyond both dances and looms in front of them. In their experience, the practice of careful observation, deep thinking, the tracking of patterns of behavior have begun to take root in an experience of a dawning deeply personal self that

is unlike any other and, ultimately, a lonely experience.

It is healing to travel through hell with Dante, and to see how he is strengthened, not weakened, by terror and pain and also by having to witness horrors he can't fully understand. Ultimately, he faces the creator and understands that he is both separate and unified with the entire universe and that the divine power of love is what creates this relationship of self to all of creation. Malcolm X discovers that understanding the true history of his African ancestors and the true painful story of their history on American soil results in self-respect.

In giving himself in service to others through his dedication to Islam, he finds humility and purpose. In both cases, a struggling self is saved by working on one's self and by love. Hamlet's lesson is that he will not compromise his truth no matter what, ultimately to his death. Though his story is tragic, every word he utters along the way confirms the hard road that sticking with your truth can involve and gives language to the experience of a dawning consciousness of self. There are too many examples to share them all. But in a conversation with his friend about how Hamlet finds Demark to be a prison though his friend does not, Hamlet says, "Why then, 'tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

In the senior year, the role that literature plays is deeply personal and different for every student. Formative texts involve what we would call voice – one's own language, one's own truth and one's own causes or dreams. We study the writers and speakers who gave North America a voice in the mid nineteenth century, distinct from what they had inherited from Europe. Ralph Waldo Emerson tells students, "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great person is one who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude" (Self-Reliance). Emily Dickinson's work is an example of deeply personal, distilled, and sometimes evasive personal truths. She writes, "Much madness is divinest sense - / To a discerning eye - / Much sense - the starkest Madness." And for the artists, she says, "Nature is a haunted house – but Art a house that tries to be haunted." In *Walden*, Thoreau's love of solitude and communion with nature opens doors to true independence. Students see how powerful that independence is in "Civil Disobedience," Thoreau's treatise on standing for—instead of fighting for—what you believe, a stance that inspired Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Thoreau reminds students, "Action from principle, the perception and performance of right, changes things and relations." Frederic Douglass is a bold voice, fearlessly taking on not just the institution of slavery, but American racism as it is woven into people's minds, accepted behaviors, laws, institutions, even the Constitution. Students are moved by his thoughts, his words, and the beauty of his language. In speaking about the supposed freedom of African Americans in 1888, he boldly pointed out "He [a person previously enslaved] is worse off, in many respects, than when he was a slave, I am compelled to admit, but I contend that the fault is not his, but that of

his heartless accusers. He is the victim of a cunningly devised swindle, one which paralyzes his energies, suppresses his ambition, and blasts all his hopes... I here and now denounce his so-called emancipation as a stupendous fraud!" And he warns, "No man can put a chain about the ankle of his fellow man without at last finding the other end fastened about his own neck" (Speech at Civil Rights Mass Meeting, Washington, DC, 1883).

Amid these voices, students settle further into themselves and find their own voices. In their conversations and writing, it becomes clear that they have so much to say without having been previously aware of it. They examine the context that their lives have provided them with in order to recognize their personal gifts and struggles; no two are the same. This step also involves a process of self-observation, self-acceptance and self-love. Ultimately, the process results in the beginning of realizations about self and declarations of self in the students' own distilled original thoughts.

Last year, a student wrote, "Emotions are the eternally changing seas: tempestuous, passionate, tranquil and fathomless." Another wrote, "Nature's expansiveness holds the soul better than any four walls." Students

also exercise their voices in expansive poetic songs of self, inspired by Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." In a section of one such song of self, a student wrote, "The eagle rides the current of the wind, like a kite without a string." "The windy trails are most pleasing to me, / They slowly let me down." Later on in this same song, she wrote, "the relationships I have are built upon snowdrifts, / I am in avalanche danger." Another wrote about what she loves, describing

...the deer sleeping in the flowerbeds,

And the lucidity of a child's imagination,

And the pedals of a piano,

And the taste of plantains,

And the sound of cascading laughter in the heart of the forest,

And the knowledge that nothing is imperfect, with the firm belief that it is true...

Another student finds himself in a universal context drawn to earth. He wrote,

Timeless, I hung in space,

**"Emotions are the eternally changing seas: tempestuous, passionate, tranquil and fathomless"**

**– A Student Statement**

A chrysalis wrapped in a cocoon of starlit constellations and the cosmos.

Guiding me down into her protecting light, an earthly soul called my name...

Peaceful as the sunrise is the scent of blooming mountain laurels,

Birds and cicadas sing their songs, and the rays of prosaic suns filter through the leaves.

Bleeding hearts cry, dogwoods blossom.

You can see how these voices speak out of deeply personal thoughts and feelings, observations, and intuitions.

We, Waldorf teachers, work with the conviction that each person is an individuality looking for their fullest, freest life. In the high school, we are working with the first foundational steps of a thinking, feeling individual whom we know will not fully arrive until around the age of 21, and who will spend a lifetime working to make what they have inherited their own and what they bring to the world as rich a life as possible. The way in which we use literature to support, inspire and grow the individual is a mindful process that takes place over four years under our care, which we hope inspires a lifetime of growth. The worlds, characters, and stories we live through, yes, *live through*, provide worlds, guides, and experiences, which, I think, we cannot do without. Without these worlds, guides, and experiences, and our capacity to live in our imaginations and build meaning, we would be left brushing teeth, getting where we need to go, interacting with the events and people, as if for the first time, and reacting without the wisdom of humanity accumulated through the ages.

I'd like to close with a quote from Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*, which expresses so perfectly what I have tried to show here. Maybe some of you are familiar with this work.

We have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god. And where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves. And where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come into the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.

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# Mani and the Soul of the Waldorf Movement

Brian Scannell

**W**hat does an obscure third century religious leader have to teach us about the socio-emotional health of our students? The answer might surprise people unfamiliar with the biography and teachings of Mani. Mani was known during his lifetime (216-276) as a doctor, not of the body, but of the various afflictions of the soul. He was a visionary who expressed that the human soul was the battleground where the forces of good and evil wage war. This inner battleground was—much more recently—also apparent to the anthroposophical psychologist Bernard Lievegoed who notes in his book, *The Battle for the Soul* (published posthumously in 1993), that the human soul is in grave danger as the forces of our modern world work to traumatize and fragment it. This article will explore how Mani's biography might be a guidepost for the type of healing pedagogy our students need now more than ever.

One of the most remarkable statements Rudolf Steiner ever made was expressed to biodynamic farming pioneer, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, in the early 1920s, revealing that Waldorf education, while beneficial to humanity at large, was created to provide the right kind of education for one particular individual. That individual was Mani, whom Steiner believed would incarnate in America sometime at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If this is true, it is quite possible that Mani is in our midst. Who is Mani and what does their possible incarnation mean for the Waldorf movement more broadly, and for our students more specifically?

Historically speaking, Mani was a religious leader who lived in Persia between 216-276CE. He was born south of what is now Baghdad, in Babylonia, in a region known today as the Middle East, an important meeting place between East and West, but also an area known for its decadence and sinfulness during Mani's lifetime. He was raised by his mother after his father left Mani at an early age to join a religious community of Jewish Christian Baptists known as the Elchasaites. At age four, Mani joined his father only to leave at age 12 after receiving his first vision that told him to forsake the congregation. According to Richard Seddon, who wrote the book *Mani: His Life and Work*, Mani claimed that from youth on he came under special divine protection and that angels and powers of holiness brought him up through visions and signs.



*Crystal Seal of Mani. Believed by some experts to be Mani's personal seal (Mani is shown at center). The inscription around the seal reads, "Mani, apostle of Jesus Christ."*

At age twenty-four Mani had a second vision that shifted the direction of his life. A Coptic text relates its significance:

He revealed to me the hidden Mystery, hidden from the ages and generations of men, the mysteries of the depths and the heights, the mysteries of light and darkness, the mysteries of the contest, the war, and the great battle caused by darkness. He revealed to me how light and darkness together gave rise to the world... the creation of Adam... the mystery of the tree of knowledge of which Adam ate, by which his eyes were made to see, the mystery of the Apostles sent out to select the churches. Thus did the Paraclete disclose to me all that had been and all that will be, and all that the eye sees and the ear hears and the thought thinks.<sup>1</sup>

Here Mani articulates a major tenet of his worldview, the relation of darkness and light. This relationship proved to be one of the most controversial aspects of Mani's teaching (and the reason its most famous practitioner Augustine of Hippo would eventually abandon

<sup>1</sup> See: *The Kephalaia of the Teacher: The Edited Coptic Manichaean, Texts in Translation with Commentary* by Iain Gardner. Brill Academic Publishing, 1995.

the religion). Mani believed that the dual aspects of light and darkness held equal value and creative potential. In this sense, both good and evil, light and dark, work together as co-creators of the universe. Mani also believed that matter was a special mingling of the forces of light and darkness and that the Earthly task was to liberate light from matter. In his Temple Legend lecture series on Manicheism, Steiner expands on the idea:

The profound thought which lies in this is that the Kingdom of darkness has to be overcome by the Kingdom of light, not by means of punishment, but through mildness; not by resisting evil, but by uniting with it in order to redeem evil as such. (Steiner, *The Temple Legend*)

If this radical idea sounds familiar to a modern audience, it is because nonviolent practitioners like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., actualized this esoteric wisdom in their respective campaigns for freedom. King even used the phrase “redeem the soul of America” as he attempted to convert racist southerners through the power of love. Of course, these ideas didn’t originate with Mani. In the Christian tradition, Jesus’ *Sermon on the Mount* provided the theoretic framework that Mani shaped his nonviolent practices around, as he attempted to realize Jesus’ vision. Mani’s gift wasn’t in creating new forms, but in creatively synthesizing existing forms in novel ways.

After his vision at age 24, Mani traveled widely around the Middle East and eventually to India. Biographer Richard Seddon notes that Mani likely learned “the middle way” from Buddhists in India and that Mani’s chief aim was to make Christ accessible to adherents of every faith. The prophet Mani envisioned his religion (which included the teachings of Zarathustra, Buddha, and Christ) as a universal and therefore “transcultural” entity, which led to its vast spread from Europe to Asia. His followers became known simply as Christians, though their understanding of the significance of Christ was not tethered to any dogmatic ideologies. They rejected the sacrament of baptism and most of the Old Testament. These followers formed a community in Babylon dedicated to living a nonviolent lifestyle and freeing light from matter. They privately referred to themselves as *sons of a widow*, in part because they sought spiritual enlightenment from within, without the aid of external authorities. Adherents lived in varying degrees of poverty, were vegetarians, and took a vow of abstinence. Because of their beliefs about light being trapped in matter they were also environmentally conscious and operated on a “do no harm” basis to the living world around them.



*The Cologne Mani-Codex was discovered near Asyut, Egypt, in 1969, and purchased by the University of Cologne. It gives one of the most complete pictures of the early life of Mani. It has a remarkable resemblance to a butterfly.*

In addition to his ideas about the nature of light and darkness, Mani was an artist. In fact, in the Islamic world he is remembered more as artist than as a religious leader. Mani believed that the visual arts could communicate the same truth as writing or speech. He seemed to intuit that some might be hindered by language and that the image could serve as an alternative pathway to spiritual transformation. A writing attributed to Mani and relayed by biographer Richard Seddon reads, “Let him who hears these truths in words also see them in an image and let him who is unable to learn them from words learn them from pictures” (Seddon, 1998, p. 9).

Much like his idea of the equality of light and dark, Mani also believed that the written word and the image held equal value. This equality of image and word is a central tenant of the first project that I highlight in this article. This view also makes a lot of sense in light of recent discoveries in neuroscience around brain lateralization. Most brains process words with one hemisphere of the brain and images with the other, therefore Mani’s approach speaks to the two distinct ways our brains learn.

## **The Modern Adolescent Soul**

Before exploring how Manichean ideas might find form in the Waldorf curriculum, it is important to identify the current issues that a modern curriculum needs to address. In the preface to her book *A Practical Guide to Curative Education*, author Robyn Brown notes:

Many years ago, when I was first a class teacher, I would say that there were perhaps one or two

students in each class that could have benefited from the work of Curative Education. Now I am often asked to observe classes. I would say that, on average, one-third of the children in each class I see could use this work; another third could use it to a lesser degree; and another third fit the picture I was given to expect in my Waldorf teacher training 30 years ago. (Brown, 2016, p. X)

Brown's observation is echoed by anthroposophical doctor Michaela Glöckler in her book *A Healing Education* (2000) where she notes, "The children I remember [in the US] in the 60s were more or less healthy children from a doctor's point of view. And in our time we must say that healthy children are becoming even more rare, something special." Both Brown's and Glöckler's observations are consistent with data from the last decade that shows a marked increase in the psychological suffering of our youth. Data from the National Institutes of Health shows that nearly 1 in 3 of adolescents ages 13 to 18 will experience an anxiety disorder. These numbers have been rising steadily over the last few decades. Between 2007 and 2015, anxiety disorders in children and teens went up 20%. During roughly the same time period, the rate of suicide for those ages 10 to 24 increased nearly 60%, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2019, an estimated 4.1 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 in the United States had at least one major depressive episode according to the National Institutes of Health. Finally, according to the National Survey of Children's Health, almost half the nation's children have experienced at least one or more types of serious childhood trauma.

All this data came before the entire world went on lockdown for COVID, which has greatly accelerated these alarming trends. While this is not an article about the root causes of these trends, it is clear that new technologies like social media, our consumer culture, and significant changes to our diets all play a role in pushing adolescents to the breaking point. As Brown notes, Waldorf schools are not immune from these problems. In fact, to some degree these issues were present when Rudolf Steiner founded the first Waldorf school over a hundred years ago. Steiner gave a series of lectures in the summer of 1924 that became known as the *Curative Education Course*. He opens those lectures by stating: "We have, as you know, quite a number of children whose development has been arrested and whom we have now to educate—or again, to heal, in

so far as this is possible." The Manichean stream brings this healing impulse to all matters of soul health. This soul realm covers spiritual afflictions, like anxiety and depression, and also issues like psychological trauma that is often a root cause of the arrested development Steiner referenced above. In his book, *Trauma and the Soul*, Jungian analyst Donald Kalsched pinpoints the epicenter of trauma: "In trauma work, we must learn to speak a soulful language, because it is uniquely the human soul that is threatened with annihilation by early trauma in a child's life" (Kalsched, 2013, p. 117).

As the souls of our youth come under unprecedented attack, it becomes especially important that the healing stream of the Manicheans take on a larger role in Waldorf pedagogy. The trauma, depression, and anxiety that many students experience are of course in addition to the necessary crises of adolescence that are part and parcel of the difficult transition from child to adult in any culture. Even in the most ideal circumstances, coming of age is a perilous journey that requires thoughtful educators who essentially function as psychological midwives helping students to successfully negotiate this crucial spiritual transition. Mani biographer Christine Gruwez notes that the inner gesture of the Manichean impulse is "noticing the one who stays behind, rather than looking for the one who is already ahead on the path" (Gruwez, 2014, p. 74). Any honest assessment of our students would conclude that more and more are being left behind as they attempt to navigate our perilous world.

## Who is Mani and what does his possible incarnation mean for the Waldorf movement more broadly, and for our students more specifically?

This article will explore several areas from Mani's biography that hint at what Mani-inspired curricular impulses might look like. Firstly, as Mani held the image as sacred, I will highlight a project I created where the image and art hold a soul-healing potential. Secondly, inspired by Mani's adoption of the middle way and his ability to synthesize disparate ideas, I will explore an assignment that grew from this mediating impulse. Finally, I will comment on the polarities that have emerged in the Waldorf movement around the work of diversity, equity and inclusion and offer a pathway to heal those divisions.

## The Healing Image

From what little is known about Mani it is clear that he placed a high value on the image as a pathway to spiritual transformation. One of his canonical writings (of his seven or eight major works) was known as *Picture Book* and it was essentially a series of illustrations by Mani

himself, in which he attempted to convey key elements of his cosmology in pictorial form. The power of the image to illuminate and heal is the focus of this section.

In 2016, I started doing research for a new class themed around the monomyth or hero’s journey, a pattern that mythologist Joseph Campbell discovered in stories across all cultures and time. In essence, Campbell discovered that all cultures are telling the same story. Campbell gives a very detailed breakdown of this cycle (see below), but also offers a three-part overview. In it he states that the hero first *separates* from his or her known world; then is *initiated* through a series of trials; and, finally, the hero *returns* home with some new treasure or boon, which typically is some new way of understanding or being. The initiation stage of the hero’s journey involves a series of trials leading up to a final challenge Campbell called the supreme ordeal. It is during the supreme ordeal that the hero is tested to confirm whether the changes that have been awakened—typically in the belly of the whale stage—have become permanent.

I designed this hero’s journey class with the idea that students in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade would first be able to identify this pattern in myths across different cultures, with the end goal that they would be able to recognize the pattern in their own lives. I have found that introducing the hero’s journey is most appropriate for 10<sup>th</sup> graders, as they seem well suited for the type of comparative analysis this pattern recognition requires. Like cycles in nature, the healthy pattern involves the continual death of the old to birth the seeds of the new, for as Goethe noted, “Until you have experienced this—die and become—you are but a ghost-like visitor on the earth.” In this sense, the hero’s cycle is to the inner life what the plant cycle is to the life of a plant.

As a culmination to my hero’s journey class at the end of 10th grade, I teach the myth of Theseus, have my students write a literary analysis paper about it, and end the year with a project I designed called *The Labyrinth of Your Mind*. I start this project by showing the class a piece of art entitled *The Maze*, by Canadian artist William Kurelek. Kurelek painted the piece in 1953 when he was an inpatient at Maudsley Psychiatric





*The Maze* by William Kurelek—Canada (1953)

Hospital in London, England. During his self-healing process, Kurelek completed several paintings over the period of his several years residency at the hospital. In his autobiography, *Someone with Me*, Kurelek writes that *The Maze* was “a kind of pictorial package of all my emotional problems” (Kurelek, 1980, p. 18).

The autobiographical painting shows the artist’s skull cut open to reveal the inner compartments of his mind, each of which represents a troubling memory from his life. In the center, there is a dead rat which, according to the artist, symbolizes his depression and feelings of depersonalization. In another section, a young Kurelek is literally kicked out of his house by his father.

In yet another section, Kurelek sits alone as other children play together behind him. The painting offers a glimpse into a deeply suffering mind, a suffering with its root in significant childhood trauma. In his conception, the artist sees his mind as a trap with each traumatic episode pushing him further into the unescapable maze of his inner life. It is clear to me, after years of working with *The Maze* and learning about the artist, that in addition to his childhood traumas, Kurelek was a highly sensitive person who acutely felt the pain of living in

the spiritual wasteland of our modern world. Part of his recovery involved his becoming a Catholic to address his spiritual longing. The other element of his recovery was naming his trauma and giving it form. Kurelek’s artwork is a great visual representation of the pain of being cut off from the spiritual world and can help students identify and navigate the unique challenges of the age of consciousness soul. The beauty of art is that it doesn’t speak to the intellect (which in Kurelek’s case is identified as the source of the problem) but is instead written in the visual language of the soul.

It is important to note that a maze and a labyrinth, though in writing are often used synonymously, are not the same thing. A maze (which Kurelek represents) presents a series of dead-end passages with the intention of trapping or confusing someone. A labyrinth—the focal point of the story of Theseus—follows a long but continual passageway to a center and out again. One cannot get lost in a labyrinth but may turn back before reaching the center. Labyrinths are ancient in origin and date back to indigenous peoples and early civilizations. At Newgrange, in Ireland, a spiral, a version of the labyrinth, can be found decorating the outside of

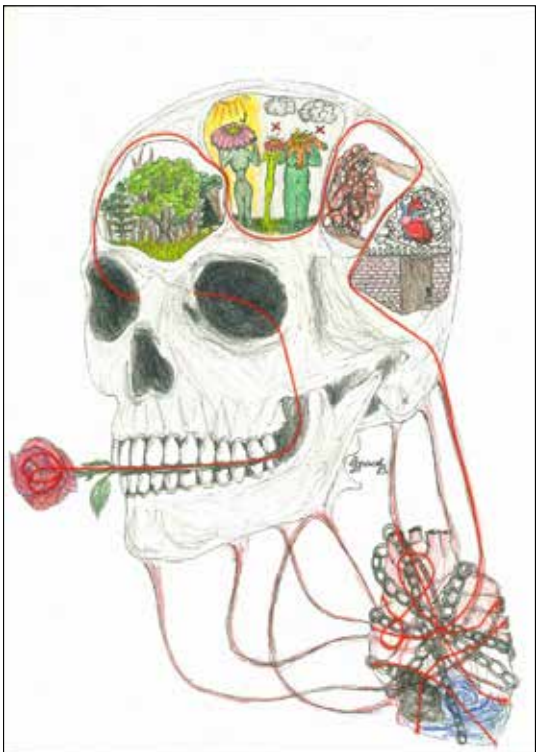
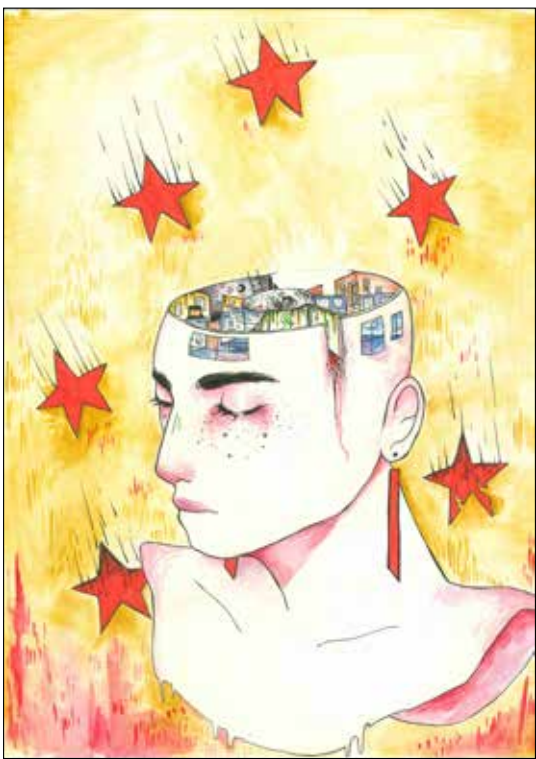


the chambers that were created over 5000 years ago. Unlike a maze, a labyrinth is a healthy conception of the mind or inner life. One enters, moves toward a goal or obstacle, then exits. Inward navigation or in-sight is facilitated by both courage and human will. The movement in and out of a labyrinth is a microcosm of the movement of the universe with its in and out breath or expansion and contraction. The in-and-out rhythm of the labyrinth is also a metaphor for the soul incarnating into a body. The labyrinth symbol is so important that it decorates the floors of many important churches including Chartres Cathedral in France.

Many students I work with have unhealthy conceptions of their minds or inner lives. I suspect that these unhealthy pictures are for many a result of trauma, which we all experience to varying degrees, though this seems to be steadily increasing as our world becomes increasingly unhealthy. Students often express disbelief when we discuss the idea that they could have control of their thoughts. For many high school students, their inner worlds feel more like Kurelek's maze than a labyrinth that they can enter and exit at will. After we spend some time looking at *The Maze* and analyzing its symbolic significance, the next step invites the students to produce art in which they begin to visualize their mind as a labyrinth and in essence map their own inner hero's journey. The assignment requires students

to look objectively at their lives, and, in this sense, is helping them understand that there is a level of awareness beyond the suffering that many feel so intensely.

I assigned this project for the first time during the 2016-2017 school year and have had hundreds of students complete it since then. Many of the students have said that the project has stayed with them and that it helped them understand their lives better. This project helps them envision confronting and overcoming challenges in their lives. It has also been interesting to notice patterns in the supreme ordeals the students select. Overwhelmingly, female students have placed issues with body image at the center of their minds. For males, their supreme ordeals range from anger issues to substance abuse to problems with procrastination. Here a quote by David Oldfield, author of *The Journey: A Creative Approach to the Necessary Crises of Adolescence*, seems relevant. In speaking about the importance of this envisioning process, Oldfield notes, "Prior to anyone making any lasting changes in their lives, they first must imagine themselves changed" (Oldfield, 1987, p. XV). Ultimately, the hero's cycle is about this spiritual or inner change. Along with the myth of Theseus, Kurelek's *The Maze* is an integral part of this curriculum, as it creatively represents an inner life that has become stuck due to trauma, and students increasingly can see themselves in it. In this way, this



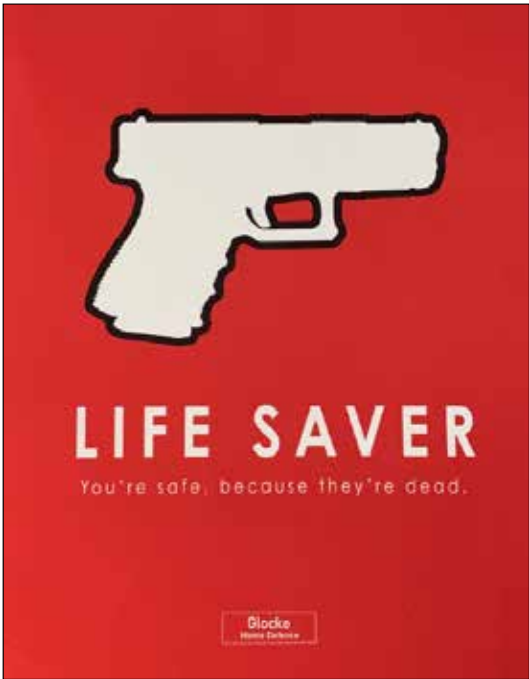
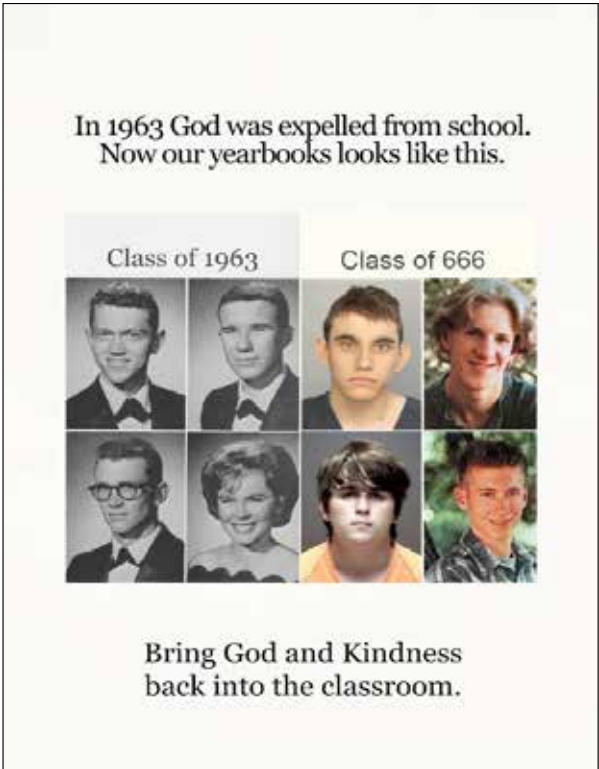
project acknowledges and bears witness to the psycho-spiritual realities of modern life, but also introduces the idea of the labyrinth as a healing impulse. What follows

are a few examples of *The Labyrinth of Your Mind* project, all of which were done by students at the end of their sophomore year.

The Synthesizer of Polarities

Manicheism is often mistakenly referred to as a dualistic religion because of its belief in light and darkness (good and evil are also used synonymously) as two distinct forces that shape our world, but Mani believed

that light and darkness were co-creating forces and were actually mixed together. Manichean communities worked tirelessly through their thoughts and actions to redeem darkness, so that, as Steiner noted, “transformed evil [could] become a quite special good.”



Examples of student propaganda posters for “1984” class. The students are tasked with creating effective propaganda for positions they don’t actually support.

Mani traveled widely during his life and was probably drawn to Buddha's concept of the middle way during his time in India. The Buddha preached about the middle way—the path between polarities—in his first sermon after his enlightenment. Relating this back to curriculum, a Mani-inspired curriculum is therefore one that attempts to identify and synthesize any given set of polarities.

There is no question that in America we are living in one of the most polarized times in our history. While I don't attribute this division to former President Donald Trump, there is no doubt that the rhetoric of his presidency pushed people further into their already established political camps. In my own life story, I have experienced both extremes of this political polarization, from growing up in the conservative state of Georgia, to settling after college in the progressive Pacific Northwest. Though I disliked growing up in Georgia with its conservative politics, as I lived longer in the states of Oregon and Washington (in many ways the polar opposite of the South), I began to appreciate how important it is for governments and institutions to have some checks and balances to their political ideologies. The more I taught in Washington State, the more I became convinced that the prevailing political ideology was being unconsciously adopted by most students in a way that served as a major barrier to their ability to think for themselves and to their striving to become spiritually free.

In his 1946 essay "Why I Write," George Orwell noted, "The more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity" (Orwell, 2005, p. 8). I use Orwell's essay as an introduction to his book *1984*, which, in my opinion, is one of the best books for helping students identify the myriad ways in which society attempts to keep them under control. One of the main ways people are controlled in *1984* is through *ideological* indoctrination. The 12th grade is the optimal time to teach *1984* because by that age students have usually made significant strides in the ability to be objective in examining their own lives. This objectivity allows them to ask the hard questions the book raises about what they believe and why they believe it.

While reading *1984*, we spend a large amount of time talking about propaganda: what it is, examples from history, how it works, etc. At the conclusion of those conversations, I ask students to make a propaganda poster, but with the caveat that it has to be for an issue

or cause they *don't* support. In addition to that, part of their grade is based on how effective their poster is. This aims to ensure that they do not design a poster that mocks the cause they are meant to promote. As my students have been overwhelmingly Democrats in their political leanings, most of their posters over the years have been in support of policies championed by conservatives. In the examples that follow, the issues that students took up included the police, religion in schools, gun control, and abortion. My goal for the assignment is not to change their minds, but instead to force them to carefully consider the opposing arguments to what they believe. To ensure they do that research I ask them to prepare for the poster by writing an annotated bibliography with three *reputable* sources, the key word here being reputable.

**From what little is known about Mani it is clear that he placed a high value on the image as a pathway to spiritual transformation.**

In debriefing with students after they have completed the project, countless students over the years have confessed it was the first time they had ever considered that there were perfectly sound, logical reasons why someone might hold a belief counter to their own. This is especially true of the many female

students who have chosen to create pro-life posters. They often started by finding weak religious-based sources, but with some prodding, found sources that challenged their preconceived notions about what the pro-life argument really is about. Again, while I don't think the project changed their minds, I do believe an assignment like this allows for some freedom in how these politicized ideas live in students. In many cases, students have reported that the assignment helped them be less rigid in their thinking and increased their empathy for others.

In his biography of Mani, Richard Seddon notes that, "If what is good is to remain good, it must constantly harmonize with what hinders it" (Seddon, 1998, p. 30-31). In this sense, these propaganda posters help students to understand and make peace with the ideas that exist in opposition to their own. Speaking of the danger of polarization in *Art Heals: How Creativity Cures the Soul*, author Shaun McNiff says, "The absence of an intermediary realm between polarized positions can create a tight squeeze that is both restrictive and dangerous. When there is little room between opposing positions, each is likely to perceive the other as a threat, rather than as a partner in the larger interplay of creation" (McNiff, 2004). This quote is a wonderful summary of the dangers Manicheans perceive in polarization, and McNiff's assertion that polarities work together as part of creation mirrors the way Manicheans view

light and darkness as working together as co-creators of the universe.

## The Polarizing Work of DEI

As this issue of the *Research Bulletin* is focused on the socio-emotional world of students, it might seem abrupt and misplaced to end this article with a section on the work of DEI, focused mainly on faculty and staff development. But DEI trainings and the initiatives that arise from them directly impact students, especially if those trainings have the potential to polarize the school community. A polarized faculty radiates spiritual energy to its students in the same way that the unspoken tensions of antagonistic parents affect their children. A feeling of shared purpose and unity are the hallmarks of any healthy institution, and the following section is meant to raise important questions about whether our approaches to DEI at both the institutional and nationwide levels might be negatively impacting the health of our students and of our schools more broadly.

Most Waldorf schools have prioritized the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion, which, I am told by some frustrated people in the movement, was something that took way too long to realize. The work of making Waldorf education accessible, inviting, and relevant to a global community is one of the most important tasks of our time. And yet, there is great irony that the work of making our schools more inclusive and diverse has actually served to polarize our movement. I have been associated with three different Waldorf schools, and at each, the ways in which DEI initiatives were implemented served to divide the faculty and push them into various camps. I am not alone in this observation, as it is happening at Waldorf schools throughout the country. In his *Bulletin* article from Spring/Summer 2021, Selim Tili—formerly of the Rudolf Steiner School of New York City—names two camps: the activists and the academics. Checking in with my own experience, I might call them the traditionalists and the progressives. Whatever labels you put on the phenomenon, the results are the same—a polarized movement where communication has broken down and trust in each other has eroded. Not only does this have major consequences on the health of our schools and our students, it also makes it nearly impossible to do the type of a healing DEI work that this moment demands of us. If what I’m describing doesn’t sound like your school, perhaps this tension lies

below the surface; dissenters may not feel comfortable voicing their views.

At a Waldorf high school I worked at in the Pacific Northwest, this polarizing approach to DEI was particularly pronounced. Like many schools, the faculty there was interested in doing a book study to better understand how to make Waldorf schools more inclu-

**The Manichean solution to the polarization around DEI in the Waldorf movement is no different than the propaganda poster assignment I assign my students.**

sive. In addition to reading what was at the time the mainstay of the mainstream DEI movement, *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo, I suggested pairing it with a book by a conservative black author, *White Guilt* by Shelby Steele. Though the faculty overwhelmingly voted to read both books together, my former school’s administration told us we couldn’t read *White Guilt* in a school spon-

sored reading group because the author didn’t believe that racism still existed (this claim is in fact not true). For all the talk about conservatives banning books, here was a liberal organization deeply rooted in the idea of freedom telling its faculty what they could and couldn’t read together. How could an educational movement such as ours, that ends every staff meeting with a commitment to have “courage for the truth,” get to the point where we were unable to see the value in reading and understanding a different perspective on such an important topic?

The DEI reading lists that many schools now post on their websites are a key indicator of the ideological and political leanings of their respective schools. What becomes clear in reading these lists is that most schools in our movement lean heavily to the left, and that shouldn’t be a surprise to most people. This becomes problematic when the ideas that inform the work of DEI originate exclusively from one perspective, even when that requires excluding the perspectives of people of color whose ideas run counter to the prevailing narrative. I have yet to see any of these lists mention books by heterodox authors of color like Glen Lowry, Coleman Hughes, John McWhorter, Thomas Sowell, and Chloe Valdary, among other scholars like Jonathan Haidt, Douglas Murray, and James Lindsay. The irony is that several of the people on this list identify as liberal Democrats. With all our focus on diversity, why is ideological and political diversity given such short shrift? If the goal of DEI work is inclusivity and wholeness, it seems counterproductive to exclude voices that make up nearly half of our country. To bring this back to students, our schools are made up of a myriad of student

voices, and not all of them fit neatly into progressive boxes. By not honoring political and ideological diversity with the same level of focus and attention that we are now giving racial and gender diversity, we are creating new problems as we attempt to solve already existing ones.

The Manichean solution to the polarization around DEI in the Waldorf movement is no different than the propaganda poster assignment I assign my students, but instead of researching an opposing view, it involves reading across the aisle and outside our bubbles. One thing that might be helpful is a truly inclusive DEI reading list, and I suggest one at the end of this article. The world and its algorithms are

getting very effective at surrounding us with only the ideas that please us. When I think about the power of this technology, I am reminded of a quote by Steiner where he says that in the future, “[People] will practice evil consciously, exquisitely, and with the aid of highly developed intellects.” An algorithm is evil when it serves to isolate us and break us off from the whole. Imagine a more spiritually enlightened algorithm that instead of giving us what we wanted, suggests what we needed. The true work of DEI is based in compassion and complexity as we move courageously toward wholeness. Our movement has become politically lopsided, and yet to heal we need to acknowledge this and hold the tension of opposites. It is only through this spiritual holding that something new can be born, and to truly meet the moment, we must make space for something new to be born. Both the activists and the traditionalists have important contributions to make. The only way we survive is by working together.

## Conclusion

In her book *Walking with Your Time*, author Christine Gruwez notes:

The primeval gesture of Manichaeism is the gesture of inclusion, welcoming and integration. The primeval gesture of the power of evil [...] is the gesture of fragmentation, division and exclusion. Being connected may be experienced in any of the three areas of human life described above, certainly, but in all cases we are concerned with one and the same fundamental question: in what way, when something threatens to split off, can I succeed in integrating it after all, and so allow an open space to be created for a possible (but not

guaranteed) process of transformation and healing. (Gruwez, 2011, p. 118)

Each time I read this quote I think of Abraham Lincoln and his thankless mission of saving the Union. The reconciling of North and South in order to give a new birth to The *United States of America* was a powerful Manichean gesture. I also think of the opposite gesture, the fracturing of the Catholic church in the wake of Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, a fracturing the church never recovered from. The forces of division and fragmentation are more powerful now than they have ever been.

There has been much written over the years of all the various divisions and spiritual streams that make up the Waldorf movement. On one level there is the classic divide between the Platonists and the Aristotelians; another view sees the Cain and Abel streams active in the West. In his book *The Battle for the Soul*, Bernard Lievegoed talks about the spiritual streams of the Anthroposophists, Rosicrucians, and the Manichaeans coming together in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What is clear is that we need each other’s gifts and insights if we are to thrive and remain relevant in a world that is crumbling all around us. Words like cooperation, equanimity, and tolerance should become our mantras as we figure out together what this moment is asking of us.

It is possible that the incarnation of Mani is among us and even possibly sitting in front of us each day in our classes. I imagine the question to ask ourselves is: “What are we each doing—regardless of the perceived impact—to help our broken world heal and move in the direction of wholeness?” Polarization, trauma, and algorithms are among the major fragmenting forces active in our modern world. From the Manichaeian perspective, they each work against our inner light and await redemption through re-unification. In a sense, we are living out the myth of Osiris as we are chopped up by our political allegiances, sophisticated mathematical equations, and more and more, just from the trauma of living in our spiritual wasteland. This might sound bleak, but the potential for healing exists all around us.

I sometimes show a video to my students of a Trump rally where the organizers invite Hawk Newsome, a Black Lives Matter activist, onstage to share their platform. Instead of using the opportunity to chastise and instigate the Trump supporters, Newsome chose to find middle ground, at one point saying, “If we really want to make America great, we do it together.” These simple

yet racial gestures from both sides—inviting Newsome onstage and Newsome’s decision to use the platform to find common ground—moved these two groups from intense polarized opposition toward dialog. Newsome admitted after his speech that he came to the rally to raise his fists militantly in the air and exchange insults with the Trump supporters, and yet something altogether different happened. Newsome says, “I feel like two sides that never listen to each other actually made progress.” The video ends with Newsome taking a picture with the head of *Bikers for Trump* and his son Jacob. Newsome reflects, “Here I went from being their enemy, to someone they wanted to take pictures with their children.” The nonviolent impulses that both sides opened themselves up to in this important, yet unfortunately all too rare example are not new. They grow from seeds planted by a radical, nonviolent spiritual leader nearly two millennia ago, and our world may finally be ready to begin reaping the harvest.



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## Appendix

**Healing our political and ideological divide through a multi-perspective, multidisciplinary approach to the work of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**

The following suggested reading list seeks to broaden the scope of DEI work by introducing texts that bring more political and ideological diversity to our important conversations around diversity, equity and inclusion. The list also attempts to highlight DEI categories—neurodiversity, for instance—that are sometimes neglected as we prioritize this work. Lastly, in several instances the list offers suggested pairings of texts that contain similar themes but that are explored from different ideological perspectives.

### **Mainstream progressive/left perspective:**

1. *How to Be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi (pair with *Discrimination and Disparities* by Thomas Sowell)
2. *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo (pair with *White Guilt* by Shelby Steele)
3. *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla F. Saad
4. *Raising White Kids* by Jennifer Harvey
5. *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (pair with *A Lot Like Me* by Larry Elder)
6. *Why are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Daniel Tatum
7. *So You Want to Talk about Race* by Ijeoma Oluo
8. *Tears We Cannot Stop* by Michael Eric Dyson (pair with *Please Stop Helping Us* by Jason L. Riley)

### **Mainstream center/right perspective:**

1. *Discrimination and Disparities* by Thomas Sowell (pair with *How to Be an Antiracist*)
2. *White Guilt* by Shelby Steele (pair with *White Fragility*)
3. *A Lot Like Me* by Larry Elder (pair with *Between the World and Me*)
4. *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* by Thomas Sowell
5. *Please Stop Helping Us* by Jason L. Riley (pair with *Tears We Cannot Stop*)
6. *The Madness of Crowds* by Douglas Murray
7. *Diversity Delusion* by Heather Mac Donald
8. *Blackout* by Candace Owens

### **Academic Centrist Perspective:**

1. *Whistling Vivaldi* by Claude Steele (Stanford University)

2. *Cynical Theories* by Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay
3. *The Coddling of the American Mind* by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt (offers a counter-perspective on microaggressions) (NYU)
4. *Woke Racism* by John McWhorter (Columbia University)

### **Historical perspective (progressive/left):**

1. *Stamped from the Beginning* by Ibram X. Kendi (pair with *Land of Hope* by Wilfred McClay)
2. *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* by Nikole Hannah-Jones (pair with *1620: A Critical Response to the 1619 Project* by Peter W. Wood)
3. *Caste* by Isabel Wilkerson
4. *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn (pair with *A Patriot's History of the United States* by Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen)

### **Historical perspective (center/right):**

1. *1620: A Critical Response to the 1619 Project* by Peter W. Wood (pair with *The 1619 Project*)
2. *American Marxism* by Mark Levin
3. *Land of Hope* by Wilfred McClay (pair with *Stamped from the Beginning*)
4. *A Patriot's History of the United States* by Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen (pair with *A People's History of the United States*)

### **Spiritual/religious perspective:**

1. *The Seventh Shrine* by Orland Bishop
2. *Fault Lines* by Voddie T. Baucham, Jr. (pair with *Be the Bridge* by Latasha Morrison)
3. *Radical Dharma* by Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams and Lama Rod Owens
4. *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents* by Rod Dreher
5. *Be the Bridge* by Latasha Morrison (pair with *Fault Lines*)

### **Pedagogical perspective:**

1. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire (pair with *The Marxification of Education* by James Lindsay)
2. *The Marxification of Education* by James Lindsay (pair with *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*)

- 3. *Teaching to Transgress* by bell hooks
- 4. *Education for Adolescence* by Rudolf Steiner  
(pair with *School Without Fear* by J. Krishnamurti)
- 5. *School Without Fear* by J. Krishnamurti  
(pair with *Education for Adolescence*)

**Jungian (psychological) perspective:**

- 1. *The Racial Complex* by Fanny Brewster
- 2. *Archetypal Nonviolence*  
by Renee Moreau Cunningham

**Books about Gender:**

- 1. *Irreversible Damage* by Abigail Shrier  
(controversial to many on the left;  
pair with *Supporting Gender Diversity  
in Early Childhood Classrooms*)
- 2. *Supporting Gender Diversity in Early Childhood  
Classrooms* multiple authors (controversial to  
many on the right; pair with *Irreversible Damage*)
- 3. *The End of Gender* by Dr. Debra Soh  
(pair with *Delusions of Gender* by Cordelia Fine)
- 4. *Delusions of Gender* by Cordelia Fine  
(pair with *The End of Gender*)

**Books about Neurodiversity:**

- 1. *Neurotribes* by Steve Silberman
- 2. *Thinking in Pictures* by Temple Grandin
- 3. *The Autistic Brain: Helping Different Kinds of Minds  
Succeed* by Temple Grandin
- 4. *The Dyslectic Advantage* by Brock  
and Fernet Eide
- 5. *The Gift of Dyslexia* by Ronald Davis
- 6. *Scattered Minds: The Origin and Healing  
of Attention Deficit* by Gabor Mate

**Books about the Environment  
and Biodiversity:**

- 1. *Oneness vs the 1%* by Vandana Shiva (pair with  
*How to Avoid a Climate Disaster* by Bill Gates)
- 2. *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster* by Bill Gates  
(pair with *Oneness vs the 1%*)
- 3. *Unsettled? What Climate Science Tells Us, What it  
Doesn't, and Why it Matters* by Steven Koonin

- 4. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom,  
Scientific Knowledge and the Wisdom of Plants*  
Robin Wall Kimmerer
- 5. *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson

**Books about Polarization:**

- 1. *All About Love* by bell hooks
- 2. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided  
by Politics and Religion* by Jonathan Haidt
- 3. *Why We're Polarized* by Ezra Klein

**Brian Scannell** is a middle and high school humanities teacher at Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School. Brian grew up in Georgia and from a young age was drawn to literature, the arts, and music. He felt called out west for college and earned his B.A. in English literature from Montana State University. After graduation he worked for a number of years in outdoor education before moving to Portland, Oregon. There he worked for many years at educational non-profits until he eventually turned his focus to photography and journalism. He followed that dream out to Amman, Jordan, where he worked for a variety of magazines. Brian and his wife Julie also worked on Semester at Sea, a university that circumnavigates the globe. Brian went back to graduate school in 2014 to earn his Master's in Teaching degree from the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, WA, and has been a high school teacher ever since. He shifted into Waldorf education in 2020 and holds a Waldorf teaching certificate from the Center for Anthroposophy.



# Diversity, Empathy, and Integration

## Reframing a Movement Toward Healing and Wholeness

**Brad Kershner**

**T**he letters DEI have become a well-known shorthand for the words diversity, equity, and inclusion – three words that have come to represent much more than any dictionary definition of the individual words would imply. In the overlapping and cross-pollinating social worlds of K-12 education, higher education, NGOs, non-profits, the corporate sector, and various levels of local and federal government, the past decade has witnessed the rapid and widespread adoption of a particular approach to talking about and addressing questions of race, gender, social inequality, and cultural diversity, and DEI has come to symbolize and refer to that diffuse yet amazingly standardized approach. The purpose of this essay is to share insights from an ongoing inquiry into what DEI has come to mean, represent, and imply, and to point toward ways that we can work together to build on the good intentions and aspirations of the DEI movement and industry while making significant changes and course-corrections to enable more positive outcomes for our society and planet.

The twists and turns of cultural diffusion and social change are not always what they seem at first glance; often, they are tinged with irony, paradox, contradiction, and unexpected consequences. As our social, cultural, and technological world grows more complex and confusing, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand what is happening, due in part to the ever-increasing assortment of perspectives that permeate our media and experiences. The meanings, purposes, and cumulative effects of DEI in our society are all contested and impossible to determine exactly, but if we tread carefully and keep our eyes on the prize of a shared understanding, which is also always open to new insights and shifts in perspective, we can find our way along the road that we need to travel together. As will become clear as we venture down the path of this essay, one of our primary tasks is the refinement and clarification of the language we use to communicate. And one of the proposals we will come to along the way, as evoked by the essay title, is to move toward the language and substantiation of *empathy* and *integration*, and away from language that serves to divide, confuse, or mislead.

Our more-than-human world is more than a language game, however, and we must attend not only

to our words but also to the qualities and values that we embody and promote. It is with this in mind that I intend to argue for some significant changes to the DEI paradigm—its words, injunctions, assumptions, arguments, and systems of relations must all be improved to ensure they are truly in service of humanity. But in the spirit of empathy, let us begin with appreciation.

### **The Positive Premises and Promises of Social Justice**

It is important to note from the start, and to emphasize throughout, that this is not an attack on or critique of the underlying importance or purpose of DEI work, broadly conceived as a manifestation of the struggle for social justice. In the past 25 years, I have worked in district, charter, and independent schools as a teacher, school leader, and/or researcher in five states, and I have extensive personal experience with progressive education and the DEI work that is happening in schools across the country. I have spent my adult life devoted to the cause of social justice, and I vow to continue this work as best I can. The question is not whether to strive for peace, fairness, and social harmony; the question is how to do so. The only way to answer that question, and to cultivate skillful means to achieve our desired goals for improving social relations and the quality of life for all people, is to look carefully at what is happening and why, so we can learn from the past and continue to improve our strategies, communication, and practices for the benefit of everyone. The key word here being *everyone*.

The core argument of DEI work is that various forms of inequality are real and problematic and can be rightly understood as examples of injustice. Therefore, we strive for social justice. The core premise of this argument is that some meaningful form of equality applies to all humans; it is because we are fundamentally equal as humans that inequality presents itself as an injustice in need of correction. Therefore, much depends upon how we understand the meaning of human equality and its relationship to equity, or fairness.

There is a way in which all people are equal. We can call this our ground value or ultimate value. Ultimately, every human life is of equal value and worth, and

therefore we all deserve equal basic rights in society. This is the claim of countless teachers and teachings throughout history, and it is a deep and fundamental tenet of cross-cultural common sense. It is this abiding conviction that has remained at the core of our collective struggle for human rights—civil rights, women’s rights, gay rights, and children’s rights, as reflected in landmark documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. The purpose of such documents, and of our ongoing struggle for social justice, is to support the creation of a social world where all people are treated fairly and justly, and to account for, remedy, and ideally eliminate ways in which people experience social life unfairly.

There are also many ways in which people are not equal that cannot be reduced to or explained by social injustice or unfairness. Every individual is different; every individual is unique. In a very fundamental and meaningful way, each person is a marvel and a marvelously unprecedented manifestation of our incredible universe. Through some irreducible and never fully explainable combination and co-arising of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, natural selection, sexual reproduction, and phylogenetic and ontogenetic evolution (along with other forces and realities we do not have adequate names for, which nonetheless influence the evolution of consciousness and culture), we are born and grow as unique exemplars of life, profoundly influenced but never completely determined by our individual or collective past or our environment. But just as individuals are different, so are groups, and differences between groups have tended to breed inter-group conflict throughout human (and pre-human) history.

Importantly, it seems that the circumference of care that encompasses humanity has been increasing over time, leading to an ever-expanding inclusion of people within the ongoing project to create and improve social justice. Over long stretches of time, people have generally expanded the scope of their relations with others, moving from small communities to villages to towns and cities; from independent tribes to feudal kingdoms to nation states to an interconnected planet. And with this expanded network of relationships and communication there has also extended an increasingly expansive moral and empathic circle of rights, responsibilities, and obligations, oriented toward values like justice and fairness. Our social systems have evolved to ensure equal rights and systems of justice for increasing

numbers of people over time. The fact that our systems are terribly imperfect and therefore unjust and in need of ongoing improvement should not blind us to this evolutionary context. We are going somewhere.

However, amidst our ongoing attempts to bring the principles of equality and fairness to fruition in our social reality, we have not always been completely clear about how these truths of equality and fairness fit together. Because there are ways that we are equal and ways that we are not, and because all the reasons and explanations for various kinds of inequality are different, overlapping, and often (if not always) partially inscrutable or not completely knowable, it is very challenging to find the best and most helpful distinctions between what is just and what is not. Who gets to decide?

As difficult and intractable as this may be, we seem to have reached a point where the basic idea of fairness and equality is widespread across the globe—to the point where hundreds of states and nations have

governments that will at least pay lip service to these ideals, if not actually try to enact them—yet our collective application of these values continues to be far from ideal and unevenly distributed. Seeing this ongoing imperfection, and the incalculable human suffering and trauma that we continue to inflict on ourselves, many of us are impelled to double down

**The DEI paradigm—its words, injunctions, assumptions, arguments, and systems of relations—must all be improved to ensure they are truly in service of humanity.**

in our striving for justice and to *demand equity*—in some cases, by any means necessary and regardless of the cost or the ensuing collateral damage. But as the people of the world come together to form one interdependent web of relationships, mediated by digital technology and hyper-financialized economies, it is becoming harder to understand clearly just what this means. It is hard to tease apart and fully appreciate the complex ways in which the past informs and shapes the present, or to determine how individuals are impacted by the collective influence of others, or to understand to what degree present systems and actors are responsible for the inequalities and injustices that we continue to experience today.

As we continue our journey to embody and instantiate our deeply held values and ideals of equality and fairness, it is important that we always remember (and strive to deepen our understanding of) our shared evolutionary context and the inherent challenges that we face in our shared project to bring our values and ideals into our social reality. Let us not oversimplify, nor jump

to conclusions, nor act as if things ‘should be’ different right now. We cannot look at the suffering of the present only through the prism of our abstract ideals; we must also see it in the light (and through the shadows) of our collective historical inheritance, which is irrefutably one of overwhelming and almost unimaginable suffering, conflict, violence, and oppression.<sup>1</sup>

There are myriad causes and conditions that have brought us to this point, and our work is to figure out the best way forward. To do that, we need to understand what is happening now, and why, so that we can adjust our trajectory accordingly, for the benefit of all.

## A Critical Evolutionary Appraisal of the DEI Industry and Postmodern Activism

Our rising consciousness and concern for social equality has led to some real progress, as well as to some unfortunate regressions and confusions. There are many ways to adjudicate both the promise and the perils of contemporary DEI work, but there are three things I will highlight in this context, each of which representing an important piece of the puzzle that we need to understand in order to improve the impact of social justice work and to heal the ongoing polarization and cultural conflict that we find on the rise in society:

1. The loss of respect for and failure to integrate modern liberal values
2. The bureaucratic spread of DEI as an industry with its own incentives and motivations
3. The shift in meaning and policy that accompanies a distorted understanding of equity

### 1. Losing Liberal Values: An Excursion into Some Salient Characteristics of our Modern and Postmodern Social World

The core tenets of civil rights and social justice rest on the foundation of modern liberal values.<sup>2</sup> Liberty, equality, and fraternity/solidarity are the principles that both expressed and enabled the democratic revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and which continued to be

the guiding lights and aspirational attractors for social movements into the 20<sup>th</sup> century around the world. It is so important for us to understand and appreciate, and to never take for granted, the cross-cultural and historical significance of the fact that these fundamental values have come to be understood as *applicable to all people* by so many citizens of the contemporary world. The emergence and spread of modern democratic values across the globe over the last 300 years is an amazing collective human accomplishment, and it was our striving to attain the ideals of those values that drove social justice movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is also important to recognize and appreciate that the values of liberty, equality, and solidarity are not exclusively or originally European. They have many sources and inspirations, and their coincidence with the spread of democracy has been overshadowed by their concurrent overlap with European colonialism, which has led to an unfortunate association and conflation between modern Europe and modern values. To equate particular qualities or values with a particular group of people is to inhibit or exclude others from being able to actualize and identify with qualities or values that are potentially applicable and accessible to them, and this is a terrible injustice.<sup>3</sup> While it may be appropriate to associate some emergent qualities and values as distinctively modern, with a sense of historical unfolding based on our imperfect knowledge of the past (and always open to revision), it is essential that we understand these ‘modern values’ as equally available to all people in the present. Once something emerges in a human culture, it has the potential to spread, and therefore belongs potentially to everyone; human culture belongs to humanity, and in fact every human culture has evolved through processes of appropriation, assimilation, and diffusion to varying degrees.<sup>4</sup> The conflation of modern values with a particular group of people is a tragedy of collective misunderstanding; we will have to liberate ourselves from such inaccurate and unhelpful historical interpretations if we are going to cohere and collaborate as a species.<sup>5</sup>

3 The conflation of whiteness with qualities and values that could be understood as modern, but are better simply understood as *human*, is happening often and is being perpetuated by people and institutions that should know better. For example, The Smithsonian displayed a poster that referred to the nuclear family, hard work, rational linear thinking, and politeness as ‘white culture.’ These associations are very widespread in the DEI community. <https://www.newsweek.com/smithsonian-race-guidelines-rational-thinking-hard-work-are-white-values-1518333>.

4 See the blog entry, *In Praise of Cultural Appropriation* by Amod Lele, <https://indianphilosophyblog.org/2021/02/28/in-praise-of-cultural-appropriation/>. Also: *Migrations and Cultures* (Basic Books, 1997) by Thomas Sowell; *The Silk Roads* (Bloomsbury, 2015) by Peter Frankopan; *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (Crown, 2004) by Jack Weatherford.

5 The cross-cultural pollination of modern values, and the strong presence and development of these values in the Americas, prior to Europeans and with an influence on Europeans, is explored in *The Dawn of Everything* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021) by David Graeber & David Wengrow. See also *African*

1 For an eye-opening look at the recent history of human conflict, read *Conquests and Cultures* (Basic Books, 1999) by Thomas Sowell. Also: *The Goodness Paradox* (Pantheon, 2019) by Richard Wrangham.

2 The term “modern” evokes many problems of periodization, which I grant but do not have adequate space to explain here. For the sake of this essay, a common-sense understanding of modernity should be sufficient, and I do extrapolate some below. For a deeper inquiry into the meanings of modernity (and postmodernity), see: *Metamodernism* (University of Chicago Press, 2021) by Jason Ananda Josephson Storm; *Metamodernity* (Nordic Bildung, 2019) by Lene Rachel Andersen; *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007) by Charles Taylor; *Postmodernism* (Duke University Press, 1991) by Fredric Jameson.

The significance of the global spread of modern values can be appreciated in relation to our understanding of pre-modern life. I am not claiming that modern life is better than pre-modern life, nor am I claiming that violence, oppression, and warfare are things of the past. Please do not misunderstand me; this is not a tale of linear growth-to-goodness or naïve presentism. My point is much narrower but still incredibly far-reaching in its consequences. The point is that the basic values that we take for granted as what ‘should’ be the case in society, and the ideological basis by which we critique our current society, are precisely those values and principles that spread historically as a result of cross-cultural contact, conflict, assimilation, and appropriation in the modern world system, and that came to be understood as applicable to all people. This kind of universal application of basic rights and equality for all humans simply did not exist in any widespread or meaningful way prior to the dominance of the modern world system.<sup>6</sup>

However, several things have happened in recent decades that have influenced our perception and understanding of this historical development. In particular, the merits and significance of modern values have been devalued and undermined through the emergence of postmodern culture and critique; and the underlying social and psychological power dynamics of human groups have continued to evolve in the modern world by weaponizing language and cultural norms to serve the interests of some groups of people in rivalry with others (i.e., groups are co-opting the language of modern values to justify various forms of identity politics). These developments have coincided with developments in technology and media that have led to a degradation of some aspects of human attention and communication, along with a fragmentation of cultural identities. These cumulative effects continue to have an impact on just about every aspect of our lives.<sup>7</sup>

*Founders* (Simon & Schuster, 2022) by David Hackett Fischer.

6 Which is *not* to say that these values and principles did not exist prior to the modern world. Exceptional individuals and small groups have brought forth these values at different times and places, but they were not widespread and nearly universal until their wider dissemination in the modern world. For a fuller explanation of ‘leading edges’ vs ‘centers of gravity’ of culture, see *Up From Eden* (Quest Books, 2007) or *A Brief History of Everything* (Shambhala, 2001) by Ken Wilber.

7 I cannot weave together all these threads adequately here, but I will try to do so more fully in later writing. For now, I highly recommend the following resources on these topics: *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (Profile Books, 2018) by Shoshana Zuboff; *Stolen Focus* (Crown, 2022) by Johann Hari; *The Coddling of the American Mind* (Penguin Books, 2018) by Greg Lukianoff & Jonathan Haidt; *The Way Out* (Columbia University Press, 2022) by Peter

The key point here is that we cannot understand what is happening in the world of DEI, race, and gender in the 21<sup>st</sup> century if we don’t understand the modern and postmodern cultural influences that have shaped our thinking and behavior. We have to have some shared understanding of history and philosophy to know what we are talking about and what we are responding to.

## The power of the DEI industry has become a culture-shaping force and an unintentional contributor to the suppression of free speech and open dialogue in institutions and schools across the country.

The modern world signifies and represents many things: the industrial revolution, capitalism, European colonialism, democracy, world war, the atom bomb, globalization, scientific and technological advances, the abolition of slavery, women’s rights, scientism, materialism, and ecological devastation are all important manifestations of

the past 500 years. An underlying theme that connects many of these modern events is the force of human reason—at times aligned with modern values (leading to democracy, women’s rights, and the abolition of slavery), and other times divorced from a deeper connection to the reality of value and nature (leading to scientism, materialism, and environmental degradation). Modern systems of civilization and patterns of behavior became based on and justified by principles, values, and processes that were thought to be objectively true. The quest for objective truth, evidenced by the emergence of new scientific paradigms, and in the technological innovations of applied science and engineering that followed, can be seen in contrast to a world of local, competing, culture-bound myths and stories about life and reality. The pre-modern world can be seen as a world of diverse, mutually incompatible, place-based, ethnocentric worldviews, cultures, and societies. (With large empires, such as the Ottoman, and early cosmopolitan networks, like those in Persia and India, showing signs of early modernity, still clearly limited in scope and reach compared to later modern empires and subsequent globalization).<sup>8</sup> The modern world can be seen in part through the emergence and spread of a dominant, quasi-objective, scientifically oriented relation to reality that attempts to transcend and include the diverse stories of different groups, with truth claims being (ostensibly) subject to the ongoing process of scientific validation—at least that was the

Coleman. And I highly recommend *The Consilience Project* website for a collection of in-depth essays that explore these overlapping topics: <https://consilienceproject.org>.

8 E.g., The “Sanskrit Cosmopolis” that Sheldon Pollock describes in *Language of the Gods in the World of Men* (University of California Press, 2009).

story that spread in the collective imagination, which coincided with very real social consequences, along with military, economic, and political systems that out-competed prior social forms (in the short term, and in unsustainable ways).

*This does not mean that modern societies or people are better than pre-modern societies or people!* It also *does not* mean that pre-modern societies or people did not have tremendous wisdom and knowledge that expressed universal truths, values, and principles (much of which we have lost and must recover and reintegrate into our collective psyche and behavior). There is much to be explained and unpacked to tease apart the dignities *and disasters* of social and cultural evolution; fortunately many able minds have done so, and it is on the basis of their work that I submit that the broad and general characterization of pre-modernity, modernity, and postmodernity that I offer here does provide a helpful, relevant, and meaningful frame of reference for our understanding of our shared past.<sup>9</sup> A critique of modern systems of science, economics, and philosophy, and what Jem Bendell has recently referred to as Imperial Modernity, is very important and has been well-documented elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> But in order to understand what is happening now, we also have to understand how our collective reaction to those problems has created new ones.

Postmodern culture can be understood partly as the attempt to critique, deconstruct, and refute the modern project and its claims of objectivity. There were many ways in which the philosophies, policies, and uses of power enacted by modern civilizations evidenced partial and limited perspectives of reality, and in which claims of objectivity and scientific truth were used and abused to justify power over others. The stark and brutal injustice, unfairness, and inequality of the modern world led to many justified and valid attempts to refute

the underlying basis of the truth claims being made by individuals in modern European organizations and governments. Postmodern culture and consciousness brought awareness and criticism to the ways in which European culture and social norms came to dominate the globe, and it further elaborated through ideas of how the assumptions, norms, and values of European societies are just as relative, socially constructed, and therefore non-objective as any other. This realization and critique then became coupled over time with insinuations or direct claims that European society and/or white people are particularly or uniquely bad, as evidenced by the recent history of European colonialism. The homogenization of diverse European peoples into ‘whiteness,’ and the subsequent conflation of white-

ness and modernity, combined with increasing consciousness about the contradictions and injustices of the modern era, have led to widespread oversimplifications and historical narratives that have reinforced modern racial categories and perpetuated polarization and social fragmentation. I will pick up this thread in the section about race, below.

Overall, we can see that several cultural and ideological currents have been mixed together and

entangled in a short amount of time. Now we have to disambiguate and reconstruct what has happened so we can learn and grow together in a healthy way (and, hopefully, figure out how to work together to heal our collective trauma and avoid a dystopian collapse of our global civilization). Postmodern culture has evolved as a combination of many things; there have been some good intentions (generally wanting to improve society by tearing down unfair power structures and myopic ideologies), as well as some deep insights (into cultural relativism, the power of bias, and the deceptions of discourse), and an opening of possibilities for future social arrangements. But there has also been widespread cultural confusion and social disorientation, along with a pervasive sense of relativism, cynicism, materialism, and nihilism.<sup>11</sup> These negative and regressive aspects of postmodern culture have become established in concert with changes in our digital media environment, which has exacerbated and accelerated their spread and influence globally.

**The goal is to work effectively so we can transition out of our current DEI paradigm and focus ever-more on collaborating to solve the myriad social, political, economic, and ecological problems that we must face together.**

9 For an understanding of Big History and cultural evolution, see: *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (Shambhala, 1995) by Ken Wilber; *The Ever-Present Origin* (Ohio University Press, 1985) by Jean Gebser; *The Evolution of Civilizations* (Liberty Fund, 1979) by Carroll Quigley; *Nonzero* (Vintage, 2001) by Robert Wright; *Evolution's Purpose* (SelectBooks, 2012) by Steve McIntosh; *Evolution's Arrow* (Chapman Press, 2000) by John Stewart; *Metamodernity* by Lene Rachel Andersen; *The Universe Story* (HarperCollins, 1994) by Brian Swimme & Thomas Berry.

10 *Breaking Together* (Good Works, 2023) by Jem Bendell offers an up-to-date critique of the financial, philosophical, and governmental failures of Imperial Modernity that have landed us in a profound climate crisis. For an even deeper and more philosophical inquiry into the problems and pathologies of the modern psyche, see *The Matter With Things* (Perspectiva, 2021) by Iain McGilchrist.

11 For an incisive explanation of the connection between postmodernism and the negative ramifications for our culture, see: *Trump and a Post-Truth World* (Shambhala, 2017) by Ken Wilber. See also: *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (Theosophical Publishing House, 1984) by Huston Smith.

In the past 30 years, we have witnessed some very unhealthy cultural messages, worldviews, and ideologies being spread across the globe in a way that is truly unprecedented. There were seeds of a critical worldview that were planted in the modern world, which grew in small circles of postmodern critique and philosophy, and which have spread in distorted and oversimplified forms through new avenues of media in recent decades. It is incredibly difficult to not get swept up in such cultural waves and movements if we are not able to look at them critically and create some healthy distance in our psyche between our individual perspectives and the cultural status quo, norms, and assumptions of the groups we most identify with. For many of us, that means taking a critical look at the progressive, justice-oriented perspectives and identities that have been influenced by postmodern critiques and sensibilities.

One of the underlying features of the postmodern perspective that has spread in conscious and unconscious ways is the sense of “the disenchantment of the modern world,” which many people have written about since Max Weber popularized the term, and which tends to come as a package deal along with presumptions of materialism, scientism, relativism, and nihilism—i.e., God is dead; human values are just culturally-relative, fictional stories and myths; conscious experience is an epiphenomena of the brain and everything can be explained by or reduced to material causes/physics or neurochemistry; there is no ultimate purpose or meaning to life or the universe—it’s all either a contingent accident, or a deterministic, mechanistic series of causes and effects, and either way any story we have about it is ultimately irrelevant and empty, etc. Seeing into the heart (or perhaps the mechanistic brain?) of this worldview is a crucial capacity and defining feature of the *post-postmodern* culture that is yearning to be born.<sup>12</sup> This disenchanted and materialist worldview is not leading us to a good place, and one of the many

things being influenced by this widespread but mostly subconscious cultural matrix is how we conceptualize and understand human identity and what it means to be human, including (of course) how we relate to conceptual categories like gender and race. I will pick up those threads below.

Another significant and influential aspect of the postmodern mood and worldview is the aversion to and rejection of grand narratives. Because every narrative is seen as relative to a particular cultural context, there is no possibility for an ‘objective’ narrative or metanarrative. There is no ‘view from nowhere.’ Unfortunately, this leaves us in an untenable situation, where it is hard to determine how we can come to shared agreements about matters of truth, ethics, or justice, or how any person or group can have any claim to a form of knowledge that would provide an adequate sense of validity and direction in life. If every view, claim, and philosophy is, like, just our opinion, then what can we do but fall back on a default assumption of a materialist and meaning-

less universe? (Though, of course, that would also be, like, just an opinion.) And then why not just accept that there is no way out of our ongoing win-lose games of power, with conflicting and incommensurate stories of ‘truth’ and ‘value’ destined to do battle with each other in a field of identity politics, with no chance of ever finding some ultimate or objective truth or shared reality? And if these are the background assumptions or our nascent global culture, and the actual arguments of some of our influential elites, then how would we expect children to constitute their identities and sense of self in this disenchanted world of power politics and relativist language games? Wouldn’t we expect them to retreat into self-referential and self-protective identities and neo-tribes, in the face of confusing, discordant, incoherent, and incommensurable multiplicities and cultural fragmentation?

A cursory glance at our social media ecology, combined with recent data about significant declines in adolescent mental health, offers some startling answers.<sup>13</sup> It should be clear to us by now—and if it is not, we must

**In the current paradigm of popular DEI books, workshops, and consultants, the word “equity” has come to represent and signal a demand for equal outcomes for different racialized groups.**

12 The term *metamodern* is being used in different but overlapping conversations and networks to describe this emergent post-postmodern world/culture/period. I am not centering the term here, only because I do not want or need it to become a focal point of the essay, but I am personally enmeshed in a network of people who are leading voices in the nascent metamodern movement, and I resonate with many of their projects and uses of the term, as I think they are all pointing to different aspects of our overall evolutionary situation and trying to move it forward in a good way. See *The Listening Society* (Metamoderna ApS, 2017) by Hanzi Freinacht; *Metamodernity* by Lene Rachel Andersen; *Metamodernism* by Jason Ananda Josephson Storm; *Dispatches from a Time Between Worlds* (Perspectiva Press, 2021) by Jonathan Rowson & Layman Pascal; and *The World We Create* (Perspectiva Press, 2019) by Tomas Björkman.

13 Troubling data about the mental and emotional state of our youth is easy to find. E.g.: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/12/05/crisis-student-mental-health-is-much-vaster-than-we-realize/>; <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2023/p0213-yrbs.html>; [https://open.substack.com/pub/jonathanhaidt/p/social-media-mental-illness-epidemic?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/jonathanhaidt/p/social-media-mental-illness-epidemic?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web); <https://www.genderexploratory.com/2021/04/30/example-post-2/>.

make it so—that the unhealthy elements of postmodern culture have contributed to an environment that is not appropriate for raising generations of people. We have to see and understand well enough *why*, so we could figure out *how* to grow out of this evolutionary cul-de-sac of culture and reach beyond the culture wars that reinforce and sustain it. Unfortunately, this is an incredibly daunting challenge and another key feature of our predicament: there are developmental demands associated with growing beyond unhealthy postmodern culture and resolving the underlying criticisms and claims that support the pervasive trends of relativism, materialism, and nihilism. These developmental demands remain mostly unconscious, yet they subsist, easy to find and plain to see, right beneath the surface of our most commonplace assumptions and communications.

Ultimately, it is to these demands that we must turn, which is why these all-important questions—of culture, identity, meaning, purpose, and the possibilities of global collaboration to resolve very real global problems—are all in fact educational questions. It is no coincidence that the DEI industry is both propagated and contested primarily in the domain of education, and it is important to see that there is a strong relationship between current DEI discourse and the overarching project of postmodern critique. It has become very common to hear DEI advocates and practitioners using and repeating language that undermines and contradicts the values and ideals that have served as the basis for social justice and civil rights movements. This has led to serious contradictions and hypocrisies that have fed and deepened elements of resistance and polarization that are threatening to undermine the aims and progress of the DEI movement itself.<sup>14</sup>

The gist of the postmodern critique is that the underlying universalism of modern values—the aim to establish values, principles, and laws that apply to everyone—is

impossible, and is itself an imposition of power of one group over others. In other words, no one group of people has a right to claim that liberty, equality, and solidarity (or anything) apply to all. All such claims are seen as relative, contextual, cultural constructions, and therefore no universal principles or values are possible. Further, since universality is impossible, any such claim to universality is seen as a power play, or even a form of colonialism.

Many have pointed to these connections and contradictions, and many are resisting their incursion into schools. Some are trying to address the deeper philosophical and cultural roots of the problem, but far too many of us are overly identified with the overt intentions of DEI and unwilling or unable to acknowledge the very real problems that DEI resistance is responding to.<sup>15</sup> *The takeaway for us, right now, in the midst of a global metacrisis that requires the coordination of billions of people and hundreds of countries in order to create actual solutions to very real global problems, is that we have to grow beyond the limits of postmodern criticism and into a new cultural renaissance that enables the widespread establishment and acceptance of global values for global cooperation, global justice, global equality, and global society.* The postmodern criticism on which current DEI theory rests is counterproductive and inadequate. It claims that there are no universal values, and yet it proclaims this to be universally true. It claims that all values, principles, and norms are culturally relative and socially constructed, and yet it relies on an underdeveloped intuition of justice and freedom for all people, with no way to adjudicate the relative goodness or merits between peoples and cultures. Ultimately, it lands us in a cul-de-sac of cultural conflict where there is no way to bring all people together under one shared banner of value and identity, and we are left instead with the dysfunctional feeling of cultural fragmentation, rooted in philosophical confusion that leads in many ways to forms of relativism,

14 Examples of DEI impact and ideology:

[https://compactmag.com/article/a-black-professor-trapped-in-anti-racist-hell?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://compactmag.com/article/a-black-professor-trapped-in-anti-racist-hell?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email);

<https://musaalgharbi.com/2020/09/16/diversity-important-related-training-terrible/>;

<https://freeblackthought.substack.com/p/abridged-six-unsettling-features>;

<https://loveofallwisdom.com/blog/2022/06/tenets-of-a-new-movement/>;

On the difference between the modern left and postmodern left:

<https://www.clearerthinking.org/post/understanding-the-divide-between-social-justice-advocates-and-the-left-leaning-anti-woke-community>;

[https://fairforall.substack.com/p/then-and-now?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web&utm\\_source=](https://fairforall.substack.com/p/then-and-now?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&utm_source=);

Other long-term effects of our current climate in education:

<https://reason.com/2023/02/28/40-percent-of-liberal-professors-are-afraid-theyll-lose-their-jobs-over-a-misunderstanding/>;

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/yes-dei-can-erode-academic-freedom-lets-not-pretend-otherwise>.

15 The polarization around these topics is so strong that most people who identify with the good intentions of DEI do not allow themselves to acknowledge the very real problems that are being pointed to, while critics of DEI and critical race theory typically fail to acknowledge the good intentions and partial truths of those who are fighting for social justice. But some are trying to thread the needle and really address the situation without increasing polarization. See:

[https://open.substack.com/pub/freeblackthought/p/colorblindness-and-racial-essentialism?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/freeblackthought/p/colorblindness-and-racial-essentialism?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web);

[https://open.substack.com/pub/andrewsullivan/p/removing-the-bedrock-of-liberalism-826?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/andrewsullivan/p/removing-the-bedrock-of-liberalism-826?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web);

<https://musaalgharbi.com/2020/05/15/definition-racist-actions-actors/>;

[https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/actually-color-blindness-isnt-racist?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/actually-color-blindness-isnt-racist?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web);

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/17/opinion/dei-trainings-effective.html?smid=url-share>; [https://fortune.com/2022/06/20/data-first-diversity-equity-inclusion-careers-black-workers-gender-race-bias-dei-roland-fryer/?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://fortune.com/2022/06/20/data-first-diversity-equity-inclusion-careers-black-workers-gender-race-bias-dei-roland-fryer/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email).

materialism, cynicism, and nihilism. If there are no universal values, and if everything is just a culturally relative social construction, then what is the point of it all, and what is to keep us from constructing ideas and systems in ways that garner advantage for our group over others?

Cultural evolution is proceeding at a quickening pace, and the horizon of tomorrow offers the possibility of a broader cultural context in which the healthy and potentially necessary aspects of postmodern critique can fulfill their potential for meaning and purpose in a broader and more comprehensive story. The remnants of postmodern culture are in desperate need of *healing and integration*. I will expand on this more below, but the key idea is that we must find a way to respond to and grow beyond a critical stance on modern values, not in order to go backward, but to move through and out of the cultural fragmentation and polarization that has coincided with a hyper-critical stance toward the modern world, and toward the people and values that have become identified and conflated with modernity. Healing and integrating here means liberating ourselves from the one-sidedness of antithetical negativity and releasing the potential of higher-order synthesis by including the values of liberty, equality, and solidarity within the de-centered and re-contextualized diversity of an emerging, cross-cultural, transnational planetary network of human relationships. Not bypassing. Not a quick fix. Not language games or trauma denial. We have to cultivate embodied, grounded, meaningful relationships to establish deep diversity, deep discourse, deep resilience, and deep healing.<sup>16</sup> Only then the post-postmodern planetary culture to come will be ready and able to emerge in a healthy form.

## 2. The Bureaucratization and Scope Creep of DEI as an Industry

“Most human institutions, by the purely technical and professional manner in which they come to be administered, end by becoming obstacles to the very purposes which their founders had in view.”

William James

16 A few resources to unpack a bit of what I am pointing to: *Healing Collective Trauma* (Sounds True, 2020) by Thomas Hübl; *Deep Diversity* (Greystone Books, 2021) by Shakil Choudhury; *Justice by Means of Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 2023) by Danielle Allen; *Neurobiology and the Development of Human Morality* (W. W. Norton, 2014) by Darcia Narvaez; *Sand Talk* (HarperOne, 2021) by Tyson Yunkaporta.

While much has changed over time in human societies, and while some changes can be seen as forms of progress, we also face persistent and perpetual challenges in our collective social life. One of the primary patterns that recurs in societies of all kinds is the establishment of in-groups and out-groups, ‘us vs them’ divisions, or tribalization of one kind or another. We are social, we form groups, and those groups define themselves in relation (and in opposition) to each other. And when there is a disturbance within a group—which happens quite often—one of the most common ways to appease the group and regain harmony or homeostasis is by finding a scapegoat to blame. These social patterns—group formation, intergroup conflict, and scapegoating—have been fundamental building blocks of our social world for millennia. We cannot understand human culture without understanding and accounting for these patterns.<sup>17</sup>

Another deep pattern is the tendency for a group or system to perpetuate itself. Once a social form comes into being, whether it be a group, an ideology, or a layer of social bureaucracy, there are strong incentives for people in such a group to seek to perpetuate and expand their scope, reach, and influence to ensure their survival. This is true of families, tribes, nations, and organizations—anything that has a shared sense of identity will seek to maintain and perpetuate itself, and any individual with an incentive for that group to continue (such as a paycheck and/or social status) will fight for its perpetuation. Perhaps there are exceptions, but the general idea should be clear and uncontroversial.

Given these fundamental social patterns and tendencies, if we add the simple truth that those of us who identify with the struggle for social justice, and who are engaged in ‘doing the work’ of DEI, are equal to others—i.e., we are not fundamentally different from all other humans—then it stands to reason (in fact, it should be a given) that we are also susceptible to these basic drives to perpetuate and propagate our ideas, influence, and power over others in order to ensure the growth of our ideology, values, and social movement. In all honesty, we must face the fact that we are driven in part by social, cultural, economic, and psychological dynamics and patterns that are not consciously integrated within our ideology of social justice or anti-racism. We

17 For insights into our deep human history and patterns of power, see: *Hierarchy in the Forest* (Harvard University Press, 2001) by Christopher Boehm and *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford University Press, 1987) by René Girard.

are influenced by and prone to perpetuating the same social drives as everyone else—and *this is true precisely because we are all equal!* If social justice advocates are not fundamentally different from all other people, then we are just as likely to pursue our own interests and to create and elaborate creative ideas, ideologies, and language to justify our self-interested actions. We cannot reduce the actions of the socially righteous to such selfish drives, but nor can we reduce the lives, beliefs, ideas, or actions of anyone else. We are all multifaceted; we all contain multitudes, and we all succumb to these primal drives and patterns at times—especially when we feel threatened or attacked.

Others have documented and explained this element of the DEI industry.<sup>18</sup> Once you see it, it is as plain as day, and not worth trying to deny. And it is a real problem. The power of the DEI industry has become a culture-shaping force and an unintentional contributor to the suppression of free speech and open dialogue in institutions and schools across the country.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the DEI movement has ironically (and tragically) become associated with a layer of social and bureaucratic power that is perceived as reinforcing and propagating some of the divisions of identity and tribalism that it depends on in order to justify its reason for being. But these are the very things that it is supposed to be eradicating and which we as a society have to figure out how to transcend and integrate. Examples of educators, elected officials, and DEI practitioners working and speaking in ways that appear to contradict the values of liberty, free speech, and equality in the name of equity are counterproductive and disheartening, and those of us who share the underlying intentions of social justice need to look soberly and honestly at what is happening and acknowledge why so many people are upset about it.<sup>20</sup> Those of us in the field who care about

the higher purposes and intentions of DEI work need to acknowledge these underlying incentives and work mindfully to tease them out and limit their influence.

For example, the work of anti-racism should be to eliminate racism, full stop. We should be focusing our efforts toward identifying, understanding, and healing racism at its roots, not reinforcing the idea that the legacies of the past will be permanently present. Any intellectual justification to the contrary should be met with all due suspicion and skepticism. If we want DEI work to be successful, we need to ensure that its aims, purposes, and uses of power are as clear and transparent as possible. The goal is not to grow the market for DEI consultants or profit from collective guilt;<sup>21</sup> the goal is to work effectively so we can transition out of our current DEI paradigm and focus ever-more on collaborating to solve the myriad social, political, economic, and ecological problems that we must face together—and for which time is running out.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. From Equal Rights to Equal Outcomes to Equal Humanity

Now, let's hone in on a key feature of our current DEI landscape: the meaning of equity. The longstanding legacy and logic of human rights and civil rights has been based on the premise that all humans are created equal and therefore deserve equal rights under the law. The struggle for civil rights is the struggle to ensure equal rights, equal protection, and equal representation in the eyes of the state. Of course, there is also a desire to be seen and treated as an equal in the eyes of one's fellow citizens, and there is a deep relationship between how people see each other and how those people act toward each other as representatives of the state. But there is also a fundamental difference between the two, in part because of the balancing value of liberty. We can demand equal rights and equality under the law, but we cannot demand how another person should think or feel about us. Other people are free to (pre)judge as they wish, as are we, but they should not be able to take away our rights. The difference is crucial.

Over time, the goals of social justice advocates have changed – in many ways and for many reasons. A key feature of change over time has been the widespread

18 More examples: [https://thehill.com/opinion/education/3718803-what-do-we-really-mean-by-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://thehill.com/opinion/education/3718803-what-do-we-really-mean-by-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email); [https://open.substack.com/pub/persuasion1/p/owolade?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/persuasion1/p/owolade?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web); [https://open.substack.com/pub/chloevaldary/p/the-problem-with-overfitting-to-the?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=email](https://open.substack.com/pub/chloevaldary/p/the-problem-with-overfitting-to-the?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email);

[https://fairforall.substack.com/p/dei-can-be-good?r=3v6p7&s=r&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=email](https://fairforall.substack.com/p/dei-can-be-good?r=3v6p7&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email)

19 The Free Press has done a series of articles on this topic of institutional capture. Even if there are more nuanced views of what is happening and why, these are important trends to be aware of.

[https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/how-dei-is-supplanting-truth-as-the?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/how-dei-is-supplanting-truth-as-the?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web);

[https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/how-ideologues-infiltrated-the-arts?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/how-ideologues-infiltrated-the-arts?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web);

[https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/how-americas-obsession-with-dei-is?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/how-americas-obsession-with-dei-is?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web)

20 Example critiques: *America's Cultural Revolution* (Broadside Books, 2023) by Christopher Rufo; *Race Crazy* (Emancipation Books, 2021) by Charles Love; *Woke Racism* (Portfolio, 2021) by John McWhorter.

Potentially more constructive responses: [https://open.substack.com/pub/persuasion1/p/why-we-created-harvards-academic?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=email](https://open.substack.com/pub/persuasion1/p/why-we-created-harvards-academic?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email); The Foundation for Individual Rights

and Expression: <https://www.thefire.org/>

21 <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/ethnic-studies-diversity-consultants-schools-sean-cooper?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=c65bdeb4-bcb4-4c19-95d8-0e3f091ea3b9>;

22 While I will not spend precious paragraphs in this essay to lay out many examples of DEI overreach, contradictions, and ineffectiveness, I am assuming that most readers are familiar with the terrain, and I offer many examples in the footnotes above. My purpose here is not to document, as many others have done; my purpose is to help explain what is happening in a way that can help us actually resolve the underlying tensions and contradictions that impede our collective learning and growth.

and dramatic shift from a demand for equal rights to a focus on equal outcomes. This is perhaps the clearest example of how the current DEI industry has moved away from the legacy and logic of the civil rights movement and into the very different project of trying to judge and control the life outcomes of individuals and groups in society. For a long period of time, it was well-established that equality implied equal rights and equal opportunity, not equal outcomes. It was (and should be) quite clear that any attempt to dictate and control the life outcomes of individual citizens would be a violation of their liberty and of their individual efforts, merits, responsibilities, and agency. Diversity of outcome is fundamentally presupposed and required by the principle of freedom and by the reality of diversity itself in all its forms. To overdetermine and attempt to control the life outcomes of all individuals and groups, and to reduce all individual outcomes to the characteristics of one group that they belong to, is a profound violation and misunderstanding of the underlying aims and intentions of every human rights and civil rights movement that has preceded us, and of the underlying values of liberty, equality, and solidarity.<sup>23</sup>

An example: In some DEI contexts, I have often heard the expression “fair is not equal”; this has meant that sometimes in order to be fair we do not treat people equally. We do not treat everyone the same because people are different and their context is different, so in order to be fair, we account for context and diversity and treat people accordingly, i.e., differently or unequally. As a teacher, I have personally found this to be a helpful frame of reference to help young children understand why a student may need extra help or more time, etc. The classic meme/image here is the picture of people of different heights trying to look over a fence. If they all stand on the ground, only one can see. In order for all to see over the fence, the shortest needs two boxes to stand on, the middle person needs one box to stand on, and the tallest person does not need any box to stand on. In this context, it is equitable, or fair, for them to not receive an equal number of boxes to stand on. All good.

But in retrospect, it makes me sad to admit that in over 20 years working in schools, and having been exposed to this image and idea many times, I have never seen

**As has been well documented, slavery did not arise from racism; racism emerged as a cultural justification for modern slavery.**

anyone question the applicability of this illustration to the much larger and higher stakes educational reality that this metaphor is meant to represent. To compare being able to see over a fence, as determined by one’s height, to one’s overall ability to achieve in school, work, or life is incredibly misleading, deterministic, and cynical – and yet that is the common implication.

This would mean that all achievement and all life outcomes are simply given, determined by immutable characteristics like height, and not at all related to other factors like effort, skill, study, passion, interest, motivation, or any of the unique ways that individuals show different capacities and capabilities for different things. It would also imply that all outcomes should be the same for all people; that everything—outcomes

in every sport, every subject, every job, every domain for which questions of merit, skill, interest, and qualification would typically hold—should be adjusted so that all can achieve the same outcome. The absurdity of this line of thinking should be readily apparent; the fact that it isn’t says much about the sad state of our cultural and educational discourse. We have to do better.

Another feature of this widespread line of thinking is that not only does it convey that all outcomes should be equal, but that the only reason they are not is due to some form of injustice or discrimination. In the current paradigm of popular DEI books, workshops, and consultants, the word equity has come to represent and signal a demand for equal outcomes for different racialized groups.<sup>24</sup> It is very common for a radically binary logic to be employed, where there are only two options available to explain the outcomes of different groups: either the cause of diverse outcomes is ‘systemic racism,’ or one is forced to concede that those who obtain worse outcomes are somehow inherently inferior.<sup>25</sup> Since the latter notion is demonstrably racist, all ‘good’ people are impelled to select the former option—the cause must be systemic racism. But this is absurd. The actual reasons for the diverse outcomes of different individuals and groups are myriad, multifaceted, and ever changing. And charges of systemic racism lose their meaning if they are overused. *We honor*

24 Just one of many examples of this argument being made very explicitly in the context of schools, see the following recording of a Princeton Public Schools Board of Education Meeting, from 4/26/2022:

<https://youtu.be/FDHooq9mDt8?t=1573>. Start watching at 26 minutes. This is not unusual; it is common. I have heard very similar things in DEI presentations.

25 This is a consistent and repeated refrain of Ibram Kendi. It is truly amazing, and a testament to how incredibly passive and accepting we can be when we want to be seen as good, that so many go along with this demeaning, reductive, and racist line of thinking.

23 It was also the fundamental mistake and misguided goal of the most abominable historical examples of totalitarianism, Communism, eugenics, and fascism (Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot, Stalin, Lenin, KKK, etc.).

*the important reality of systemic racism by always being specific about what system we refer to and how it is racist.* Racism is real; it is a cancer that requires a scalpel, not a hammer looking for a nail. And we honor the spirit of equity by never allowing ourselves to fall prey to the sleight of hand that equates equity with the demand for something that is impossible. *It is literally impossible* for all groups of people to achieve equal outcomes in all areas of life in proportion to how these groups are racialized in a given place or context. It is an incredible and absurd idea. It is a ploy. We can do better!

The desire to obtain homogenous results for diverse people is not feasible, desirable, or wise; the only thing it ensures is a never-ending battle between racialized groups. The contradictions and inherent problems with these lines of thinking—which are clearly dominant in the domain of contemporary DEI work—are readily apparent, since counterfactuals are so abundant. (Does systemic racism explain the overrepresentation of Ethiopians in long-distance running? Russians in chess? East Asians in math testing? Black Americans in the NBA? The high median incomes of Indian-, Filipino-, and Taiwanese-Americans, or the relative economic success of Nigerian- and Ghanaian-Americans?) These kinds of fallacies would be easy to dismiss if they weren't so impactful, with such dire consequences for our cultural discourse and collective decision-making.

Again, the reasons for this cultural confusion are many and complex, and I won't be able to explain them adequately here, but it is crucial that we begin to break free from the constraints of social pressure and conformity that keep well-intended illogic from dominating our educational and social spaces. It is essential that we can question together, think together, and search together for better ways of thinking and acting in alignment with the values and ideals that remain at the core of our efforts to honor diversity, ensure fairness, and maintain freedom of thought and action for individuals and groups everywhere. For us to do so means finding a way to clarify and reintegrate the values that animate our intentions and efforts. We have to return to an affirmation of our shared humanity, a humanity that will always include a diversity of diversities, and to a shared understanding about how the principles of equality and liberty must reinforce and balance each other in order for either to flourish.

With these distinctions and contexts in mind, let us take a closer look at the two areas of social life that

have taken up the most energy and attention in the DEI industry: race and gender.

## Course Correcting the Arc of Racial Justice

The distinctions noted above, between current popular notions of anti-racism and the underlying (modern) tenets of the civil rights movement, are widely underappreciated and misunderstood. Fortunately, there are many thoughtful scholars and writers who have been trying to sound the alarm and clarify some of these distinctions in an attempt to reframe and reanimate the underlying intentions and purposes of civil rights and social justice movements.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, such perspectives are inadequately interpreted through the prism of the very ideology they are trying to expose and improve upon, and are consistently misrepresented in media contexts that tend to frame everything in binary left/right terms. Therefore, I will continue to emphasize that we cannot meaningfully address and understand these issues unless we also address the broader and hypercomplex context of social media, neotribalism, polarization, and cultural fragmentation, which is the dysfunctional water we're swimming in as we sputter and flail our way toward a post-postmodern world. I cannot unpack all of this adequately here, but must mention it again and point to sources for further reading.<sup>27</sup>

The question of race therefore cannot be addressed in the terms of popular discourse; nor can we fully explain how we ended up in a place where popular discourse is so misguided and unhealthy (though I've offered some pointers above). We must instead return to first principles and values, and attempt to find a new simplicity, or second simplicity, on the other side of social and cultural complexity. This is not a bypass. It is not naïve color-blindness.<sup>28</sup> It is not a disavowal of collective trauma or the ongoing legacy of racialized injustice. It is an

**If we engulf children in totalitarian indoctrination of any kind, we violate their liberty.**

26 Just a few examples: *Racecraft* (Verso, 2014) by Barbara Fields & Karen Fields; *It's Not So Black and White* (Hurst, 2023) by Kenan Malik; *Self-Portrait in Black and White* (W. W. Norton, 2019) by Thomas Chatterton Williams; *Theory of Racelessness* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022) by Sheena Mason; *The Arc of a Bad Idea* (Oxford University Press, 2016) by Carlos Hoyt. Others contributing to the conversation include Chloe Valdary, Coleman Hughes, Greg Thomas, John Wood, Daryl Davis, Angel Eduardo, Olufemi Taiwo, and Amiel Handelsman.

27 See note 7 above. On the topic of our current social construction of race, see: <https://manhattan.institute/article/the-social-construction-of-racism-in-the-united-states>

28 On the topic of color-blindness, see: [https://open.substack.com/pub/freeblackthought/p/colorblindness-and-racial-essentialism?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/freeblackthought/p/colorblindness-and-racial-essentialism?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web);

[https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/actually-color-blindness-isnt-racist?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/actually-color-blindness-isnt-racist?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web)

affirmation of goals, values, and ideals that can be shared by all people. What we inevitably share, ultimately, is a potential and a story: a shared story of human evolution that is the context of every human life, every injustice, every atrocity, and every redemption.

In the shared context of human (and cosmic) evolution, we can look at the question of race in both historical and contemporary terms, and in light of where we want to go together, collectively and interdependently. We can begin by distinguishing culture, ethnicity, and race. There are many ways to use and define these words, but the following distinctions may be helpful.

*Ethnicity* can refer to the fact that humans have evolved in different regions of the planet over long stretches of time, and there are some physiological differences between ethnic groups from different regions, which are readily apparent and need not be doubted or dismissed. For instance, it is often possible to discern if someone's recent ancestors are from Europe, Africa, or Asia on the basis of how they look. However, it is necessary and important to assert the equally important fact that generalizations and assumptions about ethnicity are unwise, as they are only relevant to the broadest categories. There are also much more local ethnic differences that are not so easy to discern, and the process of globalization and cross-ethnic pollination means that more and more people will become multi-ethnic over time, so it is safe to predict that these categories will continue to break down and shift, as will any associations and characteristics of ethnic groups. This should be a central theme in every discussion of anything human: change is constant and is a central feature in our evolutionary story, so it is best not to get too attached to impermanent identities or their fluid associations.

*Race*, as distinct from ethnicity, and as we currently use the term, can be seen as a modern social construction, connected to the emergent social/economic category of whiteness.<sup>29</sup> This notion of race, which has played such a dominant role in the modern and postmodern worlds, emerged in a particular way in the era of European colonization and slavery as a result of a *cultural need*

to justify the ongoing enslavement and inequality of African slaves (I'll explain more what I mean by *cultural* below). As everyone reading this should know, the enslavement of Africans who were brought to the Americas was a terrible and tragic episode of human history. Everyone should also know that the practice

of slavery extends much further back into human history and has a very long and widespread legacy throughout every habitable continent, with various forms and permutations in different historical and cultural contexts over the course of millennia.<sup>30</sup> But in the Americas of the modern world, a particular shift took place, in language and in our collective imagination, which continues to cast a long shadow over the cultural fragmentation

of postmodern society. At the same time, within the shadow of that tragedy lies the source of our salvation and collective liberation.

The tragedy of modern slavery was unique in human history because it was self-contradictory. Prior peoples enslaved prior peoples in part because they lived within cultural stories that did not problematize slavery. In the absence of universal human rights, and without a shared understanding that every person has inalienable rights as an individual simply by virtue of human birth, the violence of the past was not nearly as problematized as it has become in the modern world. It is very easy to project our widely shared assumptions about human rights and equality into the distant past, but this is a very significant and common mistake. To judge the past by the standards of the present is a form of presentism. It is anachronistic and misguided, precisely because of our shared context of evolution. Values change and evolve, along with everything else. This is a key point that is hard to overstate or fully appreciate. So much of our contemporary discourse and collective understanding depends on the foundation of our relationship to the past and on our presuppositions about human nature, cultural change, and evolution (cosmic, planetary, and human). And *the prevalence and constitution of those presuppositions all change over time*, as do the explanatory frameworks of each individual as they grow, learn, and mature. So there is a relationship

**The failure to integrate diversity in a healthy way is the historical norm (though it seems this is improving over time).**

29 There have been prior conceptions of social inequality that mirrored our notion of race (e.g., the caste system in India), with very similar dynamics at play, but those ideas can be well explained by the realities of ethnic and cultural difference combined with economic and political inequality. See: *Caste* (Random House, 2020) by Isabel Wilkerson. The conception of whiteness, which is a focal topic in DEI work, and which has conjoined with an appropriation of the term "people of color" as a contrast, is what we need to understand and explain here.

30 See: *Race and Culture* by Thomas Sowell. The Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism offers a helpful introductory video series about slavery – FAIRStory #6-9: <https://www.fairforall.org/videos/#>

Also: <https://aeon.co/essays/the-idea-of-precolonial-africa-is-vacuous-and-wrong>;

[https://open.substack.com/pub/freeblackthought/p/was-american-slavery-unique?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/freeblackthought/p/was-american-slavery-unique?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web); For a poignant look at some of the aspects that were unique to the transatlantic slave trade and its legacy, see *Blues People* (Harper Perennial, 1999) by Amiri Baraka.

between our personal maturation process and the way we situate ourselves in a historical context—our relationship to history can deepen and mature over the course of our lives. This is what we need collectively: a deepening of our relation to history, so that we understand better the salient differences between our post-modern world and the social and cultural worlds of our distant ancestors.

In the modern world, the story of human value and of equality, liberty, and solidarity, was emerging and spreading, and this made slavery untenable and unconscionable. Unfortunately, it remained economically profitable and advantageous for slave owners for a period of time after the notions of universal equality became widespread, so new justifications needed to be made. This juxtaposition of competing values and incentives is what led to the notion of whiteness and to the demonization of Africans (and of all 'non-whites,' by extension). Modern proponents of slavery needed a new justification. As has been well documented, slavery did not arise from racism; racism emerged as a cultural justification for modern slavery. The concept of race, as it was constituted and propagated in the modern world, was tethered to the binary of white/black, as the concept of whiteness became an ever-expanding social category that enabled and justified economic inequality and racialized oppression throughout the modern world. It was initially developed as a way to justify (through tortured and contradictory illogic that would not stand the test of time) the ongoing practice of slavery in the Americas.<sup>31</sup>

Now that we are coming to historical awareness of how the story of race has been constructed in recent centuries, many are coming to the realization, and are making the argument, that an understanding of race and racism demands a refutation of the concept and the category of race itself.<sup>32</sup> The construction of whiteness and blackness that emerged from modern slavery was inherently racist. The origins of these forms of racialization are rotten to the core, and the propagation of this racialized grouping of people inevitably perpetuates us/them and good/bad dynamics between racialized

groups, while erasing the actual ethnic and cultural diversity that lives and breathes between and within these broad categories. If we actively keep these labels and categories alive in our culture, then we are perpetually co-constructing racialized identity groups in ways that are fundamentally unnecessary and unhealthy. Of course, and importantly, this does not mean or imply the erasure, denial, or failure to appreciate the importance of ethnicity or culture. Nor does it mean that we cannot express contextually appropriate feelings of group belonging and solidarity; and we may continue to use the language that has been given to us for some time (e.g., 'white' and 'black'). But culture is in flux, and language will continue to change, and we can develop collectively toward reducing the reification and reinforcement of unhelpful language and concepts over time. Ethnic and cultural uniqueness and diversity do not depend on the social construction of race—at least not in the way it has been constructed around the concept of whiteness in recent centuries. Nor does this understanding imply a denial or a bypassing of the ongoing social impacts of whiteness and race. Racism and its underlying bias of ethnic prejudice is a real and persistent feature of intergroup relationship, but it is resolved in various real and meaningful ways along the arc of human growth that we all can experience for our-

selves. Importantly, seeing through the concept of race—making it diaphanous, or transparent—is a way of disempowering and counteracting the ongoing problems and traumas of race and racism.<sup>33</sup> It can also be a way of enabling healthier developmental environments for multi-cultural and multi-ethnic communities.

*Culture* can be defined in many ways; I will highlight two. There is the general and widely agreed upon notion of culture as the

shared, learned patterns of behavior of any group. This definition of culture, while usually applied only to humans, does meaningfully apply to other animals as well; we can easily observe and describe the culture of apes and other animals.<sup>34</sup> Typically, this is what we refer to when we refer to any culture or subculture: a group that has distinctive, shared, learned patterns of behavior (that include shared beliefs, stories, language, etc.). This notion of culture, while inclusive of behavior, can also be seen to rely on and refer to what can be thought

**It is important for us to establish this big history, evolutionary framework for our inquiry into the topic of gender, because we cannot understand what is happening today if we do not understand how we got here.**

31 *The Meaning of Race* (New York University Press, 1996) by Kenan Malik; *Mistaken Identity* (Verso, 2018) by Asad Haider; *The History of White People* (W. W. Norton, 2010) by Nell Irvin Painter; *Race* (Oxford University Press, 1997 [1965]) by Thomas Gossett; *Race* (Harper & Row, 1965 [1937]) by Jacques Barzun.

32 *The Arc of a Bad Idea* by Carlos Hoyt; *Against Race* (Harvard University Press, 2000) by Paul Gilroy; *Theory of Racelessness* by Sheena Mason.

33 *Seeing Through Race: Towards Diaphanous Anti-Racism* by Ryan Nakade: <https://greenteaji108.medium.com/seeing-through-race-towards-diaphanous-anti-racism-4842b3d2a662>

34 *Different* (National Geographic Books, 2022) by Frans de Waal.

of as the 'shared interiors' of a group, the intersubjective space of shared meaning and communication.

A second definition of culture has to do with what is particularly and quintessentially human. Human cultures are constituted in part by the systems of justifications that we make to each other about our beliefs and behavior.<sup>35</sup> When we look at what is distinctive about people, we find that the evolutionary leap that constitutes humanity manifests significantly in the domains of language and technology, and in the linguistically-mediated arena of communication, which is where we negotiate and co-create our shared human culture of meaning. We do so in part through the process of having to justify or explain what we think and do to others. Human culture is a social reality of meaning, communication, and justification that exists in conjunction with the behaviors, beliefs, and values that we enact and justify to each other and which leads to the ongoing development of ever-changing forms of behavior, language, and technology.

Defining human culture in reference to systems of justification is a meaningful move. It enables us to see the importance of this ongoing process we are engaged in—the process of perpetually expressing, questioning, challenging, and explaining to each other what we do and why. This process of dialogical interaction helps to perpetuate the dialectical process of cultural evolution. We are collectively engaged in a process of questioning, explaining, and refining our actions and beliefs; this is ultimately an engine of progress. Not necessarily progress in the sense that things always get better, but progress in the sense that there is an ongoing *progression*; it is a process that does not stop. It keeps changing, and over time we can discern the qualities and characteristics of how and why changes have happened.

There is much more to say about this, but for now the takeaways are that human culture is a very broad category that describes patterns of thought and behavior; that human groups are inevitably engaged in processes of cultural refinement and change, through the ongoing mediation of disagreement and justification; that different ethnic groups have evolved cultural practices

over time; and that the concept of race, as we understand and use it in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, is a relatively recent cultural idea that arose as an attempt to justify the practice of slavery in the modern world. From this combination of principles and historical facts, we can see that the construction of race, that continues to

be employed as a social category, is no longer adequate to the cultures that have evolved around it, nor is it adequate to the global culture that we can aspire to construct together moving forward. In fact, we can see that it was never well-justified to begin with! *The creation of race as we know it was a desperate attempt to continue a practice that was no longer justified according to*

*the dictates of the modern values that emerged in the era of democracy.* Just as the practice of slavery, and even more generally, the reality of group-based prejudice and violence, does not belong to any one culture or society, so too do the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice belong not to anyone, but to all. With all due respect to Audrey Lorde: the master's tools never belonged to him in the first place.<sup>36</sup>

## Nurturing the Evolution of Gender

Our striving for justice should be oriented toward the meaningful and healthy integration of all people, without exception. This includes all transgender, nonbinary, and queer identities and all sexualities. There is no room for transphobia or homophobia, just as there is no room for racism, in the more beautiful world we can co-create together. But in order to create that more beautiful and healthier world, we need more clarity and maturity regarding how to discern and ascertain what each individual's unique path is, in the context of their evolutionary story and cultural context. This is why shared modern values are so important. The trinity of liberty, equality, and solidarity offers us a balance of values that enables everyone to find their way to truth, beauty, and goodness. If we engulf children in totalitarian indoctrination of any kind, we violate their liberty, and if we immerse them in a cacophony of confusion and mixed messages, with no grounding in shared stories of value and purpose, we diminish and deteriorate their potential to experience mature solidarity and empathic equality with others.

**If we take this developmental background as a given, and zoom in on current trends in sexuality and gender, we can see that our children are becoming increasingly confused and distressed.**

<sup>35</sup> Gregg Henriques develops this notion of culture as part of his Unified Theory of Knowledge. See: *A New Synthesis for Solving the Problem of Psychology* (Springer Nature, 2022) by Gregg Henriques. Or: *How do you Define Culture?* <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/theory-of-knowledge/202307/how-do-you-define-culture>

<sup>36</sup> Jason Ananda Josephson Storm uses a similar quip in his book *Metamodernism*.

There are interesting similarities and differences in the ways that race and gender have been constructed in human cultures across time and place and within our current milieu. With race, it is necessary to distinguish the concept from ethnicity and culture, precisely because the way we think and talk about it is particular to our time and place. There is an ongoing evolution of ethnic groups and cultures, but the concept of race as we use it is more specific to a particular cultural justification that arose in the era of modern slavery (and then continued to mutate and persist into the present day, in ways that are both understandable and unfortunate, and whose impacts have been almost completely negative and detrimental to the development of a healthy human environment for cross-cultural harmony and mutual regard). With gender, the situation is quite different.

We can define gender as the culturally determined roles, norms, and expectations for men and women in a given group. It is therefore important to acknowledge that gender is distinct from yet inevitably and inherently coupled with sex. Humans reproduce sexually, and like almost all animals, we are therefore constituted by males and females (and we can easily define males and females with reference to our means of reproduction: males produce sperm and females produce eggs).<sup>37</sup> The cultural diversity of gender roles does not in any way alter the universally human fact that human bodies have evolved according to the evolutionary processes of a dimorphic sexual species. As is widely acknowledged and documented, the cross-cultural presence of specific, well-established, contrasting gender roles for men and women is one of the most consistent and universal findings in all of anthropology.<sup>38</sup> It is safe to assume that every society (past and present) includes people who do not fit neatly into the masculine and feminine roles and norms of their culture, and this can include people who are gay, lesbian, trans, etc. It is also a given that cultural norms and roles

change over time. Every culture has their own way of responding to gender diversity and/or nonconformity. Unfortunately, it is often through forms of suppression, repression, or oppression, as our shared history is filled with the subjugation and scapegoating of social minorities. The failure to integrate diversity in a healthy way is the historical norm (though it seems this is improving over time, as noted above). Some cultures have found ways to create social niches for more than two categories of gender, but this never changes the reality of sexual dimorphism or the fact that those cultures also have clear roles and norms for men and women. Cultural diversity is prominent, and it is important not to overgeneralize, oversimplify, or romanticize different cultural norms, but in every culture, each individual human is still either male or female.<sup>39</sup>

The fact that gender norms are tightly coupled with the sexual differences between males and females means that they are also tightly coupled with the ways in which males and females relate differently to the means of production, labor, and technologies of each society. Gender norms look different in different societies because men and women have different roles in those systems based on a complex combination of physiology, culture, choice, and power dynamics that manifest physically, socially, politically, and economically. But even with all those factors and more, we can still see distinctive cross-cultural patterns in relation to different organizing structures of civilization and technology. I do not think we can reduce all gender role differences to the means of production, but it would be foolish to deny or dismiss such clear influences and patterns, especially if we see them recurring across different societies (and it seems that we do). Broadly speaking, foraging societies tend to be more

37 There are other ways to define the sexes, e.g., by chromosomes, but this binary biological definition is a simple, elegant, and simply true definition that need not be problematized. And note that it is binary; there is no third category in addition to sperm and eggs. One of the reasons not to define sex with reference to chromosomes is that there are various developmental anomalies that lead to different chromosome combinations other than XX and XY—but every possible chromosomal combination still falls into one of the two binary categories of human bodies: those designed to produce eggs and those designed to produce sperm. Being *able* to produce eggs or sperm is a separate question. There are various reasons why an individual may not produce sperm or eggs, but the present ability to produce eggs or sperm does not determine whether one is male or female. E.g.: <https://www.theparadoxinstitute.com/>;

<https://www.britannica.com/science/sexual-differentiation>;

<https://www.realitylaststand.com/p/sex-is-not-a-spectrum>; [https://open.substack.com/pub/naturalselections/p/whatdogirlsdo?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/naturalselections/p/whatdogirlsdo?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web)

38 David Graeber & David Wengrow make this point in their book, *The Dawn of Everything*.

39 Much has been made of cultures that have third genders, or more, but it is unfortunate that this is often portrayed in a way that obfuscates the fact that those same cultures still have clear roles for men and women and that the third genders are often marginalized in some significant way. Some examples refer to a class of male prostitutes whose social status is determined by the fact that those cultures do not accept homosexuality. This is a pattern that continues to this day—cultures that do not accept male homosexuality can create social pressure for gay men to identify (and behave) as women. I think we do not want this, and if we could improve our conversations about such topics, most would agree. We want to accept gay men as men and lesbians as women, and allow transgender people to be normalized and integrated, not split off into a separate class, so I think we should stop romanticizing other models. In some cultures, ‘two-spirit’ people may more likely hold the role of healers or shamans. This could be a healthy way to integrate diversity while serving the whole community, and it should be honored and appreciated. We should also acknowledge that all third genders and two-spirit people are still either male or female, in the sense that their bodies are designed to produce sperm or eggs. I am not aware of any exception to this. See note above.

See: [https://www.newsweek.com/stop-imposing-western-lgbtq-identities-non-western-cultures-its-gender-colonialism-opinion-1705785?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.newsweek.com/stop-imposing-western-lgbtq-identities-non-western-cultures-its-gender-colonialism-opinion-1705785?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email);

<https://quilllette.com/2023/05/04/fictionalizing-indigenous-history-in-the-name-of-gender-activism/>;

[https://open.substack.com/pub/andrewsullivan/p/the-queers-versus-the-homosexuals-cfd?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/andrewsullivan/p/the-queers-versus-the-homosexuals-cfd?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web).

matriarchal (where women are responsible for most of the food production); agricultural societies tend to be more patriarchal (where men are responsible for most of the food production); and industrial/modern societies have tended toward a rebalancing and reshuffling of gender roles (here, women re-entering the workforce has led toward an ongoing increase in women's rights and social power, growing out of the patriarchal legacies of the pre-industrial, pre-modern world; and where we see modernization lacking is precisely where we see the progress of women's rights into the 21<sup>st</sup> century lacking as well).

It is important for us to establish this big history, evolutionary framework for our inquiry into the topic of gender, because, as noted above, we cannot understand what is happening today if we do not understand how we got here, how things have changed, and where we may be going (or where we would like to go). The context of our shared human history enables us to see recent changes in gender politics in light of the broader characteristics of postmodernity noted above, while also being enveloped

in an even deeper reality of cross-cultural patterns that relate fundamentally to our evolutionary human biology.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, we have to find a way to acknowledge and integrate all of these major contexts and influences that overlap and impinge upon our current lifeworld: the deep, evolutionary matrix of sexual biology, which has not changed significantly in recent millennia; the still-changing influences of the modern world, which have coincided with rapidly changing gender norms and expectations since the emergence of industrial societies, enabling the spread of gay rights movements and multiple waves of feminism; and the postmodern currents of fragmentation and disorientation that currently coincide with digitally-mediated social worlds in which young people engage the all-important process of self-formation while being bombarded with incessant and ubiquitous messages of identitarian sensationalism, aimed to capture and degrade their attention in order to sell advertising. To repeat: I am not saying that things are all better now than in the past, but they certainly are more complex.

If we limit our scope a bit to just look at the recent history of gender in the USA, we can see that the changes

we are experiencing are quite significant, but they didn't come from nowhere. If we look at the history of gender and gender nonconformity, we can see that the late 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an unprecedented hyper-gendering of childhood, in which prior norms and expectations (such as the assumption that childhood was not sexualized, and that boys and girls did not require radically different clothing or toys) gave way to novel and very questionable new norms (such as the assumption that young children should be expected to act, look, dress, and play according to particular gender patterns) that are now so ubiquitous as to appear 'natural' or 'normal'.<sup>41</sup> As others have argued, a primary driver for

these changes can be found in the economic incentives of diversifying the market. Emphasizing the gender identity of children means the creation of new markets for economic growth. And, by extension, the more identities that proliferate in society, the more market niches there are to sell to (and sell advertising for).<sup>42</sup>

The creation and proliferation of the concept of gender identity, and what many are referring to as gender identity ideology, has arisen at

the nexus of these very powerful forces—the market forces that drive niche production; the cultural forces that continue to unravel shared and stable stories of identity and objectivity, and produce ever-smaller memetic tribes; and the technological forces that distort and mediate processes of self-development within manufactured and ersatz realities of digital/social media.<sup>43</sup> And yet, there is also a deep human urge toward freedom, liberty, and liberation that should not be denied – especially in the modern world! The gender roles of any culture can be experienced as limiting to any given individual, and the modern and postmodern emphasis on individuality and individualism also plays a big role in enabling and encouraging people to resist, defy, or alter the gender norms of their society. This can be a healthy feature of human development; it all depends on the unique situation of the particular individual and their combination of biology, psychology, and cultural context. It is also one of the primary ways that cultures change over time, through individuals

**It is our responsibility to protect our children and to nurture their development, and this means enabling their construction-of-self-in-relation-to-the-world to be as healthy and reality-based as possible**

40 For a helpful summary of implications of evolutionary biology, see: *A Hunter-Gatherer's Guide to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Portfolio, 2021) by Heather Heying & Bret Weinstein.

41 For the history of gender nonconformity in the USA, see *Tomboy* (Legacy Lit, 2020) by Lisa Selin Davis.

42 *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* by Shoshana Zuboff.

43 Some helpful books that explore these overlapping influences: *Trans* (Oneworld Publications, 2021) by Helen Joyce; *Material Girls* (Fleet, 2022) by Kathleen Stock. *The End of Gender* (Threshold Editions, 2020) by Deborah Soh; *Gender Dysphoria* (Phoenix Publishing House, 2021) by Susan Evans & Marcus Evans. See also note 7.

pushing against and beyond cultural norms to create new ones. But seen in the aggregate and in the present, and with clear signs that increasing numbers of people are not experiencing the process of gender differentiation and integration in a healthy way, current trends and changes related to gender identity should also be understood in relation to the broader dynamics of deconstruction and dissociation that constitute the postmodern turn away from stable, universalized conceptions of self and world.<sup>44</sup>

We are currently witnessing a marked proliferation of new tribes and identities, all demanding not just equal rights, or equal value, but ultimately, in a world where all truth claims are relative and everyone is expected to be engaged in battles of power over others, we see a demand for the right to demand that others conform to what we want, based solely on how we feel. This is a complex and nuanced situation to navigate, related to the existential struggles for recognition and authenticity that permeate our striving for self-actualization in postmodern society, reflected in what Charles Taylor calls 'the ethics of authenticity.'<sup>45</sup> But in the absence of objective truth, and in the absence of an evolutionary context of development, we can feel that we are left with nothing to trust or ground our experience except for our feelings—and if the world does not reflect back to us how we feel and what we want, we are liable to feel like a victim of injustice (and to scapegoat villains in the process), even if our overall situation is relatively privileged. These emergent characteristics of victimhood culture have been well-documented and discussed, and are a big part of what we need to address and heal as a society.<sup>46</sup>

44 As with my arguments about DEI as a whole, I am choosing not to belabor examples here, or fill my text with documentation to prove that there is a problem. I am assuming that anyone interested in this topic is either well aware of many examples or in some form of denial about them, as they are very prevalent. There is plenty of content and documentation in the footnotes for anyone who is unconvinced or unaware that there is a serious problem with how we are approaching gender dysphoria, youth transition, and identity politics, with children at the center of our cultural battle. E.g.: <https://4thwavenow.com/2017/12/07/gender-dysphoria-is-not-one-thing/>;

[https://open.substack.com/pub/persuasion1/p/why-we-need-a-serious-debate-about?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/persuasion1/p/why-we-need-a-serious-debate-about?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web);

[https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/i-thought-i-was-saving-trans-kids?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://open.substack.com/pub/bariweiss/p/i-thought-i-was-saving-trans-kids?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web);

[https://fairforall.substack.com/p/trans-people-not-a-monolith?r=3v6p7&s=r&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://fairforall.substack.com/p/trans-people-not-a-monolith?r=3v6p7&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web);

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/07/when-a-child-says-shes-trans/561749/>;

[https://www.skeptical.com/reading\\_room/trans-matters-overview-debate-research-policies/](https://www.skeptical.com/reading_room/trans-matters-overview-debate-research-policies/);

45 *The Ethics of Authenticity* by Charles Taylor; *Redistribution or Recognition?* (Verso, 2003) by Nancy Fraser & Axel Honneth.

46 E.g.: <https://lisamarchiano.com/depth-psychology-can-tell-victimhood-culture/>;

[www.persuasion.community/p/the-illusion-of-a-frictionless-existence?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](http://www.persuasion.community/p/the-illusion-of-a-frictionless-existence?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web);

Trigger warnings: [www.persuasion.community/p/the-futility-of-trigger](http://www.persuasion.community/p/the-futility-of-trigger)

At the foundation of the evolutionary story of human gender lies the deep and important insight that people and environments are co-constructed. We influence and change our environment over time, and we are also profoundly influenced by our (cultural and natural) environment. We are not completely determined, but our freedom has constraints. Even more importantly, the developmental pathways that we can take to actualize our potential freedom and agency are significantly impacted by the cumulative effects of our culture (parenting, family, society, education, media, etc.). In short: children are very impressionable! The wide range of what humans can become and how we can live is a testament to how malleable we are. This is one of our evolutionary gifts—we are a uniquely neotenous species, meaning we have an exceptionally extended period of childhood, in which we learn what it is to be human (whereas other animals generally know what to do and become mature in a much shorter amount of time). This is crucial to acknowledge and remember when we consider how we are responsible for the myriad messages that we send to our children about what it means to be human—and what it means to be a man or a woman.

In the light of this evolutionary context, it should be clear that we are indeed responsible for how we teach our children about sex and gender, and that they (and all future generations) are depending on us to enculturate them in a way that will enable their healthy development and self-actualization. Our children are resilient and reliant mirrors; they will always reflect back to us the state of our own family, culture, and society, while adding their own progressive twist to whatever status quo we offer them. If we take this developmental background as a given, and zoom in on current trends in sexuality and gender, we can see that our children are becoming increasingly confused and distressed, in part because we are not providing adequate clarity and reassurance regarding what it means to be human. They are getting mixed messages, to say the least, and are developing their identity within media ecologies that are predatory, materialistic, partisan, and disorienting in ways that are completely unprecedented in the scope of human history. *TikTok is not a campfire or a dinner table. Instagram isn't grandma.* The fact that the former now has more of an influence than the latter on most children represents an almost unimaginable degradation of human culture, which has taken place in just the past few decades. The stakes are high and the environment is toxic. It is our responsibility to protect our children and to nurture their development,

[warnings?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://www.persuasion.community/p/the-illusion-of-a-frictionless-existence?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web);

Concept creep of trauma: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1047840X.2016.1082418?journalCode=hpli20>;

and this means enabling their construction-of-self-in-relation-to-the-world to be as healthy and reality-based as possible. This also means a construction of self that is not mediated by screens or influenced by advertisers and influencers. If we can get the environmental influences under control and oriented more toward human development, health, and emotional well-being, I think the confusion and dysphoria around gender roles will largely sort itself out (assuming that we remain a sexually dimorphic species of earth-based mammals for the time being).<sup>47</sup>

It is sad but true that some prevalent features of social justice activism have moved out of alignment with the orienting principles and aims of social justice in general, and I've tried to outline some of the causal and explanatory relationships above. It is also the case that transgender activism has exceeded the scope of its potentially pro-social purpose; we have moved far beyond the inclusion of transgender rights, and deep into the terrain of othering, scapegoating, demonizing, and attempting to silence or cancel anyone who questions gender identity ideology in good faith.<sup>48</sup> When we acknowledge this, and remain in solidarity to the principles of free speech and civil discourse, the agenda for re-establishing balance in the domain of gender can be relatively straightforward: stay grounded in science and biology (ensuring that the differences between males and females, and between sex and gender, are not erased or blurred); ensure equal rights for all individuals, regardless of group identity, and protect individual freedoms regarding gender expression and identity; and protect children from harm by ensuring that any decision that will impact them long-term is handled slowly, carefully, and with parental involvement as much as possible. This means we protect sex-based laws and rights for women; we do not presume or project gender identity onto anyone who appears to be gender nonconforming, allowing for as much individual freedom and expression as possible (while not violating the rights of others); we help children understand

**The future is open, but the past needs to be integrated, not denied. Integration is the path of health and healing.**

and accept themselves as they are, for who they are, as much as possible; and we offer grace, forgiveness, and love to anyone who misunderstands us or is confused about any of this. This last feature is clearly the most important of all!

One way to facilitate better sense-making in this domain is to reorient our language toward clarifying the differences between sex and gender. One of the most diffuse and detrimental influences of our post-modern milieu has been the creation of a climate of confusion regarding the use of language. The insights of some academics have been badly misunderstood, misapplied, and overgeneralized in popular discourse. In

addition, we have come to accept as normal the strategic use of language to deceive, manipulate, and distort reality in service of whatever goal one is trying to achieve. In the realm of sex and gender, this has meant a deepening conflation of the two, with 'gender' rapidly replacing 'sex' in both popular and professional discourse, as though

they are interchangeable terms. This has led to a failure of language in reflecting sexual/biological difference and to the emergence of the idea that sex/gender is reducible to identity, which is reducible to how one feels. Such a reduction completely ignores and effaces the co-constructed reality of how individuals (and especially children) are influenced by their cultural/linguistic environment, as well as by their biology. So by conflating sex and gender in a culture where the objectivity of biology and science is suspect, and where the malleability and sensitivity of children is denied, we have ended up feeding a self-fulfilling prophecy: If we conflate sex and gender and believe that both are equally a matter of choice along a spectrum, then we will have increasing numbers of children exploring various choices that have long-term *physical* implications as they progress through their developmentally appropriate periods of *identity* exploration and discovery.<sup>49</sup> If we were clear about the distinction between sex and gender, and this exploration was happening in the creative cultural arena of gender construction, then we could have now been in the midst of a healthy and progressive process. But because gender identity is now widely confused

47 It does occur to me, and it should to you, that other trajectories are possible. Indeed, there is much to be said about the possibilities of transhumanist futures. Personally, I am committed to a future that enables the health and well-being of the planet earth and all life forms here, and I see humans as crucial stewards of that process. But not everyone wants or expects that, and some transhuman possibilities and intentions do coincide with new visions and vistas for human sexuality and reproduction. See: *From Transgender to Transhuman* (Martine Rothblatt, 2011) by Martine Rothblatt for a radical yet alarmingly influential version of another worldview.

48 In particular, there are many examples of liberal women being attacked for refusing to deny that transwomen are not literally the same as women. See: *The Witchtrials of J.K. Rowling* by Megan Phelps-Roper: <https://www.thefp.com/witchtrials>.

49 For evidence and accounts of widespread demographic changes: [https://www.sfexaminer.com/archives/opinion-when-it-comes-to-trans-youth-we-re-in-danger-of-losing-our-way/article\\_833f674f-3d88-5edf-900c-7142ef691f1a.html](https://www.sfexaminer.com/archives/opinion-when-it-comes-to-trans-youth-we-re-in-danger-of-losing-our-way/article_833f674f-3d88-5edf-900c-7142ef691f1a.html);

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0202330>; <https://cspicenter.org/reports/born-this-way-the-rise-of-lgbt-as-a-social-and-political-identity/>;

[https://lisaselinadavis.substack.com/p/an-update-on-youth-gender-surgeries?r=3v6p7&s=r&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://lisaselinadavis.substack.com/p/an-update-on-youth-gender-surgeries?r=3v6p7&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web).

with sex (and one's identity as male or female), it is now becoming harder to determine who will be better off going through a medical transition and who will not. The result is an injustice to both those who should and those who should not transition—a judgment that could only be made by their own future selves.

As many trans-identified people have noted, transition is not something to take lightly or promote for others; if it were simply a matter of choosing a gender identity, it would make no sense to medically transition.<sup>50</sup> The very real experience for actual transgender/transsexual people is more than a feeling that can be assuaged by performing stereotypes; it is a deep and probably physiological and/or neurological condition that leads them to be better off and more self-actualized after they transition to live as the opposite gender.<sup>51</sup> There are various ways to explore gender expression and gender identity, and we can create cultures that allow healthy exploration in this domain, but we should not lose sight of the very real differences between sex and gender because sex denotes physical/biological life, grounded in objective reality, and pursuing hormones and surgeries is not something that should be included in the identity exploration of children, unless medically necessary. Adults who want to transition may pursue whatever medical pathways they desire, and we can strive to create cultures that do not judge or discriminate against those individuals. This is unequivocally 'pro-trans.'

We can create space for nonconformity and individuality in the name of liberty, and we can hold open the possibility that new forms of gender expression will continue to emerge and adapt to new social and cultural environments, but we should do so while striving to make those environments as healthy and developmentally nurturing as possible. This means that we find ways to integrate the fundamental and essential realities of the past and present, not denying, negating, or suppressing them. This, furthermore, means that we stay connected to and meaningfully grounded in our physical and biological realities as

**We must embrace diversity; there is no meaningful alternative.**

human beings and do not allow patterns of dissociation, fragmentation, or alienation to become normalized and pervasive in society. The future is open, but the past needs to be integrated, not denied. Integration is the path of health and healing, and our long transition from matriarchy to patriarchy to new possibilities of gender balance and expression need not end in our current state of confusion. Indeed, the path cannot and will not end here; it will continue to change and evolve. The question is: How will we co-create the culture of the future, and how consciously will we do it?

## Moving Toward Shared Goals, Shared Identity, and Cultural Evolution in a Field of Value

I have tried to lay out a vision for where we are coming from, where we are currently, and where we want to go if our intention is to create a global culture of shared humanity that is able to cooperate and collaborate to (re)solve the planetary metacrisis.<sup>52</sup> We come from a shared history of violence, war, and intergroup conflict, inclusive of widespread practices of slavery, mass slaughter and sacrifice, and sexual oppression. We also come from an all-inclusive process of multi-ethnic cultural evolution, through which meaningful values and ideals have been established and spread across the globe. We are living in an epoch of confusion, disruption, possibility, and accelerated change. It is a liminal time, a time between worlds. The world we are living in is already very different from the world we grew up

in, and this rate of change continues to accelerate and destabilize cultural continuity. The rate of technological change that impels the rate of social and cultural change is overwhelming our established modes of intergenerational transmission and education. The pressure of evolution has become overwhelming, but

we can't stop it. Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing, and unpredictable innovations in technology will continue to emerge, and we must figure out how to cultivate our humanity in a way that enables us to be stewards, guardians, and caretakers of the earth—and of each other.

The many causes and conditions that have led to the establishment of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as a social force to be reckoned with are best understood in the fractal light of cosmic, planetary, and human evolution. DEI is one paragraph in one chapter of a grand

50 E.g.: [https://fairforall.substack.com/p/trans-people-not-a-monolith?r=3v6p7&s=r&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://fairforall.substack.com/p/trans-people-not-a-monolith?r=3v6p7&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web); [https://open.substack.com/pub/lisaelindavis/p/buck-angel-im-a-trans-elder-trans?r=3v6p7&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=email](https://open.substack.com/pub/lisaelindavis/p/buck-angel-im-a-trans-elder-trans?r=3v6p7&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email).

51 There are different ways to look at this terminology. Some trans-identified people insist that sex cannot be changed. Others think the term transsexual makes more sense because it denotes an actual physical change via hormones and/or surgery, and not just identity, dress, etc. But popular discourse conflates sex and gender and refers to transgender in contradictory ways – sometimes as a choice to change identity and sometimes as a process including hormones and surgeries. There are rarely adequate distinctions made between these very different phenomena. For more info, see: <https://genspect.org/to-help-trans-identifying-kids-follow-the-science/>; <https://segm.org/>; <https://rethinktime.org/>.

52 See: *Tasting the Pickle* by Jonathan Rowson for a helpful reflection on our overall predicament, which we refer to as the metacrisis. <https://systems-souls-society.com/tasting-the-pickle-ten-flavours-of-meta-crisis-and-the-appetite-for-a-new-civilisation/>

story of human purpose and meaning, but it carries within it a plotline that predates the modern world, and that will continue to stretch far beyond the biographies of our distant descendants. It is the plotline of justice, harmony, and right relationship.

To summarize as simply as I can, in light of what I've written above (and informed by the broader conversation that is pointed to in the footnotes): Diversity is indelible. It is important; it is beautiful; it is an expression of the radical and fundamental creativity of the cosmos itself. We must embrace diversity; there is no meaningful alternative.

Equity can signal fairness, and that is important. But in the convoluted language games of the 21<sup>st</sup> century metacrisis, the word equity is being used in ways that increase confusion about the nature of equality and justify a deep human impulse to control and manipulate others to conform to predetermined standards and outcomes; that is not good. What we need is more empathy and compassion.<sup>53</sup> Whereas the demand for equal outcomes leads to the repudiation, denial, or suppression of diversity, empathy embraces it. *Diversity includes and implies diversity of perspective and diverse outcomes for diverse reasons in diverse contexts. Empathy ensures that fairness is maintained as a goal and ideal in all contexts, and that the multiplicity of pathways is cherished and appreciated in the light of the unique attributes of unique people.* Diversity and empathy go well together.

Inclusion, like equity, is generally well-intended in principle but also falls short of the mark as an ideal. We are not looking for one group to include another. We do not want to privilege a dominant majority in which others can be included. Ever-expanding the category of whiteness, for instance, which has been happening for over 200 years, is certainly not the answer. One way to nuance and improve our conceptual orientation is to aim for integration, individually and collectively. Integration denotes a dynamic state of psychological and relational health. We have many facets and layers to our individual and collective psyche, and ultimately we can seek and strive for the healthiest possible balance and expressions of these different parts—of ourselves, and of our society. We want to find the right relationship between the various aspects of ourselves,

and we want to find the right relationship between individuals and groups. This notion of integration also points to the dialectical holism of development: as different parts find dynamic balance, new wholes are created, emergence happens, and evolution continues.<sup>54</sup>

So diversity, empathy, and integration, in harmony with liberty, equality, and solidarity—these are the underlying values that we can rely on to get us where we need to go, together.

**Diversity, empathy, and integration, in harmony with liberty, equality, and solidarity—these are the underlying values that we can rely on to get us where we need to go, together.**

There is no pre-determined ideology or script to adopt, and there is no 'good' group of 'us' who will finally overcome the 'bad' group of 'them.' There will continue to be polarities and spectrums and ignorance and imperfection and various stages of growth, and the health and goodness of the communities to come will be determined by the degree to which they are able to orient individuals and

groups toward their own self-actualization in harmony with others. In order to do this, we will need to liberate ourselves from the circular and repetitive patterns of disharmony and discontent that entrap and limit our potential.

We will need to find a way out of the vicious cycle that currently ensnares so much of ostensibly progressive culture, where any attempt to move forward is seen as a failure to acknowledge and understand the past. We cannot move forward if we do not acknowledge, understand, and integrate the past, but we should not stand in judgment of those who attempt to heal and grow and enable real progress. In our current moment, it often happens that any attempt to offer constructive solutions or goals is met with skepticism, and those who strive for a post-postmodern, transracial, and transpartisan future are accused of denying the suffering, trauma, and inequality of the present. In our zeal to affirm and honor the pain and injustice of the past and present, we can unwittingly deny ourselves very real opportunities and possibilities for actual healing and progress. In order to enable and enact the real resolutions we so desperately desire, we have to believe that resolution is possible and allow ourselves to move from the places where we are stuck in our current perspectives, identities, and ideologies.

However advanced we become and however much we change, polarity and paradox will remain as

53 In this essay, I am using the word 'empathy' to be roughly synonymous with 'compassion.' I am aware of ways to distinguish these words, and I think that 'compassion' is probably the better word to use. I am compromising to stick with the DEI acronym.

54 For more on integration, evolution, and psychological health, see *Integral Psychology* (Shambhala, 2000) by Ken Wilber. Also see my essay, *Hope as Process: Being and Becoming in the Great Integration*. <https://integrallife.com/hope-as-process-being-and-becoming-in-the-great-integration/>

fundamental features of our world. The masculine and the feminine, the conservative and the progressive, the left hemisphere and the right hemisphere, the yin and the yang—all are indelible and dynamic facets of our amazing world of human experience. The individual and the collective are expressions of a singular, dynamic process of unfolding, and we find ourselves here, *in medias res*—always already right in middle of an infinite saga of meaning, purpose, and value. Will we find our way? Will we become the balancing force that transcends and includes essentialism and relativism, fundamentalism and nihilism, determinism and freedom? Time will tell, and who is there to tell the time but us?

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# Social-Emotional Education and Waldorf Education\*

David S. Mitchell

**T**ry to remember the days of September ... and your school experiences. For the majority of us, what we were taught and what we remember from our school years present two different pictures. We sat through countless hours of lessons about common denominators and mitosis, about heliotropism and split infinitives, about world revolutions and the Industrial Revolution.

Our skills developed quietly in the background at a rate equal to our interest. In the foreground, like a guardian to a fortress, was our feeling-life. Our emotions set the stage for our learning. Early memories contain the many sweet recollections of childhood but also feelings of intimidation suffered on the playground, the loneliness we felt as we tried to figure out who we were, awkward, blundering moments with the opposite sex, victories and defeats, and the antagonism we felt toward adults who seemed so sure in their correctness. As we matured, perhaps, we swam in a sea of insecurity lifted by waves of hope. In this area of our life-education, we were often largely on our own.

We should not leave emotional education to chance, however, in a world in which cultural decay and the dominance of modern media have created toxic soul conditions in which today's children must fight to survive.

In western societies the drift to greater individualism raises the question of the future social coherence and sustainability. The increase in family fragmentation with a dramatic rise in the divorce figures places new emotional strains on a child, faced with feelings of insecurity and risk over which they are powerless.<sup>1</sup>

Across our country, one in ten children suffers from a serious mental health disorder, and very few of them receive the help and services they need. A national survey by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control reported that eight percent of students in grades 9–12 tried to take their own lives, and seventeen percent reported “seriously considering” suicide. These troubling statistics

reflect symptoms of a deep unhappiness afflicting children from all backgrounds.<sup>2</sup>

The remedy to this soultoxic condition is a strengthening of the self so that young people are able to emerge from adolescence as self-directed, emotionally stable, social beings. The task of providing this inner training once belonged to the community—to church, family, and neighborhood life. This is often not the case today, and schools are asked to fulfill these needs.

As humanity evolves we recognize the surge toward individualism, and we can glimpse the preparation for the emergence of the consciousness soul. It is a light streaming from the future and a pathway with no detour. In the future, we will experience the experience of others; we will be unable not to do this. In spiritual science this post-individualistic stage is referred to as development of the “spirit-self.”<sup>3</sup> This higher soul state is predicated on emotional health and inner balance.

## Social-Emotional Education

Cognitive researchers<sup>4</sup> point out that children's social-emotional development is as important as their intellectual and physical development. Our emotional life may also be called our life of instinct. It responds before thinking commences and it can even extinguish thinking. Children's emotional health affects their academic performance, and their academic performance affects their emotional health. In other words, depression, anxiety, and unhappiness impair school performance. Similarly, school failure contributes to emotional health problems.

António Damásio, a neuroscientist from the University of Southern California, researches the neurobiology of mind and behavior with emphasis on emotion, decision-making, memory, communication, and creativity. He has shown that, in the brain, emotions and thinking are not separate activities but constantly play into one another. “Emotion appears to be the support system without which the rational building process cannot work.”<sup>5</sup> The prefrontal lobes of the brain, which are associated with emotional impulses, are also associated with working memory and learning.

Linda Lantieri puts it this way:

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Educators and parents alike are [becoming] much more aware that when chronic anxiety, anger, or upset feelings intrude on children's thoughts, less capacity is available in working memory to process what they are trying to learn.

This implies that, at least in part, academic success depends on a student's ability to maintain positive social interactions.<sup>6</sup>

Children's social-emotional skills drive them to learn to communicate, to connect with others, to resolve conflict, and to cope with challenges. These skills give children the confidence they need to reach goals and the ability to persist in the face of life's difficulties. Like other important milestones that babies and toddlers achieve in their first three years—such as uprightness, walking, and talking—developing social-emotional skills takes time, practice, and patience of parents and teachers. In school, the first task of a wise teacher is to engage the “feelinglife” of the class in the subject being taught; this interest opens neural pathways to allow for cognition.

The champions of social-emotional inclusion claim an intellectual pedigree stretching back to Aristotle, who described emotional control and understanding as vital virtues. Aristotle wrote:

Humankind is by no means agreed about the things that ought to be taught, whether we look to virtue or the best life. Neither is it clear whether education is more concerned with intellectual or with moral virtue. The existing practice is perplexing; no one knows on what principle we should proceed—should the useful in life, or should virtue, or should the higher knowledge be the aim of our training; all three opinions have been entertained.

Not all people have the same opinion about what youth should learn in order to develop a good character or to enable them to lead the best life. There is also no consensus about whether education should mainly focus on acquisition of knowledge and understanding or character formation, whether the right type of education should consist of disciplines useful for life, to breed a pure character, or to enlarge knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

Around ten percent of American grade school and high school students now receive some form of social and emotional learning curriculum, according to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a Chicago-based emotional learning research organization.<sup>8</sup> Supporters point to a growing collection of studies that show the benefits of emotional learning programs on everything from test scores

to lowered anxiety and lower rates of drug use. But the ultimate goal is something larger: a redefinition of what school is meant to teach and what sort of knowledge we value. Emotional literacy campaigners argue that the problems of the American school system will not be solved by getting youth to read sooner or training them to find the Okefenokee Swamp on a map—they need to better understand, and take charge of, their essential and unique human qualities.

Daniel Goleman contributes significantly to views of education when he addresses the need to nurture the social and emotional lives of children. In *Emotional Intelligence* he summarizes research from the fields of neuroscience and cognitive psychology that identifies EQ (emotional intelligence) as replacing IQ, high-stakes testing, and College Board examinations in importance for children's development and future life success. He identifies five components that can be translated into essential social-emotional aptitudes:

1. **Self-regulation**—conducting ourselves and controlling our emotional states;
2. **Self-consciousness**—recognizing and understanding our feelings;
3. **Motivation**—managing feelings in order to achieve our objectives;
4. **Empathy**—identifying and decoding the feelings of others; and
5. **Social Abilities**—relating to and influencing others.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, social-emotional education classes address five age-appropriate and essential areas of social and emotional development:

1. **Self-awareness**—recognizing our capacities, strengths, emotions, and values;
2. **Self-management**—managing emotions and behaviors, persevering in overcoming obstacles;
3. **Social awareness**—demonstrating understanding and empathy for others;
4. **Relationship skills**—forming positive relationships, teamwork, and conflict resolution; and
5. **Responsible decision-making**—making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behavior.

“The emotional mind is far quicker than the rational mind, springing into action without pausing even a moment to consider what it is doing,” according to Goleman.<sup>10</sup> Students need to learn that they have the ability to make choices in how they respond to their

individual emotions and they must learn to understand what these emotions are in order to lead richer lives. Goleman adds that students should learn

self-awareness, in the sense of recognizing feelings and building a vocabulary for them, and seeing the links between thoughts, feelings, and reactions [thinking, feeling, and willing]. They should understand whether thoughts or feelings are ruling a decision and [be able to] see the consequence of alternative choices. They should be able to apply these insights to decisions about such issues as drugs, tobacco, and sex. Self-awareness also takes the form of recognizing your strengths and weaknesses, and seeing yourself in a positive but realistic light.

Another emphasis in managing emotions [is] realizing what is behind a feeling (for example, the hurt that triggers anger), learning ways to handle anxieties, anger, and sadness, and following through on commitments.

A key social ability is empathy, understanding others' feelings and taking their perspective, and respecting differences in how people feel about things. Relationships are a major focus, including learning to be a good listener and question asker, distinguishing between what someone says or does and your own reactions and judgments; being assertive rather than angry or passive; and learning the art of cooperation, conflict resolution, and negotiating compromise.<sup>11</sup>

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry sums up much of this in *The Little Prince*: "It is with the heart that one sees rightly: What is most essential is invisible to the eye."

## **Waldorf Education and Social-Emotional Learning**

"Waldorf education encourages a balanced development toward physical, behavioral, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual maturation."<sup>12</sup> Research on graduates of Waldorf schools has documented how the Waldorf school curricula already contain many of the attributes of a strong social-emotional curriculum.<sup>13</sup> Still, we can do more. Schools must broaden the scope of the term "education" to give it its full meaning, and social-emotional education must be consciously taught. Resources are available, but, first, it is vital to understand child development; this is an area neglected in Goleman's work. Second, we may study our curricula in order to determine where emphasis can be placed to strengthen social-emotional skills. And, third, we may

focus on the demographics of ageappropriate social-emotional development, which may vary from community to community.

Waldorf school curricula have much embedded within them to help form the moral will of students. "In the learning process, the creativeexpressive, aesthetic dimension has a [secure] place alongside the dynamics of the data-driven, knowledge-based global society, because the arts provide a bridge that promotes the inner and outer health and well-being of the individual."<sup>14</sup> Rich stories and biographies of men and women provide mental images containing powerful ideals toward which our students may strive. Respectful teachers afford students an opportunity for moral imitation. We may speak without moralizing about the dangers of cigarette smoking during combustion experiments in 7th grade chemistry, for instance, as well as about depression and the physiological effects of alcohol during 8th or 9th grade chemistry. True relationships and responsibility are unfolded as requisites for sexual intimacy, and procreation is looked at with wonder.

Our students are in need of a more direct development of their social-emotional skills, especially once they reach high school. Parents may have been diligent and class teachers may have laid a strong moral foundation, but the influences of modern life, as experienced, for instance, through music, the cinema, and arrogant athletes, eat away at this foundation as a strong acid attacks metal.

## **Empathy**

At the foundational stage, social-emotional education concerns itself with acquiring selfknowledge. The words "know thyself" were inscribed in the pronaos (forecourt) of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, and meta-cognition (awareness of thought process), meta-mood (awareness of one's own emotions), and self-awareness (the sense of an ongoing attention to one's internal states) were trained in the mystery school of Pythagoras. Situated in Crotona, a town next to the Gulf of Tarentum in southern Italy, the school was highly concerned with strengthening the morality of society. Members were required to live ethically, love one another, share political beliefs, practice pacifism, and devote themselves to the mathematics of nature. These timeless concepts return to humanity with the regularity of a merry-go-round and set the foundation for modern spiritual work as well as social-emotional education.

At the secondary stage, social-emotional education concerns itself with the cultivation of empathy—from my perspective the most important and necessary

capacity for our times. Empathy is the “potential for holding still [the] eternal oscillation between sympathy and antipathy”<sup>15</sup> “...and in this deed of holding still, making a space, a gateway open[s] toward another person and toward [this person’s] experience.”<sup>16</sup> Thus we give up ourselves and begin to experience the other person’s experience. The attainment of empathy is a condition for achieving total compassion. Thomas Weihs describes empathy as follows:

While love is often impatient,  
empathy is patient.

While love is often aggressive,  
empathy is kind.

While love is often generous,  
empathy envies no one.

Love is often proud,  
but empathy is never boastful nor conceited.

While love is often selfish and very easy to take offense,  
empathy is never selfish and never takes offense.

Empathy keeps no score of wrongs, nor does not gloat over  
other men’s sins, but delights in the truth.

There is nothing empathy cannot face,  
There is no end to its own faith, hope, and its endurance.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

Twenty-five years ago Waldorf high school teachers could enter a classroom and, so to speak, find the table set, as if in preparation for a wonderful meal. For the most part, students were relatively attentive, manners were exercised, and there appeared to be an eagerness to learn. When teachers enter a classroom today, they may well find they have first to set the table and meet the pressing emotional needs of the students before they can serve the meal—that is, teach the class. High school teachers in 2009 are often required to prepare students in a new manner before teaching can commence. This is not to say that they do not want to learn. Here, for example, Leo Tolstoy describes the torment of the underachieving pupil, Seryozha:

The father and the teacher were both displeased with Seryozha, and indeed he studied very badly. But it was quite impossible to say that he was an incapable boy. On the contrary, he was much more capable than all the other boys. And, as his father saw it, he did not want to learn what he was taught. But in fact he could not learn it. He could not because there were demands in his soul that

were more exacting for him than those imposed by his father and teacher. These demands were conflicting, and he fought openly with his educators.

He was nine years old, he was a child, but he knew his own soul, it was dear to him, he protected it as the eyelid protects the eye, and did not let anyone into his soul without the key of love. His educators complained that he did not want to learn, yet his soul was overflowing with a thirst for knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

A teacher’s love, an aesthetic environment, and a profound respect for awakening individuality in each student are the mortar to strengthen the education of modern human beings. Love is a force that will grant each young soul the strength to meet the rigors of the path to “knowing themselves.” The chart on the next page gives ideas for the implementation of a Waldorf high school social-emotional curriculum.

## Endnotes

1. Christopher Clouder, *Social and Emotional Education: An International Analysis* (Fundación Marcelino Botín Report, 2008), p. 25.
2. Testimony before the US Congress on National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day by Goldie Hawn, Washington, DC, May 7, 2009. [http://www.casel.org/hawn\\_testimony\\_2009](http://www.casel.org/hawn_testimony_2009).
3. See Rudolf Steiner, *Theosophy* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1969) pp. 41–44.
4. Such as Marti Berstrom, António Damásio, Reuven Bar-On, and Linda and Nick Elksnin, to name a few. Brain research indicates that emotion and cognition are profoundly interrelated processes. Specifically, “recent cognitive neuroscience findings suggest that the neural mechanisms underlying emotion regulation may be the same as those underlying cognitive processes” (Bell and Wolfe 2004, p. 366). Emotion and cognition work together, jointly informing the child’s impressions of situations and influencing behavior. Most learning in the early years occurs in the context of emotional supports (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2000). “The rich interpenetrations of emotions and cognitions establish the major psychic scripts for each child’s life” (Panksepp 2001). Together, emotion and cognition contribute to attentional processes, decision-making, and learning (Cacioppo and Berntson 1999). Furthermore, cognitive processes, such as decision-making, are affected by emotion (Barrett et al., 2007). Brain structures involved in the neural circuitry of cognition influence emotion and vice

| A PROPOSED WALDORF SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SKILLS CURRICULUM FOR HIGH SCHOOL                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                      | 9                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 10                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 11                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 12                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| The high school Social/Emotional curriculum has two parts:                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| The first a weekly forum where guided discussions take place, sometimes with community experts.                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| The second is embedded in the curriculum as it unfolds - each teacher identifies the opportunities to bring forward. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Forums                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Soul Skills<br>Needing<br>Development                                                                                | Discuss Physical boundaries (harassment)<br>Develop a tolerance for differences<br>Awaken empathy- recognize the good in everyone<br>Ninth grade orientation<br>Time management<br>What is ok and what is not<br>Transition- extrinsic to intrinsic<br>Social exercises/Team building exercises<br>Current events<br>Health (alcohol & tobacco)<br>Study Skills | Relationships<br>Masculine/Feminine (sexuality)<br>Identifying anger/joy<br>Listening skills<br>Explain sexual harassment<br>Non-Violent Communication<br>Debating<br>Fair arguing<br>Drugs, drinking<br>Advertisements<br>Test taking skills & techniques for success | Emotional boundaries<br>How to process feelings<br>Creative playfulness<br>Conflict resolution<br>Vocational training<br>The media & pollution of the "I"<br>Current local events<br>Stress management<br>Adolescent loneliness issues | Life management<br>Life recapitulation (Senior seminar)<br>(pre-birth to death)<br>Community Building<br>(How to provide before someone needs to ask)<br>Global citizenship<br>Current world events<br>What is service to others?<br>Finding the "Self" |
| Curriculum                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Thinking Capacities                                                                                                  | Thinking lives in the Will                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Thinking lives in the Feelings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Thinking lives in the Thinking<br><i>Now the student can ponder his/her own thoughts</i>                                                                                                                                               | Ego Directed Thinking                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Thinking Skills                                                                                                      | Casual                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Teleological                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Analytic                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Synthetic                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Historical Orientation                                                                                               | Modern                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Ancient                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Medieval/Renaissance                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Destiny Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Writing Tasks                                                                                                        | Summarize                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Compare/Contrast                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Analyze                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Synthesize                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Poetry to Heal the Soul                                                                                              | Ballads                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Epic                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Dramatic                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Lyric                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Project Week                                                                                                         | Farming<br>How is farming economically possible & what rhythms are followed?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Forestry/Conservation<br>How can we care for wild lands and wildlife?<br>Combine with surveying                                                                                                                                                                        | Industry<br>Work on an assembly line. What is social? What is work? Labor unions?                                                                                                                                                      | Vision Quest<br>Develop and experience to allow for inner listening and self-finding                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Self Esteem building                                                                                                 | Festivals, right recreation, sports, music, art, crafts, eurythmy, drama, sculpture                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Health Focus                                                                                                         | Smoking/drugs/alcohol/sexuality<br><i>(develop each year as appropriate by age)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Mental health<br><i>(perversity, meditation, insanity, prayer, philosophy)</i>                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Soul Needs                                                                                                           | Put your feet on the ground!<br>The world is yours!                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | A new beginning!<br>Establish your own inner foundation!                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Thinking creates the world! Nature needs human culture!                                                                                                                                                                                | Who is the human being?<br>What is my life task?                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

versa (Barrett et al., 2007). Emotions and social behaviors affect the young child's ability to persist in goal-oriented activity, to seek help when it is needed, and to participate in and benefit from relationships (California Department of Education, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/itf09socemODEV.asp>).

5. António Damàzio, *Descartes' Error*.
6. Linda Lantieri, *Social and Emotional Education: An International Analysis* (Fundaciòn Marcelino Botin Report, 2008) p. 199.
7. Aristotle, *On Politics, Book VIII*, "Education and the Ideal State."
8. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) works to establish social and emotional learning as an essential part of education from preschool through high school.
9. Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (NY: Bantam Books, 1997).
10. Ibid., p. 291.
11. Ibid., p. 268.
12. Rawson & Richter. *The Educational Tasks and Content of the Steiner/Waldorf Curriculum*, 2000.
13. See *Survey of Waldorf Graduates, Phase II*, David Mitchell and Douglas Gerwin, (Wilton, NH: Research Institute, 2007) and *Absolventen von Waldorfschulen*, Dirk Randoll and Heiner Barz, ed., (Wiesbaden, Germany: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007).
14. Trevor Mephram, (conference reporter, *European Council for Steiner/Waldorf Education News*, no. 15, June 2009.
15. Rudolf Steiner, *A Psychology of Body, Soul and Spirit* (NY: SteinerBooks, 1999). Steiner describes "sympathy and antipathy as the two primary forces in our soul. The force of sympathy lives in our Will; the force of antipathy is released from our nervous system— through our intellectual processes."
16. Anke Weihs, "Youth Guidance and Empathy," *Waldorf Journal Project*, no. 6 (Ghent, NY: AWSNA Publications), pp. 35–36.
17. Thomas Weihs, "Empathy," *Waldorf Journal Project*, no. 6 (Ghent, NY: AWSNA Publications), p. 34.
18. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* (NY: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 526.

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**David S. Mitchell** (1945-2012) was a towering figure in the North American Waldorf landscape. A Co-Director of the Research Institute of Waldorf Education, founder of the Waldorf Online Library as well as of AWSNA Publications, the precursor to Waldorf Publications, David is responsible for a very long string of articles, journals, and books, which he had edited, initiated, or authored. David started his career in Waldorf education as a class teacher at the Pine Hill Waldorf School in Wilton, New Hampshire, followed by several years as a high school teacher and director of admissions at the High Mowing Waldorf boarding and day school, after which he co-founded the high school at the Shining Mountain Waldorf School in Boulder, Colorado. He was a regular contributor to the Research Bulletin, which he had refashioned into its current form.

# A Waldorf Teacher's Journey

## A personal reflection after forty-some years

John Anderson

# “W

hatever language was that young man speaking?” Miss Judy Compton Burnett asked her colleague as I left the room, having just completed my interview with the College of Teachers at The New School, King's Langley, England. That language I was speaking had, clearly, a strong enough American accent to undermine her idea of good speech.

Miss Judy, as she was called by one and all, was a pupil of Rudolf Steiner, sent by him, together with her sister, Miss Vera, to introduce eurythmy to England. When these two young Victorian women replied that they had not as yet finished their eurythmy training, Dr. Steiner simply remarked that they should learn along the way through experience.

All this I found out some time later, but it did explain why after my hire, when I had begun my first real lessons at the school, I encountered Miss Judy feeling her way along the main corridor. Her blindness and old age had little effect on her arriving at the school most days, and she recognized people either by their footsteps or voice. In my case, probably both. “You, come with me,” she said in a voice filled with warmth and purpose. Every week during term time, Miss Judy and I met in the *Old Kitchen* of the former hostel. It had nothing in it but for our two chairs, yet as Spartan sparse as it was, it became a sacred place for us, as Miss Judy imparted her wisdom and love of speech through insight and instruction to one who had waited his entire life for this opportunity without knowing it.

It was Miss Judy who later encouraged me to leave the school after four years to study speech at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. If I may be so bold as to reveal a certain intimacy, I was invited to the Compton Burnett's ancient thatched cottage in Berkhamstead for tea and the conversation that would lead to my speech training. Because Miss Vera had a way of dominating the talk around the table, Miss Judy indicated she wished to speak to me alone and took me upstairs to her room. Stepping into that room was like entering another era, except for one quite modern Seiko clock on the mantle, probably a gift. Later, back at school, one of her closest colleagues, a co-founder of The New School, told me of the honor of having been

invited to her room, adding that I was most likely the only male to ever have entered it.

There is a tale to tell behind the naming of The New School, Kings Langley, founded in 1949, my birth year. Michael Hall has always laid claim to being the oldest Steiner-Waldorf school in the UK, and has the technical right to the title. However, when Steiner came to England for the first time, he was invited to a school run in Kings Langley by a certain Miss Cross who was a keen supporter of Steiner's new educational philosophy. It seems that Miss Cross did her utmost best to follow Steiner's pedagogical instructions, with the possible exception of her insistence on cold baths for children, but that is another story that I heard from one of Miss Cross' students. During his visit, Steiner gave Miss Cross permission to found the first school in England. This was in 1922, well before the founding of Michael Hall in East Sussex, 30 miles south of London. Kings Langley is located in Hertfordshire, some 30 miles north of London.

Located at *The Priory*, a medieval Dominican monastery on the grounds of the former summer home of Plantagenet kings, the school was an exceptional, historical site. During my time there, the entrance to a secret tunnel was discovered beneath the building that came out in the cellar of the local pub, *The King's Palace*, itself of medieval roots. Archeologists determined that the tunnel was the king's escape route in times of danger. My upper school students had their own ideas of what they might use it for.

Miss Cross continued with her school for some 25 years, but when newer teachers, including the Compton Burnetts, challenged the rigidity of her older age, they decided to found a new school on the property next door. Miss Cross' school soon closed and *The New School* began to prosper.

By the time I arrived, in 1977, class size was between 30 and 35, both in the upper and lower schools, though after class 10 there was some attrition due to the English exam system. Thirty-five 14-year-olds, my first class in English, looked with some interest at their new teacher from North America. One girl, now a

well-known London artist, seemed to be admiring my LL Bean couture and I nervously blurted out, “Oh, do you like my new pants?” The class erupted in laughter – *What did he say... Did he say pants?* Realizing that I had said something wrong, I blushed. Afterwards, that same girl came cautiously up to the front desk and after looking around to be sure no one was listening, lowered her voice and said, “Mr. Anderson, you didn’t really mean to say *pants*, did you?” “No” I shyly offered. “Because,” she went on in a whisper, “in England your pants are your underwear.” So, first day, to a class 7, do you like my new...?

There are many challenges that a novice Waldorf teacher must face that are true for most new teachers of children and adolescents. I only want to go over what is perhaps held less in common. The first is the sheer amount of preparation, the need for which becomes all too apparent from the onset, and the effect that this has on a teacher’s former everyday life. Friends and family notice it too. You seem to drift off, preoccupied in thoughts you cannot immediately share. Who at the dinner table could know that a mention of a particular woman whose heroism was recently reported in the news would send you off in thought reviewing the biography of Joan of Arc, which you were presenting to Class 7 that week? They would also notice that your free evenings, once reserved for downtime and friendly conversation, seem now to only happen on weekends.

More deeply, what is happening is that Waldorf teaching, *ab initio*, shows your personal will no longer to be entirely your own. This is a sacrifice that one is asked to make, and how each of us meet this is an individual undertaking. It is the beginning of an initiation; the first trial known in the mystery centers of ancient times, such as Ephesus, as a *fire trial*; the burning off of the old as something new prepares to be born within. In my experience, this trial can find a certain resolution by the first three years. It does, though, reappear for further refinement and deepening in later years, as what was at first a *felt* experience finds a deepening in one’s thought life. In a verse given by Steiner to the early eurythmists, such as Miss Judy and Miss Vera, and later adopted by teachers, appear the lines: *Life will be harder around me. Life will be richer within me.* The reality of this richness appears later as the years progress. One’s will may no longer be entirely one’s own, but a new space is created within for the will of another. I will call that other *the spirit of Waldorf education*. It becomes a real being; one that is palpable.

**One’s will may no longer be entirely one’s own, but a new space is created within for the will of another. I will call that other *the spirit of Waldorf education*.**

The colleagueship that one discovers at one’s first school forms bonds that can span decades. I am still closely connected with some of those first individuals, though our careers have taken us far apart. For many of us, those first years also bring a harsh reality. The inner progress that one has to make in Waldorf teaching with all its richness can also cast a shadow. While the longing for real community is shared by those in Waldorf teaching, its shadow side appears when the personal sympathies and antipathies of colleagues appear unrecognized and are often turned into ideals that are thought to be commonly held when in fact they are not. Groupings can and will appear. Only when there is sufficient insight and strength to handle and heal such discordances, can deeper conflict be avoided. I have found this a most difficult challenge at particular times in a career that has spanned schools in five countries.

In this regard, I would like to point out the verse used at many Waldorf schools:

*The healthy social life is found*

*When in the mirror of each human soul*

*The whole community finds its reflection.*

*And when in the community*

*The virtue of each one is living.*

What does this actually mean and demand of both the individual and the community? Firstly, all the group recitation in the world will not make this ideal a reality without it being openly shared amongst colleagues as to how they actually put the ideal into practice. Such sharing I have seldom found in practice. Even with a more gentle approach, many in the Waldorf school community find it exceedingly difficult to speak out honestly about the challenges and progress they have made in working with the meditation. This is so easy to avoid when there is much important business to take care of: festivals to be planned, students

to discuss, parent issues arising, pressing, even urgent, administrative tasks to be seen to, and let’s not neglect that preparation to be done when all these other matters find their place. I have always looked upon such as the bait that leads the community of teachers further away from this meditative ideal.

How can you manifest the virtue of another when they have become so impossible in meetings and appear as a hindrance to decision-making? How can you speak out of this recognition of the other when that virtue

you have seen in another is now overshadowed by personal antipathies or even sympathies? How does an individual manifest the will of the community when this will appears so wrong to them?

I found this conundrum often in schools where ideals were taken as a given that lives on within a general consensus that everyone is trying their best. That is until it is announced that someone's schedule appears to be lighter than yours, or when a colleague is granted a certain consideration that you feel you have been denied.

I have often found it helpful, in pondering the content of verses given by Rudolf Steiner, to find ways of changing the perspective. *The healthy social life is found when...* There was always something awkward in the phrasing of this opening line to me, perhaps even a bit rigid as well. I ascribed this awkwardness to the difficulties of translation. But, at this point of my career, a second year speech student who could now speak German, albeit with a slight Swiss accent, I was able to consult the original. Well, I was surprised to learn that the opening line said nothing at all about the healthy social life or where it was to be found; though it may be implied: *Heilsam ist nur, wenn...* goes the German, that is, *Healing is only when (if)...* . This allows for quite another perspective. With further research, I found that Steiner had given this verse to his English co-worker and sculptor, Edith Maryon, who had devoted her talents to understanding the art of the future, *the social art*. The meditation had thus acquired the title, *The Social Ethic* (or *Motto*). One can see how the *healthy social life* had attached itself to the English translation while losing something quite special found in the original. *Heilsam* is an active word, a process in itself that counters an illness or sickness that has appeared, bringing a needed healing. The healing begins when the community is able to fulfill the two conditions: *when individuals can reflect the whole of the community within their soul, and when the strength of soul of each individual lives in the community*. The original verse speaks as if the illness already is present.

When a community is in need of healing a particular social issue or a greater malaise, it will need to find suitable processes to bring this about. We are *not* moving now in the realm of what is today departmentalized as HR. The processes of healing go much deeper, whenever possible transcending legalities and dealing with the soul forces of antipathy and sympathy, which undoubtedly are behind much of what is encountered in conflict. Worth noting: Edith Maryon was working on

the statue of Ahriman–Christ–Lucifer when this verse was given to her.

I have spent decades trying as much as my humble efforts would allow to bring healing to such situations. It has been at times welcomed and often ignored while business as usual carried on. I have contributed my own shadow sides as well.



Walking up the hill to the Goetheanum for the first time, the thought came to me that I could never regret a day being here. And that proved true for the four years I spent studying speech and so much more. Building on my already established record in using the wrong word at the wrong time in another language, my early attempts at everyday German did cause some embarrassment. Though I could already recite poets like Goethe and Hamerling half way decently, I found myself one afternoon in the supermarket trying to buy a jar of mustard (don't ask) and got lost in the unfamiliar aisles. I asked the salesperson, *Ich möchte gern Seife kaufen. Können Sie mir Bitte helfen?*

Helpfully, she took me down the aisle into the detergent section. Confused, I repeated my request, and when she looked perplexed, I pointed to my mouth, saying, *Seife, zu essen*.

The Swiss sense of humor only extends so far and I had reached the limit. I left without my mustard and later learned the difference between *Senf* (mustard) and *Seife* (soap).

While I sided with many speech students at the Goetheanum who found much to criticize in the old-fashioned approach to acting and to teacher-student relationships, there was little doubt that my inner organs were undergoing a sea change with the daily exercises, choral recitation, breath work, and, most tellingly, private instruction. I went from Miss Judy to Ruth Unger Palmer and considered myself one of the most fortunate fellows I knew. Ruth had been a pupil at two of the first Waldorf schools in Germany. On the Goetheanum stage, she appeared as Luna, one of the three soul forces from Rudolf Steiner's *Mystery Dramas*, and her speech was full of power and movement. Some of my classmates wondered how I could have been so lucky to have lessons with one of two *grand dames* of speech in Dornach. Ruth had a soft spot for English speakers, Americans in particular, and I reaped the rewards.

In a wooden house that today would remind you of a Hobbit dwelling in *Lord of the Rings*, but was built in the goetheanistic style of the first Goetheanum, I ascended a raised platform in her studio and looked down on a being that was the embodiment of the art of speech; so much movement, so much breath, such nuanced expression in her interpretation of the greats of middle European poetry and literature. While my appreciation knew no bounds, it has taken me decades to comprehend what she was trying to communicate. When I was not getting “it,” her left foot would begin to tap at speed, and I knew I was in for it. *More breath*, came the command... *What have you got in your mouth, a potato?... It's not moving... Did you practice since last lesson?* With so much that is significant in one's life comes the wish to be allowed to repeat an experience and get from it what you know now you missed.

Four years, never regretting a day, and it was time to move on. From my training years in Detroit, the first school in Stuttgart where it all began loomed large in my imagination: Steiner's initial courses for teachers; the first successes and missteps; praise and criticism alike from the founder. The school was just over three hours away from Dornach, and with the encouragement of one of the leading teachers of the second generation, I applied for a position as an English instructor. A most popular American language teacher was leaving to return to the US. Some readers may have heard of him, William Fordham. My interview with the assembled *Interne Konferenz* (the College), some thirty weighty souls, had something of that earlier interview at King's Langley. I heard later that one colleague-to-be had asked another whether I was merely charming or did I have any real depth? The latter assumption wasn't too far off the mark, notwithstanding the anti-American prejudice lurking below the surface. It was time to plumb the depths. Three years there taught me to dig deeper. My language colleagues in Russian, French, as well as in English, formed a tight bond and we were in continual interaction to improve teaching methods, share insights, and seek advice. I owe them greatly.

But how could I better my linguistic faux pas after *pants*, *mustard* & *soap*? Well, it didn't take me long. I have related the following anecdote before and it has sometimes jarred sensitive ears, but I will repeat it here.

We are again in Class 9, English for German speakers, and we are reading a Hemingway short story. “Two

men walked into a bar...” I know this sounds like the opening of a bad joke, but wait. While preparing the lesson the evening before, I knew someone was going to ask what a *bar* was. I searched for a synonym in my *Langenscheidt's English-German Dictionary*, and found it. Sure enough, next day, Michael, back row, left corner, *Mr. Anderson, what's a bar?* Well, *Michael, in German that would be a Bumslokal*. Dead silence throughout the class. *Mr. Anderson, were you ever in a Bumslokal?* I believe in being honest when asked about myself by a student. *Yes, when I was younger*.

I might be over-dramatizing this, but I believe they not only fell into silence at that moment, but also left the classroom that way. Realizing again that I had said something that I shouldn't have, I asked one of the oldest, most experienced language teachers, of the traditional kind, what a *Bumslokal* was. Magda Meier's expression twisted as if someone had just forced a lemon slice into her mouth. *A Bumslokal, my dear man, is where some men go to pick up ladies of the night. Why ever would you ask?* Oh, just wondering.

The next day's class began and I dreaded what I had to ask. *How many of you went home last night and told your parents...* I never finished the question as 18 hands shot straight up into the air. I backed out of this one as graciously as I could and told them to never take the first synonym you find in a foreign language without double-checking its meaning.

After three years in Stuttgart, I was not ready to leave, but destiny had spoken again. I couldn't resist teasing some of my colleagues who had wondered years before if I had any depth and would ever speak more than a basic German. I concluded the announcement of my resignation at a faculty meeting with... *Ja, Lieber Kollegen, was kan man tun, wenn die Schicksal so spricht?* (What can you do when destiny speaks?) The reaction was immediate. **Das**

*Schicksal, Herr Anderson, das Schicksal, nicht die*. My retort had been carefully rehearsed. *Aber, wie so, wenn es so oft in die weibliche form kommt!* (But how can that be when it so often comes in a female form?)



If it can be generally said that English lives in the vowels between the consonants, German comes alive in the latter. Now, there are English exclamations such as *drat* or *piffle*, that illustrate this. The vowel sounds leave little to go on, but the movement is provided by

the consonants. German can sound harsh, even hard to the untrained ear, but it is a goldmine of consonants for language teaching.

Not so Danish; next stop: Denmark. My fourteen years there involved endeavors beyond teaching, and I welcomed new experiences in social therapy, biography work, and organizational consultancy.



Much discussion over the last decade has focused on diversity, justice, and racism in society, and our schools have rightly been involved. In thinking back over the decades, I have reviewed my past experiences in this light. One pronounced expression of nationalism stood out. It happened during the Falklands War, when the English tabloids exploded with nationalistic and degrading headlines regarding the Argentinians. *Give the Argies Some Bargy* was one unmemorable page one. On this particular morning, when I did not have to rise quite so early as I was not on main lesson, I awoke to a loud flapping just outside the window. My upstairs flat faced the school grounds and the flagpole was just a few yards away. I had never seen a Union Jack so large, waving proudly in the breeze. Why this day, I wondered? Then I remembered that the day before the papers carried the news that a Royal Navy submarine had sunk the Argentine cruiser, the *General Belgrano*, with the loss of 323 lives. I was young, American, and easily vexed when my ideals were disturbed. There was not going to be any English nationalism on my watch, and I marched out the front door and lowered the flag. When I entered the school an hour later, I was confronted by an irate science teacher and a senior boy. *What right did I think I had lowering the English flag on such an occasion?* Whatever words I used seemed to have a sobering and more calming effect. How could a Steiner school take part in celebrating the loss of life, even of the enemy?

There can be no doubt that more diversity and ever-more racial, social justice and religious awareness are positive developments. Yet, I have also found that generalized judgements spoken out to discount the efforts of the past as biased and insufficient have left me unsatisfied. The biographies and societies that I have seen introduced forty years ago in European schools have included studies of South American culture, the US civil rights movement, Apartheid in South Africa, Laozi, Gandhi, the mistreatment of the indigenous tribes of the US and the horrors of manifest destiny, the slave

trade, Belgian colonialism in Africa, Islam's contribution to world history – I could go on. Many deep-going discussions arose between teacher and students because of these efforts. Awareness is a human faculty that should be deepened without discounting past efforts, which were appropriate to their time, but no longer in ours. I will go so far to say that in my experience, when efforts are made to strengthen and enact the good, shadow sides also come into being. I am concerned that not enough attention is given to this biographical fact.



*Who will teach the teachers?* I can't recall when I first became aware of this question, but it has brought me to assess and appreciate the teachers that came to The Waldorf Institute of Detroit in the 1970s, presenting Waldorf education, anthroposophy, and the practical impulses inspired by Rudolf Steiner to its students. We were for the most part, but by no means all under thirty. The oldest were involved in a change of profession, the youngest, to which I belonged, in finding one. Before arriving at the Institute, I had been a devotee of Amanda Marga and Hatha Yoga and I was encouraged by the local group to study Montessori and early childhood education. This brought me from my native New England (Vermont) to a pre-school in Kansas, where Anada Marga had an active and lively Montessori inspired pre-school. It was where I was to first experience *destiny* as a conscious reality. I can still distinctly recall, in the small school library, coming across a thin, yellow-jacketed book, with its title on the spine: *The Education of the Child*. Unfamiliar with the author's name, I asked the lead teacher what the book was about. She said two things: 1) It is a book on Waldorf education by a German educator, and 2) she really knew nothing about it, but she did know where I could find out more. The *where* oddly enough happened to be a thousand miles to the east, at the Washington Waldorf School of DC.

I finished my Montessori practice teaching period in Kansas and made for the nation's capital. I really had little idea of what was driving me, but it was something more than the baby blue VW Beetle that carried me those many miles. A call to the school, located next to the Washington Cathedral, got me an appointment to see the head teacher, an Austrian who had come to the US via New Zealand. I think Carl Hoffman saw something in me, as he was very generous with his time and description of the aims of Waldorf education. After an intense conversation, he invited me to an upcoming lecture by Dr. Werner Glas, the head of the

**I have become the type who must be in an empty classroom at least an hour before the students arrive for their main lesson.**

Waldorf Institute of Mercy College in Detroit. This was in early summer, and after the lecture, Dr. Glas invited me to visit him at his vacation spot in Virginia Beach. In hindsight, it appears that I just said “yes” to all that was asked of me because at the end of our beachside talk, I had committed myself to enrolling in the teacher training course that September. My road map, long before Google Maps and in-car GPS, had a blue line that went from Vermont to Kansas to Washington, DC, Virginia Beach, and finally Detroit, Michigan. It seemed I was not going to be a Montessori teacher after all. In Detroit, I did things backwards, starting out in teacher training and receiving my diploma, and then enrolling in the Foundation Year studies at the same school.

Werner Glas and Hans Gebert, lead teachers and founders of the institute, were an inspiring pair who developed a warm and deep connection to their students. There is much I could write here about the profound and lively way they introduced us to what lay at the heart of this education. In brief, what I can see now is that in addition to the artistic and practical methodology of teaching which was also partly covered in the adjunct courses at Mercy College, the various streams within anthroposophy were represented by a visiting faculty that came for intensive periods throughout the year – Aristotelians, Platonists, Camphill founders, Christian Community priests, class teachers, bee-keepers, agriculturalists, Executive Committee members from the Goetheanum, and so on. Today, the need to parse part-time, online, and summer courses to achieve such training have a much different rhythm and learning curve. I cannot compare them having only undergone the one, but after two years, every weekday, for eight months of the year, I had found my profession. I had practice taught in classrooms with a diverse student body both in a Waldorf school and a Detroit public school, and was waiting to hear back from the schools that I had written to.

Which is how I got to England, The New School, and Miss Judy. But not before being stopped at UK Customs, where the immigration officer carefully read my letter of acceptance as a humanities teacher at The New School, asking pointedly why England needed an American to teach it English. I was told to wait, and he disappeared for an anxious 20 minutes. When he returned with a doubtful look on his face, I feared I would not be granted entry.

*Just what is this school?* he intoned seriously.

*It's a Steiner school, I said.*

*Well, why didn't you say so?*

And *smack* went his stamp on my passport, and I walked through the gate into my future. To this day, I simply cannot fathom what had happened at Customs, but I now see the destiny connection all the way back to that book in the library in Kansas.



I am grateful to a colleague, adept at contributing thoughtful and insightful writing on education and adolescent development on his blog, for the following. One of his own inspiring high school teachers had written an article for the New York Times, in which this gem appeared: *Mostly what you're teaching is your own enthusiasm and how you learn. The best classes are about the public education of the teacher.*

Steiner prioritized the quality of enthusiasm in his work with teachers. In meeting some of the first Waldorf teachers in England, I would say that it is this quality that shone through, and what learning they carried was carried lightly behind this enthusiasm. One told me of how, during a chemistry lesson in the upper school which he had come to observe, Steiner was drawn out of his seat in expectation of what was to happen as the experiment neared its conclusion.

Being a trained scientist himself, Steiner surely knew what the result would be, and yet I doubt that he was play acting. I leave any conclusion as to what was happening in that chemistry lesson and how it connects to the above quote to the reader.

What spoke to me decades ago in Detroit was the simple phrasing of *education as an art*. To what extent art can be codified, formalized, and administrated, I withhold my judgement. I have become the type who must be in an empty classroom at least an hour before the students arrive for their main lesson. In those alone, quiet moments, as one speaks out a verse into an empty room full of possibility, practices a bit of eurythmy, prepares the seating to better reflect the content of the lesson (rows, a square, straight lines or angles), it is not unlike preparing a canvas to be painted upon. The first student enters: another evolving human being expressing a stage of their development on that particular day in the way they walk, what they carry, the expression on their face, their greeting or lack of it. Maybe it is similar to the morning before, maybe quite different—the teacher can make this a felt experience that continues to shape the inner preparation of what is still to come.

Then that moment at the end of the morning verse, spoken communally, a moment of silence and portent; I have found it a *felt communion* when the art of education can be said to begin. Whatever the subject, it is always the challenge to bring the living spirit alive in all that happens in this world before one's students. And that, dear readers, is anthroposophy.

Hamlet was right: *"The readiness is all."*

**John Anderson** has been a middle and high school teacher at Waldorf schools in five different countries since leaving the US in 1977 for Kings Langley, England. After further training in Speech Formation and Biographical Counseling, and working for a time within the curative-social therapeutic movement, he returned to the US in 2003. John has spent the last twelve years at The Rudolf Steiner School in New York City and now lives with his wife in Denmark.



# Report from the Online Waldorf Library

**Marianne Alsop**

OWL Site Administrator

**S**ince 2001, the Online Waldorf Library has helped facilitate research and answer questions on a wide variety of topics concerning Waldorf pedagogy. In 2023, the OWL had 254,000 site visits, with the following countries topping the list of site-visitors' residences: USA, Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, India, Mexico, Spain, Argentina, Chile, New Zealand, Malaysia, Philippines, China, Vietnam, and South Africa.

We continue to offer an ever-expanding number of eBooks, articles, and journal articles available in pdf format. New articles in Spanish and English are posted every month and can be accessed from the home page by clicking on Artículos en Español or Articles.

In our Journals section, we are pleased to continue to share all back issues of the Research Bulletin and Gateways. Also of interest is the Pacifica Journal, published by the Anthroposophical Society in Hawaii, and edited by Van James for the entire Pacific Rim. The OWL has editions available since 2004, offering insights into the vast work that encompasses Anthroposophy in the Far Eastern sphere of the world.

The OWL has begun the process of updating and fine tuning its website. There has been only one update since its start in 2001, so we hope you will bear with us as we continue to upgrade while still allowing access to our vast resources!

## **eBooks added to our collection since the Spring of 2023:**

### **From WECAN Publications**

- *Birth to Three in Education and Care*  
edited by Heather Church
- *The Picture Language of Folktales* by Friedel Lenz
- *Dancing as we Sing* by Nancy Foster
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- *¡Tú no eres jefe de Me!* edited by Ruth Ker
- *Las Fiestas estacionales en la primera infancia*  
edited by Nancy Foster
- *Del Jardín de infancia a la primaria*  
edited by Ruth Ker

### **From Waldorf Publications:**

- *Bare Hand Crafting* by Aleshanee Akin
- *Music Around the World* by Michael Preston

### **New eBooks in Spanish include:**

- *Verdad, Belleza y Bondad*  
by Michaela Glöckler, M.D.
- *Aprendiendo a ver el Mundo a Través del Dibujo*  
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- *Apoyando el camino de la niñez* by Elizabeth Auer

### **New eBooks in Portuguese include:**

- *A Criança, os Professores, e a Comunidade*  
by Jørgen Smit

The Online Waldorf Library welcomes your questions, and we are happy to help you find resources for your research projects.

**Visit the Online Waldorf Library at**  
**[www.waldorflibrary.org](http://www.waldorflibrary.org)**

# Report on the Research Institute for Waldorf Education

**Patrice Maynard**

Director of Publications and Development

**T**his year, 2023-2024, marks the tenth anniversary of the transfer of Waldorf Publications (WP – formerly AWSNA Publications) to the Research Institute for Waldorf Education (RIWE). This year also marks the twelfth anniversary of the passing of David Mitchell (1946-2012) whose steadfast pursuit of resources for teachers led to the Delegates' Circle of AWSNA's asking David in 1987 to begin a publishing endeavor to produce books and monographs that would serve Waldorf teachers and Waldorf schools.

It was David's long-standing wish that Publications be conjoined with RIWE, the two strongest loves of his work (after teaching, of course!). Before he passed away, Ekkehard Piening was a partner in the development of resources with David for two years. The original Publications Committee included Patricia Livingston, Jan Baudendistel, and James Pewtherer. Today's Publications Committee comprises Natalie Adams, Alice Groh, Elan Leibner, and Patrice Maynard. Reading prospectuses to find the highest quality resources, authentic to Waldorf education, is the mission of the Committee. Literate, committed, and insightful, with Waldorf education central to their experience, these dedicated participants guide the decisions about which books Waldorf Publications will publish.

RIWE was likewise developed in 1996 out of repeated requests from Waldorf teachers to document the value of practices on behalf of children and young people. Henry Barnes, in particular, saw the value of substantial research to reassure the world – and parents – that the unique approach to education practiced in Waldorf schools is effective. Susan Howard and Douglas Sloan were the first team of RIWE Directors, followed by Roberto Trostli, and then, as a team, Douglas Gerwin and David Mitchell.

Having Publications in service to RIWE as well as to Waldorf school communities offers possibilities in producing results of research undertaken and completed by the Institute. The publication this year of *The Community Speaks: A Survey of Current Waldorf Parents*, the result of a multiple-year study, is one good example of this benefit. The book offers a summary of responses to a nuanced series of questions about being a "Waldorf parent." Graphed illustrations showing the many facets of this survey along with insightful analysis make the research visible and useful to our Waldorf communities.

Meta-research is the newest, years-long effort to provide pithy research for Waldorf schools and for other educational organizations, underscoring recent research into elements of child development and educational approaches that verify the effectiveness of 100 years of practice in Waldorf education. The effect of sleep, of breathing, of block teaching, of music, of poetry, of handwriting, of the Waldorf approach to teaching reading and teaching math, are some examples of topics being pursued.

The Online Waldorf Library (OWL) uses all materials produced by RIWE and WP, making them available for free download. So abundant are the resources on OWL that a current re-mastering of the site is underway. "The shelves of OWL are full!" exclaims Marianne Alsop, curator, with Dave Alsop, of this generous and growing collection of supportive manuscripts. In recent years, translations into Spanish and Mandarin have added to the wealth of available material.

The Research Bulletin provides articles – many of them – to the OWL. As each new issue of our journal is published, the previous issue is added to the OWL, article by article, simplifying the search for needed materials by topic, author, or title. Each issue of the Research Bulletin works to focus on a single theme to identify supporting materials for that topic. "Social Emotional Learning" is the current focus, providing techniques, imaginative support, practices, and research to inform and support Waldorf educators in their endeavors to meet the social and emotional needs of their students. Previously, special issues of the Bulletin were devoted to Learning Support, as well as to supporting diversity, with the latter theme prompting articles from around North American Waldorf schools describing the efforts to raise consciousness about how the Waldorf curriculum, and Waldorf teachers, can transform systemic racism while protecting the distinct stages of children's development.

From the stated needs of the AWSNA Delegates for resources and research, through the creative vision of David Mitchell to today's OWL, WP, and the Research Bulletin, the ongoing efforts of these endeavors under the wing of RIWE give life and depth to the unique approach to educating the young with confidence, surety of heart, and truthfulness – heads, hands, and hearts – as human beings of body, soul, and spirit.

# Donors to the Research Institute for Waldorf Education and Waldorf Publications

With our annual listing of donors to the Research Institute for Waldorf Education (RIWE) comes a deeply felt and warm-hearted thank you from all at RIWE, the Online Waldorf Library (OWL), and Waldorf Publications (WP). Every gift serves as an affirmation and confirmation that we are not alone and that the work we strive to accomplish each year is valuable in our community. This makes every gift invaluable, and RIWE, OWL, and WP extend an immeasurable gratitude to them for their sustaining generosity.

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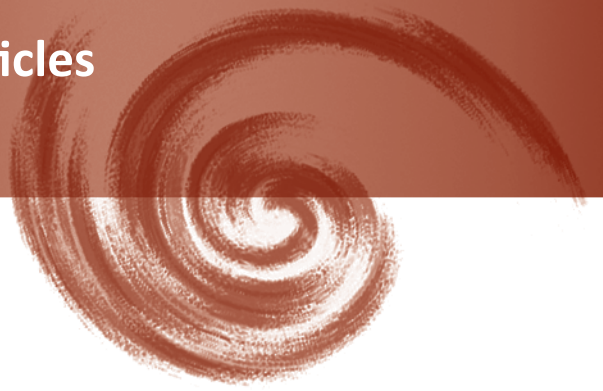
The *Research Bulletin* offers the Waldorf community in North America and abroad a published verification of practices, curricula, and philosophy in Waldorf classrooms and Waldorf schools. Beyond the Waldorf community, the greater academic and educational community receives a glimpse into the unique worldview and approach used in Waldorf education.

RIWE salutes the following schools who support the Institute with their sustaining membership. Supporting Members receive twenty copies of each issue of the *Research Bulletin*. Schools use these additional copies for their school and teacher libraries, for distribution throughout their communities, and as public relations offerings to visitors to their communities. Unlike other public relations and enrollment materials, the *Research Bulletin* offers academically documented evidence of the scholarly basis for Waldorf education and its techniques.

In addition to these twenty copies of each issue, the Supporting Members listed below receive the immeasurable appreciation and enormous thanks from all at RIWE for the generosity and solid help their sustaining membership gives for the continuing production of the *Research Bulletin*.

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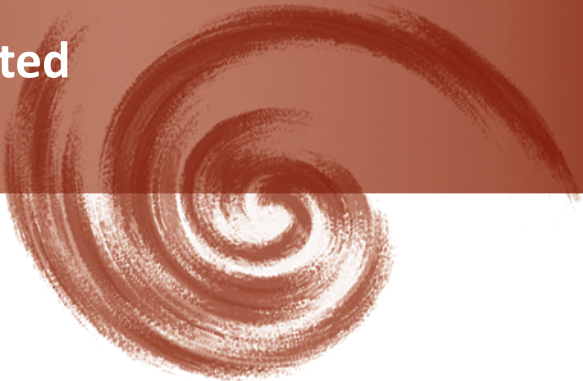
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Jason Yates

# About the Research Institute for Waldorf Education



**T**he Research Institute for Waldorf Education (RIWE), founded in 1996 in order to deepen and enhance the quality of Waldorf education, engages in sustained dialogue with the wider educational-cultural community and supports research to serve a wide range of educators in their work with children and adolescents.

The Research Institute supports projects dealing with essential contemporary educational issues, such as computers and the effects of media on children, alternatives to standardized testing, physical health and psychological well-being of students, science teaching with a phenomenological approach, the role of the arts in education, and the philosophical underpinnings of Waldorf education.

As a sponsor of colloquia and conferences, the Research Institute brings together educators, psychologists, physicians, and social scientists for discussions on current issues related to education. RIWE publishes a *Research Bulletin* and prepares educational resources, including collections of eBooks and articles, a growing number of them newly translated into Spanish and Mandarin

Chinese. Many of these publications are available without charge on the website of the Online Waldorf Library (OWL), a virtual library created and managed by the Research Institute,

[www.waldorflibrary.org](http://www.waldorflibrary.org)

In 2013, the Research Institute took on the publications arm from the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA) and re-branded it as Waldorf Publications. It includes resources for teachers and administrators, readers and children's books, collections of plays and poetry, science materials and kits, science and math newsletters, inspirational essays, proceedings of colloquia, and a range of publicity materials about Waldorf education. It also carries books published by the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (WECAN) and the Pedagogical Section Council (PSC) of the School for Spiritual Science, as well as archived copies of AWSNA's magazine, *Renewal*, now renamed *School Renewal*.

## Submissions

The next issue of the Bulletin will be dedicated to the various ways of studying, thinking, and teaching climate change and the challenges it poses to us as teachers and as shepherds of the next generation. You are welcome to contact the editor with essay topics and other questions.

Submissions to the Research Bulletin should be made as Word document attachments sent to [theresearchbulletin@gmail.com](mailto:theresearchbulletin@gmail.com). You are welcome to suggest topics and themes for future issues by writing to the editor at the same email address.

# WALDORF SCHOOLS AND TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTES IN NORTH AMERICA

## United States

**AL:** Alabama Waldorf School **AK:** Anchorage Waldorf School **AZ:** Tucson Waldorf School **CA:** Bay Area Center for Waldorf Teacher Training · Berkeley Rose Waldorf School · Camellia Waldorf School · Cedar Springs Waldorf School · Davis Waldorf School · Highland Hall Waldorf School · Live Oak Waldorf School · Maple Village Waldorf School · Marin Waldorf School · Pasadena Waldorf School · Sacramento Waldorf School · San Francisco Waldorf School · Sanderling Waldorf School · Santa Cruz Waldorf School · Sierra Waldorf School · Summerfield Waldorf School & Farm · Valley Waldorf City School · Waldorf Institute of Southern California · Waldorf School of Mendocino County · Waldorf School of Orange County · The Waldorf School of San Diego · Waldorf School of Santa Barbara · Waldorf School of the Peninsula · Westside Waldorf School · Wildcat Canyon Community School **CO:** Boulder Valley Waldorf School · Denver Waldorf School · Shining Mountain Waldorf School · Tara Performing Arts High School · Waldorf School on the Roaring Fork **CT:** Housatonic Valley Waldorf School **FL:** Heart Pine School · Sea Star School · The Waldorf School of Tampa Bay · Waldorf School of Palm Beach **GA:** Academe of the Oaks · Waldorf School of Atlanta **HI:** Haleakala Waldorf School · Honolulu Waldorf School · Malamalama Waldorf School **ID:** Sandpoint Waldorf School **IL:** Arcturus Rudolf Steiner Education Program · Chicago Waldorf School · Da Vinci Waldorf School · Four Winds Waldorf School · Urban Prairie Waldorf School · The Waldorf School of DuPage · Waldorf Teacher Institute of Chicago **KS:** Prairie Moon Waldorf School **KY:** Waldorf School of Louisville **LA:** Waldorf School of New Orleans **MA:** Berkshire Waldorf School · Berkshire Waldorf High School · The Hartsbrook School · Waldorf School of Cape Cod · The Waldorf School of Lexington · Waldorf School at Moraine Farm **MD:** Waldorf School of Baltimore · Washington Waldorf School **ME:** Ashwood Waldorf School · The Bay School · Maine Coast Waldorf School · Seacoast Waldorf School **MI:** Detroit Waldorf School · Rudolf Steiner School of Ann Arbor **MN:** City of Lakes Waldorf School · Minnesota Waldorf School **MO:** The Waldorf School of St. Louis **NC:** Asheville Waldorf School · Emerson Waldorf School **NH:** Center for Anthroposophy · High Mowing School **NJ:** Waldorf School of Princeton **NV:** Nevada Sage Waldorf School **NY:** Alkion Center · Aurora Waldorf School · Brooklyn Waldorf School · Green Meadow Waldorf School · Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School · Ithaca Waldorf School · Lakeside School at Black Kettle Farm · Mountain Laurel Waldorf School · New Amsterdam School · The Otto Specht School · Rudolf Steiner School of New York City · Sunbridge Institute · The Waldorf School of Garden City · Waldorf School of Saratoga Springs **NC:** Emerson Waldorf School **OH:** Cincinnati Waldorf School · Spring Garden Waldorf School **OR:** Cedarwood Waldorf School · Corvallis Waldorf School · Eugene Waldorf School · Portland Waldorf School · Shining Star Waldorf School · The Siskiyou School · Swallowtail Waldorf School and Farm · Waldorf School of Bend · Waldorf Teacher Education Eugene **PA:** The Camphill School · Kimberton Waldorf School · River Valley Waldorf School · Susquehanna Waldorf School · The Waldorf School of Philadelphia · Waldorf School of Pittsburgh **PR:** Escuela Micael **RI:** Meadowbrook Waldorf School **SD:** Lakota Waldorf School **TN:** Linden Waldorf School **TX:** Austin Waldorf School **VT:** Lake Champlain Waldorf School · Orchard Valley Waldorf School · Upper Valley Waldorf School **VA:** Charlottesville Waldorf School · Potomac Crescent Waldorf School · Richmond Waldorf School **WA:** Bright Water School · Madrona School · Olympia Waldorf School · Seattle Waldorf School · Sound Circle Center for the Arts and Anthroposophy · Sunfield Biodynamic Farm & Waldorf School · Tacoma Waldorf School · Whatcom Hills Waldorf School · Whidbey Island Waldorf School **WI:** Great Lakes Waldorf Institute · The Madison Waldorf School · Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School · Prairie Hill Waldorf School · Tamarack Waldorf School · Youth Initiative High School ·

## Canada

**ALBERTA:** Calgary Waldorf School · Waldorf Independent School of Edmonton **BRITISH COLUMBIA:** Kelowna Waldorf School · Nelson Waldorf School · Okanagan Waldorf School · Squamish Waldorf School · Sunrise Waldorf School · Vancouver Waldorf School · West Coast Institute for Studies in Anthroposophy · Whistler Waldorf School **NOVA SCOTIA:** South Shore Waldorf School **ONTARIO:** Everlasting Tree School · Halton Waldorf School · London Waldorf School · Mulberry Waldorf School · Rudolf Steiner College Canada · Toronto Waldorf School · Trillium Waldorf School · Waldorf Academy **QUÉBEC:** École Imagine · École Rudolf Steiner de Montréal · Institut Rudolf Steiner au Québec ·

## México

**AGUA SCALIENTES:** Colegio Waldorf Amanecer **BAJA CALIFORNIA:** Semillero Comunalidad Educativa · Waldorf Amantolli **CHIAPAS:** Waldorf Chiapas **GUANAJUATO:** Colegio Yeccan Waldorf **HIDALGO:** Jardín Coporillo **JALISCO:** Waldorf de Guadalajara **MORELOS:** Centro de Desarrollo Antroposofico · Escuela Waldorf de Cuernavaca **GITA:** Centro Antoposófico de México A.C. **NUEVO LEÓN:** Casa Umal **OAXACA:** Papalotes Oaxaca · Papalotes Puerto Escondido **PUEBLA:** Escuela Raíces Iniciativa Waldorf Puebla **QUERÉTARO:** Colegio Waldorf Lila K'erendarhu **QUINTANA ROO:** Ak Lu'um Waldorf School · Del Mar Waldorf Initiative Cancun · Waldorf Baxall · Ximbal, Iniciativa Waldorf Cancun **VERA CRUZ:** Comunidad Educativa Calli **STATE of MÉXICO:** Colegio Inlakesh · Comunidad Educativa Elhilar ·

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