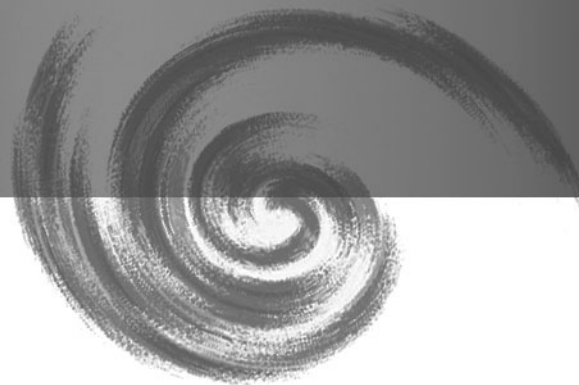


Editor's Introduction

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Almost 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*.