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Editor's Introduction

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The school year coming now to a close did not only feel longer than usual; in fact, it *was* longer than usual. Its beginning point, clearly, was not in September but in March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic became an acknowledged reality and schools throughout the country abruptly started closing. The shutdown turned into a starting point of consistently demanding work for school teachers and administrators; the challenges and innovations that were initiated in that miserable March have marked the full-scale of the 2020-2021 school year, making it, in practice, a 16-months-long Pandemic Year.

The challenges and solutions of the Pandemic Year were the focus of the *Research Bulletin*'s previous issue. Now we turn to the other central event that marked contemporary times: the spirited demand for social justice, for true equity, sparked by the senseless killing by the hand of police of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Breonna Taylor in Louisville. The Black Lives Matter movement brought many Americans out onto the streets in weeks and months of protests, wherein Americans of different backgrounds were united in the understanding that the historical lagging of equity and social justice in this country concerns all of us, even if it affects different communities in dramatically different ways. We are once more reminded that we can't wait for justice to work itself out and that it is time, again, for slow-moving change to accelerate.

In our Waldorf schools, we have been assuring ourselves for decades that we are doing the right thing, marching on the right path, far ahead of the most progressive crowd. After all, we do not even judge our students by the content of their character but welcome and love them for the individual humanity that shines through their skin, even as their characters are still in the process of forming.

But the growing awareness, nationwide, of less visible shades of discrimination, of exclusivity, of an intergenerational relay of unequal opportunity has steadily called for further inward reflection, also in Waldorf communities. We hear this call in many comments included in the survey of Waldorf graduates, published in 2020, where alumni speak lovingly about their education but hesitate to send their own children to a Waldorf school because of its perceived lack of socio-economic and racial diversity, and also because they feel wary of a curriculum that is perceived as being heavily Eurocentric. We hear it in our schools' student clubs for diversity and social justice. And we hear it at times from parents and other community members, who voice their activism in ways that make some of us step back into a self-surprising conservative stance.

If we devote this issue of the *Bulletin* to the subject commonly known as DEI – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – in relation to the Waldorf curriculum and to Waldorf communities, it is not because we finally realize that the time for a conversation has come; it is because that conversation has been going on for a while.

In fact, the article with which we open this issue is a reprint of an article by Linda Williams, a pioneering voice in this conversation, whose essay "Multiculturalism and Waldorf Education: A Call for an American Curriculum," originally published in the journal *Renewal*, in 1994, and appears here with a new section, reflecting back from the present moment on the questions and issues the author had raised nearly three decades ago.

Williams – class teacher, former professor of Teacher Education, former director of the Elementary Program at the Waldorf Teacher Development Association (WTDA), and a leading voice on the issue of diversity in Waldorf education – notes in her original article how well-suited Waldorf is to meet the challenges of inclusivity in what at the time was termed a "multicultural" society, but it might be hampered in its task by its traditional sources and resources – the stories, histories, and images transplanted from early 20th century Europe. The three key questions she raised in this mid-1990s article are (depressingly) still relevant today, asking how the Waldorf movement could (1) attract and retain more students and parents of color, (2) equip teacher training programs to prepare for teaching in a multicultural or diverse environment, and (3) become more sensitive to cultural differences and adapt the pedagogical approach to meet them.

In the new, reflective section, written especially for this issue of the *Research Bulletin*, Williams returns to her original article, noting both the historical moment in which that article was written—a moment of nationwide educational reform—and the dramatic cultural transformation that has since taken place in the country as well as in the Waldorf movement. Looking at the lessons of the current moment, but also at the decades

that have passed in between, Linda shares a key realization, a most valuable recommendation, "that biography work – both individual and institutional – is essential to helping us understand how the interaction of an individual school or person and the surrounding culture creates a particular field of action for the human soul and the soul of the institution." Her insights into the importance of community, and Waldorf's need to form affiliation with communities who are composed of constituents other than those to be found in the traditional Waldorf community of North America, should be read closely and carefully.

Melanie Reiser, Executive Director of Membership at AWSNA and a former class teacher who has been devoting her work to the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Waldorf schools and teacher education programs, asks: What is the responsibility of Waldorf education? Her answer is short and clear: It is a responsibility to work towards racial justice and equity, acknowledge the "injustice and dehumanization" systemically embedded in our country and schools, and acknowledge "the spirit in each human being" in a way that ensures that "human dignity is at the center of our work."

Harlan Gilbert, of Green Meadow Waldorf School, explores what he sees as the history of a mistake: "We strove for a universal education that acknowledged and respected every individuality," he writes about the good intentions of his school, "but we were not conscious of the need for a differentiated education that met the particularities of individual constitutions, communities, and cultures." Aspects of the "mistake" will probably sound familiar: adhering to a curriculum designed in early 20th-century Germany, with a European focus and a neglect of Asian, African, and Indigenous cultures; ignoring the diversity of contemporary American society; employing a more-or-less ethnically homogenous faculty; neglecting to prepare the students for the systemic inequalities and injustices that they are bound to encounter in the America that lies outside of the Waldorf bubble. Having observed mistakes of the past, Harlan turns to pose a question about the way forward: "How does a school balance the goal of transcending race to allow students to experience each other as individualities and the goal of providing an education sensitive to diversity?" The answer, or at least a further elaboration of the question, is laid out in a brief yet poignant reflection, which many readers and many school communities may find helpful.

Kristin Mathis, the Pedagogical Administrator at the Brooklyn Waldorf School, contributes here a detailed suggestion how to weave the story of the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr., into and throughout the full cycle of the Waldorf curriculum. Offering a grade-by-grade set of themes and sharing multiple resources for teachers, Mathis recommends using the figure of MLK, and the values that his biography carries, as a way to embed African-American history in the curriculum. It is worth pointing out that the Brooklyn Waldorf School has made Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and "undoing racism" a core value of its mission and part of the very identity of the school and its community. The school's webpage describing this mission, states:

> "In order to nurture each child as an individual, according to their own particular needs and experiences, the school must first seek to understand the ways in which the far-reaching and deep imprints of racism have touched all our community members. The Brooklyn Waldorf School is developing our antiracist lens, recognizing that racism is steeped in our country's foundation and permeates every institution. Bearing that in mind, our efforts to undo racism in our own community and to dismantle structures of oppression within educational institutions as a whole are ongoing, active, and fundamental to the Waldorf mission."

More on these initiatives can be found on the school's website, *www.brooklynwaldorf.org*, and, it is to be hoped, in a future issue of the *Bulletin*.

Ryan Cameron, a graduate of the Rudolf Steiner School in New York City, who returned to her alma mater to teach Language Arts to the middle school classes, is well placed to reflect on the blind spots in the curriculum. "Being an alum and a teacher of color," Ryan writes, "is, at times, a lonely experience, for the child in me wishes that my former teachers, now my colleagues, had the answers, voiced the regret, and could illuminate the path forward." She further shares some insights, using this double perspective of a former Waldorf student of color and a current Waldorf teacher of color. It "is important to understand," she notes, "that our students, engaged as they are with social media (as am I), view themselves as part of the movement to dismantle racism, heteronormativity, and ablism, and they may indeed view any and every lack of inclusion in their lessons as violent." Ryan's short essay includes also multiple samples of the literary works she has been introducing to her school's middle grades curriculum as a way of expanding cultural and historical awareness, which means expanding its inclusivity.

Defne Caldwell, also an alumna who returned as teacher to her alma mater, brings us back for a second look in this issue at Green Meadow Waldorf School. Caldwell tells the story of a great awakening: Already on the path of revising the literature and drama curriculum to make

it more inclusive, more diverse, Caldwell attended the Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Fairview*, by Jackie Sibblies Drury. A (white) audience-challenging moment in the play brought about a realization: "Suddenly, I realized, I needed to make room. I needed to be willing to be left out, to not matter sometimes – all White people do." From here on, Caldwell and her colleagues set about to make such room in their curriculum, leaving out many of the traditional white authors in order to bring into the classroom and to the students' imagination the voices and experiences of scores of Black writers. The story of this transformation, appended with a full list of the texts and authors populating the current English curriculum at Green Meadow, is told in Caldwell's essay, "To Make Room for Black Lives, Homer Stands Aside."

Selim Tlili, a former NYC public school teacher who had found a home several years ago at the Rudolf Steiner School, walks us through the process in which he has taken on the role of faculty advisor to the high school's DEI student club. The process Selim describes is one of transformation, both within himself and in the students. From a starting point of resenting some students' accusation of the school being "racist," and of overall wariness of "woke" culture, Selim finds a way to hear the students better but also to offer them ways of thinking that do not simply and simplistically divide the world and the immediate community into the stark contrast of "You're either with us or you're against us," as one student had put it. Selim seeks the role of a "bridge builder," the happy middle between the "activists" and the "academics," which he defines in an essay entitled "Activists, Academics, and Bridgebuilders."

Elan Leibner, with some help from Douglas Gerwin, put a central theme of their collaborative essay in the form of its writing—the need for multiple voices and multiple identities in a community that would still seek to harmonize such plurality. The authors use several different textual styles and tones to address the question at hand. Taking note of a brewing discord in the ongoing conversation about identity and diversity in the Waldorf community and beyond, the authors return to the originating core of Waldorf education as a spiritual practice that seeks to see and cultivate the Self of each student. The point is worth quoting at length:

> "A spiritually-based approach to karmic circumstances will not deny or ignore or dismiss the veils of gender, race, etc., but neither will it fixate on them. What matters is the persons' gifts and challenges rather than the veils they wear. Individual agency is more important than group identity. Every time we see ourselves and our fellow human beings clearly, veil-less-ly, in their Self-identity, we accomplish a spiritual deed; every time we see ourselves or another person as primarily a veil identity, we remain blind to Self and bound to self."

The final contribution to the multi-voiced conversation on diversity and inclusion offered in this issue comes out of Germany from the British Waldorf teacher, teaching-trainer, and scholar Martyn Rawson. Rawson leads off his reflective essay with a brief summary of the life and thought of a 17th-century philosopher born in Ghana and educated in Germany, before moving on to the postcolonial literature Rawson has been reading with his students in a German Waldorf school, to the international surge of consciousness sparked by George Floyd's killing and Black Lives Matter, and finally to the pedagogical responsibilities prescribed by an ethic of care. This meandering tour leads back to the question at heart of this issue: "Assuming we have modified our curriculum from its German original model of 100 years ago, have we done so in a way that looks at its content from a post-colonial perspective in the widest sense?"

Lastly, as an addendum to our previous issue, which was devoted to the educational challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, David Sloan shares with us a summary of a recently-completed survey of Waldorf parents. Sloan, the leading author of a much wider-ranging survey being conducted by the Research Institute for Waldorf Education, analyzes parents' reflections on how well their children's schools adapted to the pandemic. He notes an overwhelming sense of appreciation and gratitude shining through these responses: Parents recognize and are thankful for the various efforts and adaptations implemented by the 43 Waldorf schools represented in the survey. A minority voice of parents also expresses criticism of what they see as capitulation to mask-and-social-distancing mandates and "fear mongering" flowing through a society in a state of crisis. In contrast, the most rewarding of responses quoted in this report credits the full cycle of Waldorf education as the best preparation for this crisis: "Twelve rich years of Waldorf education prepared my child for this unexpected spell of quiet, contemplative time. Despite the sadness from missing a normal senior year, she has remained balanced, creative, productive, and generous."

Reports from the Waldorf Online Library, by Marianne Alsop, and from the Research Institute and Waldorf Publications, by Patrice Maynard, conclude this issue. The latter report, please note, includes a highly relevant call for submissions to a forthcoming anthology of stories and approaches to teaching a more authentic, inclusive, and multicultural history America, a project helmed by Betty Staley.

As you work your way through the collection of essays presented here, each one of which deserving of close attention, you might note agreement and overlap but also hints of disagreement and contrast of approaches. For those already in the thick of this conversation, it is no secret that fissures are forming within the North American Waldorf community when it comes to the question of action, of change. At times it seems that the disagreements are informed by how close one is to the traditional curriculum, how close one is to anthroposophy, how close one is to progressive politics; but the variety of voices in this collection might show that a lifelong Waldorf teacher could now be in the forefront of change, that a newcomer could be a defender of tradition.

We offer you this multiplicity of voices, whether they speak out in consonant unison or in dissonant contrast. To be clear, the *Research Bulletin* is serving here as a stage, welcoming each one of these voices to speak for itself.

Call for Submissions

- We hope to continue the reflection on questions of diversity, inclusion, social justice, and the Waldorf curriculum and community launched in this issue. Teachers, administrators, scholars, alumni, and other members of the Waldorf community who would like to share reports from their experience, practice, or scholarship are invited to send submissions in Word document to theresearchbulletin@gmail.com.
- We intend to focus in our next issue on questions of learning differences and disabilities, broadly conceived, and the ways Waldorf practices address or could address such issues. Research, reports from the classroom, case studies, and reflections on the way Waldorf schools aim to meet the needs of a wide variety of students are welcome. Please send submissions in a Word document to theresearchbulletin@gmail.com.

Multiculturalism and Waldorf Education[1]

A Call for an American Curriculum

Linda Williams

All right, here is the scene: one of the newer, more generic Detroit suburbs. I am standing at a bookstore counter, a thirtyish African-American woman with burgeoning dreadlocks. The clerk waiting on me is young, female and Asian-American. While my books are being totaled, I sneeze. The clerk looks perplexed and is not sure what to do. Hesitantly, and with an apologetic smile, she says, "I was going to say 'Gesundheit'," and her voice trails off as she looks down. I realize the source of her embarrassment and smile, and offer in my best, accented German, "Danke." She laughs and the tension of the moment is relieved for both of us. The situation, however, is a typically American one: an Asian-American, an African-American, a European language. Does it all fit together? Of course it does—in America. But the clerk's embarrassment is certainly a sign of the great sensitivity that currently surrounds the issue of multiculturalism.

There are many reasons why the discussion and debate over multiculturalism have taken hold of America. We are today more conscious of each other because of shifting demographics; the increasing immigration of people of color; the civil rights and feminist movements; and the rising prominence of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the changing global economy. But multiculturalism is almost synonymous with America herself. Even before the Europeans arrived, America was a multicultural place, containing many, varied Indigenous tribes. Our task has always been to find some way to "jus' get along," as Rodney King expressed it.

The current debate is also a response to "anticulturalism," or what I call the "Wonder Breading" of America. With the advent of and the rapid increase in the use of technology, mass production, and mass transit over the past seventy years, "culture" in America is becoming homogenized. Regional differences are disappearing under the influence of the mass media. Cultural mores are being shaped by standardized images of what we should aspire to. We are all being assimilated into a culture of automation, speed, and efficiency that leaves little room for individual expression. No wonder the multicultural question has arisen. Sometimes I call it the "anycultural" question. What culture, if any, do we, can we have?

The educational world is particularly concerned with this debate. On the one hand, "inclusive" curricula seek to incorporate and recognize the contributions of frequently ignored minorities in American culture. On the other hand, many, such as E. D. Hirsch, advocate a return to the basics, the fundamentals of Eurocentric Western thought as a way to acculturate the "unacculturated."

The Waldorf school movement in America, interestingly enough, was conceived and born in an era that was similarly fraught with cultural controversy. In 1925, a group began working to bring forth the first Waldorf School in America (the Rudolf Steiner School in New York), and the school opened its doors in 1928. Those years in America were filled with irony. It was the time of Prohibition, gangsters, jazz and flappers. The heights of the Harlem Renaissance contrasted with the sobering picture of lynched African-Americans in the South. "Rugged Individualism" was a popular slogan and aspiration at a time when membership in the Ku Klux Klan approached five million. (President Harding was inducted into the Klan on the grounds of the White House.) Americans were entranced by the mobility offered by the automobile and the growing network of paved roads, while the nation, in an isolationist mood, closed its doors to the world. Native Americans finally gained citizenship, but many important socialists and communists were deported. In the arts, it was the time of Chagall, Klee, Picasso, Fitzgerald, Hughes, Cather, Woolf, Ellington, and Gershwin. In the mid-1920s, motion pictures began to feature sound, and the first transmission of recognizable human features was achieved by something called television.

Within this milieu, the American Waldorf movement was born. In order to preserve its independence, Waldorf education had to join the private, independent school movement. By doing so, it joined ranks with the elitist schools that educated the Vanderbilts and the Carnegies. But it also became spiritual partners with every independent Freedman's school that helped newly emancipated slaves learn to read and with every privately sponsored settlement school for newly arrived immigrants.

During these first seven decades, American Waldorf schools have often resembled their European

1 This essay first appeared in *Renewal* (Spring-Summer 1994): 29-32, and was reprinted in *The Riddle of America: Essays Exploring North America's "Native Expression-Spirit"* edited by John Wulsin (Chatham, NY: AWSNA, 2001).

counterparts. But the stamp of the American experience is helping to shape our schools into truly American institutions. Clearly, Waldorf schools have a cultural mandate, a charge to preserve, enrich, and transmit a cultural heritage. But at this point in history, our cultural imperative cannot be realized in small, private enclaves where only middle-class European-Americans are educated. Our doors will have to open to more people of color (and to people of more economic classes) because integrated education is now American education. According to a 1990 *Time* magazine article: "By 2056, most Americans will trace their de-scent to Africa, Asia, the Hispanic world, the Pacific Islands, Arabia-almost anywhere but white Europe." A clear majority culture will no longer exist in America within the next generation. "Meeting the other" is becoming a basic component of education today.

The Waldorf curriculum is an ideal curriculum because it has the potential of being multicultural. It can be a medium through which students meet each other and come to understand the diverse cultures to which they belong. Behind the guidelines and indications stands the picture of the human being as an integrated organism of body, soul and spirit, and of humanity as a single, interconnected reality. It is a universal view that includes rather than excludes, that embraces rather than rejects.

Our doors will have to open to more people of color (and to people of more economic classes) because integrated education is now American education.

Also, within the Waldorf curriculum, with this all-embracing image of the human being and of humanity as a guide, the complexity of the human condition is approached in a basic way, through the arts. It is through the arts that our full humanity is affirmed. And it is through the arts that multicultural differences can be understood and appreciated.

Traditional African education was a socializing process, not an individualizing one, and one in which mind and spirit were considered inseparable. Current research on African-American children often calls for an education that de-emphasizes a Eurocentric, paternalistic, top-down format, and that encourages an experiential, hands-on, inquiry-based learning format, a cooperative education rather than one based on competition and survival-of-the-fittest.

This, of course, is exactly what Waldorf education is. Thus, we in the Waldorf movement have the means to carry out effective "multicultural" education. Our holistic, synergistic, all-embracing approach is what is needed. We lack however, the content. Our stories, songs, verses and historical vignettes—the expressions we use of the archetypal experiences and pictures of human development—have been drawn mostly from European and European-American sources. Only now are we beginning to find the archetypal pictures that live in other cultures.

In the various ethnic and national cultures, there are many different expressions of the same archetypal truths, of the same universal human experiences. How can parents, teachers, and other adults decide what particular stories, pictures, music and crafts to bring to the children?

First we must find out what is essential in our own being. One effect of the homogenization of North American culture is that few of us know about our ethnic background. We need to become aware of what we have received from our heritage—be it Thai, German, Czech, Yoruban, Chinese, Sioux, or a mixture of two or many traditions. We need to become aware of the physical attributes, the qualities of soul, the world views that form the "group soul" or "folk soul" (a term used both by Rudolf Steiner and Carl Jung) of our own ethnic group.

As well we need to study and understand the unique qualities of the other ethnic groups in our culture. Exploring our own history and culture gives us the necessary framework to explore others. Also, examining the reality of "white privilege" and of the class system in America is necessary if one is to understand one's past and future paths.

When these steps are consciously taken, in faculty and/or parent-teacher organization meetings, a school or organizational culture is established that encourages real interest in "the other." This creates an atmosphere in which work to diversify the content in our schools and to answer some of the myriad questions facing our movement can begin.

And the questions are tough ones:

- How can we consciously attract and keep more children, parents and teachers of color in the Waldorf school movement?
- How will our training programs help prospective teachers meet the challenges of teaching in a multicultural environment?
- How can we become more sensitive to cultural differences and the different approaches to pedagogy these may require?

Those of us within the American Waldorf movement need more opportunities to investigate and to discuss what is going on in our classrooms, schools, and in our larger Waldorf community. Some individual schools have undertaken particular multicultural studies. We need to discuss the fruits of that research. Parents, friends, students, and teachers need to be able to share their own exciting and worthwhile experiences and knowledge and to ask questions.

To that end, all are invited to respond to this article, and to the issues that multiculturalism raises. Waldorf education is born out of experience and dialogue. Issues such as multiculturalism cannot be relegated to a few. The more voices the better.

To stimulate discussion, some colleagues and I have drawn up a list of what we call "Essential Reading for Americans." This is not intended to be a list of clear, pedagogical sources, but rather some readings that can contribute to an adult's (or high schooler's) view of what it means to be an American. Of course, this is not a conclusive list by any means—it features only the favorites of a few folks. Additions are welcome, and I hope the blatant omissions prompt readers to respond. Titles not normally available in bookstores or libraries are listed with mail-order addresses.

Suggested Reading List

Nonfiction

Adair, Margo and Howell, Sharon. *Breaking Old Patterns, Weaving New Ties*. Alliance Building: 1990.

Anzaldua, Gloria. *Borderlands: La Frontiera*. San Francisco: Spinster's Ink, 1987.

Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage Books (Random House), 1962.

Delaney, Sara and Elizabeth A. Delaney with Amy Hill Hearth. *Having Our Say: The Delaney Sisters' First 199 Years*. New York: Kodansha International, 1993.

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Signet Books, 1969.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*. New York: Harper, 1989.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1970.

Hale-Benson, Janice E. *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture and Learning Styles*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

Haley, Alex. *Roots*. New York: Doubleday, 1976.

Hooks, Bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1991.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.

Lorde, Audrey. *Sister Outsider*. Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1984.

Matthiessen, Peter. *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*. New York: Viking, 1983.

McIntosh, Peggy White. *Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies.* 1988.

Niehardt, John G. *Black Elk Speaks*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1961.

Peterson, Bob. "What Should Kids Learn?" In *Rethinking Schools: An Urban Education Journal*. Winter 1993, Vol. 8.

Staley, Betty, ed. *Multiculturalism in Waldorf Education, Vols. 2, and 3.* AWSNA.

Steiner, Rudolf. *The Universal Human: The Evolution of Humanity.* Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, New York: 1990.

Steiner, Rudolf. *The Mission of Folk Souls in Connection with Germanic-Scandinavian Mythology*. Garber Communications, Inc., 1989.

Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1993.

West, Cornell. *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

X, Malcolm. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* New York: Grove Press, 1964.

Fiction

Cooper, J. California. *Homemade Love*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986.

Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man.* New York: Modern Library, 1952.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *Woman Warrior.* New York: Knopf, 1977.

Mohr, Nicholasa. *Rituals of Survival*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1985.

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eyes*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

Naylor, Gloria. *Mamma Day*. New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1988.

Shange, Ntozak. *Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Storyteller*. New York: Seaver Books, 1981.

Storm, Hyemeyohsts. *Seven Arrows.* New York: Ballantine, 1972.

Walker, Alice. *The Temple of My Familiar*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.

Wright, Richard. The Outsider. New York: Harper and Row, 1953.

30 Years Later

Diversity and Waldorf Education

Oh my, oh my. I always found the daily review – *die Rückschau* – the most demanding part of my own inner practice, and doing a public *Rückschau* is even harder. Pushing aside the creeping feeling of mortification, I would like to thank the fine editor of this publication for bringing to the fore one of my public writings about Waldorf Education and what was then called "multiculturalism" in the Waldorf movement. Now, nearly 30 years later, I am asked to reflect on this essay and perhaps give an update from the vantage point of this moment in history. So here it goes, leaving the authority and hubris of my 30-something public self and slipping into the more reflective waters of my more private, melancholic 60s.

Oh my, oh my.

Context is necessary. I first want to acknowledge that I wrote this article for *Renewal* during the mid-1990s, when I was teaching for a short three years at Urban Waldorf School in Milwaukee, the first public Waldorf school in the country. I had joined an engaged group of Black and white colleagues who were willing to meet and educate the mostly Black children in their care through Waldorf methodology and curriculum. The fact that the school existed at all was the result of the larger education reform conversations in the country around schools of choice, charter schools, and multiculturalism. Waldorf schools across America were also grappling with these conversations and much about multiculturalism in the curriculum is recorded in the essays contained in "Multiculturalism in Waldorf Education," a compendium of the booklets published in the early 1990s by the Waldorf Multicultural Committee.

The first thing that strikes me about this essay is how much has changed culturally in our country and in the Waldorf movement. I won't try here to enumerate those enormous changes, but suffice it to say we are in a new moment in our history as people on the Earth and, consequently, in our story of Waldorf education. The cultural conversation has deepened and expanded and so has the educational discussion. The understanding of the homogenization of culture spoken about 30 years ago has expanded in both palpable and nuanced ways and is now labeled white supremacy. My own awareness continues to swirl and deepen as I engage with the fluidity of concepts, feelings, and experiences and how we are all racialized, gendered, and colonized in classification systems ignited by a logic so pervasive, it feels invisible to many. However, this logic is not going unchallenged, and I am grateful for the voices in the human choir that have stepped up presently to share the lead in confronting our assumptions, beliefs, and ideas that form the very bedrock of our identity as human beings, as spiritual beings. You won't need a list from me to find these voices (although the previous list, appended to my 1990s article, still has some gems). You can find their writings on any book aisle; their voices on innumerable podcasts; their faces broadcast in webinars, conversations, and talks. There is a grand conversation happening right now, drawing forth manifold healers, warriors, shamans – artists of being in every genre. As we celebrate this new cultural engagement, grieve the many lives sacrificed, and rededicate our will to at least bear witness, we are called upon to participate. And I think every child in our care requires our participation in these conversations in order for us to fully realize our mandate to look squarely at what we are doing and how.

In the earlier essay, I tried to paint a brief picture of the cultural environment within which the American Waldorf school movement was born. I have come to believe that biography work – both individual and institutional – is essential to helping us understand how the interaction of an individual school or person and the surrounding culture creates a particular field of action for the human soul and the soul of the institution. I think it would behoove every Waldorf school to examine its own birthing gesture as it situates its biography in the cultural milieu – and it probably goes without saying – that every member of a school community would benefit from such biography work too. It is important to me now that we also really interrogate the picture of "the human being as an integrated organism of body, soul, and spirit" and of "humanity as a single, interconnected reality" in much more meaningful ways. It is too easy to assign a rather generic picture of the human being that teachers can hold without examining themselves, their cultural roots, and their own predispositions, prejudices and assumptions. I have found myself having to unpack even my own generic picture of who a Waldorf teacher is (or even a Black Waldorf teacher)

in order to arrive at a more truthful sense of who I am and who I am becoming individually and in community. When our anthroposophical terms get too overused or too generic, they can tend toward what I think may be termed "spiritual bypassing," which I have experienced in my life as a coping or defense mechanism to deal with dissonance or trauma. The interrogation being called for includes antiracism work—but can also be called "further humanizing" work as we recognize the fields of action souls engage in to make sense of this human experience of the I. My experience of the process is both painful and liberating, as most births are. The space must be prepared carefully and lovingly and the activity takes place both in solitude and in community as trust is built over time. The goal (if there needs to be one) is to deepen connections and rejuvenate practice. The process is uncomfortable, tearful, and humbling, and can invoke rage. But I also find moments of revelation, gratitude, and joy. The key is to stick with it and keep plowing the fields together.

I do believe we have made progress over the last 30 years toward expanding our vision of humanity in our curriculum. I am grateful to hear and see the work of many of my younger colleagues who, in service to the children in their care, have researched festivals, biographies, literature, and artistic varieties that help create vessels for the developing I. Although I sometimes hear the voice of Tevye's "Tradition!" raised, I hear more voices committed to the research and practice of listening out of the future. I am also grateful that the conversation I keep imagining across our schools is happening not only in places like this journal, but especially in the Community Hubs and across many regions and sectors.

Retrospection reminds me that we are a very small movement. With fewer than 200 independent schools in North America (including 40 high schools), and sixty or so public Waldorf-inspired schools, we have not managed to keep up with the American metric of progress: growth. We all have felt the contraction with the shifting economic crises of the last 30 years, and I am afraid that private education is no longer possible for huge swaths of the North American public. I have the feeling (and I may be wrong) that our schools are often ensconced in suburban, urban, or rural enclaves born out of housing segregation policies of the 20th century, thus limiting our engagement. Even my own beloved Detroit Waldorf School is feeling the effects of the decline of the Black and white middle-class, increased gentrification, and income disparity in Detroit. While our social mission may be resonant with cultural renewal, we have as a movement only limited affiliation with communities of various classes or abilities or where the majority of residents are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, or immigrant. The paucity of Waldorf teachers in general, and Waldorf teachers who are people of color or with various abilities, point to the possibility of even increasing isolation. I know in my bones it is okay to be a small movement, that it is alright to "mend the part of the world that is within our reach," as a recent quote by Clarissa Pinkola Estés reminds me.

But bell hooks and adrienne maree brown, two Black feminist seers, also remind me about the importance of community, of how identity is not the same as community, and how learning to be in community is the task for this (Consciousness Soul) age and the task our students are already taking up. So, I will leave it at that. The conversations continue in the many voices heard in this issue of the *Research Bulletin* and throughout the movement. And maybe more importantly, as we participate in the pointed and potent conversations happening all around us in our community of colleagues outside of Waldorf, I feel my earlier prayers have been answered. I look forward to our engagement even more.

Linda Williams, *Ph.D., completed her Waldorf teacher training and M.A. at the Waldorf Institute and Mercy College in 1987. She has been a Class Teacher at the Detroit Waldorf School and the Urban Waldorf School in Milwaukee. She is also a former director of the Elementary Program at the Waldorf Institute of Southeast Michigan. In 2006, Linda earned her Ph.D. in Curriculum, Teaching, and Educational Policy from Michigan State University, with a specialty in Literacy Studies, and spent eight years as an associate professor of Teacher Education/Literacy at Eastern Michigan University. She resigned from that position to class teach once again, and is currently in the 7th grade with her students at Detroit Waldorf School.*

The Responsibility of Waldorf Education

Melanie Reiser

Does Waldorf education in the United States have a responsibility to actively engage with racial equity and justice?

Leading up to the founding and well into the development of the United States, those in power, primarily White people of European descent, have had a 400-year history of dehumanizing People of Color (POC). This includes the enslavement of millions of Black people and historical and new Jim Crow laws that perpetuated injustice and dehumanization. The evidence exists in the gaps across fields and regions, with overrepresentation in areas such as special education, incarceration, and lack of access to healthcare, and underrepresentation in areas such as wealth, leadership, and higher education. These gaps cannot simply be explained away by economics or culture. The United States also carries a history of injustice and dehumanization of Native Americans and immigrants, especially immigrants of color. However, we have not gone through a process of Truth, much less Reconciliation, as has been done in Canada and Australia. The result is that as a people and government, the US does not have a shared understanding or acknowledgement of this history and the current inequity, which is the result of this history.

I come back to my opening question: What responsibility Waldorf education has to actively engage with racial equity and justice?

Waldorf education was born out of the insights of Rudolf Steiner, described in his body of work and path of self-development collectively referred to as anthroposophy. A key concept of this body of work is the threefold social organism, which refers to finding the right relationship between values and realms of society. Specifically, Steiner spoke of the importance of freedom in the cultural realm, collaboration in the economic realm, and equity in the rights realm. What was known for centuries, but has become especially glaring in the past year in public discourse, is that in the United States, the narrative of equity in the rights realm is only that – a narrative, and that the American reality is not one of equity for people of color, LGBTQ+ folks, and many others. In fact, the narrative of equity for all, suggested as the founding set of values of the country, stands in stark contrast to the reality for many. Personally, I cannot help but think that I have been living in *The Truman Show*, that I have been led to believe in a particular reality of equity, but in fact I don't have to look very far or push the boundaries very hard to see that many people not only don't have equity, but are severely oppressed, delegitimized and brutalized.

Understanding the extent of the inequity and knowing we are a microcosm of the larger society in which we find ourselves, we have a responsibility in Waldorf education to ensure that equity exists for everyone in our communities, that we teach accurate history and racial literacy, and that we have communities that acknowledge and counter the dehumanization through policies and practices that support equity.

Waldorf education and students of anthroposophy have been in America since the 1920s, and there has been little direct engagement with this question of racial equity and justice up to this point. Internationally, anthroposophical organizations have made statements against racial inequity and generally defended Steiner's body of work while making some acknowledgement of concerning remarks. In the US, the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA) engaged in the development of a public school in a predominantly Black neighborhood of Milwaukee, WI, working out of Waldorf principles in the 1990s. Since then, the public Waldorf school movement has continued to grow, welcoming in a more racially and socio-economically diverse student body, but AWSNA initially distanced itself from supporting the development of these schools. While these few examples are not the only work done in Waldorf communities on this topic, they demonstrate missed opportunities in taking a more united, active stance towards racial equity and justice.

Engagement in the work towards racial equity has changed recently, in particular during the 2020-2021 school year. The Council of Anthroposophical Organizations (CAO), a group within the Anthroposophical Society in America, has been working cross-organizationally to develop a shared racial equity and justice statement, engage in racial equity training, and study Steiner's race-related ideas. AWSNA has accelerated its work in this area, focusing on supporting schools in deconstructing problematic curricular and pedagogical endeavors and reimagining this work in light of what Steiner said and in consideration of the time and place and specific students in a teacher's classroom. There is also a focus on the transformation

of school culture, policies, and practices to be based on racial equity and justice. This is a new beginning of engagement in racial equity and justice.

What I have come to believe is that what is critical in working towards racial justice and equity is addressing and acknowledging the spirit in each human being and addressing and acknowledging the injustice and dehumanization embedded in the systems and power dynamics currently working in our country and schools. In other words, we need to address what is in our hearts and what is embedded in our policies and practices and ensure that human dignity is at the center of our work, both inner and outer work. These two threads are not mutually exclusive, rather they are best propelled forward when working together.

Melanie Reiser, *Ph.D., is Executive Director, Membership of the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA). A former class teacher at the Detroit Waldorf School, she has focused her attention on the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion among AWSNA member schools and has spearheaded closer collaboration among the organizations—both independent and public—representing Waldorf early childhood, elementary, and high school institutions, as well as the circle of Waldorf teacher education institutes.*

Individuality and Diversity

Harlan Gilbert

During my first year of teaching at a Waldorf high school, one of the few Black students in the community shared with me his experience at the school.

On the one hand, he said, he was friends with all the students in his class and had friends in other grades as well. His friends who went to highly integrated public schools told him that they had no white friends and never talked to the white students.

On the other hand, each day my student passed across a cultural chasm. For example, at school he played classical music (he was one of the finest cellists ever to attend the school), while in his neighborhood it was all about the hip-hop scene.

In just a few words, Daniel (as I will call him here) precisely delineated a characteristic strength and a characteristic weakness of our school. What we did well and what we failed at then is important, because our problems were and still are typical of many US Waldorf schools, and because, though efforts at improvement have been made, there is still a long journey ahead.

With the benefit of hindsight, I would say that we strove for a universal education that acknowledged and respected every individuality, but we were not conscious of the need for a differentiated education that met the particularities of individual constitutions, communities, and cultures. The following is an attempt to explore the roots of both aspects of our history.

Education as Celebration of Individuality

To start with the positive side of Daniel's experience: From their founding on, Waldorf schools have worked to create communities of mutual respect, in which every individual is treated as significant, and to welcome and integrate students across genders, ethnicities, religions, and (where economics permit—a significant limitation of US independent schools) social classes, even in times when and places where these were often segregated. There is evidence that this effort can succeed to an impressive extent both in the special sphere of racial relations – our students do not separate out in groups based on ethnicity or race, and of other groupings – our students don't separate out into "jocks," "artists," and "nerds." In fact, one of the most consistent reflections by graduating seniors and alumni is how special it was to be friends with *everyone* in their class, and how they became aware that this was not the norm in other schools. Without exaggeration: instead of asking, "*Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?*"[1] people who visit our school sometimes ask, "*Why are all the kids sitting together in the cafeteria?*"

Whereas in most institutions there is no opting out from being placed in an identity box by the surrounding community, our students can, to a much greater extent, choose when and how they frame themselves and be accepted for who they are. A transfer student offered the following metaphor: "At my old school they made fun of me if I wore blue shoes. Here I can wear whatever shoes I want." A group of diversity pedagogy professionals who asked our students how safe our school is for people of color were taken aback when every single student walked to the side of the room that was meant to signify "very safe."[2] The consultants told me that they had never seen this happen before.

It is a blessing to live as an individual in a community without experiencing particularities such as race constantly playing a defining role. Members of majority cultures commonly enjoy this privilege without even realizing that it *is* a privilege. The striving to create a space where all may live without being seen in terms of their external characteristics or group affiliations is a natural outgrowth of the core mission of Waldorf schools: to be aware of and committed to the spiritual individuality of their pupils and faculty. In a way, Waldorf schools sought to realize a glorious and honorable dream.

Education for Inclusion and Diversity

But, as dreams go, it was fatally flawed, and I suspect that when Daniel mentioned the abyss separating his experience within the school from his experience outside the school, he had something like the following in mind.

First: An institution that regards each individual as a sacred entity may be oblivious to the need to reflect each person's constitution, community, and culture. Our curriculum, so carefully constructed to nurture

1 This is the title of a famous book by Beverly Daniel Tatum, first published in 1997.

2 To be fully accurate: one (white) student felt that she had not been at the school long enough to opine on this issue.

individualities, was largely based upon European cultural norms, as well as other cultures interpreted as precursors thereof, and our school was slow to recognize the necessity of broadening this to encompass other perspectives. Ancient Egypt was thoroughly explored; modern Africa ignored. The history of European settlement of North America was treated in depth, yet it was possible to pass through twelve years of education here without hearing more than a word or two about the Indigenous cultures of this land. Focusing on competently delivering a curriculum developed on another continent at another time, we did little to celebrate the contemporary diversity of America. Though we were aware of the importance of offering, in Emily Style's inspired metaphor, both windows (new perspectives on the world) and mirrors (opportunities for self-reflection), the surface of both were too often, in my own metaphor, lazured white.

Second: Until recently our school was oblivious to the importance of its faculty and staff reflecting the diversity of backgrounds found in its students and families. After all, we were all individuals, were we not? Should this not be sufficient? The answer is obvious: Human encounters do not happen exclusively individuality to individuality. In reality people meet and experience differences, on every level of their being.

Finally: Even if we were somehow able to completely transcend race within our school environment—and perfection is always an unrealistic expectation—it would still be our responsibility to prepare our pupils to encounter, understand, and overcome:

- the reality of racial relationships in America and the world today, which includes both personal prejudice and institutionalized/systemic/structural racism.
- the level of privilege and respect that those identified as white are given in our society and the level of disparagement and disadvantage members of other races and cultures can face.
- the long history of transgressions of rights that has led to current differences in wealth, education, status, etc.
- the experience of not being represented in a school or other institution, particularly in positions of power and authority (e.g., faculty and administration).

Synthesizing the Positions

> "Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world."
>
> – bell hooks

How does a school balance the goal of transcending race to allow students to experience each other as individualities and the goal of providing an education sensitive to diversity?

Pedagogically speaking, valuing diversity allows pupils to feel met as a situated person connected to a particular constitution, community, and culture. Focusing on the diversity of identity awakens us to the importance of honoring race as a defining factor of human identity and celebrating the cultural heritages that makes each race unique.

Pedagogically speaking, emphasizing the universality of individuality allows a pupil to feel met as a spiritual being. Focusing on the universally human awakens us to the underlying unity of all humanity and moves us toward a time when people "will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the *content of their character,"* as Martin Luther King, Jr., famously declared in his 1963 speech in Washington, D.C.

Though these two are not necessarily contradictory in all things, they do tend toward somewhat polarized goals. On the one hand, though race may be a series of social constructs, what has grown up around these constructs is real and significant. On the other hand, though we will always see color, we can strive not to see it as something important, allowing the social construct of race to fade into irrelevance.

For centuries, the conversation around race in this country has swung back and forth between these two aspects. Our schools should be safe centers for explorative and mutually respectful discussions to take place and creative centers for solutions to arise. For Waldorf schools are ideally situated to act as nurturing spaces where students can live as individuals with rich identities not reducible or reduced to members of groups, while being educated in the diversity of humanity and the sometimes problematic, sometimes inspiring history of cultural encounters.

Conclusion

> "We can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist."
>
> — James Baldwin

Like other institutions in the United States, Waldorf schools are seeking ways to respond adequately to the country's problematic history of race relations. In the conversation around race in this country, two approaches that appear to be nearly diametrically opposed have alternately dominated the conversation. One approach affirms the unity of all humanity and looks forward to a time when race will become completely irrelevant as a factor in society. (If current sociological and demographic trends hold, the long arc of history is indeed bending slowly but inevitably in this direction, but there remains a long journey ahead.) The other approach focuses on honoring the constitutions, communities, and cultures that make up the various ethnic groups and races.

If you could choose, would you wish future generations to be secure in a racial identification that was also honored by society, or to consider race an outmoded category irrelevant to their lives?

Perhaps this is a false dichotomy. Cultivating individuality and honoring specific characteristics may appear contradictory, but it seems to me that they are actually complementary elements of human life. Would a person securely grounded in their own constitution, community, and culture not more easily appreciate the fundamental unity of humanity? Certainly, disrespecting a person's differences erects barriers for that person to experience such unity. Would a person strongly committed to humanity in general not naturally be more open to and interested in the differentiated ways humanity manifests? Certainly, those who do not see humanity as a unity will naturally tend to elevate their own particular identity over that of others.

Perhaps there is a middle way between overcoming race and upholding a racial identity. Perhaps future generations will have the same freedom with respect to race that we are learning to grant to other aspects of identity. Religious identifications, for example, used to be directly tied to a person's ancestry and community, and people of different religions frequently felt themselves to be on opposing sides of a cultural divide. There is a growing awareness that people might—among other alternatives—have a strong or weak identification with a single religious tradition, nurture varying connections to multiple traditions, be spiritual but non-religious, be uncertain or in a process of exploration, or be completely indifferent to the theme, and also that it is wise not to draw conclusions about other aspects of a person's life on the basis of this one element.

Perhaps we will come to recognize that race, ethnicity, and other group identities are of varying import to different people, and that their meaning can only be determined by the individuals who bear these identities. Perhaps human beings will ultimately be free to relate to these themes at each moment of their lives in whatever way they choose.

Harlan Gilbert, *Ph.D., began his career as a Waldorf educator in 1986. He has taught mathematics, computer science, philosophy, and physics at Green Meadow Waldorf High School since 2003. In 2005 he published* At the Source: The Incarnation of the Child and the Development of a Modern Pedagogy, *an attempt to free Waldorf pedagogy from a particular cultural context. He earned a PhD in Transformative Studies from the California Institute for Integral Studies in 2016 with a dissertation on identity and ethics. He gives workshops and writes essays on a wide range of themes; for more information, see harlangilbert.com.*

MLK's Life as a Theme in the Waldorf Curriculum

Kristin Mathis

Introduction and Caveat

Let me begin this curriculum sharing with a caveat. As a White educator and school administrator, I want to acknowledge that my choice to center Martin Luther King, Jr.'s biography as the focal point of this piece can be seen as problematic in several ways: as a further example of tokenism (one famous Black figure standing in for many), as leaning heavily once again on a well-known figure rather than lifting up new or different voices, as prioritizing messages of non-violence and "fitting in" rather than uprising and revolutionary change. I've grappled with each of these critiques myself along the way.

Nevertheless, I chose to work with MLK's biography as a way to "think through" the task of bringing African-American history into the core of the Waldorf curriculum precisely *because* he is the most publicly celebrated African-American in the United States. As the only Black person currently recognized with a national holiday, MLK and the day that celebrates his life can and should be central to American Waldorf schools' festival life and curriculum. It shouldn't be the *only* time we celebrate Black history and culture, nor should MLK be the *only* example of a Black "holy troublemaker" we lift up, nor should we focus *only* on moments of Black suffering, and resistance to suffering.

With all of this in view, I have gathered a number of resources that other teachers may find helpful. With these materials, our educational community can reach what is admittedly a very low baseline: *a step beyond the assemblies, bulletin board displays, and days of service that celebrate MLK in order to encompass deeper study of the man, his work, and the many people and causes intersecting his biography. This work should be woven through our curriculum as seamlessly and elegantly as any other aspect of our students' learning.*

This work can begin as early as Nursery (yes, Nursery!) and continue up through 12th grade. Because my school, Brooklyn Waldorf School, is pre-K through Grade 8, I've focused on these grades here. As I hope I can demonstrate, looking at King's life's work in terms of the developmental stages outlined by Steiner and others, and mapping aspects of King's biography onto the themes of each grade, can serve as a useful example of how other such figures, themes, and non-Western histories could be integrated into the curriculum in an authentic and meaningful way.

My hope for the children would be that by encountering Martin Luther King each year in a different facet of his identity and work, students will come to feel that they know him and his many colleagues deeply, thereby forming a living picture of him that they would retain for the rest of their lives. On a spiritual level, I believe that these sorts of living pictures connect us in a very real way to the individualities whose lives we study, and that both teachers and students will be spiritually renewed as a result of deeper engagement with a human being of such deep and lasting profundity.

One final warning: The curricular guide that follows is very much a work in progress. Its assemblage just began in January 2021 as an attempt to compile work already going on in our school classrooms, with additions which are yet far from complete. It is intended to be a living compilation that grows each year as teachers add new resources or re-think new ways of weaving aspects of MLK's life and work into the developmental themes of each grade. It is also the product of many minds. Much of the work comes from colleagues at Brooklyn Waldorf and other schools, as well as many, many educators outside the Waldorf community. I also would like to thank those BIPOC folx in the Waldorf movement who have done this work for decades, patiently and sometimes impatiently keeping me honest, accountable, and on my toes. You all know who you are. Thank you.

Note: All internet resources are indicated with the name of the hosting website and the title of the webpage, which could be found by using the search function on the hosting website (or on any good internet search engine).

Early Childhood: MLK as a Person

Theme

MLK as a little boy, as a son, as a father. Teachers can use these books and resources to form their own stories or puppet shows.

Resources

The Story of Martin Luther King Jr. by Johnny Ray Moore, illustrations by Amy Wummer (WorthyKids,

2015). A board book that is truthful but also positive for very young children.

Articles for teachers on MLK's boyhood that could offer some details for stories:

Time.com: "What Martin Luther King Jr. Was Like as a Child"

Washingtonpost.com: "What was Martin Luther King Jr. like as a child? A prankster and 'an ordinary kid.'"

"Freedom, Freedom, Let It Ring" - A song (not in the mood of the fifth) with lyrics that could be made into a circle game or re-set to different music. Just be sure to credit the author, who is a Black preschool teacher. Youtube.com: "Preschool songs - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. song – Littlestorybug"

Grade 1: MLK's Big Birthday

Theme

Who is MLK? Why do we celebrate his life and legacy? The idea for the first grade is to create a sense of Martin Luther King being so important, so amazing that the whole country celebrates his birthday every year.

Resources

Why do we celebrate MLK Jr Day? By Michaela Seymour (The Rosen Publishing Group, 2018).

A biography told by "Kid President" presented in a three and a half minutes video; it could be adapted into a story. Youtube.com: "The Story of Martin Luther King Jr. by Kid President"

Grade 2: MLK and Others as Heroes or Saints

Theme

Many schools have already made a place for MLK in the current second grade curriculum, as it's relatively easy to envision him as one of the "holy troublemakers" highlighted in this year. This could be an opportunity to feature a number of other heroes from the Civil Rights era, particularly children or current individuals continuing the struggle for equal rights.

Resources

The Ruby Bridges Story:
The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles, illustrations by George Ford (Scholastic, 1995).

Lesson plan from the *Martin Luther King, Jr. Research & Education Institute* at Stanford University – a rich resource of lessons plans for all grades: Kinginstitute.stanford.edu: "Delivering Justice: Westley Wallace Law and the Fight for Civil Rights"

Kinginstitute.stanford.edu: "Lesson Plan: Ruby Bridges"

Scholastic.com: "Ruby Bridges: A Simple Act of Courage Lesson Plans and Teaching Resources"

Stacey Abrams
Teachers could use this "kid interview" to glean facts for a biographical story of this contemporary citizen rights activist:

Kpcnotebook.scholastic.com: "One-on-One with Stacey Abrams"

Rosa Parks
Rosa by Nikki Giovanni, illustrations by Bryan Collier (Square Fish, 2007).

Claudette Colvin
This is a teacher resource intended for older students, but it is also an excellent resource for preparing a biographical story. Zinnedproject.org: "Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice"

Multiple Heroes
Holy Troublemakers and Unconventional Saints by Daneen Akers (Watchfire Media, 2019).

Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History by Vashti Harrison (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2017).

Grade 3: MLK as a Freedom Leader

Theme

Third grade is a year to tell stories of liberation and of moving towards freedom. MLK's deep connection to Biblical stories and his own resonance with the figure of Moses make for an excellent opportunity to tie the MLK story to the general third grade curriculum, for example through the story of the March on Washington, as well as other freedom marches. A connection can also be made to the power of prophetic speech: Moses' speeches to the Israelites as well as short quotes from MLK's "I Have a Dream" and "Mountaintop" speeches.

Resources

March on Washington
A Sweet Smell of Roses by Angela Johnson, illustrations by Eric Velasquez (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2005).

MLK's Life and Speeches
Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by Doreen Rappaport, illustrations by Bryan Collier (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2001). This is picture book biography, but teachers could spread this reading out over a few days, as the book includes lots of "stories within stories" that might need unpacking.

Children's March
Let the Children March by Monica Clark-Robinson, illustrations by Frank Morrison (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018).

A short *Newsela* article on the Children's March can be found at Newsela.com: "Children marched in the streets to help end segregation"

Grade 4: Civil Rights in Our Town or Neighborhood

Theme

Local Geography and Local History are themes of the fourth grade. In Brooklyn Waldorf School, we focused on "Boycott in BedStuy"—the story of the boycotts organized by CORE, FOCUS, and other groups in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. This part of the curriculum should be as localized as possible. Check your local library, historical society, or interview older residents to find out how the Civil Rights movement played out in your school's geographical community. Another appropriate focus would be on a civil rights issue happening right now: local individuals working for Black Lives Matter, for AAPI civil rights, or migrant workers. Invite an activist to speak to the class.

General Resource

Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America, edited by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (NYU Press, 2005).

This collection offers 13 informative articles on various Black Freedom organizations, events, and stories.

Examples from Brooklyn Waldorf School
Resources about Brooklyn
The Museum of the City of New York website: www.mcny.org: "Civil Rights in Brooklyn: Behind the Scenes, New York at its Core"

Youtube.com: "From Bed-Stuy to Harlem: The City Confronts Civil Rights"

Brownstoner.com: "Remembering Brooklyn's Civil Rights Activists and the Fight for a Better Bed Stuy"

Alicebernstein.net: "Remembering the Civil Rights Struggle in Brooklyn"

Oral Histories
Our school's board members Jelani Mashiriki and Kojo Campbell come from a prominent Bed-Stuy family that was very much involved in Civil Rights activism in Brooklyn in the 1960s and 70s. They regularly present an oral history account of this activism, including the role the school building played in the community.

Grade 5: The Freedom Riders or MLK and Gandhi

Theme

The fifth grade's focus on North American geography dovetails nicely with the history of the Freedom Riders, whose commitment to desegregation took them on long-distance bus journeys across the American South. Mapping, reports on individual Freedom Riders, or projects on specific cities are just some of the opportunities teachers have for folding in MLK's connection (or not) to these groups. Alternatively, the focus on ancient Hinduism in this grade provides an opportunity to highlight MLK's connection to Gandhi and his philosophy.

Resources

Freedom Rides
Learningforjustice.org: "Freedom Riders"

Amightygirl.com: "The 12-Year-Old Who Defied the KKK To Help Civil Rights Activists After Their Bus Was Firebombed"

A map of the freedom riders' journeys is included on the Britannica Kids entry "Freedom Riders" at kids.Britannica.com.

MLK and Gandhi
A lesson plan that introduces Gandhi's practice of nonviolence and how MLK and others adapted it for the American civil rights struggle: kinginstitute.stanford.edu: "Lesson Plan: Nonviolence in the Indian and African-American Freedom Struggles"

Book for middle grade readers:
Threads of Peace: How Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Changed the World by Uma Krishnaswami (forthcoming: Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books, August 2021).

Grade 6: MLK and Voting Rights

Theme

Diving deeper into the issue of voting rights offers opportunities for comparative work with other aspects of the fifth and sixth grade curricula, such as looking at the history of representative democracy and how Athens, Rome, and other democracies created voting systems that included certain members and excluded others. Looking at the math of voting, "literacy" tests, and other concrete systems of the voting process appeals to the sixth graders' either/or thinking and helps them move from a simple "Everyone should be

able to vote" stance to "How do we make it more or less possible for people to vote?" This can lead to conversations about the ongoing fight for voting rights in the current political scene.

Resources

Many different voting rights resources from *Learning for Justice* (formerly known as "Teaching Tolerance"): Learningforjustice.org: "Voting and Voices Classroom Resources"

A particularly helpful article on this website can be used for engaging students in a study of how voter suppression actually works in a given state: Learningforjustice.org: "Teaching the Truth About Voter Suppression"

Resources from *Facing History and Ourselves* on current events and voting rights: facinghistory.org: "Voting Rights in the United States"

A helpful article from *Newsela* on how voting is difficult now; the article can be adjusted for different reading levels: Newsela.com: "How voting in the U.S. is harder than just checking a box"

Grade 7: MLK and his Vision for a "World House" (MLK's relationships with other marginalized groups)

Theme

Riffing broadly off the theme of exploration and discovery, as well as the 13-years-old emerging sense of personal identity, the seventh grade presents a perfect opportunity to focus on MLK's expansive view of coalition building, as well as his personal relationships with people of all backgrounds. In particular, the theme offers an opportunity for students to explore different facets of identity through biographies of LGBTQ+ leaders in the Civil Rights movement. Teachers could also expand to include MLK's anti-poverty work towards the end of his life, when he made coalitions with poor people across racial and cultural lines.

Resources

LGBTQ+ bios (for teacher prep)

Learningforjustice.org*: "Pauli Murray: Fighting Jane and Jim Crow"*

Pauli Murray was a Black, gender fluid attorney who literally wrote the book (a legal compendium) that enabled the NAACP and others to launch all the landmark lawsuits such as Brown v Board of Ed, etc. Her preferred pronouns were she/her, but she unapologetically identified as a man publicly at a time (1930s on) when it was unheard of to do so. She was a follower of Gandhi and later in life became the first female African-American Episcopal priest.

Learningforjustice.org*: "Bayard Rustin: The Fight for Civil and Gay Rights"*

Bayard Rustin was a Black, openly gay civil rights organizer who introduced MLK to the teachings of Gandhi, made pilgrimages to India to learn the methods of protest and non-violent resistance used there, and became the teacher and conversation partner of nearly every well-known civil rights leader of the 1940s onwards. Rustin organized the March on Washington, as well as co-founded CORE with Pauli Murray and others. It is hard to overstate his impact on the Civil Rights movement. He is less known than his peers because MLK had him work behind the scenes as his personal assistant and secretary in order to protect him from the legal ramifications of his identity as a gay man, as well as the hate from some of his fellow organizers who disapproved of his unapologetically gay lifestyle.

Both Murray and Rustin have short bios on the King Institute site, due to the inspiration they drew from Gandhi for non-violent resistance. Kinginstitute.stanford.edu: "Early Disciples of Gandhi's Principle of Nonviolence"

Another helpful resource from the King Institute is a lesson plan that contextualizes King's belief in welcoming and building coalitions with other marginalized groups, using his concept of a "World House." Kinginstitute.stanford.edu: "Lesson Plan: Building King's World House - Diversity and Inclusion"

Grade 8: Contemporary Black Lives Matter Movement

Theme

By eighth grade, the students are ready to talk about revolutions. The most obvious point of overlap in our current context is the Black Lives Matter movement, about which students can learn and further compare it with the earlier civil rights work done by MLK and others. By following the spiral curriculum outlined here, eighth graders will have a fairly nuanced understanding of these issues—indeed better than that of most adult Americans. The focus in this grade is on contemporary manifestations of the impulse to create equity for Black Americans.

Resources

BLM Lesson Plans for Middle School from D.C. Area Educators for Social Justice: Dareaeducators4socialjustice.org/black-lives-matter: "Resources for Middle and High School"

From *Learning for Justice* on BLM:
Learningforjustice.org: "Why Teaching Black Lives Matter Matters"

For the most recent articles on BLM to get you up to date, check on Newsela.com, which also ranks its materials' reading (lexile) level.

Additional Resources

There are so many different directions to take lessons that have their root in MLK's life, teaching, and legacy. The items included here are samples to give an idea of the resources that are already out there. As each school delves deeper into the work of reimagining what a truly inclusive, equitable, place-based American Waldorf curriculum looks like, we need to encourage all teachers (specialty subjects included) to explore the deep work that has been going on for decades in mainstream educational settings. We have much to learn from our colleagues there, particularly BIPOC educators. We can always adapt the lessons to fit our aesthetics and developmental stages, but we have a responsibility to take up this work.

Spanish

Minute by Minute Spanish, which offers teaching materials for several other languages as well as ESL, offers a song in Spanish as well as an associated lesson plan.

Minutebyminutespanish.com: "Dr. Martin Luther King Honored by Spanish-Speaking Countries – Spanish Class Lesson for Civil Rights Day – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day"

Mandarin

Miss Panda Chinese:
Misspandachinese.com: "Chinese Through Story Martin Luther King A Poem"

Math

This is a piece about polling data around the civil rights movement in the 1960's coming from the website "Not Awful and Boring Ideas for Teaching Statistics":

Notawfulandboring.blogspot.com: "Izadi's 'Black Lives Matter and America's long history of resisting civil rights protesters'"

Music

Carnegiehall.org*: Learning "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around"*

The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute at Stanford University, a rich resource for lesson plans and themes for all grades, suggests a songbook on Civil Rights songs:

Kinginstitute.stanford.edu: "Nobody Gonna Turn Me 'Round: Stories & Songs of the Civil Rights Movement"

Kristin Mathis *is the Pedagogical Administrator at the Brooklyn Waldorf School, which serves pre-K through 8th grade students in the historic neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. Born in the US but raised in Asia, Kristin struggled with acculturating to the racial dynamics of American high school when she returned to her "home country," and has been active in social justice and DEI work ever since. Despite her many years as an activist, educator, and mother to a Latinx teen, she is still working every day to unpack her own implicit biases, and relies on her colleagues and friends to call her in when she goes astray. This article is dedicated to all of them.*

Be Always a Question Mark:
On Reforging Curricula in Waldorf Schools

Ryan Cameron

For the past five years, I've had the privilege of teaching English Language Arts at the Rudolf Steiner School, NYC, my alma mater. The experience of alumni returning to teach at their Waldorf school seems to be a shared one. In this scenario, of a graduate stepping as teacher into the classrooms in which she once was student, there appears to be a special glimmer between teacher and students, a thread of belonging, a sensation of being two sides of one coin. To engage with a curriculum I know and love as well as with a new generation of students feels right. At the same time, stepping into the gyre of memories, disappointments, personal joys, and the all-too-much-at-once feeling that middle school dredges up is not without its struggle. Educating is an odd exercise in time-travel, wherein one reaches back into one's past learning experiences to dream anew, with memory guiding the way forward.

Upon returning to Steiner in 2016, my mission, like the one of many of you, was to drive the curriculum towards celebrating multiracial, multicultural, non-heteronormative, and gender expansive perspectives. As a biracial person, one of two minority students in her elementary school class, I am still challenged today, as one of few faculty members of color, in navigating conversations about representation of various identities in the curriculum. I loved my Waldorf education, but at times, I recognize in hindsight, I felt a fool for loving an education that did not, while I was a student, show love for my cultural heritage, my Asian American identity. As a teacher, I vowed I would show love, through my curricular choices, to as many expressions of human identity as I had time for, but I have to admit that I definitely stumbled and made dubious choices along the way.

In the thrust of our social justice movement of the 21st Century, in which we as a society are attempting to expunge the etched roots of systemic racism from our schools, prisons, cultural institutions, and houses of government, lack of awareness is often maligned as evil intent. "White silence = violence" was a chant I heard (and uttered) often last May and June, as I took weekly to the streets of New York to protest the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police. I, as an adult, understand that Waldorf institutions intend no violence, but it is important to understand that our students, engaged as they are with social media (as am I), view themselves as part of the movement to dismantle racism, heteronormativity, and ablism, and they may indeed view any and every lack of inclusion in their lessons as violent. Each middle school class I've taught has always had one or three or fifteen students impassioned by the rhetoric of equity, equality, and inclusion, and their voices lead their classmates into figuring out their own stances on the subject. Any teacher who does not teach with these voices in mind risks losing the trust, and therefore rapt attention, of the students. To meet the children where they are means untangling the threads of hearsay and misinformation of the internet from the true gems, that is, the voices that are doing the work of building a new narrative of history and that can be found online, in books, and in the media at large. It is up to us as teachers to model for the students what social justice is and how to apply it to their lives rather than allow the internet to do that for them.

To do this work takes awareness, curiosity, accountability, and follow-through. My school has had many successes: one class teacher added a History of Ancient Africa block to her 6th grade Main Lesson rotation, an 8th grade teacher taught the American Revolution with a focus on the Indigenous People it affected, a colleague and I, when we were asked to step in to teach the 7th Grade Renaissance Main Lesson, realized a long-held dream of ours by incorporating lessons on the Harlem Renaissance to complement the stories of the Italian Renaissance. History of the world is covered in our high school, and elementary school and early childhood teachers celebrate Diwali, Eid, Lunar New Year, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and so on in their classrooms. All these efforts are stepping stones on the way towards "the right direction," but until we can, on an institutional level, guarantee that each and every class of students hears diverse stories, reads about experiences utterly unlike their own, and experiences Main Lessons that reliably plant seeds for diverse perspectives, our work is not done.

Rather than connect through our successes, I believe that more can be learned through our failures. As I tell my students, every mistake is a wonderful opportunity to teach oneself and those around you something you did not know before. Perhaps, being a person of color,

I have a bit more leeway to fail in my lessons on diversity, but I hope that by sharing my mistakes, my fellow Waldorf teachers could feel emboldened by their own mistakes rather than feel discouraged by the endless voices of criticism and outcries of injustice that I'm sure many teachers have weathered in the past decades. Finding the right path forward, it seems, requires tenacity through trial and error, so by investigating my own errors in judgement over the years, hopefully you can avoid some of the same social experiments I've undergone.

Fail Again, Fail Better

While attempting to build a middle school Language Arts curriculum in collaboration with each grade's class teacher, my first serious misstep in a book selection occurred during my second year at Steiner, when I taught Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* to a 6th grade class. This was a book my own class teacher loved, a book I loved as a child, and a story many of my students appeared to love; it was also a book many of the class' parents didn't love. I was prepared (though not prepared *enough*) for the conversations about the racist language in the book, but I was fully unprepared for the way in which encountering and discussing hate speech would wound our class' community and, most especially, harm the psyches of the children of color in the class. Any enjoyment the kids showed for the book felt hollow in the end because of the stain that seeing that searing slur, the n-word, in print, nine times over the course of the novel and further discussed in our conversations, sullied any linguistic beauty the book did have to offer.

From this mistake, I realized the children need a more thorough understanding of the history of racism in our country before encountering such language in literature. Even if Mark Twain's mission was to expand and diversify representation through his 19th Century novels (as I myself argued at the time), the reality I encountered was that the twelve-year-olds in front of me could not reconcile such intention with what they encountered on the page. I had learned at a Sunbridge Middle School Conference, several years ago, that if you teach what you love, your students will share in that love with you. The more recent experience with my students showed me that anachronistic love, love that was a product of a different era, does not translate well for today's child. I would have to release yesterday's love into the pastures of nostalgia and forge my way towards a new canon.

Several years later, after participating in annual workshops with a Rudolf Steiner School alumna, and one of my current educational heroes, Monique Marshall, as well as in professional development workshops with the institution *Facing History and Ourselves,* I found myself mapping identity charts with a group of 8th graders. We had just read Malala Yousafzai's eponymous memoir and had drawn an identity chart on the blackboard to show how the many facets of her personhood and cultural ancestry fueled her activism. As we went about drawing each student's own chart, I asked students to include parts of themselves that were visible to others as well as the aspects that were invisible. But when a white child asked if he could identify as Irish rather than simply "white," in my haste to get to the next activity I said no. I later learned from his father that this was hurtful to the child and his family, which allowed me to reflect on the ways in which categorizing anyone on the basis of skin color is indeed harmful.

Learning that one will at some point be expected to identify as a member of a certain race is a difficult realization for any child to navigate. Reconciling the experience of how one identifies internally with how one might be categorized by appearance can create a strange dissonance. When I was a student, I found myself blushing when historical figures from ancient China came up in class or wondering to myself why was I assigned research projects on Noh Drama and the like when my white classmates were not. As a teacher, I have found, though, that speaking frankly about difference and the numerous ways in which one can choose (and not choose) one's identity helps give a name to the numerous diversities (learning differences, gender, sexual orientation, race, and class, to name a few) that exist in any classroom. Nevertheless, I've realized it is not up to me to tell children how to identify, but rather guide them in maintaining conversations about difference in and beyond the classroom.

> It is our duty to build a school curriculum and culture that provides a safe, clearly delineated space for children to explore their questions about the world they see unfolding around them.

Year after year, I introduce my class to the slam poem "White Boy Privilege," by then fourteen-year-old poet Royce Mann (thank you, Monique, for this resource), and I see how the white children in the class melt when they finally see in print how they, too, inherit a history of racism and white supremacy that they do not wish to see themselves as part of. The poem begins:

> Dear women, I'm sorry.
>
> Dear black people, I'm sorry.
>
> Dear Asian-Americans, dear Native Americans, dear immigrants who come here seeking a better life, I'm sorry.
>
> Dear everyone who isn't a middle or upper-class white boy, I'm sorry.
>
> I have started life in the top of the ladder while you were born on the first rung.
>
> I say now that I would change places with you in an instant, but if given the opportunity, would I?

Every year, a white child, often the most unruly boy in the class, comes up to me after the lesson to say thank you for teaching this poem. Just as expanding the curriculum to capture the multiplicity and intersectionality of Black, Asian, Latin, Middle Eastern, and Indigenous perspectives is important, giving children the space to new possibilities for white identity is equally important. No child can be deprived of their unique intersectional heritage and identity, even as we race along towards reform and, hopefully, redemption.

I continue to try out lesson plans that respond in varying ways to the content that class teachers introduce in their Main Lessons. I've long since replaced *Tom Sawyer* with other adventure books that feature protagonists of color and/or authors of color (I like Nancy Farmer's *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm,* set in Zimbabwe in the year 2194, and Pam Muñoz Ryan's *The Dreamer,* which imagines the childhood of Pablo Neruda). I like teaching Tomi Adeyemi's *Children of Blood and Bone* while the eighth graders learn about the Atlantic slave trade; the book shows that Nigerians also have their own beautiful mythology, the Yoruba tradition, that inspired a fantasy series. It is also a good opportunity to introduce a novel with a black protagonist which is *not* about racial suffering.

This year, I tried pairing Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynold's *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* with the Waldorf classic *I, Juan de Pareja* by Elizabeth Borton de Treviño, aiming to ground the book's grateful slave narrative, in which a slave is depicted as loving his master and feeling lucky for his experience of servitude in a more contemporary framework (with thanks to Green Meadow's Liz Hall, who warned me of the novel's treatment of history). I'm not sure yet whether these experiments are working or, in fact, confusing the children, but I do see that arming students with language to help them navigate the changing world, quite simply, meets a need in them. Speaking directly about these topics, by engaging with the issues and reforming lesson content, offers a model for the children how to discuss such topics, rather than simply allowing them to react without guidance. Steiner says that children are messengers of the future, but we cannot let the children do the teaching for us; it is our duty to build a school curriculum and culture that provides a safe, clearly delineated space for children to explore their questions about the world they see unfolding around them. At our school, we valorize the ingenuity of the curriculum spiral, but without spiral accountability, a grave dissonance arises between the children of color we advertise on the cover of our school brochures and the content taught in classrooms. And the children notice.

We need to pass the point of merely *representing* other cultures, races, and marginalized experiences in our curriculum; we must engage with them in depth. The Black experience, Islamic history, Asian heritage, the fight for LGBTQ+ rights, etc. – all deserve prime real estate in our curricula. When parts of the story are shuffled into late-elementary school geography blocks or relegated only to the realms of fiction, the children, regardless of their race, are not served. When non-Western festivals are held primarily by the parents of students of color and not by the teachers themselves, the children, who are hard at work categorizing and observing what is of value and what is of lesser value, notice the difference. Reciting a poem by Langston Hughes while leaving the primary content of the curriculum untouched is not sufficient (I learned this the hard way). But we all have a different starting point and it is important for Waldorf institutions to state aloud, as so many do already, that we are all at different starting points in our curricular upheaval. As I say to my students (and as I learned at *Facing History*), we all bring different lived experiences, different levels of knowledge, and different assumptions to the classroom. We cannot be afraid to show curiosity, to explore, to make mistakes, to ask questions, to ask for help, and we must avoid judging each other for being beginners. We must make space to build new understandings together (and a database to support it).

> Being an alum and a teacher of color is, at times, a lonely experience, for the child in me wishes that my former teachers, now my colleagues, had the answers, voiced the regret, and could illuminate the path forward.

My lived experience fueled a career path in Waldorf education because I do not want any child to experience, as I did, a lack of representation of their culture in the curriculum. Being an alum and a teacher of color is, at times, a lonely experience, for the child in me wishes that my former teachers, now my colleagues, had the answers, voiced the regret, and could illuminate the path forward. But now I realize, a child no longer, that it is up to me to draft the plans for an education that I had longed for and have compassion for myself and my colleagues through my and our failures along the way.

In an address to students, included in his book of essays and meditations *A Time for New Dreams,* author Ben Okri says:

> Be always a question mark. Seek to know for yourself, so that you may grasp the deeper truths of life with a strong mind. Give of your soul. Feel the life and suffering and the joys of the world. Feel! Don't be afraid to feel, or to love, or to fail. So long as you are doing the little best you can to make this ruined world better, you are making good use of the miraculous reality that is your life.

To my fellow teachers: the pleasure of teaching is that we get to forever be students. "Be always a question mark," and we will all, hopefully, one day be able to embody the questions our students continuously ask of us. Let us not fear mistakes, lack of knowledge or imperfection. Let us acknowledge the errors we make and draw strength from an ever-growing well of curiosity for our changing world.

Ryan Lin Cameron *is a graduate of the Rudolf Steiner School NYC (Class of 2005) and of Haverford College (2009). Ryan currently teaches middle school Language Arts at her alma mater, and, before the pandemic, served as the school's elementary school librarian. Ryan lives in Brooklyn and describes her return to the Waldorf world as the work of an "After-Lifer."*

To Make Room for Black Lives, Homer Stands Aside[1]

Defne Caldwell

Waldorf teachers and poets love a good metaphor. I'm going to start with the metaphor and then get to my point, another habit of Waldorf teachers and poets.

When I joined the faculty to teach English and drama at Green Meadow in 2005, I discovered that a favorite metaphor there was, *our school is a ship*. I got it right away and even remember using the metaphor myself in a talk I gave at an assembly. It felt good, like we were going somewhere all together with a little bit of danger thrown in because of squalls. Sometimes in meetings, we spoke about the strength of the vessel supported by anthroposophy and by our traditions. Sometimes we admitted or bewailed our inability to turn quickly, but it was all explained by our imagination of this huge ship. I attended Green Meadow from kindergarten through twelfth grade. So, in my mind, the ship looked like a great 19th century whaler I had learned about as a ninth grader in the *Moby Dick* main lesson (which I was now going to teach myself). Green Meadow could stay out at sea for years, it weighed three hundred tons and had thirty-five sails and precious cargo, so… Well, you understand, no quick turns. In the early 2000s, when it came to race, we believed that all people are equal and that blindness to race was a good approach to fostering equality.

I took up a rich curriculum handed to me by my former teachers who had made the high school the inspiring, scholarly, and artistic place it was. I had graduated in 1987 and knew that my peers were doing well as alumni. They were people like Alex Steffen, a leader in climate consciousness; Jessica Stoberock, stock broker; Aicha Woods, architect for Cesar Pelli and now the executive director of city planning for New Haven, CT; Karin Schaefer, painter; Stefan Schaefer, filmmaker; Michael Berkowitz, founding member of Resilient Cities Catalyst; Ciril Hitz, award winning baker; Jennifer Stahl, violist with the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra; and countless others living happy lives as teachers, doctors, writers, and such. Now, in my mind, the high school was even better than in the 1980s. It had all the traditions I grew up with, plus a more rigorous applied science curriculum and an award-winning robotics team, for example. Why would I rock the boat? (I can't resist).

Well, the wind changed.

Towards the end of *Moby Dick*, Starbuck, the upright first mate, begs with monomaniacal Captain Ahab to understand that the winds they are fighting their way into (in Ahab's obsession with catching the white whale) are a sign that they should turn and go home. And indeed, they should. But Ahab's vengeful pride won't let him, and he is all powerful, so they all… well, I won't give it away. But around 2014-2015 when Opal Tometi, Alicia Graza and Patrisse Cullors started #BlackLivesMatter in response to Trayvon Martin's murder and George Zimmerman's acquittal, the winds changed. At Green Meadow, many of us did not fully understand or know what to do, but no one could deny that ignoring racism was not working.

Most of us were and are White, so we knew we had to begin to educate ourselves. At the urging of our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, the Collegium required every person working at Green Meadow to do the Undoing Racism training, led by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond. But it takes longer than a weekend to understand racism and especially where it may hide in oneself, or in a curriculum or in a school, and what to do about it. I started by putting aside my love of authors like Donna Tartt and Cormac McCarthy and began only reading texts by Black American authors like Jesmyn Ward, James McBride, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Paul Beatty, and Colson Whitehead. Those voices, characters, and stories took root in me. I was moved by the artistry, wit, and imagination of these authors, I witnessed the exceptional qualities of the characters I found there, I fell in love, I laughed and suffered with those characters, I was outraged with them about the violence and injustice they faced and moved by their wisdom. I still did not know what to do.

But then, the lifechanging moment:

My husband and I were also seeing as much theater by Black authors as we could, mostly at Theater for a New Audience and BAM. We attended a play by Jackie Sibblies Drury called *Fairview*. It was about a contemporary upper-middle-class Black family and played around with how race is viewed. First, the family appeared to be caught in a strange sitcom. Everything was perfect. They were getting a perfect birthday dinner ready for the matriarch who was upstairs. They listened to music and danced in the living room. The interior of their

1 This article first appeared on the Green Meadow Waldorf School blog at www.gmws.org/blog

home was all startling bright white and shiny. I whispered to my husband, *mark my words, that set is going to be ruined before this is over.* I was right. I remember thinking that the play was trying to elicit racism in viewers who didn't know what to think about Black people who are financially well-off, interested in getting the root vegetables into the oven, their biggest problem: that their teenage daughter wants to take a gap year instead of going straight to college.

Then, the scene played out again, in silence, while we listened to the voices of American and European White people revealing commonly held racist views in phrases containing microaggressions and in playing games like *if you could be any race, what would it be?* There were the voices that may have been living below the surface in some of us.

Our views of race were challenged and tipped over in various ways as the play went on (the difficult grandmother finally came downstairs and was White, and the brother, a lawyer held up at work, showed up dressed like a rapper). The dinner was over the top, insane, and the food, including a giant turkey, went everywhere. I was surprised, moved and thrilled by it all. But being woke enough to somewhat access what was happening did not prepare me for what I never saw coming.

In the final scene of the play, Keisha, the daughter who wanted to take a gap year, stepped up and just started talking to the audience. She asked all the White people in the audience to come up onto the stage; she meant, for real.

I shrink from audience participation, but I recognized that I had to go. We all did. Once we were crammed up there in the bright lights, she turned her back and continued to speak to the Black audience left in their seats. Everything had shifted. As one of the White people on stage, I at first thought I was turned into the subject that I was being viewed. That made me feel like a moth on a pin. Then I realized that we were not important, really. An intimate conversation was going on between Keisha and the Black audience members. It literally had nothing to do with me, except that Keisha was clear that she thought Black people needed a bit more room.

At Green Meadow, many of us did not fully understand or know what to do, but no one could deny that ignoring racism was not working.

Suddenly, I realized, I needed to make room. I needed to be willing to be left out, to not matter sometimes – all White people do.

It still took a few years to have the clarity and courage to make large curricular changes like replacing Homer's *Odyssey* with Richard Wright's *Black Boy* for tenth graders. Odysseus is lauded as the everyman who carries our consciousness through temptation and trial to his rightful place. Odysseus makes many mistakes, but, with Athena's help, he finally reclaims his home from the men who have overtaken it through clear thinking, restraint and the sword. It's hard to put him aside. Richard Wright's story carries our consciousness through the hardships of a Black boy growing up in the South in the early 1900s. Instead of storms at sea, he faces crippling poverty, a family in crisis and the real threat of death. In the place of island captivity, he faces the prison of his role as a Black boy who must stand aside, appear to be mindless and laugh away all injustice. Wright's version of 20 years away from home is the withholding of an education, the opportunities to work and to pursue his dream of being a writer. He is victorious and overcomes the power and rage of the White world, more powerful than Poseidon's against Odysseus, through a love for nature, an independent moral compass, and an individuality that draws meaning from all things, even suffering. Recognizing that he needs to wrestle himself free from what keeps him from his rightful destiny, Wright says, "In me was shaping a yearning for a kind of consciousness, a mode of being that the way of life about me had said could not be, must not be, and upon which the penalty of death had been placed. Somewhere in the dead of the southern night my life had switched onto the wrong track and without my knowing it, the locomotive of my heart was rushing down a dangerously steep slope, heading for a collision, heedless of the warning red lights that blinked all about me, the sirens and the bells and the screams that filled the air." My students are riveted and moved by Richard Wright's story, which is a contemporary story and universal one as well. I am fortunate to witness the way literature transforms young people. I am moved now, as I watch my tenth graders becoming better people, inwardly elevated and victorious, travelling through the body and mind of a Black hero. Actually, it doesn't even matter if *Black Boy* is better than *The Odyssey*. Just as the White people in the theater during *Fairview* needed to make room, Homer can make room, and Wolfram von Eschenbach can, any one of them. That is right, now, in this time.

At Green Meadow, we want to understand and transform the way White people dominate the curriculum, the stories that are told, the history recounted, the images displayed, the examples brought, the expectations set, the

rules, decisions, and priorities upheld. It has not been easy to make changes in such a well-established institution. In the high school, we started slowly around 2008 (when we rejoiced in the election of President Obama), when Alix Christofides took over the African-American literature class from Leah Henderson, who had taught it for many years. Previously, African-American literature or Russian literature was offered to the senior class. That way we didn't need to remove anything "important" like Russian literature entirely. So, it was an important move when Alix and I decided to let other things go in order to require African-American literature. As we moved forward, removing some texts did not only have to do with making room. In the past 10 years, we experienced that some of our most treasured texts, like Goethe's *Faust,* Wolfram Von Eschenbach's *Parzival,* and Homer's *Odyssey*, were not moving our students as they had in the past. That is not to say that students were not able to enter into the work and recognize timeless truths and the way they resonated within them personally. Rather, the timeless truths of White men regularly peppered our work with sour bits, outright racism, misogyny, White supremacy and people missing from the narrative we saw in our world, especially Black people.

We are teaching *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in the place of *Parzival* now.

My colleague, Alix, and I kept looking at the English curriculum. In reality, making changes was easy once we landed on something right (it took me a long time to land and decide on *Black Boy*, for example) and it felt like we were enriching the students. In our effort to make things right, the key to recreating the world was our feeling for truth, the courage given to us by our high school colleagues and our imagination for what could more rightly, for our time, meet the needs of our students.

While I saw the ship clearly before, I never saw the destination. I now know that key to a successful sailing voyage is knowledge of destination, wind, tide, and weather. I have a clear destination in mind now: a place where all students are elevated in part because Black people in the United States are recognized and realized as they should be. Wolfram Von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, "a brave man slowly wise," learns that the key to becoming the Grail king is the question, "What ails thee?" And yes, asking this question is a key. But there is also something powerful in just standing aside and making room for all the wonders that Black people bring.

We are teaching *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in the place of *Parzival* now. African-American literature is a required class, not an elective. In what was called *Transcendentalism* and then *American Voices* block, we have added and increased the focus on Frederick Douglass, George Moses Horton and added Harriet E. Wilson. Black contemporary poets like Amanda S.C. Gorman and Gregory Pardlo (one of my favorites!) and many, many Black poets speak the voice of America today to our students of poetry. We study Black lives through film starting with "I Am Not Your Negro," based on the writing of James Baldwin. The eleventh grade study of comparison/contrast was, for 30 years, a comparison of two poems: one an excerpt from the *Iliad* by Homer, and the other a poem by W.H. Auden. In the last few years, students have worked on a comparison of two artworks instead. This allows them to look at western and non-western works side by side, if they wish, and many students have chosen the work of Kerry James Marshall, Kehinde Wiley, J.M. Basquiat, Hale Woodruff, and Jacob Lawrence. This year, Alix changed the art history main lesson to systematically look at concurrent cultures while examining "Western Art." She also spent more time on Native American art. She made sure to include contemporary artists of color and artists from diverse ethnic backgrounds who are being much more recognized, (by the Obamas in their selection of Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sherald as portraitists) to show how the international/global art scene has changed. And sometimes, I find myself bringing Black voices, artists, and accomplishments that are not well known but *should be*.

In our thoughts, Waldorf teachers look to the spirit of our time for guidance. We have been listening and trying to hear and understand for some time. We are not cut out for rash moves, but we are eager to make progress. Now I feel the wind at our backs. Maybe we can find our collective home.

A Complete List of Texts and Authors used in Green Meadow's English Classes

Antigone, by Sophocles

A Midsummer Night's Dream, by William Shakespeare

A Raisin in the Sun, by Lorraine Hansberry

Moby Dick, by Herman Melville

Red Scarf Girl, by Jiang Ji-Li

Black Boy, by Richard Wright

Inferno, by Dante Alighieri

The Autobiography of Malcolm X, by Malcolm X and Alex Haley

Canterbury Tales, by Geoffrey Chaucer

Hamlet, by William Shakespeare
The Tempest, by William Shakespeare
Essays and speeches by Ralf Waldo Emerson
Essays and speeches by Frederick Douglass
Walden, by Henry David Thoreau
Poems, by George Horton
Our Nig, by Harriet Wilson
Their Eyes Were Watching God, by Zora Neale Hurston
Poems by Emily Dickinson
Short Stories by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Films

I Am Not Your Negro, by Raoul Peck, based on the life and works of James Baldwin

Malcolm X, by Spike Lee

If Beale Street Could Talk, by Barry Jenkins based on the novel by James Baldwin

Moonlight, by Barry Jenkins

Queen and Slim, by Melina Matsoukas

Black Panther, by Ryan Coogler based on the Marvel comics book *Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet, Book 1*, text by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Black Writers Added to the H.S. List for Independent Reading

August Wilson plays
Books by Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, by Maya Angelou
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, by H. Jacobs
I am Malala, by C. Lamb and M. Yousafzai
Becoming, by Michelle Obama
The Life of Olaudah Equiano, by Olaudah Equiano
Narrative of Sojourner Truth, by Sojourner Truth
Twelve Years a Slave, by S. Northup
The Beautiful Struggle, by Ta-Nehisi Coates
Americanah, by Chimamanda Adichie
Between the World and Me, by Ta-Nehisi Coates
Native Son, by Richard Wright
The Twelve Tribes of Hattie, by A. Mathis
The Invisible Man, by Ralph Ellison
The Known World, by Edward Jones
White Fragility, by Robin DiAngelo

Black Poets Read in the Art of Poetry and African American Literature Classes

Gwendolyn Brooks
Lucille Clifton
Langston Hughes
Paul Laurence Dunbar
Claude McKay
(and other classic Black writers)
Joy Harjo
Terrance Hayes
Tracy K Smith
Jericho Brown
Hanif Abdurraqib
Tina Chang
Natalie Diaz
Martin Espada
Kimiko Hahn
Nathalie Handal
Saeed Jones
Kofi Awoonor
Assetou Xango
Zeina Hashem Beck
Chimako Tada
And others

Defne Caldwell *graduated from Green Meadow Waldorf School in 1987. Before joining the Green Meadow faculty full-time, in 2006, she taught English and humanities for six years at Ramapo Indian Hills High School, in Franklin Lakes, NJ. She also taught literature, college writing, and creative writing courses at Ramapo College in Mahwah, NJ, for four years. Defne completed independent Foundation Studies under Signe Schaefer and trained as a Waldorf teacher with John Wulsin. At Green Meadow, she teaches high school English and drama and is advisor to the Class of 2023. She currently serves as High School Co-Chair and Humanities Department Chair. Defne is also the parent of two alumnae daughters who attended Green Meadow.*

Activists, Academics, and Bridgebuilders

Selim Tlili

"Stand up if you think that this school is racist!" The senior leading the Students for Inclusivity, Diversity and Equal Rights club (SIDER) demanded at an upper school assembly meeting organized during Black History Month.

The room was silent as we all looked at one another. Then, all the members of SIDER stood up in unison. One by one, other students stood up. Some members of the younger faculty rose to their feet. Eventually, about half of the people in the room were standing.

The effects of this Inclusivity and Diversity event were subtle but pervasive. Faculty discussed the meeting in hushed tones when we had the opportunity to talk in private. Everybody hesitated to share opinions, and when we did, our comments were prefaced by multiple qualifiers about "not wanting to overstep or speak over a student's lived experience" and other such modifiers. We remarked about how the dialogue had dramatically shifted in tone over the last couple of years. This level of hostility was new. I couldn't speak to the novelty of this anger but I certainly did not notice it in any single meeting since I joined the school back in 2016. Suddenly it was clear that sometime, recently, the rules had changed and we were collectively caught by surprise.

A recent search on Google Trends for terms like "anti-racist," "white fragility," and "white supremacy" supports this sense that something has shifted. According to Google Trends, searches for these terms have increased over a hundredfold after 2017.

Usually, what happens in the "real world" trickles slowly into school life. But in this case what is happening in schools is magnifying out into spaces beyond educational institutions and academia. Ideas about language, privilege, and historical injustice, concepts that have mostly served as discussion points in classrooms for decades, have now become the topic of public debate. For people who have not been immersed in the conversation in recent years, it seems like the rules of what is considered acceptable had changed.

Among the demands made by faculty at one Upper East Side prep school was the call for half of all donations made to the school to be passed on to New York public schools if the school did not manage to match its student demographics to the one of the public school system in the next five years. Additionally, all students would be required to take classes on Black liberation, and all adults at the school would be required to complete annual anti-racist training. Tracked courses would have to be eliminated if Black students did not reach full parity in the next three years.

Another private school saw students engaged in a four-day sit-in because of a viral video, taken several years earlier, showing students making racist jokes. Perhaps less than five years ago, the case would have ended with some kind of disciplinary action against the offending students; that would have put the matter to a close. This time, a demand for a meaningful response came from the student body, calling on the school to mandate bias training for all faculty and staff, hire more teachers of color, provide more funding for scholarships for students of color, and implement mandatory courses in Black and Indigenous history. It seemed that every progressive school was going through some similar kind of "great awokening."

It's good for rules to change, but it now seems that the "Overton Window," the range of political viewpoints that are considered acceptable in a given time frame, had moved so much to a certain extreme that now many people like me, who were firmly entrenched in the liberal camp, are now finding themselves more closely agreeing with the center right. This shift has led to a tremendous amount of friction. Things that were once acceptable are no longer acceptable, but there was no lag time allowed for people to catch up to this transformation. All of the sudden we are told that "students have been demanding things for years and there has been no change." Teachers, who consider themselves to be a rather liberal group overall, were feeling incredibly guilty for disparities that they did not create. The guilt about these disparities made for an interesting turn of events that allowed Upper East Side private school students to lecture their teachers, even though, by every objective global measure, these students are a part of the most privileged people to ever exist on the planet.

This is the context under which I was asked to serve as co-adviser to SIDER.

I did not want to do this. I did not want to get involved in work that would be confrontational. My own sense

of autonomy and a philosophy of "to each his own" made this role quite unappealing to me. I've seen how discussing issues around race, gender, and social justice can bring out the worst in people. I've seen online "struggle sessions," where statements as innocuous as "the new Star Wars movies are terrible" have led to accusations of sexism. To put myself potentially in the line where my inherently imperfectly articulated utterances could subject me to cancel culture is something I studiously wished to avoid.

I understood why I was being asked. With an Arab father from North Africa and a Puerto Rican mother I do not look like I fit into either group, nor in the American dominant group. The absence of full acceptance in the groups of my ethnic heritage and the feeling that I don't belong, by name or culture or temperament, in the dominant WASP culture that was my high school and college experience, had left me jaded and angry. I saw a lot of bogeymen and hypocrisy, which I reveled in identifying and pointing out. The term "woke" wasn't *en vogue* in the late 90s, but I was quite woke for the time.

> It seemed that every progressive school was going through some similar kind of "great awokening".

And being woke meant I was angry. I was irritated by the fact that French was a more popular class than Spanish at my school, even though there are far more Spanish speakers living in NYC than French speakers.

I resented that I was asked "are you a US citizen?" when I told people that I am from Puerto Rico. The fact that so many people in college didn't know that Puerto Rico is part of the United States smacked of both racial arrogance and the ignorance of an education system that does not acknowledge its colonial history.

I was incredibly angry about the fact that after 9/11, I heard a lot more jokes about my Arab heritage from friends. I was called a "terrorist" and other names that are inappropriate to mention here by people that I consider to be my friends far more than I heard those phrases earlier in my life. I was livid that nobody could consider that maybe the issues in the Middle East are more complex than the summarized version that the Arabs just wanted to go "all jihad on our ass."

I held grudges about a great many issues. And that's ok. I was at the stage in life where I was supposed to be angry. But I'm no longer in that emotional state. The last twenty years allowed me peace in understanding my cultural identity. I have found my place; here, at this institution and in the wider community. I have been searching for the better part of a decade for a career that I could grow in and I finally found it. Now I was being asked to venture into an aspect of my life that I felt I had mostly resolved.

But it was also clear that my own past experiences fully justify why I should be serving as the student club's advisor. Even if I did not share the exact same experiences as my students, my feelings as a young man were the same as theirs. At the same time, I also share the liberal intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment, promoting the belief that I should focus on teaching my students *how* to think, not *what* to think.

Given that writing is a way to clarify and understand one's own thoughts, this essay is my meager attempt to distill an understanding, my own understanding, first of what appears to me as a significant gap between different faculty members on the role of teachers in negotiating questions of diversity, and, second, how our view of the world affects the way we teach impressionable high school students. Finally, I hope to be able to reconcile whatever answers I could produce for these two questions. These observations, while intellectually informed by the work of scholars like E.D. Hirsch, author of *Why Knowledge Matters* (2016), and Jonathan Haidt, author of *Can't We All Disagree More Constructively* (2016) and co-author of *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* (2018), are based on my 15 years of teaching, discussing, and connecting with teachers from across a diverse range of schools.

Activist vs. Academic

There seems to be a spectrum of thought around questions of social justice that could be categorized by three dominant mindsets among teachers. The distinction between Progressive and Conservative does not offer accurate labels, since the vast majority of teachers identify as liberal. Instead, I will use the terms "Academic" and "Activist" to explore the differences.

If I look at the teachers I know and take into account the reasons—mostly, *ideals*—that made these individual choose education as their profession, I see that the vast majority of them are well-meaning liberals who do not focus on issues of social justice. They tend to want to get along with their colleagues and they tend to be liberal minded and willing to go with the flow; at the same time, they do not explore these social justice issues of their own accord. To the left and right of this assumed majority are the "activist" and the "academic."

The "academic" mindset views the world as determined primarily by individual choices and efforts. Our

success in life is mostly determined by the consistency by which we work and our ability to delay present gratification for future benefit. This viewpoint predominates in physical education, as well as in math and science departments. The "academics" mostly belong to Gen X or even older generations. In contrast, the "activist" attitude is found more commonly among younger faculty. They are more likely to be teaching in the humanities or involved in administration or admissions. These differences are mirrored in other intellectually driven professions, such as journalism, where a fundamental ideological disagreement between older opinion editors and a younger generation of journalists has resulted in many editors resigning their positions, as we have seen this past year at the *New York Times*.

The activists tend to describe the world in terms of the gross inequalities they see and look at these inequities as something that every single person who benefits from the existing social order has a moral responsibility to address. From the activist's perspective, societal barriers are the main determinant of our life outcomes. Teachers, in this framework, bear a moral responsibility to educate and to expose the differences in outcomes; they should express the demand that whatever actions necessary must be taken in order to correct such differences. In the context of school, this translates to a focus on increasing representation of diverse identities in the school community and in the curriculum. The activist is more likely to agree with the statement, "our school's history curriculum is too focused on straight, dead, white men."

The academic, on the other hand, is focused on the idea of education as a means to creating common ground. From the academic's point of view, we are all inheritors of mankind's intellect. Homer has bequeathed all of humanity invaluable gifts in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as has Newton and every other intellectual giant upon whose shoulders we stand. The color of their skin and their sexuality, from this point of view, are irrelevant in comparison to their intellectual contributions. They might agree that there is room to expand the curriculum, but they do not approach it with the same sense of mission that the activist feels.

Both points of view have merit. It is factually correct to say that intellectual heritage is just as real as cultural heritage. It is also correct to say that there are significant disparities in achievement and outcomes among racial groups. These disparate outcomes are the result of many factors, and it would be insulting to suggest that history plays little to no part in those differences. It is also understandable when activists get upset with academics for "playing devil's advocate" or approaching these questions solely as a theoretical, even hypothetical exercise.

Many schools have spent the last two years focused on acknowledging and attempting to rectify where they have fallen short of ideals of inclusivity. Mission statements have been changed; pronouns were added to email signatures; restorative justice consultants were hired; affinity groups were created; implicit bias tests were taken; mandatory anti-racist professional development seminars were held; many more cultural festivals are being celebrated. But nobody is happy.

From the activist point of view, the work being done now should have been accomplished a long time ago and is woefully insufficient compared to what still needs to be accomplished. For the liberal majority, the reality is that many teachers feel guilty and self-conscious about discussing issues around race and often feel afraid to say or do the wrong thing. This fear puts them in a state of paralysis or incentivizes a superficial exploration of the issues. The problem from the academic's point of view is that if nothing that is being done seems to be good enough, why bother getting involved at all?

To illustrate these differences with an example: the liberal teacher may be in favor of beginning important school meetings with a land acknowledgement of the Indigenous people. The activist teachers might think that this is insufficient and would want to significantly expand the curriculum to teach more about Indigenous peoples. The academic leaning teachers are sanguine about the idea but are worried that the students won't learn enough about the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution if they devote more time to Indigenous people. If this were to become a discussion, it would most likely be a civil one among friendly colleagues, but the differences would become apparent if every faction were to articulate its opinions on the issue.

> In order to do this work of bridging the divide I needed to understand the rules by which students were operating and the narrative that framed how they view the world.

We need activists – activists see the proverbial forest and share a large moral truth that needs to be stated. Activists keep curricula from ossifying. The work of academics can be too cerebral and pay insufficient attention to the emotional needs of students. Students shouldn't only read the works of dead white men.

We need academics – academics see the individual trees and share a contextual truth that needs to be

explored. Academics keep a sense of continuity and rigor in the work. Education can provide shared norms and build human capital. The work of activists can be too heart driven and pay insufficient attention to the practical needs of students. Ideas build off each other and if we view the world of literature as a kind of continued conversation between books across history then the works of Homer and Shakespeare, that have stood the test of time and influenced countless other authors, are incredibly important and can't be summarily dismissed as part of the heritage handed down by "a bunch of dead white men."

So how do we reconcile these outlooks in our communities? I am far more of an academic than an activist, even though I agree with the activist point of view that changes are necessary. Can I be a bridge builder? Can I help my community see the forests and the trees? Am I capable of finding the common ground between these two points of view? Do my own intellectual biases make me a poor candidate to close that gap? I wasn't sure but I was determined to try.

> Where the tone last year was hostile, with students implying that some of their teachers are racist, they are now respectful and collaborative.

Year One

My first year as advisor to the Students for Inclusivity, Diversity and Equal Rights club was not successful. The students did not trust me. They liked me as a teacher but they were pretty sure that I was planted by the administration to keep their revolution in check. They weren't totally wrong. I wasn't being directed by anyone but I also did spend a lot of time trying to argue with their point of view. I did it as gently as I knew how but I was essentially trying to tell them that their entire way of viewing the world was incorrect. I would site statistics to support my point of view and ask them questions that I knew they lacked the background knowledge to answer; I expected that they would be dazzled by my brilliance and by the facts and change their point of view. Looking back, it is a wonder that I thought such an approach would have even the slightest chance of succeeding with anyone, let alone with a teenager.

The year culminated with a school-wide Zoom assembly in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. In that meeting, one of the student organization's board members stated to the whole school: "You're either with us or you're against us." It wasn't clear what exactly was meant by this divisive statement, but it was emblematic of the feeling that the student club members held about the school as a whole. Other students quietly spoke to me and told me that their peers were harassing those who did not post the black square racial justice solidarity symbol on their social media accounts. At a separate meeting with the club's board, the students asked me why the demands they made to the school four months prior have not been met yet. They didn't accept that we had made progress on four of their seven demands and that Covid had slowed down a lot of projects. One of the students said, "The school is dragging its heels on hiring teachers of color because they're racist."

It had not been my intention to argue with the students. I was sympathetic to the fact that collectively the nation was grappling with the devastating events that took place in Minneapolis a few days earlier and that emotions were raw. But I could not let the students make accusations about teachers without challenging their logic. I asked this student to name a single racist teacher at the school. He refused to do so. I pushed harder than I should have on this point but I would not allow a student to make a blanket accusation without a single bit of evidence to support such an assertion. I asked the board members questions I knew they couldn't answer. I asked them to reflect on population demographics, the percentage of teachers of color in NYC, the history of Brown vs. Board of Ed, Equal Employment Opportunity laws and other topics that pertain to this discussion. I used my greater depth of knowledge against them like a cudgel.

The truth was that their accusation of the school of being racist hurt, and a petty part of me wanted to hurt them back. It hurt to hear them accuse my colleagues, who spend a tremendous amount of time thinking how to deliver the best education they could, of such a terrible thing. It hurt that they would paint us all in such a prejudiced light when they spent all this time supposedly fighting against prejudice. In keeping their accusations vague they were damning all of us, intentionally or not, either as racists or as tacitly accepting of racists. At the end of this meeting the students were emotionally drained and the two faculty members that joined us wouldn't speak to me. I certainly didn't feel good about my "victory."

Over the summer I did a lot of thinking. I realized that in order to do this work of bridging the divide I needed to understand the rules by which students were operating and the narrative that framed how they view the world. I read *White Fragility* to understand the language that was being used to talk about issues of racism. I read

How to be an Anti-Racist to better understand the goals of the movement. I read *Caste* to see alternative ways to frame the narrative by other activists. I read *1491*, to get a better perspective on the Americas prior to Columbus, and several essays by James Baldwin, to get a greater historical sense of the intellectual underpinnings of the social justice movement. I would never consider myself an expert even as I continue my exploration of these topics, but I believe I managed to develop enough of an understanding of the lens through which students are viewing the world to articulate the unspoken rules by which they were operating.

Year Two

I needed to become crystal clear on what I wanted to achieve. In the previous year, all I wanted to do was try and make students see the world differently. That was a mistake. It isn't my place to convince them that *I* am right no matter how gently I articulate my point of view. I've said throughout my entire career, "I don't want to teach my students *what* to think, I want to teach them *how* to think." Despite that mantra, I had to recognize that a large part of me did want to make my students think just like me. I can't say that part of me has disappeared but my greater awareness of that desire has helped to tamp down on the impulse.

I distilled my objectives into two measurable goals: I wanted students to make a clear, positive, and collaborative contribution to the school community. It was important to me that students could take on the mission of bringing change to the school in a way that would be meaningful to them without falling into the misguided view of "students against the racist teachers." Instead, I was hoping that their activism would be characterized as a collaboration between students, faculty, and administration.

I also wanted to help students avoid nurturing and cultivating resentment. Resentment is a dangerous emotion that can drive people into self-destructive behavior. We all can get addicted to the dopamine hit that we get when we find something that confirms our self-righteous view of the world. It is not healthy for students to have such significant resentment against their school community; it hinders their ability to focus on school work, which in turn could exacerbate many of the gaps that students are concerned about in the first place. If you spend your life nursing grievances, you will never run out of grievances.

Members of the community feel that students should not have to bear the burden of changing the school culture; that burden, they believe, should rest upon the faculty.

As a biology teacher with a keen interest in evolutionary biology, I have read many of the works of Charles Darwin, Richard Dawkins, Steven Pinker, Ernst Mayr, Stephen Jay Gould, E.O. Wilson, Daniel Lieberman, and other scientists who have written extensively on various aspects of human evolution. From their works I have come to believe that humanity's tribal nature makes us hyper aware of two things: our perceived differences, no matter how tiny they may seem, and any appearance of unequal distribution. This focus on differences is why Capulets and Montagues could never come together, and why it is unnatural for an Ohio State graduate to marry the proud bearer of a University of Michigan diploma. In a hunter-gatherer tribe, any evidence that someone was hoarding food rather than sharing it would lead to drastic consequences for that person. These traits allowed us to survive in small groups successfully for thousands of years.

But as human life has predominately shifted from small kin groups to dense collectives, those traits that helped keep us alive have turned on us. When we compared ourselves to our neighbors, we did not mind the relatively small disparities in social status, but when we got a chance to compare our lives to the carefully curated image of a sponsored celebrity's life, we felt sucker-punched by the perceived disparity and its associated massive injustice. This is why there will never be an end to resentment – there will never be an end to perceived disparities. But we do not need to do this. We can override this if we focus on our common ground and shared sense of community and mission.

My challenge, then, is how to help steer my students away from our tribal instincts that focus on social grievance as the central paradigm and towards a focus on what is best for the school community without pushing them to think like me. It is natural for them to go into this kind of romantic view that makes the students see themselves as freedom fighters against the establishment that only cares about preserving an unjust status quo. In many ways, it is appropriate for them to go into this moral stance. I can't deprive them of their indignant phase, but I also do not want them to stay mired in it to the point that it overwhelms their ability to appreciate all the tremendous privilege that is in their life.

A shared sense of mission is pivotal to overcoming our natural tribal nature, so this year I decided to guide SIDER in working on two particular goals: discussing disparities in a larger context, and making concrete

suggestions for the school to diversify its curriculum. Students demanded what they imagined as a more diverse curriculum, but they did not take up the work of exploring it carefully and coming up with recommendations where the curriculum should be diversified. Their demand was simply left on the table with the expectation that it would be taken up and seen to by the faculty. Their general suggestion, to see more biographical history of important people of color, was specific and offered valuable insight into what they needed to see in their classes. This information, which we shared with the Humanities department, gave the faculty some insight into the students' thinking and will continue to inform discussions on future main lessons and track units.

> The truth was that the students' accusation of the school of being racist hurt, and a petty part of me wanted to hurt them back.

Sometime in October I called the SIDER board for a meeting. I had a frank talk with the members, telling them why I chose to serve as advisor to this particular group. I told them a bit of my own history, the frequent "random" screenings at the airport, the fact that my renewed passport was late in coming even though my wife and I have submitted our renewal request at the same time. I told them how I can't really prove that my Arab name has anything to do with such incidents but that it seems more likely that it does than not.

I wouldn't say that things immediately turned around after that meeting but I think the challenges of social distancing, coupled with some space from the injustices of this past spring, helped to quell a lot of the resentment in the students' hearts. It allowed us to start the year on a new page at the very least.

The second thing I wanted was for the students to develop the ability to discuss complex topics in depth. SIDER went from being a grievance circle where students complained about what they think is unfair in school to a place where they could thoroughly explore issues that concerned them. The students led discussions on the history curriculum, the concept of whitewashing history, why all humans develop stereotypes, what are micro-aggressions and how do they operate.

Shifting away from finger pointing to exploring large and complex topics created some interesting effects. The number of students who participated in discussions increased dramatically. Many students, particularly the Caucasian ones, were previously afraid to express an opinion out of fear of saying the "wrong thing." Now students were willing to engage in a back-and-forth dialogue and even disagree a bit. The danger of disagreement was removed in these discussions, which allowed for students to explore different ideas. Such discussions allowed me to ask questions to help students clarify their thinking on the given topics. When we discussed micro-aggressions, for example, I asked the students whether they wanted the school to monitor or have punitive consequences for inappropriate messaging that occurs outside of school. Some students made a case for the school getting involved, while other students disagreed. Still, the disagreement was cordial and it focused on the issues discussed in a constructive way. SIDER has become a "safe space" to honestly discuss some topics in a way that many institutions currently seem to lack.

We also brought in speakers to discuss topics external to the school and its internal concerns. We had a Judge come in and speak about her experience as a Black female presiding in the Bronx criminal court. She discussed the challenge of recognizing the disparities in criminal sentencing and her commitment to following the law while still offering compassion to youthful offenders. The Judge graciously extended an invitation to students to observe criminal court proceedings virtually, which was an incredibly exciting opportunity. Another guest speaker was a reporter who spoke of his experience working as a Black man in the white-dominated field of journalism. More speakers are lined up for the rest of the year, including a state senator, an actor, and a female police officer who will speak about her experience protecting NYC during the George Floyd protests. Some of our students have taken advantage of these events to apply for internships with the speakers' organizations.

This year I have noticed a tremendous difference in how the SIDER students perceive the school. They are still frustrated with the pace at which they feel progress is happening, but they do not appear to be resentful. Where the tone last year was hostile, with students implying that some of their teachers are racist, they are now respectful and collaborative. They have skin in the game and they recognize that their actions are contributing positively to the community. There is a sense of optimism in the work they are doing.

It is difficult to overstate the positive impact that SIDER is having on the school, especially this year. Because of COVID, very few of the school's student organizations have been able to operate effectively. It took us a few months to get the ball rolling, but eventually SIDER was able to offer a collaborative discussion space for

students, which has been sorely lacking. SIDER offers the community an opportunity to operate as a community.

My approach to organizing this inclusivity and diversity student club is not without its detractors. The more activist-leaning members of the community feel that students should not have to bear the burden of changing the school culture; that burden, they believe, should rest upon the faculty. Several members of the SIDER board feel that there is still way too much focus on talk and not enough focus on action. But as Larry David once said, "A good compromise is when all parties are dissatisfied."

One of the wonderful things about a community is that people can hold different views and still be valued. I began this endeavor with significant discomfort about voicing even mild disagreements. Now I express myself without fear. It is clear to everyone that we all want what is best for the community even if we do not agree exactly what "best" means or how to get there. I still have concerns about sharing my thoughts with students because what they have in passion they lack in the ability to think through. But even if I annoy or even seriously upset some of the board members when I express my opinions, I am confident that I have built sufficient goodwill over the years as a teacher, advisor, and even occasionally as a fellow classmate who sits in on classes taught by my colleagues, that I can express my disagreement without lasting damage or loss of trust.

Looking back at my work with SIDER, I appreciate the opportunity that came about from stepping up to do work that I didn't want to do. My fear of confrontation and judgement, the proverbial dragon, was guarding a treasure trove that held inherent value for me, the freedom to express my worldview to my community without fear of reprisal. My work with SIDER has subtly changed my view of my work. While my main job is still to impart high school students with a greater scientific understanding of the world, my underlying motivation has changed to help students look at the world as objectively as they can, so that they can muster their resources to take responsibility for making the best changes that they can for their community. If I can help students embrace their own sense of agency and use that to make measurable changes in their own way, I will know that my time with them has been valuable.

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Diversity and the Symphony of Human Hearts

Elan Leibner with Douglas Gerwin

Part 1: Aphorisms

I. How Love begat the world

In the innermost core of being lives Love, True Self.
True Self begat a Hierarchy of Beings.
In them It sparkles.
Those Beings spoke a world into existence.
In the world twinkle sparks of the Beings, but not of True Self,
Except
That world unfolds upwards toward Human Beings,
In whom IS a spark of True Self.
That spark, at the dimmed step downwards, is called the Higher Self.
Further still, it is the ego. Not Self, but a self, contracted and small.

Human beings have incarnated over and over, dimming the light of True Self,
Though occasionally brightening it, too.
The journey has led to the land of forgetfulness,
Where True Self, and the Beings, and even the Higher Self
Are forgotten,
Or, at most, are found only in stories,
So we may return one day, of our own volition,
Through self, to Higher Self, to Love.

II. Karma

Before returning to this created world,
Human beings veil the Higher Self with Karmic necessities:
The veils of
gender,
race,
ethnicity,
appearance,
disabilities,

All the things that aren't Self,
But attributes of self.

They grow up, and a choir of other selves chants at them:
You are *this* veil, and
That veil, and
This one, too,

And *his* veil has smothered you, and
Hers belittled you,

Or

Your veil is evil!
Bow down!
Apologize!
Repent!
Regret!
The other selves cannot be Selves because of YOU!

Wait.

What?

III. Interlude

"Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
Oh no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken."

(From Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare)

IV. The Work

The task of the teacher is to help the self awaken to Self,
Reach for True Self now and then.
See a child,
Love a child.
Seed in the child a knowledge of Self,
A yearning for Goodness, Beauty, Truth.
These are not mere social constructs;

They are the language of the gods.

If, in my veiled blindness, I missed the eyes of a child,
That's on me.
If, in our veiled blindness, we missed the eyes of children,
That's on us.

But we will not seed a Self
By relentlessly hectoring on veils and self,

Policing words,
Apportioning representation.

We will only confuse and obfuscate
And bind the ever-thicker veils to the self.

V. Love again

Sing me your song,
And I will open my heart to hear your Self,
Whispering between your words,
And help your self move sideways, modestly,
To make a little space.

Part 2: Narrative

For over a year now, we have been engaged as a society in an examination of deep-seated social inequities as we struggle to find ways to redress four and more centuries of injustice. This widespread debate about racism, diversity, equity, and the need to secure basic human rights for all constituents in our society is often couched in terms of the basic tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality. These principles are deeply rooted in the philosophical soil of postmodernism, which also gave rise to other relatively recent disciplines such as Postcolonialism, Queer Theory, Gender Studies, and other forms of contemporary discourse.[1]

In this essay we aim to introduce into this discussion a few anthroposophical ideas—two in particular—that offer another possible perspective in this debate. We suggest these ideas as a way of broadening the terms of the discussion to include elements otherwise omitted or simply denied a voice. Further, they may serve as fertile soil and grounding for healthy human interactions, including relationships between historically marginalized populations and those socially dominant groups of European origin.

First Idea: The Evolution of Consciousness

Human beings have incarnated over and over,
dimming the light of True Self,
Though occasionally brightening it, too.
The journey has led to the land of forgetfulness,
Where True Self, and the Beings, and even the Higher Self
Are forgotten,
Or, at most, are found only in stories,
So we may return one day, of our own volition,
Through self, to Higher Self, to Love.

The Evolution of Consciousness is Rudolf Steiner's description of a journey that humanity has undertaken since the very beginning of cosmic existence. In the last few thousand years, it has assumed a more perceptible form and consists, broadly, in the gradual loss of our connection to our spiritual origins in order to gain freedom of thought and mastery of the material world.

During the course of this journey, which is far from ended, different groups within humanity take on a sort of "public service assignment," losing spiritual capacities and gaining individual consciousness and material mastery sooner or more intensively than other groups. It is crucial to understand that this description does *not* mean there are better or superior peoples, for two reasons: First, we incarnate again and again, so each one of us has been born into multiple and different ethnic groups. We may gain experience, wisdom, and karmic debts along the way but no inherent value by dint of birth into this or that group. The second reason is that the ultimate goal of this journey is the development, in freedom, of love in its spiritual aspect. There is no possible way to ascribe collective advantages to any one group in its striving towards this goal. Love is a free deed accomplished individually; no position of power or position of weakness precludes or guarantees the unfolding of spiritual capacities.

Since humanity has been journeying from epoch to epoch and changing its consciousness along the way, it is natural that conceptions of reality change over time. We have a dim sense of this, for example, in that the vast majority of people today who worship in Christian, Jewish, or Muslim congregations read and teach their children about miracles. And yet those same parents

1 Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, for instance, describe the core tenets of these disciplines in their book *Cynical Theories* (*Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything About Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* [USA: Pitchstone Publishing, 2020]). One does not have to endorse the authors' commentaries on these disciplines to appreciate the thoroughness of their research. As Pluckrose and Lindsay describe them, the twin approaches to the fundamental ailments of our time are characterized by a few signature principles:

- Personal narrative (or "lived experience") outweighs data and evidence. Evidence can be debated, but personal experience of discrimination cannot.
- Interactions between people of different racial groups in society will *always* be manifestations of racism and power structures.
- Language is a tool of power and privilege. In consequence, universal truths are an illusion, since there can be no absolute good, truth, or beauty, for these are social constructs designed to perpetuate power and privilege.
- To the degree that equity, the share of ownership, has been denied marginalized people, justice for them entails forcing a reversal of this uneven equity. As Ibram X. Kendi says, "The only solution for past discrimination is present discrimination. The only solution for present discrimination is future discrimination."
- People at the intersection of multiple discriminatory realities (for example, black, transgender, lesbian, and disabled) require special protections and privileges.
- Progress in remediating discrimination is to be measured in terms of equal outcomes: if people of color comprise 13% of the population, then 13% of wealth and power needs to be in their hands if this inequity is to be righted. Similar percentages must be achieved in every place where competition is present (school admissions, executive suites, cultural institutions, etc.).

would probably seek psychological advice if their child had ever claimed to have wrestled with an angel. In past centuries, miracles were accepted as something involving the intervention of divine beings, but this idea is no longer widely accepted, at least not in the same way. Another example: scientists admire Isaac Newton, but conveniently ignore the fact that he spent substantially more time on the mysteries of alchemy than on the empirical study of physics. From their point of view, Newton was still partially "trapped" in an age of ignorance and superstition, or he simply slipped back into it during the dotage of old age. Our point is not whether these scientists are right or wrong about Newton, but rather that they are implicitly acknowledging that his consciousness was different from their own. A further and related example from scientific study: what today we count as legitimate evidence (repeatability of an empirical experiment, for instance) would have been regarded as recently as medieval times as irrelevant to the pursuit of scientific knowledge. By the same token, what in medieval times would have counted as evidence or legitimate explanation—for instance, the presence of divine intervention in natural events—would today be treated as merely random chance or coincidence.

Just as a choir needs the full harmony of voices even if not all are equally strong, so each of our societal "songs" can have its own soprano, its own bass, its own alto, tenor, and other voices.

In other words, the same phenomenon in nature, seen by an Indian sage, an Egyptian pharaoh, a Medieval scholar, and a contemporary Nobel laureate scientist can be understood in completely different ways. Over long periods of time, the gaze of humanity has descended: from an upward gaze accompanied by the dismissal of the material as "maya" in ancient times to the gaze into the microscope and concomitant dismissal of the spiritual as being mere superstition. This shift in our consciousness has yielded a certain mastery over the material world and the freedom to think independently, but at the price of a lost connection to our spiritual origins. In societies such as the Nayaka in India or the Mbuti in Africa, we see people who still have a direct and matter-of-course connection with the spirit. Whereas a European of old may have labeled them "primitive," we can appreciate that, in their relationship to the spirit, they are much healthier as a society than we are. The challenge of modern humanity is to integrate our empirically acquired knowledge with the wisdom that still lives among those who haven't lost the spirit and to ensure that the benefits of this integration are available to all. A sizeable challenge, to be sure, but worth the striving.

If one allows that *every* human being cycles through the constellations of the cosmos, so to speak, learning to see and understand the world through successive incarnations and successive perspectives, then truth-seeking and meaning-making assume a new context: One's own perspective can be valid without excluding others'. To be sure, it is not therefore the case that all perspectives have equal merit. One can still be wrong, and the weight of evidence still matters. But just as a choir needs the full harmony of voices even if not all are equally strong, so each of our societal "songs" can have its own soprano, its own bass, its own alto, tenor, and other voices. Different songs will call out different leading voices. We need to recognize when our voice is required to carry a leading melody or cadence, when our contribution is to provide supporting harmonies, or even, heaven forbid, when our voice needs to keep quiet for a few bars.

In a society that desires this kind of polyphonic structure, we *converse* as a way to discover more truth, and we *partner* in an attempt to do more good. A conversation, as opposed to an argument, can yield new insights and understanding, and the mere engagement with another person is proof that we assume this to be possible. Similarly, partnership is a way to multiply our collective strength. Both a true conversation and a real partnership work as generators of completely new possibilities: they are not mere sums of two preexisting opinions or capacities, but incubators of genuine new beginnings. In that, they reach for the truly human: the creative potential harnessed for the good of all.

To be sure, there are legitimate differences within the voices of the liberal democratic project as a whole: those who call themselves "political liberals" will tend to favor the underdogs, seek to legislate in their favor, and include more government intervention in economic life through higher taxation and redistribution of wealth; those who name themselves "political conservatives" will favor the existing order, prefer a small and limited government, seek slow, gradual change, and prefer to focus on traditional institutions of society (family, congregation) over government programs. Though they debate fiercely, there has been basic agreement among these groups, at least historically, that they can and should coexist. Democratic societies, the quintessential manifestation of this liberal project, are possible only because citizens accept that the winning party can lead

their country even if the one they personally support has lost an election.

By their own statements, postmodernist thinkers (such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault) and their philosophical offshoots, such as adherents of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, have lost faith in this project altogether. For them the ideals and principles of this outlook are simply social constructs that serve as power structures of a ruling elite. The activism that grew out of their work challenges the standard logic of formed discourse—hypotheses supported by evidence—since these are taken to be tools of oppression. Hence air horns can be used to drown out public lectures of opponents on college campuses, for example. From their viewpoint, to engage with those of opposing views is a fruitless exercise since it entails negotiating with oppressors (or their Uncle Toms) on their oppressive terms.

Second Idea: Karma

Before returning to this created world,
Human beings veil Higher Self with Karmic necessities:
The veils of
gender,
race,
ethnicity,
appearance,
disabilities,

All the things that aren't Self,
But attributes of self.

They grow up, and a choir of other selves chants at them:
You *are this* veil, and
That veil, and
This *one*, too,
And his veil has smothered you, and
Hers belittled you,

Or

Your veil is evil!
Bow down!
Apologize!
Repent!
Regret!
The other selves cannot be Selves because of YOU!

Wait.

What?

Karma is the familiar concept of meeting in this life the consequences of past lives. In its anthroposophical context, karma is understood to be not some kind of cosmic punishment, but rather the lawful way in which the human spirit takes on a particular set of circumstances, primarily chosen for the physical instrument provided, that will allow it to make its desired progress by meeting (and, it is hoped, overcoming) necessary obstacles. Those obstacles can consist of relationships with individuals, with one's own body (as in the case of a disability), with society, or indeed with other groups of people. As an individual, one tries to find the most suitable physical configuration (physical body) with which to resolve past difficulties and take up the resulting challenges out of one's own yearning to grow closer to the better angels of one's nature.

Speculating about karma is an odious and fruitless pursuit. For the most part, we simply don't know why other people are born into their circumstances. We can rest assured, though, that however miserable, disenfranchised, or privileged we seem to be from without, our karma has blessed us and challenged us in ways that others will never fully comprehend. What seems so awful from outside may not feel that way seen from within, and what seems like a cosmic winning lottery ticket may not be so great from the perspective of the supposedly lucky winner. Be that as it may, the default mode of most modern people is that our cup of sorrows is always full. We experience criticism far more acutely than praise; illness far more acutely than health; what we crave far more acutely than what we already have. It is easier to be empathetic towards misery than towards success, for the latter begets jealousy much more easily than empathy. "Every time a friend succeeds, I die a little," in the words of Gore Vidal.

We come into the world bearing with us our individual and collective spiritual heritage, or what in our aphoristic opening poem is called "veils"; these veils are not our essential Self. We have to embrace them, but only so that we can let them go. Everything about our appearance and physical instrument is a series of veils, and, like a veil painting, one overlaps another, at once deepening the colors and obscuring the light. Our individual and collective challenge is to see through the veils, our own and others'. This seeing is not a seeing with the eyes, of course, but a seeing with the heart. Every time we fixate on the veil-ness of others, we weaken the ability to see them through the heart. It isn't that the veils are unimportant, for they serve as a challenge to be overcome, but they can be transcended only when we see the individual, the Self, through them.

A spiritually-based approach to karmic circumstances will not deny or ignore or dismiss the veils of gender, race, etc., but neither will it fixate on them. What matters is the persons' gifts and challenges rather than the

veils they wear. Individual agency is more important than group identity. Every time we see ourselves and our fellow human beings clearly, veil-less-ly, in their Self-identity, we accomplish a spiritual deed; every time we see ourselves or another person as primarily a veil identity, we remain blind to Self and bound to self.

Martin Luther King, Jr., exhorted us to see his children for the "content of their character rather than the color of their skin." This is how we will "hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope" and "transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood."

A Spiritually-Based Approach to Diversity in Waldorf Education

The Work

> The task of the teacher is to help the self awaken to Self,
> Reach for True Self now and then.
> See a child,
> Love a child.
> Seed in the child a knowledge of Self,
> A yearning for Goodness, Beauty, Truth.
> These are not mere social constructs;
> They are the language of the gods.
>
> If, in my veiled blindness, I missed the eyes of a child,
> That's on me.
> If, in our veiled blindness, we missed the eyes of children,
> That's on us.
>
> But we will not seed a Self
> By relentlessly hectoring on veils and self,
> Policing words,
> Apportioning representation.
>
> We will only confuse and obfuscate
> And bind the ever-thicker veils to the self.

There are two somewhat distinct yet related aspects to the question of diversity in Waldorf education, one having to do with children, the other with adult colleagues:

- The first and most important aspect is pedagogical one: How do we educate children of diverse backgrounds and varying personal circumstances in such a way that the Core Principles of Waldorf Education are enacted in relevant, authentic, and meaningful experiences for them?
- The second aspect has to do with adult relationships within a school community: How do we foster a work environment and a community spirit in which people's talents and interests are given room to flourish, regardless of their background, and at the same time allow for a healthy culture of debate and disagreement?

The gesture of our age, the age of the consciousness soul (inasmuch as it relates to interpersonal relationships), is one that we have previously characterized as *empathy*.[2] This compassionate gesture is thoroughly appropriate when meeting another person's veils. When we state that our ultimate goal is overcoming veil identity, we do not thereby ignore or diminish the fact that being seen (and treated) solely according to an identity determined by gender, race, ethnicity, or disability has been the cause of immense suffering for those whose identity incorporates these veils. In pointing to the essential spiritual humanity of every person, the reality of discrimination on the basis of veils is in no way denied. Our goal must be to transcend veils altogether while still recognizing the harm caused by seeing and treating persons solely in accordance with their perceived veils.

Pedagogical Considerations

When the Pedagogical Section Council of North America (PSC) drafted—then periodically revised—its "Core Principles of Waldorf Education" document, it deliberately left out any specific educational content. The only indications relative to the content of the curriculum are that it should be age-appropriate and taught using sound methodological principles. This omission was completely intentional and points to the need to make the content relevant, authentic, and meaningful to the students.

In recent conversations, Waldorf alumni of color have reported to us that they did not see themselves reflected in the curriculum and in the schools they attended: there were no heroes and heroines of color, and the faculty was mostly of European descent. The former observation, especially, raises an urgent criticism of the Waldorf curriculum and must be remedied, for in some of our practices, as opposed to our principles, we have been blind as a school movement to perspectives other than a traditional European one. The latter observation may prove to be of less central concern: a child needs good teachers, not necessarily teachers who look like the child. Part of growing up and getting initiated into society (which is one of the roles of school) is meeting role models. Teachers, whether they like it or not, model being a human being. It is a necessary aspect of being a good educator that one

2 Elan Leibner, "Between Our Demons and Our Gods," Research Bulletin XXII-2.

pays attention to the background and circumstances of one's students, and, to the extent that the students' veils are different from one's own, finds in told narratives, books, and art, examples of people with whom the students may find it easier to identify. The Nigerian storyteller Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in a poignant TED talk on "The Danger of a Single Story," offers a vivid perspective on the importance of finding multiple narratives for children.

Regardless of the personal veils a teacher wears, one can still develop a comprehensive cultural narrative. The essential point is to find two types of materials:

1. Those that every student, regardless of background, should learn.
2. Those that a specific class should learn.

Regarding the first type: Students grow up in a particular place and time, and they need to be equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to function autonomously in these environments as adults. Some content is crucial, and a youngster cannot be considered well educated who has not encountered this content. This includes learning about important yet utterly objectionable characters as well as learning about people whose opinions or actions may not accord with all present standards of righteousness. In fact, in a figure such as Thomas Jefferson we have ample opportunity to appreciate human complexity. In our own classes, we have studied fundamentally different historical characters such as Adolf Hitler, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King. How the material is actually presented will determine the pedagogical value of the lesson.

It is very worrisome to us if broad swaths of classic literature, for example, are stricken from the curriculum. Classic texts from Homer to Shakespeare to Twain and even Dr. Seuss have been eliminated in schools for failing to abide by contemporary values or terminology. An education devoid of certain classics limits students in innumerable ways, not least by leaving them ignorant of the banned material and the ways in which it still resonates within their culture. Why would we be so afraid to read demanding and even problematic texts with students? In Elan's high school in Israel, for instance, students read *The Merchant of Venice.* Aside from the literary value of the work, it gave students the occasion to discuss historical and contemporary European anti-Semitism. No one had to be sent to a safe space because the Jew is presented unflatteringly in Shakespeare's play.

> We experience criticism far more acutely than praise; illness far more acutely than health; what we crave far more acutely than what we already have.

In the second type, the door opens wide for each teacher to consider what the specific students in the class need to hear, read, sing, and/or do. There are literally endless possibilities for using festivals and blocks (such as geography and science) to bring a wide range of biographies, artistic work, crafts, and research projects so that all students can engage with what they need, both individually and collectively: women scientists, gay and lesbian poets and authors, Michaelic figures in the Civil Rights movement, great figures in the kingdoms of Western Africa prior to the transatlantic slave trade – and so forth.

There is a further pedagogical aspect to the "how" of teaching. Different children need different approaches to learning. In this regard, diversity is both everything (when considered in the sense of human individuality) and, paradoxical as it may sound, less significant a factor as far as the teacher is concerned (when considered tribally). It is the teacher's task to reach every student and to sense what every student needs. In this sense, it is too simplistic to say that marginalized communities produce different kinds of people. As a teacher, one has to figure out how to help all students reach their individual potential. Some students need mild encouragement, some need to be challenged competitively, some need an intellectual stimulation, some humor, and some need artistic entryways before they can relate to abstractions. There is nothing, as far as we know, that makes individuals of any minority background different in this fundamental sense. Look at the student; try to see the student; love the student; now teach.

Adult Relationships

Working with adult relationships, in the context of diversity as in life generally, can be more challenging than working with students. The most difficult aspect of school life when it is subjected to hyper-vigilant surveillance of one adult by another is that one either feels left out of the inner circle, excluded from the centers of decision-making because of some veil quality, or fearful that one's every word will be measured against some yardstick of potential offensiveness. The inability to develop trust in collegial relationships is the sad consequence of this kind of surveillance, a trust that can otherwise grow among colleagues who hold a basic faith in the goodness of one another and a sense that they are on a common journey. When one has to be on guard all the time lest one say, do, or even somehow cause someone to imagine that one may have said or done

something wrong or offensive, so much energy is spent remaining vigilant that trust grows very slowly – if at all.

In addition to the two key anthroposophical notions—evolution of consciousness and the rules of karma—discussed earlier, there are two additional concepts out of anthroposophy that may serve to build a healthy imagination of collegial work. The first is the idea of the *threefold.* We have written about it at length elsewhere[3]. For our purpose here, the key idea is that in the third space between two polarities, an altogether new quality can arise. This isn't merely a middle area, like some grey tone between black and white, but rather a new dimension of being, as in the Goethean rainbow arising between light and darkness.

If we accept that the human being is at its core a spiritual being, we need to practice seeing … with the heart: artistically, compassionately, warmly.

Conversation and partnership can be experienced as examples of this idea. In conversation, a mode of discourse different from argument or even debate, *both* sides seek to see more light, find more truth, move beyond the "two-ness" of their starting points in search of new insight that transcends their own positions. If we could learn to have conversations, rather than stake positions and demand adherence to a single point of view, the common journey will build the intimate trust mentioned earlier. A great example of such conversations is offered in the deep friendship between the late Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. They could not have been farther apart in their jurisprudence, and yet they grew to admire and respect each other as kindred seekers of the deepest levels of meaning and ethics. Partnerships, rather than allyships,[4] build strength for action similar to the way that a conversation builds wisdom: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

How about we set ourselves a task *not* to see Racism and Anti-Racism, for example, as the only options, but seek instead individual and collective encounters that unite us around a common goal of activating love as a potential and a force within our communities?

Can you see me with your heart?

Can I see you through mine?

Racial color blindness and disability blindness are impossible at the physical or material level—indeed they are a sign of mindless unconsciousness—and yet they constitute the ultimate goal of a truly human circle. If we accept that the human being is at its core a spiritual being, we need to practice seeing in that way — in other words, practice seeing with the heart: artistically, compassionately, warmly.

The second potentially helpful concept is the *twelve points of view*. Rudolf Steiner suggests that every question can be viewed from twelve different perspectives, as though from the twelve signs of the zodiac. Rather than engaging in inflammatory language that sets one group against another, we may make more progress in speaking of "the missing voices in the choir." If we are, as Martin Luther King dreamed all those years ago, to transform our discord into a beautiful symphony of human camaraderie, it is incumbent upon us to let every honest voice find its place in the choir. This is the task of both those inclined to muzzle the voice of the marginalized, and for the activists who would airhorn the voices they perceive to be privileged. Suppression of song, from whatever side, does not a symphony make.

As teachers in various schools and institutes, we have had the privilege of working in a few circles of human beings that became true vessels of spirit light. Not every voice carried the same weight in them, but every voice carried the appropriate weight at the right moment; it is the (momentarily relevant) competence that should guide the relative value of a contribution. Sometimes being quiet and attentive is the most active and positive contribution one can make, and sometimes it is the courage to oppose a convincing but misguided perspective. In a spiritual circle, everything is born anew at each moment; everything old (such as a covering of veils) is momentarily set aside. If each one of us enters the conversation with the image of bringing, at most, two or three perspectives of the needed twelve, we will know when to be quiet, and also when to speak.

> Love again.
> Sing me your song,
> And I will open my heart to hear your Self,
> Whispering between your words,
> And help your self move sideways, modestly,
> To make a little space.

An opened heart ready to resound with fellow seekers does not fear discord. Just as a muscle grows in the presence of resistance, insights expand through conversation, meditation, partnership, and a return to conversation. The difference between a symphony

3 Elan Leibner, "The New Impulse of the Second Teachers' Meditation," *Research Bulletin* XIX-1.

4 This is a fairly new term coined in sociology for certain kinds of diversity training in which dominant groups take on the unconditional support of marginalized groups.

of professional musicians performing in a concert hall and a symphony of human hearts is that the latter play without a prepared score – and, typically, without rehearsal. Let us make music, then, as the angels have never yet heard.

Elan Leibner *and* **Douglas Gerwin** *are long-serving Waldorf teachers and adult educators, as well as authors and editors of articles and books on a range of anthroposophical subjects related to Waldorf education and the study of anthroposophy.*

A Forgotten German Black Philosopher:
A Self-Critical Reflection on Black Lives Matter by a High School Teacher

Martyn Rawson

The German philosopher, legal scholar and polymath, Anthony William (Anton Wilhelm) Amo, successfully defended his PhD thesis in 1734, at the University of Wittenberg, after having already gained several Master's degrees. Amo was probably born around 1703, near Axim, in what today is Ghana, into the Nzema people, a subgroup of the Akan people, and was sold into slavery at the age of five. Having been transported to Amsterdam by the Dutch West India Company, Amo was subsequently given as a gift to Anton Ulrich, the Duke of Brunswick and Lüneburg-Wolfenbüttel, who passed him on to his son, August Wilhelm, as a "chamber Moor." Thereafter, in an Enlightenment experiment to see if all human beings, even those from Africa, are really born as a tabula rasa – a mental blank slate that takes on the knowledge impressed upon it, Amo was raised and educated within the court, in which Gottfried Leibnitz was the librarian. He was christened Anton Wilhelm Amo and later attended a *Ritterschule*, a school for noblemen. Amo was obviously gifted at languages and mastered German, Dutch, French, Hebrew, Latin, and Greek and presumably spoke his mother tongue, Twi.

He subsequently studied law at the University of Helmstedt, as well as medicine and philosophy at the Universities of Halle and Wittenberg. Later, Amo taught at Halle, a very cosmopolitan university at that time, as well as at Wittenberg and Jena. Amo was initially highly respected and influential in early Enlightenment circles in Germany and the Netherlands, following in the tradition of the controversial philosopher Christian Wolff, who himself was inspired by Chinese philosophy, having read Confucius and Mencius in Latin translations by Pater François Noël. We may detect this influence in Amo's notion that happiness comes through right practice and right thinking. Amo also engaged closely with the works of Rene Descartes and indirectly with the ideas of John Locke. One of Amo's first significant works was a legal argument for the equal rights of Africans in Europe.

In 1747, at the height of his fame, Amo sank into depression, resulting from a growing climate of intolerance, anti-Enlightenment sentiments, racism, and the loss of his patronage. He left Germany and returned to his native land, where he was reunited with his father and sister. His reintegration was apparently not easy and he lived as a recluse working as a goldsmith until the end of his life.

Amo is best known philosophically for his theory of the relationship of the human mind to the body. His thinking was very much located in the early Enlightenment debates between notions of independent thinking and a scientific approach, on one side, and pietism and religion, on the other. His representational theory of mind built on the one developed by Descartes but departed from the French philosopher with respect to explaining the nature of sensation. According to Amo, the mind (or in German *Geist,* which translates more correctly as "spirit" – and Amo clearly meant *spirit*) is absolutely non-material and has no physical, bodily cause. Its nature is continuous action, and it is the source of what we would call agency. *Geist*, for Amo, is the location of consciousness. He wrote (in Latin): "The human mind is: a purely actual and immaterial substance which, in exchange (*commercio*) with the living and organic body in which it belongs, understands and operates from intentions to an end of which it is self-conscious" ("On the Impassivity of the Human Mind," 1734, p. 8, cited in Meyn, 2019). The term "exchange" suggests an interaction between mind and body, though an asymmetrical one, as the mind is the one to determine the meaning of the sensations of the body. The mind itself is not capable of experiencing sensation directly, but rather is conscious of the bodily states that respond to sensory information, forming mental representations of experience, which it retains and to which it gives significance and meaning. Amo further explains sensory perceptions as the response of the living physical organs to their fields of contact with the world. Indeed, Amo's description of the whole process of perception is remarkably detailed and has close affinities to both Aristotle's and Steiner's.

Amo's philosophy further defines spirit as something existing in its own right, neither the product of material processes nor of divine gift. And yet, whilst mind is a category of spirit, it operates in conjunction with the body; it uses the body as "an instrument and medium of its operations" ("On the Impassivity of the Human Mind," p. 8). In doing so, the mind uses ideas that have two possible origins: *sense experience* and *reflection*

or non-sense-based thinking (the latter explains the source of concepts that have no obvious empirical basis, such as the concept of justice).

Amo's position on the relationship between mind and body was eclectic, original, profound, but also questing and incomplete. Had he continued to publish philosophical writings, had he developed his ideas further, had others constructively engaged with him in discourse, perhaps he would have significantly changed the course of philosophy. Sadly, Amo's work was entirely ignored by the important thinkers who later taught at the same university in Jena, such as Schiller, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling (for overviews of Amo's biography and works see Fikes, 1980; Sephocle, 1992; Abraham, 2004; and Meyns, 2019).

I came across Amo when reading Kwame Anthony Appiah's (2018) book, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity, Creed, Country, Color, Class, Culture.* Appiah is himself a philosopher, half Ghanaian, half English, a professor at New York University, and a leading writer on the notion of cosmopolitanism, among others. I used extracts from Appiah's book, including his section on Amo in my class 12 block. We teach English as a second language in blocks at my Waldorf school, in Germany; the benefit of teaching English as a second language is that it carries no Waldorf curriculum requirements other than that it should be used to study social and cultural issues.

In class 11, I had introduced a new block on postcolonial literature, using short stories, centrally the collection *An Elegy for Easterly* by Zimbabwean Petina Gappah. A third of the students were people of color, immigrants or children of immigrants, including a boy who came to Germany as a refugee from Afghanistan. In classes 12/13 we focus on the *African-American Experience*, a theme determined by the local Hamburg exam board in its guidelines for the graduation or Abitur exams. (Students in Waldorf schools in Germany who want to go to university have to take the Abitur exam in eight subjects, of which English is one of three majors). For this theme, I had chosen Yaa Gyasi's 2016 novel *Home Going*. Gyasi, too, was born in Ghana but raised in Alabama. We just started to work on this novel, when the protests following the death of George Floyd began.

The benefit of teaching English as a second language is that it carries no Waldorf curriculum requirements other than that it should be used to study social and cultural issues.

Gyasi's novel offers a historical panorama of biographies from mid-18th century Ghana to the present in the USA. It follows the lives of the descendants of two women, first in Ghana, where they are abducted and transported to the United States, where they are enslaved and put to work in plantations. Later they escape to the North and experience the challenges of life in post-abolition America; the narrative continues to track these challenges up to the present. The novel has been widely and rightly praised for its literary merits, which make it very suitable for learning about narrative voice and narrative structures and many other literary devices. Having studied the novel's important social theme and rich stylistic elements, students should be well-prepared for their exam, in which they are required to demonstrate their ability to analyze the stylistic qualities of different text types.

We had just read the chapter in which the son of an Asante woman and an English slave trader – the Governor of the settlement – is sent to England to continue his education and to remove him from the temptations of his homoerotic feelings towards his male friend, when the protests following the killing of George Floyd began. These were the first months of the Covid-19-pandemic and classes were taking place online. We used Padlet as an online platform for posting links, texts, and images, and we were meeting daily through video conferences, thus making it possible to engage in both synchronous and asynchronous, on- and off-line learning.

Among the links I uploaded for the class were two articles from *The Guardian* newspaper reporting on events in Bristol, UK, where protester pulled down a statue of the 17th-18th century politician and merchant, Edward Colston, who was heavily involved in the slave trade, and rolled it into the harbor. The whole event was both symbolic and an expression of outrage. After the statue had been toppled, recalling the toppling of a statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad, in 2003, a photographer captured an image of one protester placing his knee on the neck of Colston's statue – a moment that few in the photograph seemed to have noticed. The statute was then dumped into the harbor at the same spot where slave-traders moored in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Edward Colston, who was the Member of Parliament for Bristol and a major philanthropist and benefactor of the city, had made his fortune as a leading member of the Royal African Company (RAC), which, like the East India Company, had a trade monopoly by Royal Charter and was in effect the pre-colonial institution that paved the way for full colonization. Other prominent

members included the philosopher John Locke, who later changed his position on slavery, and Samuel Pepys, the famous diarist. The RAC's main business was slave trade, taking part in that infamous trading triangle that included cheap industrial products and guns shipped to Africa, enslaved people shipped to America, and raw materials such as sugar, cotton, and tobacco shipped from the American plantations back to the factories of Britain. There were other similar shipping companies in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and Hamburg; though slave ships did not dock in these ports, the European trading companies owned the slave ships and even plantations in the Caribbean, where enslaved people were forced to work. The captains of the Bristol slave ships were permitted to bring one or two slaves back to Bristol to supplement their income, and today there are many descendants of these slaves still living in the city. For years, there have been attempts to get rid of Colston's statue and to remove his name from the city's main concert hall, but even as recently as 2017, prominent local business people and politicians managed to prevent this. There have been racial tensions in Bristol for decades; in the 1980s, my father's shop was burned down during riots. Members of the Black community helped him clear up the rubble and they continued to exchange Christmas cards until last year.

> Assuming we have modified our curriculum from its German original model of 100 years ago, have we done so in a way that looks at its content from a post-colonial perspective in the widest sense?

As such, one could say, the lessons and the material in my 12 class English block could not have been more appropriate. And yet I had a strange feeling because the theme explored in our readings is so close to the living realities of many people today. Here we were busily analyzing texts, writing essays, and gathering points for academic achievement. In a short time, I will be marking exams with objective, clinical, detached accuracy, detailing and documenting the points the students achieve for their interpretations, their literary analysis, their skill with language. I ask myself: Can one really use such significant biographical experiences that the students were having as the basis for measuring and assessing and awarding points? What happens to us when we do this? Isn't our empathy and emotional response being abstracted, alienated, instrumentalized, reduced to grades, and then filed away? Isn't that a kind of colonialism too?

Some, perhaps many readers, including my colleagues at the Waldorf school, might find this question completely exaggerated. What is wrong with using such material? Doesn't it show just how relevant some exam material could be? Yes and no. I would like to ask, whether and how can one separate these levels, and if we do have to perform such separation, what do we lose in doing so?

Perhaps I am being over sensitive. I could call on my pedagogical common sense and rationality and say, Yes, there is no logical reason why we shouldn't separate the instrumental from the existential. Or I can draw on my pathic, pedagogical sensitivity, on my tact. Tact, as the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013) and before him the physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz describe it, is a particular sense for the social, intersubjective field of the lifeworld. We develop this sense and the abilities belonging to it, like all senses, by using it. The Dutch-Canadian educator and phenomenologist Max van Manen (1991, 2008) describes pedagogical tact as the ability to sense emergent qualities in children and young people in order to construct learning situations that can support this process. In particular, pedagogical tact is needed to support transformative learning that leads to sustained change in capacity in the whole person.

Gert Biesta (2013), the educational philosopher, says that schools have three functions: enabling socialization, which means guiding students to being the kind of people they need to be in a democratic, multicultural society today; enabling qualification, which means learning dispositions, skills and knowledge to participate constructively in civil society and the world of work; and enabling subjectification. Subjectification, or becoming a subject, means being capable of making judgements and acting in an ethical and ecological way; Biesta also refers to this as *grown-up-ness*. A practice that prescribes and controls educational input and output throughout the course of their education prevents young people from becoming autonomous subjects. Subjectification cannot be taught; at best, teachers can facilitate it through providing learning opportunities and supporting these with dialogue and reflection. Biesta has also been warning for years of the impact of the "Global Educational Measurement Industry" (e.g., Biesta, 2020), the impact of which has been to lead education to valuing primarily what it can measure. This can also lead to using grades as the primary learning motivation and to collecting grades, credit points, and certificates as social capital. Both of these outcomes can further lead to an egotistical attitude

towards learning; they educate the person not towards freedom but towards dependency and paternalism.

The theme of postcolonialism is much wider than the experiences of former colonies. It has come to refer to a much wider awareness of processes of oppression and the instrumentalization of identity. Together with the insights of feminism and critical pedagogy, we have learned to develop a new sensitivity to encountering otherness (even if we have never engaged with academic versions of these ideas). These perspectives have changed the way we look at the world. Instead of looking at the world as something 'out there' that we can represent 'in here', instead of taking a spectator position and rationally analyzing what we see in a detached, presumed objective way, we can try to meet the world as *other*, with openness and respect, while not expecting to capture, master, control and use what we find.

The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2006) has argued that democratic education needs to enable students to learn to make judgements, develop democratic capacities, and, above all, cultivate narrative empathy, that is, the ability to tell another's story authentically. This capability is also the basis for an ethic of care, which is a central quality in education. An ethic of care depends above all on being able to listen attentively to the other. It also includes self-care, listening to one's inner voice and needs, and cultivating the self in the sense of self-education. It means being open to and sensitive to the vulnerability of the other and to acknowledge our own vulnerability. It is an essentially inclusive gesture. An ethic of care requires us to take responsibility, firstly, for our own actions, which means being critically reflective of our own dispositions, attitudes, habits of mind, assumptions, expectations, and prejudices.

As Waldorf teachers we have to apply this critical pedagogy to our own practices and what informs them. We may ask ourselves whether and how we critically reflect on how inclusive our practice really is and how post-colonial our curriculum is. Assuming we have modified our curriculum from its German original model of 100 years ago, have we done so in a way that looks at its content from a post-colonial perspective in the widest sense? Is it enough to ensure that our dolls and puppets come in a variety of hair and skin color in kindergarten, that other than white faces appear in our blackboard drawings? (And how do we portray black faces on a blackboard? And how do we relate to the color black?) Are there female heroes and archetypes in our stories? Do we present the Age of Discovery from the perspective of those peoples who lost their cultures, identities, and their lives and tell the stories of their long journeys to emancipation? Do we valorize the influence of Islam and Asia in European culture? And when we tell our students about other cultures, do we stereotype them, be they Ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Celts, Romans, or Americans? Does our curriculum reflect an antiquated Middle European perspective rich in Grimm's Fairy Tales, Norse Myths, and Parzival? And if these issues do not pose as a problem for you, why not? We have questions enough about our curriculum and its not-so-hidden assumptions.

The questions raised by the Black Lives Matter protests go deeper than the curriculum. But can we allow these questions to be instrumentalized as 'school stuff'? Nel Noddings (2012), the American educational philosopher and feminist thinker, has pointed out that teachers have always struggled in a field of tension between their responsibilities within an ethic of care and delivering prescribed learning outcomes, though the struggle has become very asymmetrical in the age of measurement. She makes the point that teachers have to critically reflect whether their school's culture is one that fosters and lives a spirit of celebrating difference, collaboration, inclusion. This also means offering all students tasks in which they can all develop their emergent personhood, tasks that engage them existentially, not as detached observers of social conflict and injustice, but as participants. If students also learn about narrative voice and stylistic devices whilst engaging with literature and media that offer challenging narratives, then they do so to become more effective writers and – not to be underestimated – to show them how literature, images, media affect us. Being a critical thinker includes understanding how text and image work. So we are reading Yaa Gyasi, Kwame Anthony Appiah, or Petina Gappah not because they are on someone's syllabus, but because they challenge us to identify and awaken our will. If the writings of Anton Wilhelm Amo had been read in the same spirit, perhaps Germany and Europe would have gone down a different road. The balance between the development of the person and the acquisition of social and cultural capital has to be dynamically maintained through ongoing critical reflection. This essay was a modest attempt at doing that.

Nel Noddings makes the point that teachers have to critically reflect whether their school's culture is one that fosters and lives a spirit of celebrating difference, collaboration, inclusion.

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Parental Perspectives
Waldorf Families on Schooling During the Pandemic

David Sloan

Just over a hundred years ago, Rudolf Steiner founded the first Waldorf school amid a raging pandemic—the so-called Spanish Flu. The disease was so lethal that it afflicted the entire world, killing over 50 million people. A century later, another worldwide pandemic is sweeping across the globe, once again claiming millions of lives, and still counting.

As with all educational institutions, over the past year, North American Waldorf schools had to contend with the myriad repercussions from Covid-19. While already engaged in a survey of Waldorf families and their perceptions of the education offered their children, the Research Institute for Waldorf Education (RIWE) decided to review the impact of the pandemic on Waldorf school communities across the continent. More particularly, we wanted to hear from Waldorf parents and air their perspectives on the effect of the Covid-19 outbreak on family life and on the way Waldorf schools have adapted to the challenges brought along with the pandemic.[1]

This survey was the first stage of a more ambitious, comprehensive plan, which aims to track the efficacy of Waldorf education, as a way of preparing for the next 100 years. With this project, initiated in the fall of 2020, RIWE is collecting Waldorf parents' perspectives of Waldorf education as they and their families have experienced it. Specifically, the larger survey goals include:

- Giving parents a place to voice their experience of Waldorf education: why they chose it and how it has influenced the development of their children.
- Documenting the impact of Waldorf education on parents' home life and their parenting styles.
- Assessing the consequences of the Covid-19 outbreak on their lives and their relationship to their children's education.
- Engaging parents in their views on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI); Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual (LGBTIQA+);
- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and how they see their Waldorf school addressing these issues.
- Inquiring whether parents would recommend Waldorf education to other family members and to friends.

Covid-19 struck the country as we were preparing for this full-scale survey. The clear impact of the pandemic and the limitations it imposed on schools, students, and families convinced us to postpone the wider survey to October 2021 and focus for the moment on the issues involved with Covid-19. Schools participating in the wider survey will receive, by December 2021, the raw data collected from members of their community who respond to the survey questionnaire. Publication of the full analysis is planned for distribution by the end of the 2021-22 school year.

General Profile of the Respondents

In January 2021, RIWE sent the survey specifically related to the effects of the pandemic to Waldorf schools in the United States and Canada. In response, 43 different Waldorf schools forwarded us completed surveys from 1,108 families; of these schools, 31 returned surveys from ten or more parents. Twenty-seven of the responding schools include a high school program as well as early childhood and elementary grades education. The locations of these schools cover a broad geographical swath, extending from coast to coast, and from Texas to Toronto.

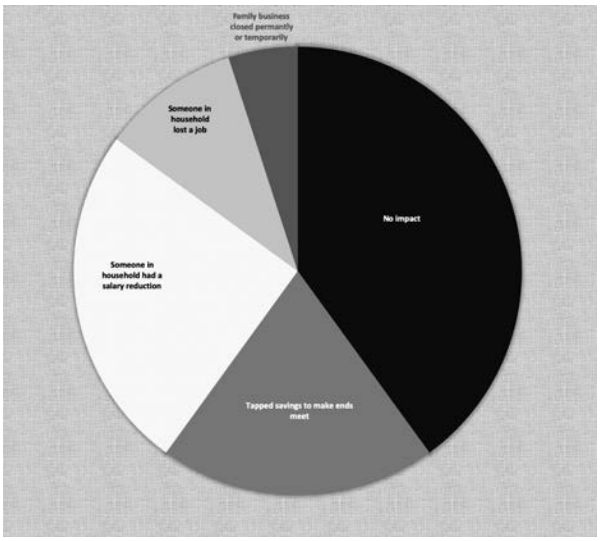
Locations of the Waldorf schools with 10 or more responses to the survey

Of the parents' responses received, 96% came from parents who currently have one or two children in a Waldorf school. Of these, just over half came from

1 This survey, made possible by a grant from the Waldorf Educational Foundation (WEF), was conducted by a quartet of four Waldorf teachers—David Sloan (author), Andrew Starzynski (statistics), Connie Stokes (survey manager), and Douglas Gerwin (RIWE Executive Director)—with assistance in the design of the survey from Patrice Maynard (RIWE's Director of Publications and Development).

parents with children in grades 1-5, a quarter in middle school (grades 6-8), and nearly another quarter in high school. (The survey did not contain questions about early childhood programs.) In addition, the pool of responses included a mix of parents new to Waldorf education (10%) and "veteran" families who have been part of a Waldorf school community for 12 or more years (26%).

To ensure respondents' anonymity, we conducted the poll using Survey Monkey, which was sent to schools for further distribution to parents. Of course, the respondents were a self-selecting group: given that they made the willing choice to take the survey, they could not be considered a random sample of the larger Waldorf-parents population. However, given the sheer number of respondents, their range of years connected to Waldorf communities, the variety of younger and more established schools, and the extensive geographical spread of schools, we feel confident that any so called response bias was minimal. While it is convenient to assume that parents who take the time to fill out such a survey tend to be more supportive of Waldorf education than those who choose not to respond, we found that most questions elicited a rich spectrum of strongly held views—both laudatory and critical—about the impact of the pandemic on family life and the schools' resulting actions.



Distribution of financial impact on Waldorf families

Financial Impacts

Over nine in ten respondents claimed that the pandemic had either somewhat or greatly affected their families. Interestingly, however, over 40% of parents stated that the pandemic had not unduly affected their family's financial situation *yet,* an indication, perhaps, that many Waldorf parents able to afford independent school tuition also have the financial resources to cushion themselves from the economic distress that other parents did report. For example, over 1 in 10 parents shared that either they or their spouse/partner had lost a job, and over 25% endured salary reductions. Another 13% disclosed that they had taken on debt to make ends meet, and 1 in 5 families stated that savings and/or retirement funds had been tapped into. A smaller—but not insignificant—number of respondents (4%) wrote that their family business had either temporarily or permanently closed.

The Pivot to Distance Learning

Last March 2020, when the first general lockdown occurred, Waldorf schools—like all other institutions—immediately shut their doors to in-person instruction. For the rest of the school year, teachers and administrators scrambled to create online options that would keep students learning. For a school system that has pointedly striven to diminish the amount of screen time in the lives of its elementary students, this abrupt switch presented a monumental challenge. Teachers who had never even heard of Zoom platforms or breakout rooms were suddenly required to familiarize themselves with such tools and within days or weeks to implement online lesson plans.

According to the survey results, those plans met with mixed success. One indication of initial parent support for the schools' adjusted programs was that nearly 80% of respondents dutifully followed the instructions provided by their schools. Because most schools quickly recognized the draining nature of the medium, teachers' distance learning lessons were soon reduced in terms of both frequency and duration.

This meant, of course, that parents—many of whom housebound because of the lockdown—needed to become more involved in their children's education. A number of parents expressed ambivalence about their expanded role, underscoring both the fulfilling and challenging aspects of their increased involvement. One parent wrote:

> We feel a lot more involved. This is positive in some sense; through regular Zoom calls with teacher and parents, we actually feel closer to other parents as we figure this out together. The primary stress has been juggling our full-time work with childcare and home school responsibilities.

The intensified engagement in their children's learning led parents to another significant discovery: their recognition—and appreciation—that they were becoming much more knowledgeable about the Waldorf curriculum. What had been more or less exclusively the

domain of trained Waldorf teachers, with its internal cohesiveness and age-appropriate sequencing, began to open like a welcome new vista to attentive parents. One stated: "We actually got a better peek at how wonderful and effective this education can be for the right child." A number of parents also commented on how learning from home had strengthened family ties. "In many ways, it feels a lot more relaxed, less pressure. We're enjoying the slower days with less to fill out our calendar in regard to school..."

On the other hand, the overlapping roles of parent and "educator" often led to increased stress at home. Balancing work responsibilities with hands-on assistance in a child's schooling proved to be a daunting task, notably in households with two full-time wage-earners short on sleep, pedagogical experience, and eventually patience. One parent declared, "Last year was a nightmare; two parents working full time and trying to implement very confusing schedules and online platforms for a child who needed much more support to keep engaged. . . . This has caused a lot of stress." Another described "adults coming home to complete disaster every day that cannot possibly be kept up while children try to learn and adults try to earn a paycheck. Two out of three kids are in counseling, and all five of us should be."

> "When the children returned to in-person learning, they were like plants that had just been watered."

As demanding as the new pandemic reality was for two-parent families, it is clear that the situation was much more onerous for single-parent households juggling work, childcare, and assisting with online classes. Dozens of respondents fell into this category. Several were justifiably upset that a "single working parent" was not included in the survey as an answer choice. One wrote, "Single full-time working parent. Your survey should be more inclusive, because there are a lot of single parents out there!"

In general, whether parents viewed their added responsibilities as burdens or as opportunities, the pandemic clearly added complications and turmoil to many family relationships. And if we burrow into the center of the questions raised about Covid-19's transformative effects on family life and schooling, we find perhaps the most contentious issue of all: wildly divergent parental views on the use of computers.

Technology: Invaluable Connector or Soul Crusher?

While a few Waldorf schools simply halted their programs altogether during the lockdown—both in-person and virtual options—online learning became the only viable option for most others wanting to maintain even a vague semblance of an ongoing school year. We already mentioned the difficulties for teachers unaccustomed to distance instruction. Not only did they have to learn how to employ digital media in the service of online education; in an atmosphere of high anxiety and uncertainty, teachers and administrators had to design schedules that would thread the needle between being too demanding and too lax. They also had to be sensitive to constantly changing conditions in their local communities based on fluctuating infection rates.

Some schools tried to recreate the full school-day schedule online, a model that usually proved to be too arduous for teachers and students alike. Still, around 50% of respondents said their school offered daily online classes, and approximately another 35% reported virtual learning options during some portion of each week. The remaining 15% of respondents said their school offered no online classes at all. One parent acknowledged the monumental challenges that confronted teachers. "Describing a response to a fundamental shift in educational delivery without preparation, during a pandemic, is not a realistic thread; people were in survival mode."

Last spring, the unanticipated upsurge in computer use proved to be a two-edged sword for most families. Decades before the advent of the internet, Waldorf educators had cautioned against children's premature exposure to media, most notably television and cinema. Since the turn of the century, as electronic technology has become ubiquitous in the culture, Waldorf schools have continued to provide a counterpoint to the mainstream's ever-increasing reliance on computers and other digital media in the classroom. Many families found their way to Waldorf education because of that very stance, so the sudden adoption of computers as a vehicle for imparting lessons to their children came as a shock to some, a betrayal to others. One parent summed up this latter view: "[Technology] opened the Pandora's box of no turning back. That was the absolute worst thing that happened to my family. My child is now obsessed with computers and that is all he wants to do." However, 40% of respondents praised the schools' efforts to establish distance learning as being either "extremely" or "very" effective, and another 38% offered qualified approval: "parts worked, other things did not." One parent commended the school

> for the tremendous effort it has taken, and continues to take, given the circumstances. However,

> remote learning has been a disaster for my son. He has ADD, and learning in two dimensions from a computer all day has been awful. The school has provided materials and has been as accommodating as they can, but we are really struggling.

Another respondent summed up the monumental task of meeting the needs of neurodiverse students. "Waldorf education does not translate well to online learning. It is particularly challenging for children with attention challenges and learning differences. Waldorf education needs to rise in its approach to working with children with sensory processing difficulties and learning differences."

Dozens of parents whose children did not identify as special needs students concluded that their school had done a creditable job of transitioning to online education, while acknowledging the drawbacks of the less-than-ideal circumstances. One parent characterized distance learning as "a way to keep education going; however, with a tremendous negative impact on my child's well-being." According to some respondents, these adverse effects manifested physically in their children.

> We have been maintaining a somewhat minimal digital environment at home and because of the current situation, it's all digital now. Kids are already showing problems related to computers for prolonged durations (eye fatigue, tired, complaining of headaches, etc.).

Equally concerning to some respondents were their children's psychological and emotional struggles to adjust to the new reality of distance learning. "Computer time has made my son's mental health much more challenging. He gets anxious and depressed more easily and he is exhausted more often."

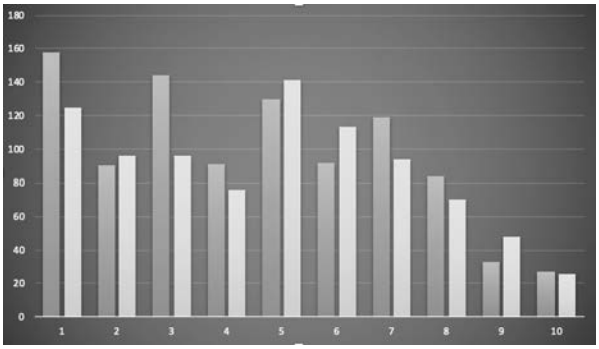
Studies have long established that such exhaustion is due in some measure to the inherent heightened stress levels induced by prolonged online exposure. However, a few parents expressed concern that this stress was exacerbated by teachers' inability to adjust to the new conditions.

> I am more appreciative of teachers in general, but I am extremely disappointed at the horrible job Waldorf has done with the online teaching. They are still using the in-person approach for online teaching. They have proven again that they are not proactive, flexible, or adaptive to change.

The experience of most parents, however, ran counter to this perception: in general, they lauded teachers who were committed to creating as much of an online Waldorf "community" as the medium would allow. One effusive parent affirmed that "I always knew how amazing [the teachers] are, but they are [now] going above and beyond and are absolute heroes and angels. Incredible what they're doing for our children."

Nevertheless, a vast majority of parents agreed that the most grievous toll exacted by the move to online education was the months-long absence of in-person interaction. Waldorf teachers are committed to cultivating hands-on, experiential lessons, invested in human connections and fostered by a child-centered education; however, for the entirety of last spring, the only schooling possible was virtual. As a consequence, the everyday handshakes, hugs, and warm interpersonal contacts between teachers and students abruptly ended. As one parent lamented,

> Seeing what this did to children and what it is still doing to them in schools where they are not allowed back is saddening. It is really difficult both for parents' mental health and child mental health to be away from people, friends, teachers they love, who still try to teach them and inspire them.



The left-hand bar in each pair indicates students' experience of at-home learning (1 being the least, 10 the most desirable); right-hand bars show parents' experience of at-home learning.

It is noteworthy that this parent was mourning a lack of social interaction not only for her children, but for herself as well. Many parents remarked that it took the pandemic—and the resulting dwindling of their school-based relationships in the move to virtual learning—for them to recognize just how much they depended upon such interactions to enrich their own lives. A representative respondent wrote that he felt "less connection to the community aspect of the school. Without the opportunity to be in person for school celebrations, festivals, athletics, it's hard to keep or build connections."

Parents felt a related, significant loss for their children in the domain of the arts and crafts curricula. Not surprisingly, parents wrote that most schools simply could

not find creative ways to virtually maintain the immediacy and robustness that students experience in well-taught handwork, music, and drawing classes. "Kids need more art, more ways to express their feelings/thoughts/perceptions. Social media is about sameness. We need to offer them creativity." Another parent concurred, missing "the things that make it Waldorf, such as eurythmy, handwork, art, movement-based learning, theater, connecting with teachers, staff, and children."

A small but forceful minority of parents applauded both the schools' embrace of technology and their relatively smooth adjustment to online learning. One declared, "The school did a phenomenal job of keeping students engaged and learning. My child struggles a lot with the virtual learning and schedule, but I don't consider this a fault of the school." Another felt that their children actually benefited from home-based virtual learning, citing the blessing of fewer in-school distractions. Yet another respondent saw the shift to technology in education as an inevitability, even after the pandemic ends.

> It's the modern world. Online learning is going to be part of it.... Waldorf needs to pivot in order to survive.... Teachers are what make the difference, not the medium. Learning to teach and engage children, whether in person or remotely, will be the new gravitas. I hope Waldorf can evolve with the same values and the same methodology, [while] assuming some new technology...

"Waldorf's lockstep submission to the narrative and implementation of draconian policies, including outdoor classrooms in the winter and masking for children has been nothing short of heartbreaking."

A Vital Factor: Transparency

How successfully Waldorf schools "evolved" and adapted during the pandemic often depended on how well they communicated with parents. Repeatedly, respondents raised the issue of communication as critical to their experience of feeling either welcomed as co-educators or treated as outsiders. Because the pandemic upended familiar and stabilizing norms both in the home and at school, two-way communication became crucial for both parents and teachers to feel mutually supported. As has been noted, many parents expressed regret that the pandemic eroded the sense of community so central to Waldorf education. Instead of redoubling their efforts to reach out to families—thus preserving a semblance of community life—some schools simply could not overcome the constraints imposed by the pandemic. When asked what they wished schools would have done differently during the pandemic, one parent expressed a view shared by many:

> [Schools could have] communicated better, faster, and decisively. They waited far too long to address the community. There should have been weekly updates. We went months without hearing really anything. I wish the school had done more to keep families from leaving... and made efforts to keep community alive.

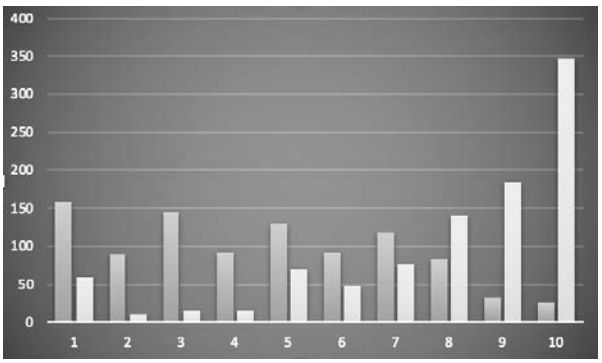
Other parents underscored their displeasure at the lack of transparency in schools' decision-making. "The school could have better engaged the community.... During our recent parent evening, the teacher did not mention one challenging thing.... We know this is not the full picture. More authentic and transparent engagement seems like a healthier approach."

Another area of concern that nettled some respondents was often divergent communications from different teachers. In the initial staging of online learning, many parents experienced wildly inconsistent messaging from the school. "At the start some teachers used different online assignment platforms and that was very stressful for my daughter, who had never navigated those types of programs." Another parent wished that there had been "more communication between subsections of the faculty and more consistency regarding quarantine protocols on campus." Respondents cited mixed messages from administrators, lack of faculty uniformity with online approaches, and shifting schedules that caught families off guard as examples of inadequate efforts to communicate clearly and in a timely manner with parents.

However, when schools made communication a priority—alongside safety protocols, effective distance learning, and clearly delineated plans to return to in-person schooling as soon as possible—parents responded positively. "The school functioned according to the immediate present circumstances. There are not only no complaints; we would say it was/is a model of a dynamic education during a crisis." Another parent captured the sentiments of hundreds of respondents, writing, "I honestly don't know what else they could have done. They were responsive, made changes when necessary, kept the parent body informed, and did the best they could in an unprecedented situation."

The Shift Back to In-Person Learning

In the aftermath of Waldorf schools' scramble to introduce distance learning during the lockdown, respondents left no doubt about their wish for the future. As tirelessly and conscientiously as teachers had worked, a vast majority of parents longed for a return to in-person learning as soon as humanly possible. Scores of parents expressed some version of the following two responses: "I can't wait until the kids can all go back to school to be immersed in their social and academic rhythms that make Waldorf so unique and truly a blessing." "Online was the best solution given the circumstances, but definitely not something we want. Our kids need personal interaction."



The left-hand bar in each pair indicates responses about the desirability of distance learning (1 being the least, 10 the most desirable); right-hand bars indicate responses about the desirability of in-person learning.

By way of contrast, a just-published national survey conducted by NPR/Ipsos reveals that nearly a third of parents polled say "they were likely to stick with remote learning indefinitely" for their children.[2] The survey did not make clear whether these parents favored the online option out of an abundance of caution for their children's health, because of the convenience associated with remote learning, or because they believed that virtual teaching was more effective than in-person schooling.

Waldorf parents expressed no such reluctance to return children to in-person education. School administrators and faculty had the summer to explore, and then implement, creative strategies for reestablishing in-person instruction. We asked parents to characterize any differences between schools' handling of the pandemic during the lockdown—from March 2020 to June—and since the beginning of the 2020-21 school year. Their responses were crystal clear about the dramatic improvement from the spring response to the fall.

On a scale of 1 to 10 rating parents' satisfaction with distance learning, the average rating was just under 5, as opposed to an average of nearly 8 that parents gave to schools that had returned to in-person learning in the fall. One respondent turned to a familiar analogy: "When the children returned to in-person learning, they were like plants that had just been watered."

We identified two obvious reasons behind parents' nearly universal praise for schools that restored in-person schooling: Most obvious was the great relief parents felt at not having to continue dividing their attentions between parenting and "assistant teaching" in their homes. "Remote learning has not been easy with two working parents and an only child who has had limited contact with others. … Our child thrives in social and educational settings, so our school having in-person learning from Sept-Dec 2020 was wonderful." Another obvious reason had to do with the clear-cut benefits of in-person learning over online alternatives already described, including the joy of seeing children reunited with teachers and classmates, and the restoration of at least some art, music, movement, and crafts activities so central to the Waldorf experience.

Two other significant rationales emerged that made in-person education much more desirable than distance learning. One had to do with the creative ways faculty and staff transformed some campuses into outdoor classrooms. Whether they employed tents or built temporary shelters, many schools utilized these spaces for as long as weather permitted. These efforts did not go unnoticed by parents: "I am very impressed and proud of how the school has managed and adapted. The outdoor classrooms are amazing. Cold as hell, but safe and so very healthy for the children to be out in nature and together as a group."

Of course, the move outdoors was a big part of yet another reason that parents celebrated the return to in-person learning. Most respondents praised the many safety protocols schools instituted—including masking, sanitization, air filters, and physically distanced classroom spacing. "We are grateful more than ever for our school and the amazing flexibility and persistence they have shown during this time. We appreciate their diligence in following health and safety guidelines."

Widespread Appreciation

This theme of gratitude surfaced repeatedly in parents' responses. While a large number of parents echoed appreciation for schools' safety precautions, respondents also reiterated their thankfulness for their school's adaptability in the face of so much uncertainty and constantly shifting circumstances. "We were totally

2 Anya Kamanetz and Edna Uzunlar, "NPR/Ipsos Poll: Nearly One-Third of Parents May Stick With Remote Learning," March 5, 2021, www.NPR.com.

amazed at how quickly and thoroughly the school adapted and met the needs of the students in this strange world and kept the curriculum going." A large contingent of parents applauded teachers' "creativity in meeting the children's educational needs and maintaining the values of Waldorf education."

Because of their resourcefulness and timely, innovative adjustments, several schools began to enthuse those public-school families that had switched to Waldorf education only because of the in-person option. One parent shared, "We chose Steiner due to their dedication to in-person schooling, which has been the absolute best thing for our child, who cried every day after online public school from Mar.- Sept., when we finally had had enough." Another new Waldorf parent disclosed, "I'm still not totally sold on the Waldorf approach, but I've really appreciated the use of the outdoors, the compassion, the flexibility toward curriculum, and awareness of children's needs, given the constraints associated with the pandemic."

Based on survey responses, parents were grateful not only for the lessons teachers provided, but for sharing an empathetic sense that everyone—parents and teachers alike—was facing this unforeseen crisis in community. Furthermore, while families looked to the schools for stability and direction during the pandemic, parents especially appreciated teachers' sharing their own vulnerabilities. A number of parents were thankful

> for all the hard work and dedication shown from the teachers and staff. This was hard and we never for a moment felt abandoned. They were open and honest about their struggles and gave us room to share ours. They worked tirelessly through sadness, confusion, and disappointment alongside us.

Do Waldorf schools not only teach, but actively foster, social responsibility, or do they stand for the safeguarding of individual freedoms?

We cite here one other intriguing reason for the gratitude expressed by a small contingent of parents. Several respondents credited Waldorf education itself for their children's positive experiences during the pandemic. "Twelve rich years of Waldorf education prepared my child for this unexpected spell of quiet, contemplative time. Despite the sadness from missing a normal senior year, she has remained balanced, creative, productive, and generous."

Another parent even extended an appreciation for the impact Waldorf had on the entire family:

> I have pondered the ideals of Waldorf as this situation globally continues. It is encouraging to see that for all our talk of adaptation and flexibility and the ability to meet life as it comes to us, we are actually walking the talk.... I am so glad that my child and my family have been in Waldorf education for so long, so that we were ready for this moment.

It might hearten Waldorf educators to hear that children's—and parents'—long-term experience of the curriculum has served as a type of therapeutic, enabling them to navigate the uncharted waters of this pandemic with an uncommon sense of purposefulness and equanimity.

Unmasking a Dispute

During the pandemic, the issue of whether to wear masks or not has been one of our country's most politicized and divisive issues. Fistfights have broken out in grocery stores between those who vehemently champion social responsibility and those defending personal liberties. Members of Congress have accused one another of infecting fellow legislators or of suppressing one's freedom of expression. Waldorf communities have not been spared this ongoing controversy, although the survey revealed strong support of schools' mask mandates. Of the 885 responses, virtually 90% of parents voiced either grudging support ("It's a necessary inconvenience.") or impassioned endorsement of schools' enforcement of mask-wearing ("I think it is a vital safety protocol to stop the virus from spreading. The short-term challenge is facial recognition/social cues that can be missed with a mask, but this seems small in comparison to the good that a mask does.").

Besides the safety factor, several respondents pointed to a larger social issue as "a perfect teachable moment to learn and model respect and demonstrate what it means to be considerate, instead of the contemporary 'me me me first' culture that the media... tends to promote." Several parents went so far as to say that *without* mask mandates, they would not send their children back to school. Among that vast majority of parents approving of masks, one qualifier surfaced as a secondary pattern: a number wished that the children, especially the younger ones, didn't need to wear masks outdoors.

Of the 10% who were critical of school masking policies, objections ranged from adverse physical effects to disdain for the "fear-mongering" they saw as the

result of "overblown" medical and governmental concerns about the virus. One parent was "extremely worried about the consequences and lack of oxygen to the brain." Another parent believed masks "give a false sense of protection and create a barrier between people emotionally and psychologically." One of the most pointed responses blasted masking protocols as

> the exact opposite of Waldorf philosophy and Steiner's teaching. To say that Waldorf aims to remove the constrictions to a child developing as a free person and then require that they cover their face, removing their self-expression … is completely inauthentic. … We believe this is extremely damaging to them and we will not tolerate it for much longer.

"We feel this pandemic has opened our eyes to new and different ways to do things."

A Question of Leadership

The masking controversy seemed linked to another one of the most discordant issues that emerged in the survey: parents' conflicting opinions of Waldorf schools' public stances regarding the pandemic. Most respondents strongly supported those schools that closely adhered to safety protocol guidelines set by medical experts and local authorities. Representing the sizable majority, one parent lauded the school's "leadership team.... We have been really impressed with the communication daily.... The school's commitment to keeping health and safety front and center with COVID has been astonishing."

However, a vocal minority criticized schools' pandemic policies on two primary counts: 1) for practices that engendered a "culture of fear," and 2) for what they perceived as craven capitulation to official mandates. One parent wrote:

> Have common sense.... Have empathy toward the kids when they are on campus and don't treat them like prisoners.... Show kids a positive mind set instead of scaring the crap out of them. I heard many kids say, 'Don't get close to me or you will give me Covid and my parents will die.'

Several other respondents saw the masking debate as symbolic of a deeper problem with the schools.

> We are so disappointed in the Waldorf school. We joined Waldorf because you were different, mavericks in a world of boring submission to the norm. Waldorf's lockstep submission to the narrative and implementation of draconian policies, including outdoor classrooms in the winter and masking for children has been nothing short of heartbreaking. We are actively looking for alternatives to Waldorf as it is apparent that you are no longer following the core tenets that you were founded on.

Ultimately, these divergent views debating whether schools upheld or abandoned their core Waldorf values lead back to a broader question deepening the current rift in American society: Do people advocate measures that promote public welfare over personal liberties, or vice versa? More specific to this survey, *do Waldorf schools not only teach, but actively foster, social responsibility, or do they stand for the safeguarding of individual freedoms?*

Unfortunately, anyone who looks at the question through a political lens could see the answer as a zero-sum outcome. Waldorf educators might argue for a more nuanced approach. In fact, they might point to one of Rudolf Steiner's most often repeated verses in Waldorf circles, which underscores the mutuality imbedded in the relationship between the individual and the larger society: "The healthy social life is found when, in the mirror of each soul, the whole community finds its reflection, and when, in the whole community, the virtue of each one is living."[3]

Lessons from the Pandemic: Shaping the Future

Having lived through the pandemic during the past year, most people must have experienced an altered sense of time at one point or another. Like Bill Murray's character in the movie *Groundhog Day*, many of us have felt trapped in an endlessly repetitive, undifferentiated "present," while simultaneously imagining life in a post-pandemic future, free from masks, social restrictions, and daily postings about horrific death rates. While most survey respondents focused on the events of the past year, some parents were thinking of the future – specifically, how Waldorf faculties could learn from the pandemic as they look toward the next school-year and beyond. All of the respondents envisioning the future were in agreement that Waldorf educators could no longer depend upon the familiar methods and curricula of the past.

We feel this pandemic has opened our eyes to new and different ways to do things. We feel the old models we followed for schooling and work are not healthy. . . . We

3 Rudolf Steiner, "Anthroposophy and the Social Question" (1919), in Understanding the Human Being: Selected Writings of Rudolf Steiner, ed. Richard Seddon (Bristol, UK: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1993). Also published in Anthroposophy (1927), Vol. II, No. 3.

hope that the schools will take this opportunity to create healthier and more nourishing ways to educate our children and move away from the go go go, non-stop mentality.

In helping schools prepare for this new reality, another parent offered a more specific suggestion: "I hope all schools take time to reflect on what is truly needed for students. … This could be outdoor education, a commitment to supporting diverse learning needs . . . and recognizing students have social-emotional needs as important as academic ones."

Finally, parents expressed a fervent hope that Waldorf teachers and staff will "take the pandemic as a wake-up call on every level. … We need to take a hard look at where the innovations in Waldorf can be; it cannot be a rehashing of what some people think that Steiner said or meant." Ironically but fittingly, perhaps it is helpful to remind everyone associated with the Waldorf movement of a statement made by Rudolf Steiner that resurfaced at the time of the centennial anniversary celebrating the founding of the first Waldorf school in 1919. Steiner remarked that as a movement or institution ages—up to 100 years—it either dies or needs refounding on a new basis.[4] If Waldorf schools can use the lessons learned from the pandemic to truly meet the needs of twenty-first century families, the Waldorf movement may be able to not only revitalize their own schools, but "inspirit" education everywhere.

David Sloan *taught at Green Meadow Waldorf School for 25 years before joining Maine Coast Waldorf School in 2006 as a founding high school teacher. He also helped to launch the Shining Mt. Waldorf High School in Boulder, Colorado. He is the author of* Stages of Imagination: Working Dramatically with Adolescents *and* Life Lessons: Reaching Teenagers through Literature*, as well as of a poetry collection entitled* The Irresistible In-Between*. David is a faculty member at the Center for Anthroposophy's high school teacher training summer program.*

4 Torin Finser, "The Future of Waldorf Education: Beyond 100," a speech presented at the Center for Anthroposophy in New Hampshire, June 2019.

Report from the Online Waldorf Library

Marianne Alsop
OWL site Administrator

The Online Waldorf Library is here to help facilitate research and answer questions on a wide variety of topics. We continue to answer specific questions about the Waldorf curriculum coming from home-schooling families and from teachers working with small pods of students throughout this pandemic time. Our eBooks have become a vital resource, especially the basic books on writing and arithmetic.

From January 1 through the end of December 2020, the OWL had over 245,000 site visitors from many English-speaking countries including the USA, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, as well as from other countries including India, Argentina, Mexico, Spain, Chile, and Colombia!

We are fortunate to be able to offer an ever-expanding number of eBooks, available in pdf format, which requires Adobe Reader software, available for free from Adobe.

eBooks added in English since the Fall of 2020:

Books to Help with Teaching from Waldorf Publications

- *Matt Mc Flack and His Flyaway Kite* by Kyra Robinow, from Waldorf Publications
- *Play With Us* by Freya Jaffke, from WECAN Publications

New eBooks in Spanish include:

- *Lecciones de Geometria en la Escuela Waldorf*, Volumen 2: Dibujo de formas a mano alzada y construcciones geométricas básicas en los grados 4 y 5 by Ernst Schuberth, from Waldorf Publications
- *Hitos del Desarrollo*, Valores Medulares y Metodología en la Educación Waldorf para Niños de 3–9 by Rainer Patzlaff, Wolfgang Saßmannshausen, et al, from Waldorf Publications

New articles in Spanish and English are posted every month and can be accessed from the Home page by clicking on *Artículos en Espanol* and *Articles*.

As always, back issues of the *Research Bulletin*, *Gateways* (Waldorf Early Childhood Association), *Pedagogical Section/Rundbrief* and a number of other international publications are available online in our *Journals* section. The Online Waldorf Library welcomes your questions and we are happy to help with you with your research projects.

Visit the Online Waldorf Library at

www.waldorflibrary.org

Report from the Research Institute for Waldorf Education and Waldorf Publications

Patrice Maynard
Director of Publications and Development

Much like the goldfinches in the neighborhoods of Hudson, New York, and Amherst, Massachusetts, we are shedding our dull grey-green feathers and dressing in gold ones for the spring. This turning of the year comes with more relief than is felt in ordinary years, given the constraints of the intermittent lockdowns we have all been practicing. Nevertheless, we are faring well enough and are lucky enough in these months of endurance.

Research took an abrupt turn this year in that we decided to precede a comprehensive survey of parents in Waldorf communities with a shorter and more focused poll on the pedagogical consequences of the COVID pandemic. Our nimble research team—Douglas Gerwin, David Sloan, Connie Stokes, and Andrew Starzynski (with backup support from Patrice Maynard and Waldorf Publications)—swiftly developed an interim "Pandemic Parent Survey," designed to discover how parents are handling the whole pandemic with their Waldorf schools, and how they are bearing up in the "all of it." The research team members were gratified to receive a robust return to their online survey of over 1,100 responses. Clearly parents were glad to be asked. The preliminary results can be read in this issue of the Research Bulletin. The broader survey of Waldorf parents will now be conducted during the coming school year.

Books related to teaching at home were high on the lists of many who, before this past year, had never been called upon to undertake this practice. We had much to do in helping parents and teachers find the resources they needed to encourage their children to continue learning. Some parents already knew about Waldorf education, some didn't know at all but had heard how Waldorf had found a lighter way to take on the arduous task of educating children in new circumstances. We heard in many conversations a new respect for teachers all around the world.

A new catalog of publications will be coming via mailing to all our schools. This new catalog comes with recommendations from the repertoire of Waldorf Publications, grade-by-grade, and will make Book Bank ordering clearer by focusing on publications covered by this arrangement and benefiting from a 25% discount. Our hope is that all of our communities will keep the catalog as a handy reference for recommended aides to teaching and parenting by age level.

The Research Institute's Online Waldorf Library (OWL) has received a cascade of new translations of our collection into Mandarin in order to serve our Asian colleagues more comprehensively. At the same time, our offerings of books, articles, and monographs translated into Spanish continue to grow as well. We receive much gratitude from participants on OWL for these multicultural offerings. The Waldorf Curriculum Fund is to be thanked heartily for the vision and generous support that make these translation projects possible!

Douglas Gerwin has been busy with remote teaching and conferencing, through the Center for Anthroposophy and Antioch University New England, in Europe, and across North America, while Patrice Maynard has continued her teaching in Mexico, China, Canada, Southern California, and New York—all online but for New York. Between them they have circled the entire Northern Hemisphere without ever stirring from home base.

Home of the Free, Land of the Slave

How can we tell a truthful story of American history in Waldorf Schools?

Betty Staley recently approached the Research Institute for Waldorf Education (RIWE), offering to share her lifelong research into the upper-grades' history and geography segments of our Waldorf schools so that they more authentically tell the story of America. Betty's commitment over decades to multiculturalism is well-known. Finding the truthful ways to include all the cultures that weave the tapestry of the American culture in the context of child development and the Waldorf curriculum has been her interest.

RIWE is looking forward to this collaboration with Betty, who will help with this research project even though it will also include the whole Waldorf community. The result might be a rich resource through Waldorf Publications of collected, effective stories—a compendium of helpful stories—to transform the traditional teaching in our schools. This is an artistic undertaking of high order and will benefit from the participation of all our schools, teachers, and parents.

At a time when culture tends to push everything into a political framework, ever moreso in these recent days, it becomes a delicate project to achieve clarity beyond prejudice—especially when the prejudice is unconscious. As reported in the most recent research of our graduates, Waldorf alumni tend to be the most inclusive and tolerant participants in life. This is the case even as our school populations and teaching staff tend to be predominantly white. Reports underline the general acceptance our graduates tend to emanate for all people, and for all life. This does speak to the transformative power of our approach and our curriculum, and how this is accomplished might be the substance of this different sort of research project.

Meanwhile, this current research is calling all Waldorf community members to join us in collecting the best American geography and history stories (or approaches) that can become a resource for all North American Waldorf schools. Please send your submission to publications@waldorf-research.org by August 31, 2021. We will select and assemble contributions into a book aiming to help all teachers, Waldorf and others. RIWE and Waldorf Publications are enthusiastic about joining with Betty in this research-publication project. We are hoping you will all join us as well.

In her recent book, *Tending the Spark, Lighting the Future for Middle School Students*, Betty highlights what she calls "the vulnerability gap." These pre-teen years are the years of sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students in our Waldorf schools. Middle and high school teachers know well how tender these years are and how important is the correctness of intention in identifying their particular vulnerability. Our comprehension of child development defines the need to protect youngsters until the great shift in skills and capacities comes in high school, as puberty settles, bringing new abilities in judgement and thinking.

How to tell a truthful tale without burdening young souls, new to the world of capacities for informed judgement and idealism, is the challenge for every middle school teacher and parent. Avoiding the current dangers of burdening young souls with troubling issues before their capacities are in place to properly digest the heaviness of adulthood, creating despair instead of enthusiasm for the future is, of course, the goal. Stories that lead to the facts of the matter are the narratives we need to share and build together. History beyond politics, beyond blame, beyond guilt, are needed in order to avoid the crushing of young hope and future visioning. Such telling of history will allow for the cultivation of ideals, the telling of truth, the sharing of biographies of real heroines, real heroes—stories that engage young hearts in compassion, comprehension, aspiration, admiration, and moral insight are needed.

If seeds of truth are planted in the hearts of lower school students, then in high school years, these same students can begin to identify for themselves issues they find to pursue as these seeds blossom. Students can then recognize with increasing discernment the complexity of human nature and can bear with strength the stories of the inhumanity brought to bear by human beings on others. By high school, students are more stable and ready to work for causes they realize out of themselves, ready to practice walking to their own destinies from the position of gladness about their lives that brought them to the point they find themselves.

In the coming months, we will circulate a letter of invitation to all Waldorf school communities to launch this research. Meanwhile, we thank Betty Staley for her vision in identifying this timely project!

Donors to The Research Institute for Waldorf Education and Waldorf Publications

With Heartfelt Thanks to Our Generous Donors

In each Fall/Winter issue of the *Research Bulletin* we publish the names of the donors who gave in the previous fiscal year. Our donor list was incomplete in the last issue, due to human and technological error. We are publishing again this listing of contributors from 2019-2020 for this reason, including all those who gave so generously!

PLEASE NOTE: our gratitude is undiminished. We could not finesse the work we accomplish without your support! Please accept our thanks for your recognition of our efforts in these gifts and for your additional gift of patience with our stumble. The complete listing for our current fiscal year will appear in the Fall/Winter issue of the *Research Bulletin*.

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About the Research Institute for Waldorf Education

The 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* twice a year and prepares educational resources, including collections of eBooks and articles (a growing number of them newly translated into Spanish). 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.

In 2013 the Research Institute took over the publications arm of 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 AWSNA's twice-yearly magazine *Renewal*.

Summary of Activities Supported by the Research Institute

Avalon Initiative

A think tank for questions of freedom in education Heartsspeak.net website of stories from the classroom

Subject-Specific Colloquia

On Teaching (with published proceedings):

- Chemistry
- Computer and Information Technology
- English
- Life Sciences and Environmental Studies
- Mathematics
- Physical Sciences
- U.S. History
- World History: Symptomatology

Recent Research Projects

Alternatives to Standardized Assessment
Computer Technology in Waldorf Schools
Handbook of Waldorf Pedagogy
Human Sexuality Curriculum
Screen Free September Initiative Worldwide
Survey of Waldorf Graduates
Survey of Waldorf Parents
Waldorf High School Curriculum Research Projects

Online Waldorf Library (OWL)

Over 3000 articles and 880 books

Research Bulletin

Two issues per year of essays, articles, reviews, and commentaries on educational themes

Retreats of the Research Institute

Presentations and discussions exploring contemporary questions related to education

RIWE Website

Collections of articles and news features on current educational issues

Waldorf Publications

Over 400 book titles, plus science kits, publicity materials on Waldorf education

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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 · East Bay 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 · Waldorf School of San Diego · Waldorf School of Santa Barbara · Waldorf School of the Peninsula · Westside Waldorf 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 · Suncoast Waldorf School **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 **KS:** Prairie Moon Waldorf School **KY:** Waldorf School of Louisville **LA:** Waldorf School of New Orleans **MA:** Ashwood Waldorf School · The Bay School · Maine Coast Waldorf School · Seacoast Waldorf School **MD:** Waldorf School of Baltimore · Washington Waldorf School **MA:** Berkshire Waldorf High School · Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School · Hartsbrook School · Waldorf High School of Massachusetts Bay · Waldorf School of Cape Cod · The Waldorf School of Lexington · Waldorf School at Moraine Farm **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 **NV:** Nevada Sage Waldorf School **NH:** Center for Anthroposophy · High Mowing School · Monadnock Waldorf School · White Mountain Waldorf School **NJ:** Waldorf School of Princeton **NM:** Santa Fe Waldorf School **NY:** Alkion Center · Aurora Waldorf School · Brooklyn Waldorf School · Green Meadow Waldorf School · Hawthorne Valley School · Ithaca Waldorf School · Lakeside School at Black Kettle Farm · Mountain Laurel Waldorf School · The Otto Specht School · Primrose Hill School · Rudolf Steiner School of New York City · Sunbridge Institute · 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:** Camphill Special School · Kimberton Waldorf School · River Valley Waldorf School · Susquehanna Waldorf School · 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 · Sunfield Waldorf School & Biodynamic Farm · 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:** Cedar Bridge School· Kelowna Waldorf School · Nelson Waldorf School · Saltwater 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:** Halton Waldorf School · London Waldorf School · Mulberry Waldorf School · Rudolf Steiner Centre Toronto · 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 **GUANAJUATO:** Colegio Yeccan Waldorf **JALISCO:** Waldorf de Guadalajara MORELOSS: Centro de Desarollo Antroposofico · Escuela Waldorf de Cuernavaca **OAXACA:** Papalotes Oaxaca · Papalotes Puerto Escondido PUEBLA Escuela Raices Iniciativa Waldorf Puebla **QUERÉTARO:** Escuela Libre Lila K'erendarhu **QUINTANA ROO:** Ak Lu'um Waldorf School · Del Mar Waldorf Initiative Cancun · Ximbal - Iniciativa Waldorf Cancun **STATE of MÉXICO:** Colegio Inlakesh ·

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