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.