

Ruminations for the PSC Meeting April 2020

In the last six weeks many of us have shared the experience of distance teaching in schools and teacher training institutes. We are engaged in rethinking so many aspects of our work that we normally take for granted when we are in the presence of the students we teach. Using a medium that does not easily lend itself to working directly with the soul spiritual challenges us to be more technically savvy and pedagogically inventive.

At each step we are asked to deepen our understanding of the foundational principles as we seek to teach authentically in these unusual circumstances. I am both heartened by the strength and resilience of our class, school, and institute communities and dismayed by the lack of warmth in the medium we use to engage them. Cultivating the quality of relationships, we are all nourished by calls for a deepening of our soul spiritual activity. These are some of the questions that have arisen from the work of these past weeks. There are surprising gifts and challenges both.

Touch

- Physical touch and its metamorphosis into a sense of the ego of the other, as well as the cultivation of the other senses.
- What is the implication for the young child whose being needs the foundational experience of touch in order to transform it into the future ability to perceive the living ego of the other?
- What could be the effects of this lack of touch on the social life of the future, and how do we work to support truly human capacities?
- How long can the relationship based on human presence, and the interaction of the sheaths, sustain distance learning?
- How can the meditative practice of the individual teacher support the students, as well as the colleagues?
- How do we work with our students when our schools and institutes re-open? Will it be “business as usual” or will an element of deeper healing be necessary?
- People are speaking to people on the street, from porches and balconies, and smiling. I have spoken to so many neighbors I have never ever seen before, let alone spoken to.
- There is a welling up of the human need for meeting the other face to face, more articles about the problems of being touch deprived and the importance of this special sense in human development.
- There is a welling up of appreciation for meeting the other face to face.

Slowing the Pace

- I do notice a slowing down, exposing deep levels of stress and fatigue that so many adults and children just absorb into their organism because of a fast-paced daily life.
- Art can help us digest and restore our forces, strengthening the heart/lung system and working on our senses directly. What is the place of artistic and hands-on practice in distance learning and how do we cultivate that? I have found both high school students and adults able to respond with a higher degree of originality that I did not expect and am heartened by.
- The six basic exercises and contemplative practice, placed in a universal context and language, are so relevant and easy to speak about in very practical terms.
- I'm discovering unexpected ways of engaging the students in artistic work, sometimes with assignments requiring the engagement of the rest of the family.
- Working with the seniors in their final block I decided to make their autobiography the prime focus. I'm experiencing it as an anchoring of their ability to have confidence and resilience as they face so many elements of their 'right of passage' being thwarted. Turning that situation to a positive is also giving them a deeper sense of how loved they are since, to complete the assignment, they are required to speak with immediate and extended family and experience their warmth.

Family Life

- Families are talking to each other more, which is strengthening.
- There are also families that are not necessarily sources of refuge for the students. On the whole, as teachers at CWS we are more fortunate in the resources typically available to our students, but this is not necessarily true for all children.
- Even news commentators are beginning to look less polished and more like normal people, even having their children show up on screen.
- There is an opportunity to reconsider what is of most importance in daily life.

Further questions

- Seeing world events as a battle for the human soul and asking how do I respond as an individual?
- Witnessing the national crisis in the political realm and wondering about the opportunities afforded us by the current situation, while also being more awake to the parallel forces of opposition. I'm thinking locally and as an individual in daily life.

And, finally,

- What effect is the current situation going to have on Waldorf education, both in terms of schools and teacher training institutes?

- Of course, there are serious financial concerns, given the economy, about the survival of independent schools, but are there opportunities to highlight strengths of this education, even while using distance learning?

Informing all of these questions and situations is the presence of the being of the universal human in us as we try to find our way into a human future.

Frances Vig