

Reflections from an Early Childhood Educator

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In my lifetime, there has never been an event with such widespread global impact. Even in the isolation of our homes, we can hardly avoid the heightened emotions that surround us. Fear is especially palpable. At the same time and despite the looming fear, there are everyday acts of courage and kindness that we can celebrate. The situation has brought out both the worst and best aspects of our humanness.

Early childhood educators are used to being calm centers in stormy times, but in this situation, we are dealing with an unprecedented level of uncertainty — for ourselves, our families, the parents of the children in our classes, our colleagues in our schools. We are in uncharted waters as a culture, as a school movement and as Waldorf educators. It is clear, however, that the strength needed to meet these uncertainty is to be found inside, not “out there.”

Already in circulation are thoughts, verses, and stories that individuals have found helpful. In difficult times, I find that it helps to remind myself that, in reality, I am not alone. I have spiritual helpers that have always been there, with guiding images and words of wisdom. What is required is that I quiet my soul enough to listen to them. As Waldorf teachers we also have guiding beings that will work with us when we consciously work together to request and attend to their guidance.

I cannot help but wonder what is REALLY happening? Why did the whole world need to push the pause button? Is there a shining opportunity under the surface of this phenomenon that will remain open only for a short period of time and then close again, like flood waters after the rainstorm? If so, what is my part? Having to adapt to distance learning is allowing us to look with fresh eyes at Waldorf education, at what is so central and difficult to maintain without face-to-face contact. What else might be happening in the larger social sphere? The pull of the longing for the familiar and the comfortable will be tempting. We will need to be awake to new possibilities and to find ways to make the good things that often arise in a crisis a part of our new normal. The likelihood of that happening without both individual and collective effort is slim. So, what is my part? That is another question I am living with during this time.

The current experiment in social distancing has become a rare opportunity to be surprised at what we are learning about our social selves. Modern culture’s love affair with technology and social media is meeting with an unexpected rival — the longing for human touch, human interaction! This is certainly something to pay attention to. How can we document what we are learning and nurture this seed of truth about our need for one another, so that we don’t forget it again?

Likewise, we are discovering treasures with which to renew Waldorf education. We are discovering how flexible we can be and how we can adapt its core principles in ways that we never imagined. We are also discovering what lies at its heart and should not be compromised.

In early childhood we have found new and more collaborative ways to work with the parents that will probably change the nature of our relationships in the future. There will, no doubt, be other changes as well. I am imagining that the recognition of our need to collaborate with our colleagues near and far will also be strengthened. I have found new ways of working with my teacher training students that I will want to retain, even when we are able to work face-to-face again. On the other hand, a lot of what we are able to do together remotely at this time is due to the level of trust that has been built up over the past two years of working together in person.

Interestingly, it is the same advice that we are giving to the parents of young children that serves us so well in this period where we are spending a lot of time in Zoom meetings in order to be able to carry on our work. To balance our time in online activity and to replace the forces that are depleted, we need to cherish our home rhythms and find renewal and joy in cooking, cleaning, gardening, and time in nature. The paradox between spring unfolding at an increasing pace and our social life on hold is striking. My long daily walk is especially healing. Moving my limbs and breathing into nature certainly helps me feel more whole again. Paying attention to small miracles of nature are the key to enhancing the healing. Stopping often to wonder at one glorious blossom or at the mist of fresh green or a just leafing out tree, or to feel the warmth of the spring sun as I step out of the tree's shadow, fills up the well of my soul.

I am excited about the fire of inspiration that has been lit in my colleagues around the world, fire to take up this opportunity for a timely introspection and review of our work in Waldorf education and to strengthen it as we approach its second 100 years!

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