

Waldorf Coronavirus Chronicles

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I feel that dating these posts is incredibly important, since what I am observing continues to evolve and change.

The energetic, etheric quality of schooling stands out to me as one of the largest changes I've witnessed in these five weeks of remote learning. Early on, I was pleasantly surprised at how eagerly my students were engaging with remote learning. They were hungry for connection with their teachers, their classmates, and with learning. Our ability to connect with each other virtually struck me as similar to the phenomenon (observed in 7th Grade chemistry) of relighting a candle that has burned for a while without touching the wick. For the first month it felt like we were living off the "vapors" of the recently extinguished candle that is learning in a classroom together. Now, after a month, it feels like there needs to be energy kindled anew, that the past life forces will slowly recede further and further until we can't use them anymore.

Related to this is that I feel that my students are drawing upon my etheric far more than when we are together in person. Normally after a lesson (at least in the middle school), I feel energized, like the students and I have created life forces that are now nourishing us all. After a virtual lesson, I feel depleted, despite the fact that these are usually only around 30 minutes long. I find that I have to extend my etheric way out in order to ensure that they are with me and connected to the lesson. There is no cohesive class organism to pull everyone in.

Similarly, it is very difficult to sense them. In person I can somewhat read the thoughts and feelings of my students, but it is very difficult to do this over Zoom, making our discussions far less interesting and bringing general participation way down. This also negatively affects their comprehension level. Virtual learning really does favor memorization and statistics. It is far more difficult for the students to understand the gesture or feeling behind something. Being in their own little boxes, I also sense that there is a threshold created that isn't there in the classroom that makes sharing that much more difficult and exposing to their already tender adolescent selves. Finally, the students (including my own 2nd Grade child) get far less done in a day than they do at school, even though the amount of time available to them hasn't changed. This has to do with the lack of the teacher's presence as well as the social inertia created by the class. It is far more difficult to do something alone than to do it in the presence of others, even if those others can sometimes be disruptive or annoying.

I have tried to be very conscious of the fact that our medium is electricity and that we are engaging through electrical light. Early on, we were studying physiology, so we talked about the nervous system and how the nerves have similarities to electricity. Interestingly, our nerves respond rather negatively to electricity, making us agitated and tired. I have thus tried to give my students as many assignments that require them to go outdoors and be in sunlight. Sunlight has a nourishing effect upon their nervous system and their etheric, which is depleted through electronic activity. It has been rewarding to talk to the parents a lot about breathing and what that means. They have so much more of an opportunity to really understand how we work through practical experience and not just through our telling them what we do. I have tried to shift my lessons so that there is a much stronger breathing out than would normally occur in a main lesson because their tendency (especially as adolescents) will be to stay inside and be on a digital device. This does not feel like a great time for me to work on their craft as writers. It does feel like a good time for me to encourage a spirit of curiosity and adventure. To this end, my next history block—involving exploration, trade, and colonization—includes assignments for

them to orient them better in their surroundings through cartography, compass navigation, and observation. I have received very positive responses from these activities in particular. I have found that I am favoring writing assignments that involve creative, historical fiction writing, having yet to assign any kind of report writing.

The role of the teacher is continually on my mind. I am saddened that I cannot observe my students or connect with them directly. Trust is a word that comes up for me a lot. I cannot see them doing their work. I must trust that they will. I cannot see them meeting challenges and overcoming them. I must trust that they will. In this way, giving something up to the angels must occur to a far greater degree than before. My meditations on my students have been emphasizing their angels far more than before, Adam Bittleston's verse providing a helpful scaffold. I have started trying and imagine them in their home space, which I witness a little through our morning Zoom calls. Through these two practices I have felt a little closer to them, but it is still a struggle to retain the connection.

There is so much to observe and learn during this time, if we are but awake to it. To be awake to the day, I have been ever more disciplined with myself about turning in for sleep at night. May we all be nourished by night's reprieve and awaken to what our times are teaching us.