
Focus—Looking into the Future

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access in Waldorf Education

— Letter from the WECAN Board

Last fall, the WECAN board made an ongoing commitment to work consciously and intentionally with the themes of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) in Waldorf early childhood education. Many colleagues have been working for decades as individuals and small groups to deepen how Waldorf education can truly be an education towards freedom for all people. The WECAN board recognizes that as a leadership body, we must work to support these individuals and groups and examine our board practices to realize an ever-evolving form of education that puts our ideals into practice. As a collaborative organization made up of members, we want to share what that work is looking like for the board and invite you to share your own learning with us.

In October 2018, the board met in Massachusetts and received a professional development training from Collaborative for Educational Services on race and bias in early childhood education. Together we looked at the impact of unconscious bias on children and how early in the child's life those biases affect a child's experience of themselves and others. This was an introductory workshop intended to give the board a common experience from which we could go forward. During this meeting we agreed to look through the lens of IDEA in our teacher education work, explore how to support our members in classrooms and care centers, and examine WECAN's own practices and publications.

In May 2019, the board met with Rebecca Ossorio, PhD, who facilitated the first of two professional development sessions using collaborative inquiry, a form of contemplative, descriptive, group reflection based on practices developed by the Prospect Center in Bennington, Vermont. Similar to an anthroposophical child study, collaborative inquiry invites the lived experience of the educator to reveal what needs to be seen and what next right steps might be. In both our spring and fall 2019 sessions we were guided by the question: How can we, as the WECAN board, see what obstacles are in the way of diversity, equity and

inclusion in Waldorf early childhood education and take steps to help remove these?

During the inquiry we were asked to describe an experience or encounter that brought us to believe that diversity, equity and inclusion are important for the WECAN board to examine. We described moments when we felt an awareness of the limitations of our practice around race, ethnicity, gender, economic status or sexual orientation. Through a series of inquiry rounds, the board members explored these recollections, allowing insights to emerge and impact the group. These reflections were intrinsically entwined with the board's envisioning work and influenced the way we see the board's future function. At the end of the May meeting, the board affirmed the mandate for a new IDEA committee to continue to support and develop this work for the WECAN board.

In October 2019, we met again with Rebecca, this time for two three-hour sessions, using the guiding question written above. We were asked to reflect on the following question; In what ways do we experience our impulses to “protect the dignity of childhood” and our awareness about “awakening” children at the developmentally appropriate time, coming up against our efforts towards diversity, inclusion and equity or our “striving for diversity in racial, cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds of children coming to our schools”? (The quotations are from the WECAN mission statement and WECAN Shared Principles.) These questions offered the opportunity for potent reflections on the themes.

We worked together to sense what intelligent action steps were being asked of the board as a result of our inquiry. Board members made a commitment at the end of the meeting to participate as we are able as individuals in Undoing Racism training (see pisab.org, “Programs” page), read and reflect together on a collection of documents shared by Rebecca on White Supremacist culture, develop WECAN's diversity/inclusion statement, look to support our teacher

education committee on further exploration of these themes, and host another collaborative inquiry session with Rebecca in the spring of 2020. During the fall meeting we also studied and wrestled with Steiner's lecture, *The Universal Human*, lecture 4, January 9, 1916.

The WECAN board recognizes that in order to fulfill the mission of Waldorf education in the next century, we must develop in an ongoing way our understanding of bias in race, class and gender. In order to educate our children in freedom we must understand not only the developmental needs of children but the context of the society and structure that influences them and us. This is potent, painful, powerful, essential work. With collaborative, sensitive and honest activity, we can go forward together. ♦

On behalf of the WECAN board,
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IDEA Committee
