

Report from the Research Institute for Waldorf Education and Waldorf Publications

Patrice Maynard

Director of Publications and Development

The transition of summer to autumn here in the Northeast often exhibits a tug-of-war (even an out-and-out war) as light gives way to darker days; briskness pulls away at the warmth of summertime; fear tugs hard at calm enjoyment of nature with Hallowe'en and El Día de los Muertos; and life gives way to death, as nature relinquishes almost everything living and flourishing. The last roses in the garden, the final outbursts of blooms and vegetation look hopeful for a moment as warm days seem to promise a continuing. Frost will come, though, as surely as autumn follows summer.

Study of anthroposophy reveals that our inner composure has an effect in the world, in nature. As Titania states to Oberon in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, "human beings fight because we quarrel," but so do our quarrels affect the world. Our seemingly small meditative efforts toward equilibrium, even as tugs-of-war crop up around us, contribute to peace on earth. Everyone holds the power to accept and to inwardly transform all challenges into the glories and opportunities of living, so that "good may become" of our struggles and conflicts—our own tugs-of-war.

Recent experience in Waldorf schools has revealed that things are continuing akimbo from the pandemic, restrictions, mandates, vaccination rules, and disruptions following these. Enrollment in many schools had gone over the top as families fled the cities to the countryside. New York City is at the root of this phenomenon in the Waldorf schools up and down the Hudson Valley, at a reported pace four times the exodus from the Big Apple after 9/11. This new enrollment has replaced existing enrollment as families who would prefer not to vaccinate their children—or at least not at the rate prescribed by the CDC (look up the "Slow Vaccination" movement online for reference)—retreat from their Waldorf schools to homeschooling "pods" or other alternatives to formal schooling. The replacement enrollment in Waldorf schools can often come in the form of families lacking any knowledge of Waldorf education but admiring the dedicated effort in many Waldorf schools to continue meeting in person with the more kindly, less test-driven approach used in Waldorf education. Newcomers often struggle with the absence of screens and the unusual approach to schooling. Teachers and schools struggle with pressure from new parents wishing for the schools to meet

common expectations like those engendered by the Common Core Standards.

The disintegration of the entire imagination of "school" that the lockdown and restrictions have wrought offers both hurdles to leap over and opportunities to re-think what it is Waldorf education has to offer in building a new imagination of "school." After a flurry of attempts to "follow the rules," using Zoom as an agent for this effort to stay connected and continue the work in the spring of 2020, when the panic of the lockdown was new, many teachers challenged the assumption that technology was a "necessity" and used this means only lightly—or not at all—and found myriad, creative ways to sustain heart connections to and among their students.

Teacher education institutes worked in a variety of different ways to continue their important work—some with full-on technology as the means; others refusing technology completely, jumping through the many regulatory hoops required to meet in person with safe distancing, masking, temperature taking, and reporting. Criticisms could be found—and can still be found—from all directions about all that schools and institutes have attempted, altered, and discovered in the dedicated insistence on continuing "Waldorf100" into the coming new century.

Administrations and boards of schools and institutes, with their remarkable legal and moral responsibility to keep organizations alive and moving forward, have in some cases appeared "authoritarian" in their enforcement of governmental rules of distancing and managing threats to good health. There are pockets of teachers who have felt curtailed, bossed, and unfree in their attempts to meet the needs of the children entrusted to their care. This enhanced struggle—tug-of-war—between regulation and freedom has been intensified by a heightened national debate about diversity, equity, and inclusion, which also has appeared at times to seem authoritarian, with statements about what should and should not be included in a Waldorf curriculum.

What a chance this all presents to overcome the illusion of a tug-of-war, to remember our common goal on behalf of the young, the future, to further a new imagination of what education can accomplish for

them through Waldorf education! As work continues on every front to transform polarities into active listening and conversation—the “better than gold” of Goethe’s celebrated “Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily”—RIWE and WP work to offer carefully vetted resources, sound research, and accessible materials to support the work at hand for Waldorf teachers, Waldorf schools, and Waldorf education. New books, research into parent responses to their journey through Waldorf education, translations into Spanish and Chinese, all available for free on the Online Waldorf Library (OWL), new enrollment materials, and gathering funders who share the vision of the potential in Waldorf education, constitute our work on behalf of all who work toward the world we know is possible, a world worthy of human beings. Enormous gratitude is due to all who share this work and make it possible. Thank you!