
School Contemplation: A Potent Tool for Waldorf Schools in Challenging Times

— Composed by Laurie Clark in collaboration with the WECAN Research Group

COVID-19 has brought challenges on every level to Waldorf communities. Here in North America schools are struggling to cope with major pedagogical, social, and financial questions. While solving everyday problems is a necessary priority, in order to move beyond reacting, we may need to remind ourselves to take time to listen and speak with one another. Sharing our stories helps us to realize that we are not alone and that we can find soul strength with one another.

We also have a potent pedagogical practice of “Child Contemplation,” also called “Child Study,” which teachers use to support a child going through a developmental challenge. Sometimes a faculty will also undertake a “Class Contemplation.” This process involves observation, imagination and meditation and helps us deepen our understanding of a child or a class.

Could we also use this kind of process to help us penetrate the deeper issues and gestures that are arising in our schools out of the current situation or in any period of significant change? Those of us who have practiced Child Contemplation know how revealing and healing the process can be.

There is an urgency at this time for each school to contemplate the communal environment with an open and honest transparency. The importance of acknowledging, seeking understanding, and deeply committing to integrating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (including LGBTQ+) in the school provides a way to take action towards the ethical roots of social justice. Raising awareness of these issues within the school has the potential to be regenerative and transformative.

A school that went through a difficult transition two years ago initiated a version of this process, out of a sense that the outside pressures had pulled the school away from its center, allowing it to become more and more Matter without Spirit. Some faculty members were also carrying the question of “What is the Being of the school?” (See note) The school contemplation process helped them rediscover and recommit to actively working with the spiritual impulses at the core of their work.

Here are some suggestions for how to approach a school contemplation process.

School Contemplation Process

Open the session by reading a verse that has a meaning for your community.

I. Social Mission of Waldorf Education

- Recall the founding of the first Waldorf School and its social impulses.
- Read the Mission, Vision and Core Values of your School. Is there an alignment of the vision and values with the mission of the school?

II. Biography of your School

- Share the inner and outer qualities of your place: geography, climate and ecology, physical characteristics of buildings and campus, organizational structures, the balance of long-term and newer teachers, the balance of tradition and innovation, the mood of soul.
- Recall the history of your school from its inception to the present time: founding members, how the name was chosen, major milestones, accomplishments, crises.

III. Awakening to Community

- How does each individual, group and the school as a whole stay aligned with the school’s mission, vision, and values?
- How can we continue to stay awake to the spiritual being of the school?
- How can we invite our spiritual helpers to meet us in our endeavors?

IV. Reflections on initiatives for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in our school

- Describe how the school is implementing DEI awareness and how it is coordinating plans in the faculty, administration, leadership structures and parent community.
- How is DEI sustained and incorporated in the school’s mission and policies (i.e. hiring, admissions)? Is there a diversity committee? Is there a safe place to share grievances?
- What is the mood and quality of the DEI work?

What plans can be put into place to increase diversity and ensure a more equitable future for the school?

V. Reflections on our Present Circumstances

- What aspects of the school are healthy and thriving?
- In what areas are we currently facing challenges?
- Is there an archetypal image or story that characterizes the present situation?

VI. Steps towards Healing and Renewal

- What images are arising that can bring balance or healing to the situation?
- Are structural changes needed?
- How can we strengthen our relationships?
- How can we communicate and deal with conflict more creatively?

VII. Moving into the Future with Courage

Esoteric inner courage—“Let us never forget that every step taken at the prompting of the spiritual world leads us into a situation where we have to look right and left and make a new decision. These decisions that are continually facing us have to be made with courage, with inner courage of life.” —Rudolf Steiner (Lecture 2, *The Curative Education Course*)

- What are our visions of the future?
- How can we support one another in our work together?

It would be ideal to be able to work through the steps of this process over the course of three days or three faculty meetings. Parts I and II could be completed in the first session, II and IV in the second session, and V and VI in the last session. This allows for questions to be worked with in the night and over time. Reviewing the results of the work together at a later date would also be fruitful.

Coming to clear insights is a critical first step in meeting the need for change. Creating plans and implementing them is a second level that requires

other kinds of meetings and resources. In the same way that our inner attitude towards the children in our care matters, so does our attention to inner spiritual activity by our teachers and school leaders make a difference in how practical solutions unfold. ♦

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NOTE:

The following is a free rendering of what Johannes Tautz, one of the teachers at the first Waldorf School, wrote about the “Being of the School.”

Just two days after the first Waldorf school’s opening, the founding teachers gathered to take on the task of forming a faculty. They wanted to form a faculty that was aware of itself as a responsible community that worked in cooperation with all of its members. In this way, the community could become capable of inviting the being of the school into its presence and become an organ for this being.

It was essential for this faculty to commit to a regular rhythmic relationship to this spiritual experience through a practice of soul exercises. Experience confirms that a spiritual practice by the community members of the school invokes the being of the school and helps the essence of the school to manifest. It also works constructively into the healthy social life of the community.

*The Meditative Life of the Teacher
Three lectures by Johannes Tautz
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