

---

# Heart-seeds Take Root

~ Holly Koteen-Soulé

## *What are we being asked to do?*

To bring the incredible gift of Waldorf education into healthy alignment with the current social situation, to renew its essence out of our own deepened awareness and spiritual inspiration.

Anthroposophy and Waldorf education were inaugurated not for a specific group, but in service of humanity as a whole. That intention is being tested in our current social climate—and rightly so!

How can we not only meet the children and families who have come to us in the past, but also welcome those who have not yet felt invited?

In this process of re-examination, we find ourselves interacting with different kinds of social groups and other educational movements. This is not unlike having a friend who can mirror for us our blind spots. Entering into dialogue with others allows us to see ourselves in a different light. While this is illuminating, it is also uncomfortable, even painful at times. While we all know that pain is a part of change and transformation, it is still hard to let go of what we have held as cherished notions. We love Waldorf education. In all of life, however, letting go is the first step of bringing something new into being.

In many conversations with colleagues during the past year, there has been a growing appreciation for having been required by COVID restrictions to let go of what was familiar and build up programs primarily out of the warmth of our relationships and the healing forces of play in nature. For many teachers, successfully Improvising out of the essential aspects of Waldorf early childhood education has been a hidden blessing in an otherwise challenging situation.

In terms of our reawakened cultural consciousness, we are being called—not by outer circumstances, but by our inner sense of conscience—to look for the essence of our work and allow it to clothe itself in more inclusive gestures. We can't do this by ourselves. We need to do this in dialogue, as a movement, in collaboration with other organizations and individually with colleagues, both within and outside

of the Waldorf movement. We need to have honest, open conversations in which we are both speaking and listening, but listening more than speaking!

The sense of ripeness that many of us feel is compelling, but the accompanying sense of urgency can be overwhelming, especially in combination with the other challenges of the past year. How do we know we are on the right path?

My own experience tells me that this is a moment to let our hearts lead. If we let our heads lead, we may find ourselves leaning into new ideologies. If we let our wills go unchecked, we may end up with superficial solutions. More than anything else we need the intuitive sensing capacity of our hearts to stay present to the moment and to trust that what is ours to do is right there in front of us—in a child's eyes, a family's request, a colleague's question. Our open-hearted interest in others, uncoupled from our desire to be right or our fear of being wrong, is where we need to start, with genuine curiosity as to where it might lead us.

The heart also guides us in the realm of time. We are fortunate to have schooled ourselves in how to support the children by working rhythmically with time. The heart and lungs are organs of rhythm, and rhythm is above all what supports development in us as well as in the children. We know how it feels to be held in the healing flow of rhythm, in the breathing between taking hold and letting go, in moving with the cycles and seasons of life.

When we carry our questions over time, through many nights and days, pictures arise in response. The language of the heart is the language of pictures, imaginations, and archetypes. This is the well where we find soul-nourishing images to share with our children. The same well will be the source for new inspirations that allow us to reform the founding impulses of Waldorf education.

For me, the Both/And gesture has to do with understanding and learning to use the wisdom of the intelligent heart. It means letting the seeds of the conversations that we are having sift down

---

into my heart space. It means being willing to work collaboratively with my colleagues to bring the imaginations arising from those seeds-in-the-heart conversations into an unknown future. It is trying to bring those two activities of exploring and experimenting together into a tentative harmony and listening to how it sounds and resounds. At the same time, for me personally, it is clearly an opportunity to actually grow the capacity of my heart and become a more loving person. ◆

**Holly Koteen-Soulé** is Early Childhood Director for Sound Circle Center in Seattle. She served as kindergarten and parent-child teacher for 25 years at Seattle Waldorf and Bright Water School in Seattle. She is a member of the Pedagogical Section Council and a WECAN board member. Holly initiated calling together the newly formed Early Childhood Research group, which contributes to Gateways.