

### **Hearts Coalescing in Courage:**

What is Truly Needed at This Time?

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Schools across the country have prepared for months for the return of students. Plans upon plans, policies, protocols, and powerpoint presentations have been filed in folders on our Waldorf resource hubs. We have accumulated so much helpful information! Is this all that is needed? As we live through the life cycle of this crisis, I cannot help but question the effects of our quest to keep up with information that is moving, changing, and contested. How does our information habit hinder us from seeing other possibilities? Moreover, after so many days of being tethered to the screen for both information and connection, what experiences have we had that help us perceive the limits of virtual connections and what else we need to care for one another?

### **A Moment in Place and Time: Sensing**

At a small, rural Waldorf school in New England, a handful of teachers had worked throughout the summer to prepare for reopening. The resulting compilation of COVID-19 documents, all-school meetings, and shared agreements was replicated across the country by schools offering in-person or on-line instruction. As early childhood educators we know that parents of young children call upon us in their vulnerability. We address this need in what we call “parent work”, “parent support,” and “parent education.” We also know that parenthood also brings forth deep courage. Parents may speak to us with a fierce clarity. Sometimes we react. Sometimes we receive.

At this particular moment in time, a group of kindergarten parents spoke directly. They reflected back to their child’s teacher a collective appreciation for the thorough and detailed information. “And,” they said, “we need something else. We need us all together.”

Information was not the healing balm for their fear and anxiety in returning their young child to school. Moving beyond fear depended upon their trust in one another. How does one bring forth such encompassing trust in a crisis? The teacher called a parent meeting not to review COVID-19 information, but to hear everyone speak to, *“Where are you with the reopening of school? Where is your child?”*

### **Gesture of the Teacher: Releasing and Receiving**

Parents, like all of us, need nourishment. We as teachers strive to nourish families through relationships that extend far beyond the typical role of teacher. Through her intentions and actions, the teacher helps create a sheltering space for all. Even in pandemic times. Even in a remote parent meeting. Few of us feel comfortable engaging with others before a computer screen. Antipathy, anxiety, self-doubt, a sense of disembodiment are typical. This is something we share with our families, as well as the longing to overcome the limits of digital relationship.

In this case, the teacher prepared inwardly and outwardly as she would have during pre-pandemic times, including what she wore, the candle she lit, the vase of flowers she placed

behind her. At the appointed hour as the waiting room filled. The teacher saw that the candles and flowers were not visible on the screen. She smiled and focused on the flickering faces of light emerging from others' homes. She saw that the parents, too, were opening up interior spaces.

The teacher abandoned the usual formalities of virtual meetings. She didn't facilitate, keep time, take notes, problem solve, paraphrase, reflect back or follow up. Parents spoke in turn. All the others listened. It became apparent that what is feared in isolation becomes less so when shared, especially when we are open to receiving. Heads began to nod. Bodies stiff and upright in desk chairs began to soften. "When I see how happy my son is to see a classmate again, well, that joy is just so much stronger than my fear." The last to speak said, "This helps me. I know my child needs to go back to school, but, I have to tell you, the thought of it is like a knife in my gut. I just have to be honest about that."

Silence. *"In silence," poet David Whyte writes, "essence speaks to us of essence itself..." "Out of the quiet emerges the sheer incarnational presence of the world..."*

As we all moved closer to the shared internal symmetry coming from the silence, unprompted offerings came forth. No longer were individuals adrift in an ocean of unknowns. Those with flexibility at home and work offered support for essential workers in the event of another school closure. The teacher stayed quiet as individual hearts began to flow together with courage. In its linguistic origins, "courage" looks to the interior. The old Norman French, *Coeur*, means heart.