

**Threshold Moment for Renewal:
Both/And Gesture**

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In the final WECAN zoom webinar of 2020-21, four voices spoke from the heart. Speaking from the heart requires honesty, courage, and humility. Always but perhaps more significantly now at a time when polarizing forces are strong. The work of diversity requires the same qualities, and in considering the question of coming to a new inner gesture of both/and as we work together toward change, members of WECAN's research group - Nancy Blanning, Leslie Wetzonis Woolverton, Holly Koteen-Soule, and Laurie Clark - spoke as individuals, first, vulnerable and authentic. What emerged as well was an unscripted resonance about the tasks at hand and how to move forward. Personal narratives of self-discovery and struggle, together with new inspirations coming forth from a wellspring of diverse sources, spoke to the urgent need for selfless, creative, and courageous work on behalf of a universal humanity. In the end the conversation guided us to listen to "seeds-in-the-conversations" that might lead us together into a shared universal space for healing and growth. Now is the time when we all must stand (up) for love.

The Waldorf movement, and the world, finds itself at a threshold moment. We are confronted by the necessity for change and a renewal of the social mission that lives at our reason for being. Questions about change have brought polarization, divisiveness, and judgement. How do we move away from polarization and towards a path of growth and change together? What is the right path? How do we know? How to move forward together?

Quiet the noise of overwhelm and eradicate the fears of not knowing.

Instead, as the panel suggested, listen. Listen to each other. Hear other's stories. Seek out the stories that reaffirm how understanding and relationships conquer prejudices. Deepen the listening. Listen with stillness and equanimity. Through the stories of others, stories of struggle and unkindness, we might see our own dark shadow of bias. Understanding becomes possible once we do this inner work. Doing this inner work with a disciplined practice of listening is essential to moving forward together.

Strive to bring our highest true selves to each other, as we do for the children.

We know to be mirrors for the children. An essential quality of our work is our striving to be models of imitation for the children in thought, word, and deed. In terms of content, the speakers expressed confidence that we will remain true to our work with the children as long as we work authentically and with integrity. We will need to let go of any notion of a singular "right way" in bringing explicit instruction and instead be mindful, more importantly, of what we know to be true about children based on our understanding of child development: the children are not intellectual and we do not want to intellectualize them.

A guiding question here, brought by Nancy, is to ask if what we are bringing is appropriate to the consciousness awakening of the child? Essential guides help us in our rightful accompaniment of the children are the writings of Rudolf Steiner, Ita Wegman, Henning Kohler, and Karl Konig.

At the same time, we also need to accept the reality of the world into which the children of today are incarnating. In Nancy's view, explicit instruction in our classrooms is needed. Children already receive a deluge of explicit information on a daily basis. What we bring explicitly and beautifully, artistically, rhythmically, imaginatively can serve as a therapeutic balance. To do otherwise (offer no explicit instruction) is irresponsible. Waldorf education is unique in that we want to nourish the child's soul. Nancy believes we can hold true to our soul-nourishing practices as we also bring our intentions into a new fusion of implicit and explicit instruction.

Our diversity work requires us to recognize both spiritual and physical domains. This form of the both/and gesture is another way in which Waldorf education is different from other educational approaches. We have to find more ways that really speak to the diversity of all children and families in our schools. As Nancy described, this task is twofold. To stay true to our spiritual understanding of the universality of human beings in the spiritual domain, we want to make sure every child and family is affirmed as human beings in a spiritual sense. And, we need to recognize the physical, social, cultural, ethnic, and religious form in which their destinies have brought them to the world now. Indeed we cannot ignore those things

Where does the real threat lie? The panel guided our attention to the adult realm. How are we behaving as colleagues? Are we defensive about what we are doing with the children? Are we listening to each other? Are we being dogmatic and rigid about what is “right”? Are our assistants able to speak and be heard, asked Leslie?

Holly urges us to lead with the heart in our adult relationships. The head, she explained, may lead to dogma. The will may lead to superficial solutions. When we trust however in the intuitive sensing capacities of the heart we see that what we need to do is right in front of us.

Why? Because when we lead with the heart we are present in the moment. To be truly present requires us to have interest and open curiosity. This inner gesture is not new to us. We know that being present in working with the children is essential. Many of us have concrete practices to support in this daily preparation. Daily verse, putting on an apron, setting the table or, in my case, loading a wagon with the gear needed for a day outdoors. And putting on my wool cap.

Can we bring this same gesture into the adult realm? We need to be interested in doing so and to bring the same steadfast intentions that we do in our work with the children. This is hard work (!), as Leslie said. Fear of the unknown, of the future, of being right or wrong, rules mightily in the adult realm.

Interest is more powerful than fear. And, we need each other. We need to help each other. We are together for a reason. A simple fact of our social and human reality that is in need of rekindling. Laurie offered this to us. Working together in the adult realm, striving together to help each other in “brotherly and sisterly love” creates a place and space for co-creation. Let us be for each other as we are for the children. Steadfast and faithful.

Open embrace to diverse sources for inspiration. The inspirations for the panelists came from a variety of sources and resources. No longer should we be bound by a prescribed body of knowledge. Moving forward at this time asks us to consider a multiplicity and diversity of experiences. Laurie, for example, was moved by the contemporary story of a young Israeli woman who opted for prison over betrayal of her friendships with Arabs. Our speakers suggest that the both/and gesture emerges organically once we step out to consider diversity of experiences and writings. And we become more accessible to other organizations outside of the Waldorf movement as well. We take a step toward speaking a common language in shared goals for social justice and transformation as we heard in the convergence between, for instance, Rudolf Steiner’s “spiritual idealism”, and Martin Luther King’s “universal altruism.” This deepens our attention to language in general as well. As Leslie brought to us, words are not “innocent” though ignorance may make them appear as such. Children make connections between words and values from a very young age. The more in which we deepen our self-awareness on language and connotations in a culturally-specific way the better able we become in seeing our own biases.

Our engagement with diverse sources also nourishes the language of the heart. Poetry, for example as Holly brought to us, provides rich soul-nourishing images. The language of the heart speaks in the pictures, imaginations and archetypes that we need in order to move forward with new forms of

story-telling with our children. This also is the well for new inspirations that allow us to reform the founding impulses of Waldorf education.

Begin the work of building community at the microcosmic level

The world is big. Our tasks are great. Where and how can we enter, so as not to experience overwhelm and discouragement? All the panelists arrived in the same place. The place where we rather would not go, but which circle back ultimately to our most intimate realms of social relationships.

Laurie brought to us a story about a Christian community priest. This priest was gathered together with others aligned in the goal of greater peace and justice in the world. Others. Many and different others. The others we want and need to feel welcomed and held by us in our classrooms, schools, and larger communities. So you might imagine a formal meeting, an intentional agenda and then the human moment when a Muslim leader stood up to state and ask, "In order to further peace and justice, you have to ask yourself, how are your own relationships? Do you have peace in your marriage? Do you have peace with your children, peace with your colleagues? What lives within us will one day be made manifest in the world."

That is what this Christian priest remembers most. Now is the time when we must look to small and immediate realms of "the social" if we are to move out of what separates and into a third space, a space of meaningful connection in which power dies and can rise transformed.

In the sounding and resounding of this conversation, each of these four individuals took a risk. The risk inherent in every truly creative act is the risk that can lead to what is uniquely individual and at the same time is universally human. In this collaborative creative act we moved forward together toward the third space described by Nancy. The first Goetheanum embodied this space in its physical form. The third space is a space where heaven and earth meet, a space that is sacred and free where there will be no divisiveness. This may be called the Christ space. This is the space where the "universal altruism" of Martin Luther King lives. In the third space between spirit and matter, the higher laws of compassion, empathy, and love are "written on the heart."

The world is calling for this healing space in which we together might guide rebirth. It is calling for us to be doulas of the earth, in Laurie's imagination, earth-keepers.

Supporting Resources

Nancy Blanning:

Foundation Stone Meditation https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA260/English/FSFTSe_index.html

Barnes, Henry. *The Third Space: The First Goetheanum and the First Waldorf School.*

<http://pedagogicalsectioncouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/the-third-space.pdf>

Leslie Wetzonis Woolverton:

Rudolf Steiner, "A Verse for Our Time", <https://anthroposophy.org/community-meeting-online/>

Rudolf Steiner, "America Verse" given for the Foundation of the Threefold Group,

1923. [https://anthroposophy.org/letter-from-virginia-](https://anthroposophy.org/letter-from-virginia-sease/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=letter-from-virginia-sease)

[sease/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=letter-from-virginia-sease](https://anthroposophy.org/letter-from-virginia-sease/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=letter-from-virginia-sease)

Laurie Clark

[Hallel Rabin.docx](#)

King, Martin Luther. *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*