

C̄ONFLUENCE

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News from the Alliance for Public WaldorfSM Education

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THE INTERVIEW
with **Betty Staley**



A LIFE DEVOTED TO WALDORF EDUCATION

The Importance of Public Waldorf High Schools

BY CHIP ROMER

On March 4, several hundred people gathered at Rudolf Steiner College to honor Betty Staley on the occasion of her retirement after fifty years as a Waldorf educator. Betty shared an autobiographical sketch, available (here). Now, in her "retirement," Betty is working on a new book about middle school that addresses the subject of nurturing the civilized mind—and exploring ways to develop training programs for Waldorf high school teachers.

Chip Romer: You are highly regarded in the worldwide Waldorf community, but best known as a leader of Waldorf high schools. In your autobiographical piece, you spoke about someone referring to Waldorf schools without high schools as "chickens with their heads cut off." Could you talk about this?

Betty Staley: The reason I think high schools are particularly important is because the young people are coming into their thinking. They are trying to find their way into their individuality, idealism, and somehow maneuver through all of the temptations that surround them. With the situations of society today, Waldorf high schools are more important than ever, not only because they offer a curriculum that is wonderful and a deep connection between teachers and students, which is very important to community, but because of the larger view of what it means to be a human being. In the lower school this is implicit, but in the high school it's explicit. High school consciously addresses the larger view of what it means to be a human being. There are so many very serious questions for teens, and troubling issues that can cause melancholy or cynicism. I think what Waldorf education brings in the high school, which is different from a lot of other schools, is that it enables students to retain their idealism and keep it grounded in reality and connected with their will.

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A Life Devoted to Waldorf Education

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CR: Is the maintenance of idealism embedded in the curriculum itself?

BS: Everything depends on who the teachers are and how clear they are about their own feelings about things. Teachers' relationships to the importance of human life, and of nature, are going to infuse everything they say and do. I think that it is very important that a high school faculty is serious in working with the insights offered out of anthroposophy. The curriculum is like a guidepost that takes you through the different steps, but without a depth of understanding of human development the curriculum can be empty. It's not a fixed curriculum—Steiner was very clear about that. He wanted it to be discussed and changed according to where one lives and the times in which one lives. I find it very exciting to go to teachers' conferences and see how flexible things are becoming. The curriculum wasn't meant to be orthodox. It's a dance we're doing all the time in Waldorf education, and particularly in the high school.



On the campus of the Sacramento Waldorf School, where she was instrumental in gathering together the colleagues who founded the high school.

A third important part, in addition to the teachers and the curriculum, is the community. The teenagers must feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves. They need a place where they can trust and rest assured that their needs are being met—even when they're fighting such a place. This is a really important part of Waldorf high school education.

CR: I agree. Students are able to trust that their needs are being met almost wholly because of the quality of the teachers surrounding them.

BS: You have good teachers in many schools, but what's different in Waldorf schools is a common purpose. I think Waldorf teachers are carrying the awareness that they are doing something for the future of humanity. This gives perspective to the heavy workload. High school teaching can be exhausting, but teachers can be replenished by their own feeling of community, by the awareness that they working as a group for the betterment of humanity.

CR: Do you think high school teachers have a greater awareness of this because their students are older and therefore closer to effecting change in the world?

BS: Steiner taught about the pedagogical law, where the teachers must teach out of the next higher body from their students. So when you are working with teenagers—who are centered in their astral body—you are working out of your own Ego and sense of higher self. High school teachers have to be really clear about where they are and not play on the whims of the teenagers. As a Waldorf high school teacher, you always have to connect to your inner faith and compassion, to express yourself through your own higher self.



Betty's many books include, from left to right: *Soul Weaving: Understanding and Transforming Ourselves*; *Africa: A Teacher's Guide*; *Between Form and Freedom: Being a Teenager*; *Adolescence: The Sacred Passage*; *Tapestries: Weaving Life's Journey*; and *Ariadne's Awakening: Taking Up the Threads of Consciousness*.

High school teachers must love adolescents. They must also love their subject—but they cannot love their subject more than they love their students. You have to be a scholar, but not just a scholar—a scholar for the benefit of the students in front of you.

CR: At your recent retirement party you saw many of your former high school students, who are now in their 50's. Do they seem extraordinary?

BS: Well, they've all had their joys and sorrows. And I think they have met what's come in their lives with a kind of dignity. Waldorf education does not make your life easier, but it does give you a kind of inner backbone, it helps you get through challenges with a certain kind of positive attitude. One student told me that doing the main lesson books, while she didn't always like it, gave her a real sense of process, of beginning, middle and end—and that really prepared her well for a life of projects. Another student, who is a tech executive, said that projective geometry helps him visualize things that other people cannot visualize. A third student, who is a doctor, developed a traveling emergency room in a van, and he serviced hotels that hosted dance groups, and symphonies. No one had thought of that before. Waldorf graduates share a quality that I recognize—they are problem solvers with flexibility in their thinking. They think of new ways to do things. Waldorf students have a quality where something has been nurtured and something has not been allowed to die.

So many years later they still care for each other, and the feelings are very strong. They realize that they are part of a world community of Waldorf students. They can go anywhere in the world and find someone who is connected to them in a very deep way. That's very special. I'd love to see a world organization of Waldorf students.

CR: Maybe you can take that up in your retirement!

BS: Ha! Maybe you can! ■

Betty Staley, MA, has been a Waldorf educator for fifty years at the kindergarten, elementary, high school and teacher training levels. She is a founder of the Sacramento Waldorf High School, where she taught history and literature for nineteen years, and an advisor to Waldorf and Public Waldorf high schools throughout the West. She is a founder and served recently as interim president of Rudolf Steiner College.

Chip Romer is the Editor of *Confluence*, a founder of the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education, and a developer of Public Waldorf schools, including Credo High School, where he currently serves as Executive Director.



What Do We Say to Our Children ... about Election 2016?

BY JACK PETRASH

The day after the presidential election, a group of preschool children were lining up for recess. One of the older boys was making plans for what they would do outside. However, in doing so he was excluding some of the children. The teacher, overhearing this conversation, reminded the boy that everyone could play. The child replied, “What about Donald Trump? He doesn’t let everyone play.”

We have to ask ourselves how aware our children are of our current political situation and how do they make sense of it. I know what it is like for me, and how difficult it has been to know how to respond. The election of Donald Trump has affected us all differently. For 45% of the country his election was a joyous surprise. But in Washington D.C., where I live, more than 90% of the votes were cast for Hillary Clinton. The people in my community have expressed dismay, disbelief, bewilderment, and often anger. This leaves me wondering how to go forward in a positive manner.

Perhaps the best advice that I have received was from a good friend who said that when the world’s events astonish you, pay attention. So I have read more of the *Washington Post* and listened to more *NPR* reports in recent weeks. But most of all, I have worked hard to find my center, that quiet place of discernment. When I am centered, I don’t say much, and if I do, I ask questions—open and honest questions. I come away with the understanding that our political situation is complex, that things are rarely black and white, and that there is invariably more to learn.

But the bigger question is: What would I say if I still had children at home and I needed to speak with them about Donald Trump’s election and this new direction in our country? How would I mediate the tension between seeing that my children are both protected and informed? I would want my response to be developmentally appropriate and that, of course, would depend on their age.

I have always put my faith in Waldorf education’s understanding of child development and have agreed with the idea that for the preschool child, *the world should be good*. Young children have such trust in the goodness of the world that they imitate the actions they see. That is why, when I hear about a Waldorf preschool student who says to his teacher that he wants

to punch Donald Trump, I am concerned. Does that impulse come from an adult conversation that this child has overheard, or is it an imitated response to a radio report heard in carpool on the way to school? We should protect our young children from experiences such as these.

However, I don’t believe in protecting children from everything. I have friends who were part of the Women’s March on Washington and brought their very young children, clothed in knitted pink hats, on their shoulders and in their arms. These children seemed fine, especially since they couldn’t read the creative, but provocative, signs that were carried. Perhaps it was the positive mood of the march, or the fact that millions were marching all over the world, but attending a peaceful demonstration doesn’t seem inappropriate to me. I was actually reminded of the words of Abraham Heschel, the religious writer, who said that when he marched in Selma, Alabama he felt like his legs were praying.

“At the center of your being, you have the answer.”

LAO TZU

At the other end of the developmental spectrum is the adolescent, for whom it is a markedly different situation. For the high school and late middle school student, *the world should be true*. You can see that, at this age, young people want to cut to the quick and have conversations about the political situation. These conversations should be thoughtful, informed, and considered. Adolescents have much to say and their insights are often surprising, but getting them to speak at the dinner table or in class is not always easy, and getting them to disagree respectfully can be harder still.

Back in 1999 during the Clinton impeachment hearings, I was teaching American history to a group of eighth graders. Trying to navigate our discussions on the Constitution and the impeachment process without running aground with comments about Monica Lewinsky and her blue dress was a challenge, especially for the fourteen-year-old boys in my class. I worked diligently to get my students to make their “behind the hand” comments public. And then

I worked harder still to get them to elaborate more fully about what they thought and felt. I have always believed in respecting the thoughts of adolescents and leaving them free to think for themselves. When we offer an honest question, such as: “What do you think about this?” spoken with genuine interest and no preconceived notion of what we believe they should answer, young people share their opinions. Teenagers need to talk. Finding out when they are most likely to talk is part of our job. Sometimes it happens late at night when they come home at the end of an evening. It can also happen over food—milk and fresh-baked cookies can be a wonderful catalyst for meaningful conversation. Sometimes it can happen when you are stuck in traffic or during walks in nature, which can be especially helpful when we are in need of peace of mind.

My real worry is for the children in the middle of this developmental journey, the elementary school students, because for them, *the world should be beautiful*. That is why there is so much art in our Waldorf school hallways and classrooms; why there are all of the beautiful blackboard drawings, the paintings, the plants, and crystals. For example, what do we say in response to Donald Trump’s really ugly comments about women? I believe that in these instances it is important to adhere to the Obamas’ guideline: “When they go low, we go high.” Rather than respond in a way that impugns the president’s character, I believe we should speak in broader terms about the real issue of respect and equal rights for women and how this matter has been coming to the fore for over a hundred years. Our children can be reminded about how important it is that women be respected in the workplace, on campuses, and in society.

In addition, there is also the matter of how our children view humanity as a whole today. Are human beings noble, and are their actions beautiful? Where is the beauty when a truck runs into marketers at a Christmas fair in Germany or when an ISIS video airs depicting an execution? Our children, exposed as they are to too much information, are at risk of becoming decidedly cynical about humanity, left with little or no faith in the goodness of people.

The first core principle in the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education is that we ascribe to an image of the human being as a unique and dig-

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Many Rivers, One Source

An Innovative Approach to Meeting the Social Mission of Public Waldorf Education

BY VICTORIA TEMPLE

“If you want to raise intelligent and compassionate children, tell them stories. If you want your children to be more intelligent and more compassionate, tell more stories!” ALBERT EINSTEIN

Waldorf education is traveling diverse paths as it inspires and informs public education in the United States today. A five-year-old initiative in Massachusetts offers a unique approach, one that has roots in the accomplishments of its neighbor – **The Waldorf School of Lexington.**

Cairn Hill, Inc. is an educational cooperative currently serving elementary school children in the towns of Malden, Somerville and Lynn, MA. “Cairn” is a Scottish Gaelic term for a pile of stones built to mark a pathway created by many individuals over time, one that serves as a traveler’s guide.

In early 2012, the image of a cairn spoke to three Boston-area educators who were meeting in a café in the town of Malden to discuss the best way to bring the gifts of Waldorf education to local public school children. Those collaborators were:

Daniel Bekele, Ed.D (Harvard University), a program administrator for Tri-City, Malden’s community development program, which was successfully organizing immigrant communities to receive needed educational and social support.

Cheryl Dressler, Ed.D. (Harvard University), an educator with a focus on creating literacy programs for English language learners, who has a deep appreciation of Waldorf pedagogy and its healing potential.

Margaret Ris, M.Ed. (Antioch University), an experienced Waldorf teacher, mentor, evaluator and administrator, who is dedicated to working with inner city children.



From left to right, Cheryl Dressler, Margaret Ris and Daniel Bekele, the founders of Cairn Hill, Inc. (Click [here](#) to view Cairn Hill website.)

The outcome of this conversation was the decision to form a non-profit organization, named Cairn Hill, after an historic spot in the town of Malden’s beautiful Spring Pond Woods. The image of a cairn spoke to the founders as they envisioned a new approach to helping guide public school children along their lives’ paths. Their mission statement thus became: “Cairn Hill brings the transformative power of the arts to young learners in urban and multi-ethnic communities using nature, story, music and the hands-on approach inspired by Waldorf education.” CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

What Do We Say . . .

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3 nified individual. I believe that as parents and teachers we should be compiling a reservoir of stories that illustrate the remarkably good qualities that reside in human beings so we can share them with our children. These stories are in our newspapers and online; they just don’t grab the headlines.

Here is a story that I have been thinking about recently. It involves a young basketball player named George Raveling. He was a member of the Villanova basketball team in 1963. That August he decided to travel from the Philadelphia area to Washington D.C. to hear Martin Luther King speak. Early on that August morning, Raveling was standing by the Reflecting Pool on the Mall when two men came up to him and asked this young, strong-looking African American man if he would be a body guard for Dr. King. George Raveling said, “Yes.”

When Dr. King gave his “I have a dream” speech, George Raveling stood by his side on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. At the end of this speech, Dr. King began to walk away. George Raveling spoke up, “Dr. King, you forgot your papers.” Martin Luther King turned and replied in a joking manner, “Oh, you keep them son. Who knows they may be worth something some day.”

George Raveling kept those three pages, a record of this most famous speech. Even when he was offered a million dollars, he wouldn’t sell them. But what was so surprising was that when Raveling looked at those papers, the words, “I have a dream” were not written anywhere. That famous phrase was not part of the original speech. Those words came to Martin Luther King as he spoke. (John Feinstein, *Last Dance*)

When we speak with our children about difficult topics—and there will be many in the coming years—we should speak out of a place that is hopeful, not frustrated and angry. And we must hope that the spirit will move us as it moved Dr. King, and that from time to time our speech may be inspired too.

But until that inspiration arrives, we can use Waldorf educators’ understanding of child development as our guide. Protect the young children from adult conversations and concerns. Engage adolescents thoughtfully and listen with interest and without judgment when they share their opinions. However, it is the grade school children who will present the greatest challenge. Their stage of development is called “the heart of childhood,” and matters of the heart are delicate. These children need a hopeful picture of this beautiful world to take with them into the challenging years of adolescence. ■

Jack Petrash is the founder and director of the Nova Institute. He is an educator with over thirty years of Waldorf classroom experience and a teacher of teachers. He has written extensively on issues pertaining to innovative classroom instruction, has served on the editorial board of the journal *Encounter*, and is the author of *Understanding Waldorf Education: Teaching from the Inside Out* and other books.



Founding a Public Waldorf High School in Washington, D.C.

AN INTERVIEW WITH LYDIA WHITHAM, M.A.

BY CHARLES BURKAM, J.D.

Lydia Whitham, lead developer of the newly forming Washington High School of Arts & Academics, is interviewed by Charles Burkam, Treasurer of the Alliance Board.

Charles Burkam: What is your background?

Lydia Whitham: I grew up in Gainesville, Florida, where my father was a professor. After college I became a CPA and moved to Miami. I met my husband there and married, but shortly afterwards we moved to the Washington, D.C. area for my husband's work.

CB: What led your move from accounting into education?

LW: After my daughter was born, I took a job in a business office at a private school to better balance my work life and home life. Being in that educational environment, I came more and more to feel that I wanted a different direction for myself. I decided to make education my focus, rather than stay just in the business realm. So, I went to Harvard to earn my Master's in Education.

CB: How did you come to meet Waldorf education?

LW: During the time at Harvard, we visited a local Waldorf school as a part of exploring different educational environments. Also, one of the other students in the master's program was a Waldorf graduate. I became very interested and, when I was back home after completing my studies, I found Washington Waldorf School. After visiting the school, my daughter decided she wanted to go and she started in 9th grade. It grew from there...

CB: How did the intention to found the Washington School for Arts and Academics come about?

LW: In September 2015, the XQ Super Schools Contest was announced with \$50 million in awards. It was a competition to modernize high school education started by Laurene Powell Jobs, the widow of Steve Jobs. In response to this opportunity, I helped form a group and we based our XQ proposal on Waldorf principles. It was decided that we wanted to focus on the area with the greatest need—which was in the SE section of Washington D.C. Our proposal

made it to the final round, but was not selected for funding. Having worked this hard on the ideas, the group wanted to proceed, and we have been working to get support for a charter application for a high school in Wards 7 & 8 of SE Washington, D.C.

CB: What is the mission of Washington School of Arts and Academics?

LW: The area we have chosen for the school

is almost entirely African-American and our estimate is that over 90% will be eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch programs. We also know that many of the students who will come to the school will not be truly ready to work at a high school level. We have to find effective approaches to get their basic academic skills up to where they need to be so that they can become college ready and escape the cycle of poverty. CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Many Rivers, One Source

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The strategic approach to bringing the Waldorf pedagogy to culturally diverse, urban populations in the State of Massachusetts was the after school program. It met the needs of working parents, enriched the children's school day, was welcomed by school leaders, and introduced the vision and values of Waldorf education into the public realm.

In September 2012, the team piloted their first after school program at the Salemwood School in Malden. The centerpiece of the program was an arts- and nature-oriented storytelling curriculum called *The Art of Word Weaving*. This is a resource they developed to make oral comprehension and word retention easy, memorable and fun. The heart of the program is vocabulary-rich storytelling, which provides a framework for related verses and art activities that include beeswax modeling, handwork and drawing. (The Cairn Hill website offers a terrific articulation of "The Art of Word Weaving": <http://www.cairnhilledu.org/the-art-of-word-weaving.htm>)

In September 2013, Cairn Hill partnered with the Somerville Community Schools to offer another version of the after school program curriculum entitled Story Play, designed as an afternoon of arts, music, crafts and drumming, built around story themes. Like Malden, Somerville is a highly diverse community with over 71 languages spoken, the most prevalent being Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian, Creole and French. Somerville is a vibrant and changing community in which the Somerville Community Schools District welcomes outside specialists and activity club providers to offer enrichment opportunities.

In 2016, a new step was taken, with the decision to open Cairn Hill Nature Preschool. The preschool will be located in Lynn, MA, home to families of diverse ethnicities, incomes and languages, which boasts a majestic expanse of 2,200 acres of woodlands, marshes and ponds with vistas of the Atlantic Ocean. On this perfect location for a nature preschool, a year-round program is being established that will offer full and partial-day enrollment for working parents, utilizing a five-level tiered tuition scale and offering parent support programs. The developmentally aligned curriculum offers a comprehensive foundation for school success, featuring language arts through storytelling, puppetry, and music, and arts through painting, clay modeling and crafts. Nature education includes rain-or-shine outdoor exploration and a gardening program. ■

VICTORIA TEMPLE is the Administrative Coordinator of the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education and a Managing Editor of the *Confluence* Editorial Board.



The Nature Preschool is planned to open in the beautiful Fells Reservation this fall.



Dr. Jay Lucker, Adrienne Gallo, Janelle Gill & Lydia Whitham (back row, from left) together with Beth Chase, Alicia Pendleton & Bud Garikes (front row), are seven members of an eleven-member board of directors working to found a Public Waldorf high school in Washington, D.C.

Founding a Public Waldorf High School

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CB: Had you been involved in social justice work previously?

LW: Not really. I did some tutoring for adults learning to read, and some other volunteering, but nothing like the focus of this high school project.

CB: What motivated you to stay with this then?

LW: I first saw the need to work with these underserved communities through a friend who ran Excel Academy, an all-girl K-8 charter school in Ward 8. After all of the preparation work for the X-Q contest, this is now what I must do. It just feels right.

CB: In what ways are you considering adjusting the Waldorf curriculum given the population you will be serving?

LW: Because of the need to bring students up to grade level in basic skills, we may have to do more in traditional survey classes in ninth and tenth grades, rather than utilize the main lesson block approach. We will have one period a day set aside for either remediation or enrichment, depending on the needs of each student. There will be extra professional development for teachers about meeting the needs of diverse learners in the classroom.

We are also working with our board members to develop history and social studies content that is more relevant to the African American community and its heritage. Since we are starting from scratch, we have the freedom to be very creative and fully relevant to these times.

CB: Who has been helping you on the project?

LW: I originally got in touch with Jack Petrash and his colleague Cynthia Bennett at Jack's NOVA institute. Later, I spoke with Allegra Alessandri. Now we have a local board that includes community members as well as educators.

CB: What difficulties do you still face?

LW: There are lots of charter schools in D.C., but there is a split within the African-American community about them because of a perceived threat to existing district public schools. Also, the community is rightly skeptical of outsiders coming in to tell them what to do. Fortunately, there are many active Area Neighborhood Councils within these wards. They provide venues for promoting the project as well as getting input on what the community values and wants. There is also an Education Council for each ward that we have connected with. We must build community support if we are to be successful with our charter application. So we attend many community events, letting people know about the project, finding individuals we can work with, and building up a network of supporters.

CB: When do you hope to open your doors?

LW: If our school is approved this spring, we will open in the fall of 2018. This is our hope. If not, we will reapply and open in the fall of 2019, which also has a nice ring to it. ■

Charles Burkam, JD, has been involved with Waldorf education for nearly 40 years, and has been leading the administrative team at Desert Marigold since 2010. In 1986 he moved to England to study Anthroposophy and was bursar at Michael Hall Steiner School for seven years. Charles has consulted for the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, the Santa Fe Waldorf School and was Managing Director of the Institute for Responsible Technology. He is currently the Treasurer for the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education and actively collaborates with the partner schools of the Arizona Council of Waldorf Education.



The 100th Anniversary of Waldorf Education *will soon be here!*

The first Waldorf school opened its doors in Stuttgart, Germany in September 1919. Today, Waldorf education is a global movement with schools in over 60 countries. As Alliance member schools, we will all have the opportunity to join a worldwide centennial celebration, scheduled to occur throughout the 2019-20 school year.

Our Alliance is represented on the North American 100th anniversary planning committee that is in turn connected to an international planning committee. We will offer updates of plans for participation in events and celebration as we move towards the anniversary.

As a first taste of what is to come, please enjoy this beautiful video on Waldorf education and feel free to share it with your communities.



Waldorf 100 – The Film

TO LEARN MORE: View the Waldorf 100 video documentary, that can be distributed to your school community via your website at [Waldorf 100 – The Film](#).



BY LIZ BEAVEN, Ed.D.

Fidelity & Flexibility in Action

AT THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL FOR CREATIVE EDUCATION IN OAKLAND, CA

with School Director, **Ida Oberman**, Ed.D.

A visitor to the Community School for a Creative Education (CSCE) steps off the street into a building bustling with life. Hand-stitched, colorful signs on the wall give directions and list the school's core values for all to see—in several languages. A variety of student art and craft work is on display. A lobby table and display board hints at the school's role as a center for community activity with notices of upcoming community cleanup events, food pantry dates, and advice on health or civic matters. A family/community room off the lobby is decorated with work that reflects the season and represents many of the cultures found within the school community. The voices of children echo up the stairs and parents and caregivers from several nations chat by the entryway.

Oakland, just across the Bay from San Francisco, is an up and coming city, often likened to Brooklyn in New York a few years back, providing slightly less expensive living for young families and artists than its neighbor. It is a city undergoing gentrification—a process that has not reached even close to the Community School's neighborhood, which could be accurately described as “gritty.”

I recently crossed the Bay Bridge to Oakland to sit down with school founder and Executive Director Dr. Ida Oberman, to learn more about the social justice mission of this inner city school. The following essay offers some highlights from that conversation, with a picture of the founding and growth of the school, its community of students and families, its mission as an urban Public Waldorf school, and the opportunities, challenges, and innovations it has experienced since it opened its doors in 2011.

IDA OBERMAN, SCHOOL FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR

An interview with Dr. Oberman is an experience of intensity and passionate conviction. Dutch by birth, Ida was a Waldorf student for 10 years of her life at the Tübingen School in Germany. There, her teachers were individuals who had received their teacher training from the first circle of Waldorf teachers, and there her belief in the power of Waldorf education as an agent for “social transformation, social justice, and spiritual justice” was born. Ida later completed her BA at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, her Waldorf teacher education in Stuttgart, Germany, and her doctorate in the School of Education at Stanford University. Her research findings provided the basis for a book, *The Waldorf Movement in Education from European Cradle to American Crucible, 1919-2007* (2007). In it, she traces the Waldorf movement from its beginnings, exploring the social and political backdrop of its founding and growth, and examining questions of “fidelity and flexibility” as Waldorf education expanded and grew in America. Unsurprisingly, these were themes of our conversation. Ida's preparatory work for founding the CSCE included participating in a Stanford study of the first Public Waldorf school in this country, Milwaukee Urban Waldorf School, and working as the co-founder of a public school inspired by Waldorf education on the border of Harlem, NYC (later closed).



A drum circle at the Community School for Creative Education during Black History Month.

THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL FOR A CREATIVE EDUCATION

Now in its sixth year, the CSCE population has grown to 210 transitional kindergarten through eighth grade students and their families. It opened as an independent charter within the Alameda County Office of Education; Dr. Oberman states that the school works closely with the local district and county and hopes to serve as a model for an urban Public Waldorf district school. She reports that the school currently has the most diverse student population of any school in a highly diverse county with 72% of students below the poverty level, 42% English Language Learners, and 21% Special Education students. It has several impressive assessment measures: in spring of 2015, CSCE special education students outperformed by five times comparable groups within Oakland Unified School District, and English learners by three times. The school is in the process of adopting the Oakland Unified performance standards; with many transient students, Ida believes strongly that it must get all students performing at grade level at an early age in order to not further disadvantage them if they move to another school setting. This reflects a firm belief that our modern task is “to braid Waldorf education and prevailing education standards.” She notes that the school is “young, and learning.”

The school population is largely drawn from the local neighborhood and the site is an active center for adult education and community services and engagement. Dr. Oberman described a range of school-based or school-initiated activities including voter registration, job training, tenants' rights workshops, healthcare information, rent control, get out the vote, “shoo the flu” immunization drive, and a once a month hosting of a food bank. The school had its founding in community organizing, and this continues as a major focus to this day.

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN ACTION

The drive to create the CSCE was strongly linked to Ida's understanding of the impulse that led Rudolf Steiner to found the first school on a factory floor in the ruins of post-World War I Germany. She passionately paints a picture of those original aims: pragmatic, future-oriented, radical in design, and linked to the needs of a local context. Based on its founding, Ida views Waldorf education's task as nothing less than systems change and disruption of the status quo in service of social justice. She notes that it

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Fidelity & Flexibility in Action

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was never intended to be a remote or removed educational movement; rather, Steiner was a man of action and political activist who taught us the need to be active in the world. As she described it, Steiner “rolled up his sleeves and got his fingernails dirty trying to help, supporting what others cared about, in the thick of things. The need for the first school came to Molt and Steiner; it was not a beautiful space with wealthy parents, but a factory floor, among the presses.” Just as that first school was revolutionary in many aspects and was designed to address critical problems of its time, Ida believes that contemporary Waldorf educators should engage in a similar level of disruptive systems change as they respond to the needs of today. She urges us “to take seriously the social and political questions of our time and respond to the urgencies... What are the equivalent social justice acts today?”

As Waldorf education moves more fully into the public sector in this country, Ida urges us to understand what that means. With an increasing gap between wealth and poverty and greater segregation, Steiner’s “radical intention,” evident in the founding of the first school, invites us to discover equivalent revolutions for 2017: “That is the task of today — developing Waldorf education in Rudolf Steiner’s spirit to heal the problems of society.” Ida notes that we are part of an increasingly global, intercultural movement and must not isolate ourselves: if we are offering Public Waldorf education, we must ask: “Who is the public? In our public schools, it is increasingly non-white and poor. Over fifty percent of our nation’s schoolchildren live in poverty. This is opposite to what often happens in Waldorf education, with a pull toward upward mobility and ‘protecting the flame.’” This has a history within our movement; Ida states that as early as 1926, the first school had gentrified beyond its factory beginnings, and that this trend has recurred in Waldorf education across time, across oceans, and across languages. In the face of this, if we truly wish to serve the needs of today, we must be learners and listeners to the parents to discover what is on their minds. We cannot isolate ourselves but must truly engage with our communities. Waldorf education must continue to adapt and reinvent itself in response to questions and needs.

PUBLIC WALDORF AT THE CSCE: WEAVING A BRAID

Ida’s questions of “fidelity and flexibility” are highly relevant for our Public Waldorf schools; what works, what must be adapted for a school population, what must be deleted or added? The CSCE strives to provide “a rigorous college-preparatory program integrated into a culturally rich, arts-infused, highly personalized curriculum inspired by Waldorf education...to promote equity and prepare culturally competent, well-rounded, life-long learners.” (Excerpted from the Mission Statement.) The school has many of the instantly recognizable hallmarks of Public Waldorf education: a garden was quickly established on the blacktop; there is strong emphasis on the arts and crafts; children participate in morning circles; and there are typical, developmentally appropriate main lessons at each grade with students recording their work in main lesson books. There is also ample evidence of adaptation to specific needs. Ida believes firmly that the school must not simply “teach to the Waldorf curriculum”; rather, with a population that traditionally experiences inequity of access to education, the school has a responsibility to have students at grade level at the end of the year to avoid further disempowering or harming them. This means more emphasis

on formal academics and language development in kindergarten, and a more traditional approach to academic instruction in several areas. It also means emphasis on faculty training in restorative justice practices and trauma-informed pedagogy, including regular work with Bernd Ruf based on his work with Emergency Pedagogy. It means school communications in four languages and a range of festivals that represent the school’s diverse community. It means ensuring that the school is home to parents as well as students with a wide range of social and community services.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Throughout our conversation, Dr. Oberman repeatedly returned to two key points:

1. Schools must be rooted in and reflective of their surroundings. Ida pointed to her earlier experience attempting to establish a school on the border of Harlem in New York City; this school did not establish roots or buy-in within the community, and failed to thrive. The lesson was thoroughly learned; the CSCE founding team engaged in three years of community organizing before the school opened, and continues to be an active center for community activity. Ida emphasizes the need to “go out into the community, to go to where our families live and work, to take in their situations, to listen deeply to what is on their minds before we speak... We must discover what challenges the community has that Waldorf education can be in service of, becoming attuned to the community.” She notes that this lesson is especially important if we as educators are not of the community, but come from outside. We must first be listeners and learners before we speak or teach. This establishes a foundation of trust and respect and allows the school to be a true community. She gave examples of community-building events that give meaning, share cultures, and allow space for the wisdom of the elders.

2. Waldorf education was radical in its original intent and has a moral imperative to confront the social issues of our time. She believes that current intercultural and international initiatives reflect this, giving examples of Bernd Ruf’s emergency relief work and the Monte Azul initiative in the favelas of Sao Paulo: “Serving the underserved, pushing what Waldorf education is, asking what our time is seeking of Waldorf education, and serving parents who do not fit into our schools.” She feels that in this country we are behind with this impulse, and have been more focused on “preserving the flame.” The move into the public sphere demands that we reexamine our priorities.

Based on her life experience and extensive study, Ida is a passionate crusader for the social justice task of Waldorf education and feels impelled to give back. Ida concluded with reference to words of Martin Luther King Jr.: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” From Ida’s perspective, as Public Waldorf educators we must reach our arms upward, wrap them around that arc, and bring it to earth in service of all children and social change. ■

LIZ BEAVEN, Ed.D., has over 30 years experience in Waldorf education in a range of roles that include class teacher, school administrator, board member, adult educator, and researcher and writer. She was an advisory member of the Alliance Board of Trustees and has served as the President of the Board since March 2016. Liz is a core faculty member of the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco, where she is working to develop a graduate program in integral teacher education. She enjoys working directly with schools on a range of topics.



Is a Circle an Appropriate Metaphor?

BY LIZ BEAVEN

Dear Colleagues,

Spring has officially sprung—and, wherever you are located across the country, the chances are high that you are navigating unpredictable, unexpected, and changeable weather and its impact on school routines and student energy. It seems that our weather is a good metaphor for today's generally mercurial conditions.

We are excited to share this newest edition of *Confluence*, with news from schools and reflections on our work. You will see that we continue to ponder the theme of our January conference, "Widening the Circle," and some of the provocative thoughts and questions that were posed. Is a circle an appropriate metaphor for inclusion, equity, and access? Can a circle face outwards, or is it by nature an inward-facing form? When we look around our existing circle of students, families, and colleagues, what do we see reflected back? Are we satisfied with what we see? If we are in a circle, how can we ensure that it is welcoming to all, with the support of hands clasped in collegiality yet readily able to unclasp and fully welcome and include newcomers?

We were grateful to hear from so many of you throughout the conference: in many conversations; in Friday evening's working groups focused on our Core Principles; through your comments on conference evaluation forms; and from those who were able to stay on Sunday afternoon to attend our Annual General Meeting. We hope to make opportunities for participation and engagement regular features of the conference as our work grows and spreads, to ensure that we can be as informed as possible in our work on behalf of Public Waldorf education, and to continue to build our circle to be a welcoming, safe, and inclusive place for all.

With your input, our Board is working hard on implementation of the seven Core Principles as the foundation of a revised membership process that emphasizes an essential, continuous cycle of self-study, collaboration, and peer review. As a reminder, historically, membership of the Alliance has had few requirements; schools have asked to join, selected what they believe to be the appropriate membership category, paid dues, and have then become members of the Alliance.

We recognize that, as our work grows and diversifies, our collective work will benefit from membership that signifies common

For a beacon of acceptance and inclusion? For a welcoming, nurturing and supportive place for children and families?

ideals and integrity of purpose. We also recognize that our schools need support in their ongoing development and that we need to provide flexible structures that are able to respond to emerging needs and innovation in service of the widest possible range of students. We believe that our emerging membership process will meet these needs, as schools begin to examine their alignment with our Core Principles through a process of guided self-study, discussion with other schools, and a peer site visit. We have been excited to receive reports that many schools are already engaging in initial discussion of the Principles.

Our revised membership process, now underway and to be fully rolled out in phases over the next 18 months, will allow a school to reflect deeply on its standing in key areas such as child development, relationships, ongoing learning for all community members, and school leadership. How do these principles manifest in practice? Where do we encounter successes and challenges? Crucially for Public Waldorf schools, it will also invite us to reflect on our approach to education as an agent for social change, diversity, equity, and inclusion. How is our work adapting and innovating to meet the needs of our students and families in our ever-widening circle of schools?

This approach is mindful of our limited resources—within a school and within the Alliance. We believe that it will strengthen our collective work and allow us to engage with and learn from one another. It is also timely: we are very aware that many of you are working daily with anxious, insecure families and are providing essential reassurance and support in the face of uncertainty and fear for so many. On behalf of our Board and Advisors, thank you for the work you are doing to ensure that Public Waldorf schools stand as beacons of acceptance and inclusion and remain welcoming, nurturing, and supportive places of learning and community life for all children and families.

With warm wishes and fervent hopes for calmer days ahead,
Liz Beaven, President



A view of a plenum at the Alliance National Conference 2017



The Alliance held an Annual General Meeting at the conclusion of the 2017 National Conference at Rudolf Steiner College over Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, which offered an opportunity for teachers and staff from member schools to ask questions and dialogue with the Alliance’s Board Members and Advisors.



THE SEVEN CORE PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC WALDORF EDUCATION

A colorful poster identifying the seven Core Principles of Public Waldorf education was distributed in registration packets at the 2017 Alliance Annual Conference last January. Then in February, two copies were mailed to each Alliance member school. If you would like to purchase a copy for \$10, to cover the cost of printing and shipping, email us at alliance.public.waldorf@gmail.com

SPRING BOARD MEETING WELCOMES MELANIE REISER OF AWSNA

The Alliance Board and Advisors gathered for their annual spring retreat over the weekend of March 10-12 at the Wineberry Inn, in Sebastopol, CA. Colleague Melanie Reiser, Leader of Programs and Activities of the Association of Waldorf Schools in North America (AWSNA) joined the gathering to work collaboratively through final details of the Alliance’s Path of Membership process that will lead Alliance members to licensing as Public Waldorf schools.

CALIFORNIA CHARTER SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION (CCSA) HOSTS PUBLIC WALDORF COLLEAGUES

During CCSA’s recent conference in Sacramento, Managing Director for Regional Advocacy, Laura Kerr, organized a lunch gathering for a group of Public Waldorf colleagues. Individuals from schools including Golden Valley, La Vida, Sparrow, George Washington Carver High School, Community School for Creative Education, Sycamore Creek, Journey, Shade Tree initiative, Bob Anderson (author of the Alliance Common Core Alignment project) and the president of our Alliance, Liz Beaven, gathered with Laura for lively conversation and delicious food. *Thank you, CCSA!*

SYRINGA MOUNTAIN SCHOOL SECURES NEW SITE

On March 10, Christine Fonner, Director of the Syringa Mountain School located in Hailey, ID, announced the purchase of a new school building that was secured by a \$1.35 million facilities loan, that includes \$450,000 for capital improvements. This will allow the student population to grow to 327 with the addition of new classrooms and an orchestra room. *Congratulations!*



G.W. CARVER HIGH SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES RENEWS CHARTER

Carver High School was established in 2008 and subsequently transitioned, grade-by-grade over four years from a struggling Gates Foundation-funded high school to a thriving Public Waldorf high school currently enrolling 330 students. Carver’s charter was renewed last month, in what principal Allegra Alessandri described as “an epic 2.5 minute unanimous vote” by the board of the Sacramento Unified School District. *Congratulations!*



Credo students arrive at their new campus!

CREDO HIGH SCHOOL MOVES TO PERMANENT SITE & JOINS ONE PLANET LIVING MOVEMENT

Now in its sixth year, Credo High School has moved to its permanent site on the One Planet Living campus at SOMO Village in Rohnert Park, CA. The school is now a vital part of a planned, 1900-home model “green” community led by Brad Baker of SOMO Village, LLC, and the international nonprofit One Planet Communities. To learn more about Credo High School, go to the story in *Waldorf Today* by [clicking here](#).

You can also view a video about this collaboration with Credo’s One Planet Living Director, **Marika Ramsden**, at vimeo.com/178104662.



Linda Williams, Jack Petrash, Orland Bishop and Liz Beaven answer questions from the audience at the closing plenum of this year's Annual Conference, "Widening the Circle."

320 EDUCATORS ATTEND ALLIANCE CONFERENCE

Deep appreciation goes out to the 40+ presenters at the 2017 Alliance Conference, and to the staff at Rudolf Steiner College, which hosted us again in 2017. Suggestions for workshops you would like to see offered next year are welcome. Please contact Victoria Temple at alliance.public.waldorf@gmail.com.

ADULT EDUCATION OFFERINGS REVIEW

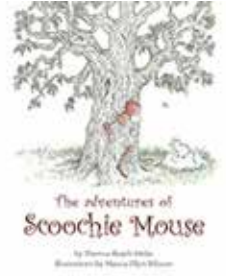
The Alliance is currently reviewing its ad hoc policy concerning publication of notices of adult educational events of potential interest to teachers in Alliance schools. We will not be posting such notices on our website or in Alliance publications until the review is completed—which we anticipate will be shortly—in order to make sure that our policy is consistent with our overall responsibilities.

POST YOUR JOB OPENINGS ON THE ALLIANCE WEBSITE

To find out how to announce job openings at your school on the Alliance website go to www.allianceforpublicwaldorfeducation.org/ and scroll to the bottom of the page, then send your information to Victoria Temple at alliance.public.waldorf@gmail.com or call for more information at 707-628-4322.

RESOURCES OF INTEREST TO TEACHERS

■ *The Adventures of Scoochie Mouse: A Book for Children & Parents*, by Theresa Roach Melia with illustrations by Marcia Allyn Nilsson. While teaching kindergarten at the Sebastopol Charter School over many years, Theresa delighted children with her stories about Scoochie mouse. These tales have now been published in a delightful book to share with the young at heart everywhere. Available at www.steinerbooks.org or by phone at 707-661-1594.



■ *Meet the Wibbly Bibs*, written and illustrated by Lee Sturgeon Day, one of the presenters at the Alliance Conference 2017 who writes stories for her granddaughters. In these tales, two little girls have adventures that take them to other worlds, sometimes in magical rocket ships and sometimes to meet magical woodland characters. Available at www.createspace.com/6970204

MEET THE WIBBLY BIBS



By Lee Sturgeon Day

■ For Early Childhood Teachers: WECAN (Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America) has informed us of the publication of *Waldorf Early Childhood Education: An Introductory Reader*. This volume combines and updates two earlier basic introductory books; it includes practical classroom ideas with an emphasis on the "what and why" of early childhood education. This, and other resources, is available on the website by [clicking here](#).



The Waldorf Book of Songs

■ David Kennedy, editor of *Waldorf Today* and *A Waldorf Book of Songs*, is in the process of fundraising through Indiegogo to produce a songbook for teachers, parents and children that includes Waldorf classics. You can learn more and donate by [clicking here](#).

ALLIANCE ANNUAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2017: WIDENING THE CIRCLE



GOT NEWS?

The *Confluence* editorial board would love to know what's going on in your school community. Help us paint a vivid picture of the Public Waldorf school movement. Share the rich experiences of your students, teachers, parents and community supporters. Contact Victoria Temple at alliance.public.waldorf@gmail.com to share your stories and photographs, schedule an interview or write an article for *Confluence*!