

Advent 2021

## Tasks and goals for a sustainable Waldorf movement

In preparation for the centenary celebrations 2019, many schools and kindergartens all over the world took part in a conversation reflecting on the anthropological-anthroposophical foundations of Waldorf education, mindful of the context offered by contemporary research. The feedback from countries on all continents showed how fruitful this work was - and how necessary that it took place.

With this letter, we would like to build on these experiences and offer you three suggestions to help focus this task of reflection and renewal on a global level. The pandemic has revealed many of our strengths, but also many weaknesses. We have to address these issues, because Waldorf education will continue to be sustainable only through our actions.

The recommendations presented here are the result of intensive consultations amongst the members of the Hague Circle, at a meeting in-person held in November 2021 for the first time after a long break. To begin with, here are some perspectives on the **recommendations found on page 2:**

### 1. The pandemic has made weaknesses of Waldorf institutions more visible in the following areas:

- The leadership and management, and the quality and vitality of cooperation between colleagues in some schools
- The deepening of the principles and practices of Waldorf education
- A learning culture in which the independent learning and personal experiences of the pupils and students and their active research of the material is not cramped by an over-emphasis on frontal instruction ("Waldorf cinema", or "chalk and talk")
- The importance of subject knowledge and expertise as a prerequisite for creative and flexible teaching
- Curriculum research and renewal
- The culture of professional development and teacher development
- Cooperation with parents
- Communication in the public sphere

### 2. Some challenges of our time:

- How can children's abilities to relate to other people and to the world be strengthened?
- How can children learn that they are emergent, growing human beings (not machines) – and what does this mean in practice?
- The growing polarization of society, which is also reflected in many Waldorf faculties and parent bodies ("walking opinions")
- A deep understanding of the heart and its working, as a means to counter an increasingly mechanistic view of human beings and the knock-on effects of this view for kindergarten and school organization and operations
- Fear and anxiety
- Media literacy
- The roles of anthroposophy and the School of Spiritual Science and the appetite and interest with which our institutions interact with people and institutions beyond the anthroposophical scene.

### **Proposal to the Waldorf Faculties and Colleges for their work from January 2022:**

The weaknesses listed above are undoubtedly counterbalanced by many strengths, which each day lead to beautiful and significant, sometimes life-changing interactions between the children, young people and adults. However, this is not a dance around an imaginary centre: If left unaddressed, weaknesses that have become systemic threaten to weaken the strengths as well. Let's turn this around! The aim of this call is to work on these matters with goodwill for the future!

From the abundance of possible topics, we have selected three that we would like to recommend to you for your conferences in the coming months. Please choose at least one of them and give us feedback by the beginning of March 2022 on what you have found out, how you want to deal with it further and where you see a need for change and action that concerns all schools. It would be good if there was a contact person for each school or centre.

Your feedback will form a very important basis for the Easter meeting of the Hague Circle in 2022, which we will of course report back to you. In this way, your work on the ground will contribute to an open and far-reaching exchange from which, hopefully, we will all benefit. Please send your feedback to the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum and the Hague Circle: [paed.sektion@goetheanum.ch](mailto:paed.sektion@goetheanum.ch) or [info@waldorf-international.org](mailto:info@waldorf-international.org)

### **The suggestions for topics to be worked on:**

1. internal mental hygiene and school management, the importance of the pedagogical meeting as a place of study, further education, joint learning and exchange of experiences and new ideas – in short: being the heart of the school.
2. putting cooperation with parents on a new footing
3. prepare better materials and methods for responding to digital media (indirect and direct media education, see footnote <sup>1</sup>), and help children and young people to be able to take hold of their own bodies. Pay more attention to the fact that learning arises directly from life and lived experiences.

On the following pages you will find further points of view, some of which refer directly to these suggestions, others list additional topics which were addressed during the Hague Circle Meeting in five working groups, each of which met six times, as further fields of work.

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- <sup>1</sup>[https://www.waldorfschule.de/fileadmin/downloads/Blickpunkte\\_Reader/Struwwelpeter\\_engl\\_August\\_2015.pdf](https://www.waldorfschule.de/fileadmin/downloads/Blickpunkte_Reader/Struwwelpeter_engl_August_2015.pdf)
  - <https://secureservercdn.net/160.153.137.14/q8h.86d.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Media-Education-in-Steiner-Waldorf-Schools-2021.pdf>

### 3. Questions and possible goals

#### General:

- **The promotion of the pupils' independent learning belongs in every lesson and every subject from the first day of school:** knowledge of the significance of one's own actions, the experience that one's feelings can be extended to become organs for perceiving others and the whole world, and the confidence in one's ability to think and develop knowledge and understanding are decisive factors in the self-determination of every human being.
- **The Waldorf School focuses on educational methods and approaches to teaching and learning,** it is not a place of ideological indoctrination.
- **The methodology and the anthropological-anthroposophical foundations (study of human being)** should therefore be worked in response to concrete questions and incorporate contemporary research findings as well as methodological ideas and methods of other educational impulses. The shared study of Steiner lectures serves as a potent introduction or conclusion to the teachers' meeting. Discussions covering a range of educational methods and topics benefit from a broad range of approaches – conversations between small groups of colleagues, experimental and artistic approaches, questions – conducted in open spaces that grant the space for personal experiences to be shared.
- **Recommendation 1:** Study of the heart anatomically, physiologically and taking indications from spiritual science into account.
- **Recommendation 2:** Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts, numbers 183, 184, and 185.
- **New subjects, ideas and themes** for cross-curricular or cross-age teaching. New initiatives need open spaces for consultation and experimentation without regard to traditions or other taboos.
- **Encourage young teachers** instead of hectoring them with old habits!
- **Each school should articulate its identity,** taking into account the unifying impulse of Waldorf education as well as the individual character of each school (unity in diversity).
- **School leadership and management:** qualitative distinctions need to be made between leadership, collegial decisions, delegations, the remit of life-span of mandates and reporting requirements and the tasks then implemented in each school.
- **The theme of leadership** – 'leadership by all', 'integrated leadership' and 'woven leadership' must already be introduced and become part of courses and programmes in initial teacher education.

#### School practice:

- Each school should maintain regular **contact** with at least two schools in their locality or region, and seek to make contact with at least one school abroad. This includes, where possible, regular conference visits, joint subject and working groups, school events and so forth.
- **Upper school:** exploring a move away from the traditional school programme and 'offer', including the compartmentalisation of subject specialisms, towards permeable subject areas, issues and topics that cut across traditional subject boundaries and the creation of spaces for personal initiatives.
- **Lower school:** more care for the practice of primary virtues (such as helpfulness, bravery, justice, tolerance)
- **Mentoring** and peer-coaching must become a natural part of a school's quality development programme and, where this is not possible, high-quality **supervision** must be present.

- **A mandatory induction period and in-service training** for colleagues must become natural aspects of **quality development** in a school.
- **In interactions and relations with parents** schools must seek to place these relationships on a new footing:
  - How are parents involved in school governance and administration?
  - What expertise do they bring with them?
  - Who can parents turn to if they have questions or complaints?
  - What are the school's processes and time-lines for responding to questions and concerns?
- **School leadership** must be clear, with individual responsibilities agreed, respected and transparent. The teachers' meeting must be understood and respected as the heart of the school and must dedicate itself to the educational mission with an attitude of action research based on living questions that arise from close observations of the school and its context.
- Every school needs a **prevention concept** against sexual assault or other forms of violence.<sup>2</sup>
- **Pupils and students** should be involved in the organisation of the school in a responsible way, according to their age. In the upper school this also concerns the organisation of the curriculum and timetable.
- **Outreach:** Every school should seek to offer educational opportunities to children in the wider community; for example, by cooperating with neighboring schools, and working in collaborations with other colleagues, to offer a range of artistic and other activities.

### Teaching:

- **The three-stage learning process** has to be revisited and the pupils addressed as acting, feeling and thinking subjects throughout.
- **Cultural techniques** (spelling, later business letters, emails, netiquette, etc.) must be practised in time.
- **Language** is one of the most important instruments for the development of extended and differentiated thinking skills. Because of the decline of language culture, the health and vitality of language practice now belongs in every school and teacher's meeting and, in this way, through the classes.
- **The aesthetic relationship to the world** must be nurtured through all ages in order to cultivate a rich life of feeling as an essential basis for independent judgement.
- The children need **movement!**
- **Experiences of nature** need to be reinforced, which includes a storytelling culture that makes children curious about their own experiences.
- Cultivating **inner images and exercising the imagination** as a necessary counter-vailing force to media 'overkill'.

All these suggestions can be added to, modified and refined. What is crucial is that these issues are questioned, addressed and tackled. For this we wish you courage, strength and joy in the work and the children!

We look forward to your feedback!

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.waldorfschule.de/fileadmin/downloads/Blickpunkte\\_Reader/Gewaltprävention-EN\\_7.2021.pdf](https://www.waldorfschule.de/fileadmin/downloads/Blickpunkte_Reader/Gewaltprävention-EN_7.2021.pdf)