



## CHAPTER 18

# DEVELOPING THE WALDORF SCHOOL MOVEMENT INTO A POTENT SOCIAL FORCE

We will now present suggestions for certain types of initiatives that would need to take place in order for Waldorf education to thrive in the twenty-first century. It is essential that these proposed initiatives are wedded to a well-articulated vision or imagination of *both* the pedagogical and social missions of Waldorf education. These suggestions are not meant to be viewed as the only possibilities, nor does the implementation of any one of them guarantee success; rather they are meant to point in the direction we need work to activate and guide our forces of will.

1. Create the twenty-first century version of the World School Association that Rudolf Steiner tried to launch during his lifetime. Such an organization could have an international character with affiliates around the world, including developing countries. For our purposes here, let us call such an initiative founded in the United States, *Independent Education in the Americas (IEA)*. An endeavor of this type could take up the following kinds of activities:

- Develop a world-wide mailing list of individuals and organizations supportive of educational freedom
- Articulate and promote the idea of educational freedom both within the Waldorf school movement and for the public through conferences, workshops, and a monthly or quarterly periodical

- Raise funds on a broad basis on behalf of Waldorf education
- Help to develop model educational projects that will show what can be achieved when educators and schools work out of freedom
- Use such model schools as case studies for fundraising efforts
- Monitor state, provincial, and federal legislation and its impact on independent education
- Draft model legislation to uphold the principle of freedom of choice for parents and self-administration for schools and to introduce alternative funding mechanisms for all private education such as the VASE approach previously mentioned

## 2. *Revamp Waldorf teacher training institutes and programs.*

Teacher training programs focus mainly on basic Anthroposophy and pedagogical theory and technique. Teacher training institutes or programs need to give equal emphasis to three areas: Anthroposophy and pedagogy, administration, and the threefold nature of social life. Steiner wanted Waldorf teachers to be equally competent in both administration and teaching. Since self-administration is supposed to be an essential characteristic of a Waldorf school, it is a recipe for conflict and confusion if we do not prepare all teachers, at least to a basic degree, in the art and science of what Steiner calls the republican approach to administration mentioned in Chapter 5. National and international teachers' conferences could also place equal emphasis on pedagogy, administration, and threefold so teachers could continue to improve their understanding and skills in all three areas.

It is vital that teachers understand the *social* task or mission of Waldorf education and how it relates to the threefold nature of social life. This understanding is essential for people to rise above personal issues and conflicts and experience a unity of purpose within the Waldorf school movement. Just as we strive to develop social understanding, social skills, and social sensitivity in the students,

so too the teacher trainings could do much more to help teachers themselves to progress in those areas.

3. *Educate Waldorf school communities about the social task of Waldorf education and its relation to the threefold nature of social life.* School parents are necessarily included here. This could be done in a variety of ways. On a national and international level, publications such as *Renewal*, which is published by the Association of Waldorf Schools in North America (AWSNA) and widely read in the Waldorf school movement, could begin to give equal editorial priority to the *social* task of Waldorf education as they do to the pedagogy. On the local level, schools could use their own brochures and newsletters. The local branches of the Anthroposophical Society could also play an instrumental role in arranging guest speakers and workshops on the social issues that a school is facing.

Too often parent education in a Waldorf school community is inadequate or focuses primarily on Waldorf teaching techniques. This often has the effect of enhancing parents' egoistic relation to Waldorf education and their criticism of the school, because they learn about the pedagogical ideals without the knowledge of the forces and the overarching social ideals it takes to achieve them. Much could be gained for the vitality and unity of a school community by focusing parent education on Anthroposophy and the threefold social organism and using this understanding in turn to illustrate the pedagogical aims.

4. *Articulate Waldorf educational goals, curriculum standards, and acceptable assessments for students and teachers in harmony with the principle of freedom in education.* While this suggestion may appear to contradict the principle of freedom, our age demands some type of explanation of how a school is educating children for practical life. If these things are done in the right spirit of honesty and in full recognition of what our social task is, we could remove a lot of confusion and concern on the part of parents and the public about Waldorf education. This would not only help with parent apprecia-

tion and student retention in Waldorf schools, but it could be an essential component of a new vision of education for all schools. A newly-formed IEA (point 1) or AWSNA could coordinate the development of such an articulation of goals, standards, and acceptable assessments.

5. *Develop a national political organization with local chapters in each state or province that has a Waldorf school.* These chapters could be linked to and collaborate with an IEA-type of organization and work on a local level to educate the public about the importance of educational freedom as well as introducing favorable legislation and opposing unfavorable proposed laws.

6. *Think in terms of community rather than exclusively from an institutional perspective.* This is meant both geographically and by sector. On a local level, Waldorf schools need to consciously build connections with other groups and organizations. These connections could be economic, cultural, and/or political. Developing relations with the local community is an essential aspect of overcoming misconceptions and misunderstanding about the school and Waldorf education in general. A school could even forge new relations based on threefold principles. For example, when considering a purchase of land, rather than simply looking for a school site, a new or expanding school might think in terms of a developing a multifaceted community that includes housing, medical care, and farming, as well as retail, distribution, and manufacturing businesses. Those who appreciate Waldorf education are people who also often have an interest in affordable housing, sustainable agriculture, and socially responsible businesses. Thus, a Waldorf school can be a catalyst for communities being formed or transformed that would bring about a convergence of many innovative, alternative movements dealing with land, food, business, housing, and financial issues. Such community building efforts could open up whole new possibilities of economic, cultural, and legal support for Waldorf schools.

There may also be a possibility to develop links to the local community that would have direct economic impact through the creation of a local Waldorf school association similar to what Steiner and Molt created for the first Waldorf school. As previously described, it was a separate legal entity that took on the responsibility of fundraising for operations and capital needs. The goal of the organization was to relieve the faculty of the burden of balancing the budget and to let them focus on teaching. Such an entity may prove to be useful now and into the future. It could relieve schools from the pressure to seek wealthy people to be on school boards, people who may or may not understand self-administration or Waldorf education itself. Such people often get frustrated and leave disillusioned, or, if they stay for any period of time, try to introduce techniques that are effective in other settings but have a splintering effect in a Waldorf school. A separate entity that focuses on fundraising and development issues could provide such people with the opportunity to apply their good will, capacities, and resources on behalf of the school without subjecting them to administrative and decision making processes that are completely foreign to their personal experiences. A school could thus be much more liberal in whom they might include on such an independent board than they could be with selections for the board of the school itself. There are obviously certain pitfalls attached to creating such a separate fundraising organization, and any effort in this direction should proceed with *the school's* overall best interests in mind.

People connected to individual Waldorf schools also need to think in terms of educational communities in the broader sense: the Waldorf school movement, other independent schools, private schools, and education in general. Participation in all of these educational venues can provide support and opportunities for a greater understanding of Waldorf education and its social ideals.

These are a few suggestions of how people could begin in a practical way to implement the ideals that are at the heart of Waldorf education.