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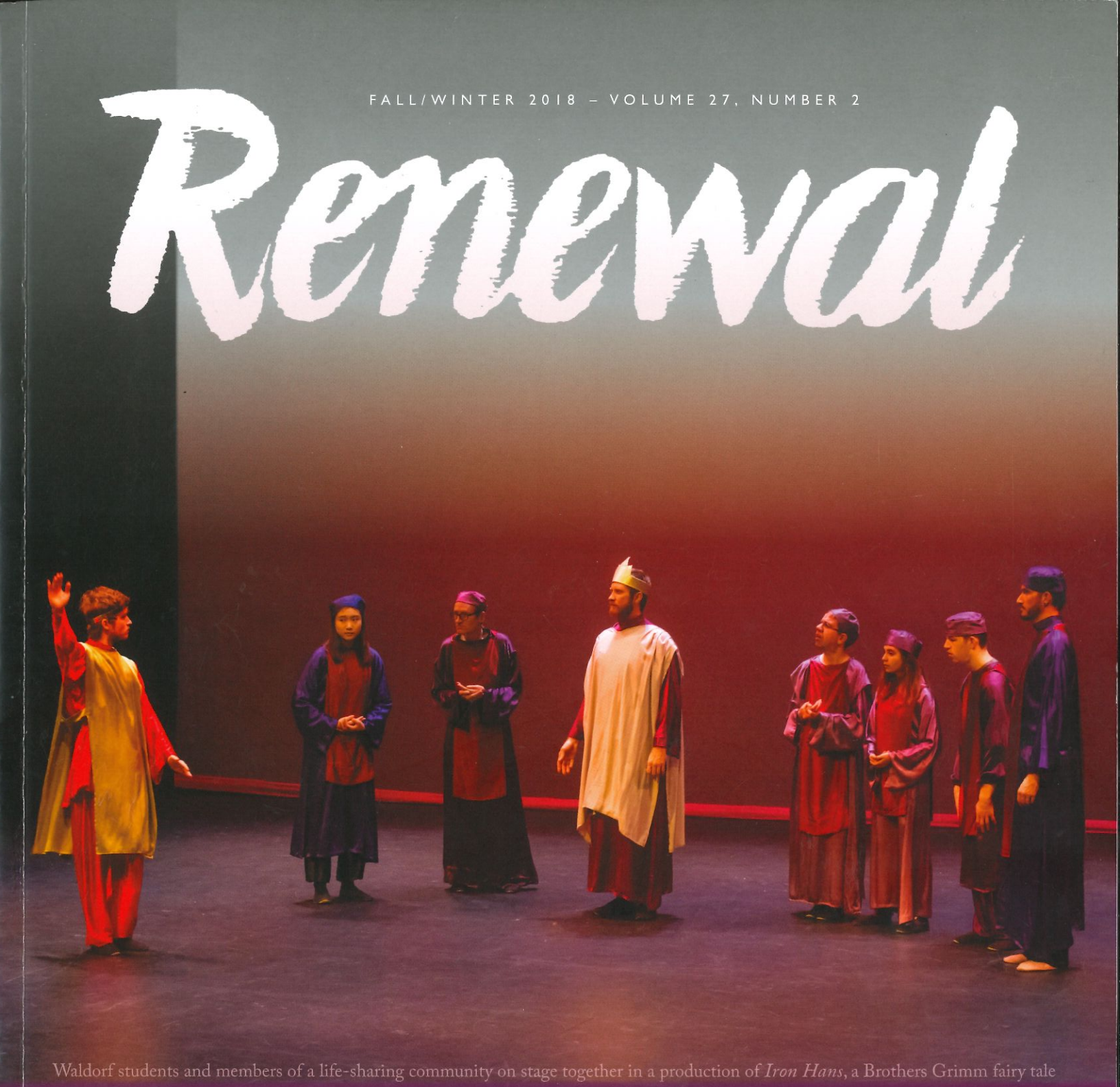
Renewal



Waldorf students and members of a life-sharing community on stage together in a production of *Iron Hans*, a Brothers Grimm fairy tale

Diversity and Inclusivity in Waldorf Education • Celebrating the Waldorf Centennial • Dirt and Learning in a Waldorf Kindergarten Building Character through Handwork • The Right Time for Competitive Sports • Computer Science in the Twelfth Grade

A JOURNAL FOR WALDORF EDUCATION

Diversity, Inclusivity, and Waldorf Education

A Call for Self-Reflection and Action

BY LINDA G. WILLIAMS, PhD

Principle 2 of the principles that guide the work of AWSNA states: *Waldorf schools foster social renewal by cultivating human capacities in service to the individual and society.* The 2018 AWSNA Summer Conference, held at Washington Waldorf School, took this principle as its theme. Over four hundred Waldorf educators, parents, board members, alumni, teacher education students, and independent researchers gathered to address issues of place, race, class, and gender. These issues were examined in the context of the background, culture, and practice of Waldorf Education at this time in North America. I was honored to share keynoting responsibilities with Neil Boland, Waldorf educator and researcher, who has written and spoken extensively on these issues.

When we engage in conversations about race, class, nationality, gender, and ability, we are also simultaneously examining many different areas of our schools and teacher education institutions. For me, these areas were highlighted in the talks and workshops and in the conversations that percolated throughout the conference. These communications centered around four areas that make up school culture:

1. Professional and personal development
2. Administrative policies and procedures
3. Curriculum
4. Teacher education

Professional and Personal Development

Through conversations at the conference, I learned that several member schools have extended their professional development offerings to include anti-bias training. They have done this through local consultants or national organizations such as the National SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) Project and Undoing Racism. This work seems most effective when a wide range of members of the school community participate, including teachers, administrators, board members, and parents. It also seems most enduring when this work is viewed as congruent with the call for self-development that lives at the heart of Waldorf Education.

Administrative Policies and Procedures

Reflecting on the ways we organize our schools and institutions, and on the means (resources) we bring together for this purpose, can be enlightening when we do this through the lenses of power, privilege, and inclusion. What messages do we send out, consciously or unconsciously, to prospective families and personnel about who we are and how we operate? How are we perceived by those who, with interest, approach us—including persons of color, Indigenous people, persons who do not fit into the sexual binary mold, and families struggling to survive financially? How are the voices of families heard and incorporated into decision-making in the school? How are resources, both human and financial, accumulated and distributed? These types of questions are usually approached, at least partially, through strategic planning and/or accreditation processes. However, they can also be the focus for ongoing study, contemplation, and discussion by faculty and staff.

Waldorf schools are becoming more and more diverse. In Detroit Waldorf School, for example, 26% of the students are African-American with another 6% identifying as multiracial.

Photo courtesy of Detroit Waldorf School

Curriculum

A renewed commitment to a place-based Waldorf Education provides the impetus for rethinking the curriculum in North American Waldorf schools. Steiner himself can be seen as arguing for a place-based curriculum.[1] Recently, Neil Boland and Jocelyn Romero Demirbag described their experiences when working with teachers and staff of Honolulu Waldorf School who explored the notion of place.[2] Place-based education gives us the opportunity to deepen relationships to Indigenous cultures, explore local geography and history, and broaden experiences in the natural sciences. It becomes a foundation through which themes of social justice can be explored through the challenges experienced by and the contributions made by many different peoples. Also, place-based education heightens students' relationships to their home, their locality, and, paradoxically, to the world. Teachers in a given locale or region could cooperate by identifying and sharing diverse source material that will meet the needs of their students.

Inclusive, place-based education in Hawai'i can involve—besides study of the native language, culture, and history—kindergartners at Honolulu Waldorf School growing kalo (taro), a traditional food, in the school garden . . .

Teacher Education

It is important that Waldorf teacher education programs continue to actively promote teaching for inclusivity, diversity, and social justice in their programs and practices. These themes should be explicit and central both in the ongoing programs and in specific workshops.

I also recommend that there be a concentrated, national effort to increase the number of teachers and administrators of color in our Waldorf schools. This step alone—to actively recruit and support teachers of color to become Waldorf teachers and administrators—would significantly increase the diversity of voices at the table.

Conclusion

In these tumultuous times, Waldorf schools across the continent are being called upon to renew their commitment to social justice and social renewal. It is important that Waldorf schools continue to deepen their relationships to the communities in which they live and serve, and remain "woke" to the cultural environment that surrounds us. The primary goal of working toward social justice is to ensure that our schools are safe, healthy, diverse, inclusive, and supportive communities for all children and adults to grow and develop in a healthy way.

. . . the use of native Hawaiian fabrics and instruments in the school's May Day celebration . . .

The 2018 AWSNA conference was a chance to bring together many diverse voices in Waldorf Education. Now is the time to capture this momentum and build upon it. We need to continue to share our experiences through publishing accounts in journals, newsletters, and blogs. Forums in individual schools and at regional and national conferences should feature the experiences of teachers, administrators, parents, and alumni as we reflect upon the many aspects of individual and collective Waldorf school culture.

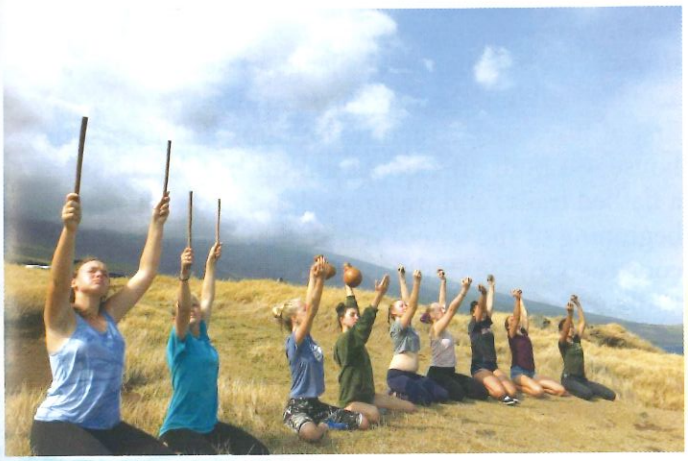
At the end of the conference, I proposed that perhaps it is time to initiate a "Waldorf Social Justice Institute." This would be a dedicated space with one-, two-, or three-week residencies, a place where we could consolidate resources and trainings, and deepen the work through focused, collaborative research and dissemination. Workshops on unconscious bias, restorative justice, curriculum development, and the arts would be interspersed with talks from students, alumni, parents, teachers, staff, and researchers about experiences in their schools and greater communities. This

. . . and eleventh graders doing a practicum on a farm that uses traditional agricultural and fish farming methods.

Photos courtesy of Honolulu Waldorf School

extended version of our recent AWSNA conference could also include components of teacher preparation and administrative practices.

Whether or not this particular dream comes to fruition, the work toward social justice must continue as we move into the second century of Waldorf Education. Our children are counting on us. ʘ



Students from Haleakala Waldorf School visit Kahikinui, a remote area on Maui, to chant and dance in honor of the place.

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LINDA G. WILLIAMS *was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, and received her Waldorf training at the Waldorf Institute of Mercy College. She has over twenty years of class teaching experience, primarily serving at Detroit Waldorf School, where her current class is in the fifth grade. She also taught for three years at Urban Waldorf School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Dr. Williams received her doctorate from Michigan State University in 2006 and taught literacy development and urban education as an Associate Professor of Teacher Education at Eastern Michigan University from 2006 to 2014. In that year, she returned to class teaching at Detroit Waldorf where she also currently serves as co-chair of the college of teachers.*

Boland, continued from page 28

of the consciousness soul as the "empathetic soul."[11] For me, working toward social justice, toward diversity and decolonization requires empathy and is what you feel impelled to do when you have empathy for the Other. Feeling within yourself how the Other suffers when marginalized, oppressed, or rendered invisible, and not just understanding or knowing it, marks the beginning of change. It is an important step toward social renewal, which lies at the heart of the Waldorf movement. ʘ

NEIL BOLAND *lives in Auckland, New Zealand, and is senior lecturer in the School of Education at Auckland University of Technology. He teaches courses in numerous programs, mainly at the postgraduate level, and is also responsible for courses in Rudolf Steiner Education at the university. As a teacher, he worked in Steiner settings from kindergarten through elementary and high school in Japan, New Zealand, and Germany. Since 1990, he has been involved in teacher education.*

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Photo at upper left courtesy of Haleakala Waldorf School