



waldorf education & diversity

# Leading for Inclusion

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## The Critical Challenge of Our Time

It would be hard to find many issues as strongly defining of our time as our mounting diversity: locally, statewide, nationally, and globally. One might argue it is our time's defining issue.

The distance among groups is growing greater. In the United States alone, more than half of all babies born are people of color. By 2030, the majority of young workers will be people of color. And by 2044, the United States will be a majority people of color nation. Research signals the powerful hope for a shared future in these phenomena.

The wins from diversity are growing clearer in brain research. Diversity is empowering for all who live within its orbit. Brain research shows what many have known intuitively: diversity builds cognitive flexibility with the ability to innovate, be adaptive, and be inclusive.

The wins are already defining action on the stock market. Blue Chip companies are charting the course to value those who are diversity fluent (more even than those who are fluent in math or computer science) because of the bottom line. Intercultural relations have come to be seen by top performing companies to lie at the heart of

organizational effectiveness, enhanced product innovation, and optimal customer relations. Those aiming to do well increasingly seek the one who can reach profitable arrangements across language, race, and gender differences: the one who is comfortable in a boardroom, at a barbeque, and at a Bollywood dance.

Yet, despite the growing diversity and mounting value of being diversity fluent, both economically and socially, we are becoming more segregated. In the United States alone, we are more segregated than sixty-five years ago, despite the 1954 Brown versus Board of Education court ruling. The question is where are the promising practices of how to confront this challenge? Waldorf education offers an important example.

## The Task of Waldorf in its 100th Year

As we celebrate Waldorf's groundbreaking work for justice (pulling down walls of isolation between class, gender, and country), we note the first Waldorf School in 1919 was the first to be coed, kindergarten through twelfth grade, and

cross-class—with the children of the factory owner sitting beside the children of the factory workers.

How have we carried forward this mission? Waldorf schools have grown to be known as an elite educational option, so we are at risk of forgetting our original intent. We have a strong history and global examples of Waldorf leading for inclusion, for example in South Africa Township’s Zenzeleni Waldorf School; Monte Azul in Sao Paulo, Brazil; or Israel’s El Zeitoun and Ein Bustan, where Arab and Jewish children learn together. Our task now is to build up this heritage, rest-

## Community School for Creative Education (CSCE)

### BRIEF HISTORY

Waldorf schools have historically been founded by groups of dedicated teachers, parents, or a blend. Community School for Creative Education (CSCE) was born from community organizing, with a different entry point. Starting in 2007, CSCE’s founder Dr. Ida Oberman, PhD was trained in the Faith in Action leadership model

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“ COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROVIDES MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES, A MONTHLY FOOD BANK, FREE EXTENDED-DAY ACTIVITIES UNTIL SIX IN THE EVENING EVERY DAY.

ing firmly on Waldorf education’s original intent, in the West, as in a public Waldorf school just outside of San Francisco in Oakland, California, known as the Community School for Creative Education.

How can we, as the Waldorf community, strengthen our voice to make the changes for justice and inclusion we were tasked from inception to fulfill? What living thinking is required of us?

(then under PICO’s Affiliate Oakland Community Organizations). Under careful tutelage of her organizer, Emma Paulino, Ida learned to do one-on-ones, join with other leaders in research meetings, and then create actions and reflections for renewed one-on-ones. Out of that initiative, local parents led the work to research Waldorf schools and high-performing, high-poverty schools in Oakland’s flatlands to make the decision Oakland was ready for a Waldorf

School. After three years of planning and building relations in the Oakland community, the country's first intercultural urban public Waldorf school was born.

The journey was not an easy one. They were declined twice by the district, and once recommended for decline by the County Office of Education staff. Eventually, they were approved in a surprised turn by a board member who became convinced a Waldorf option in the flatlands community was worth the chance. The approval exemplified the power of having a community voice. At the public hearings, fifty-two individuals from different languages, backgrounds, and roles rose up to speak in support. That was a decade ago, June 2010.

Today, CSCE is comprised of grades transitional kindergarten through eighth, serving 283 students. In diverse Oakland, it is among the most diverse schools. The student demographic is comprised of forty-eight percent English Learners; fifteen percent entitled to special education services, over double the average charter school and higher than the district; and eighty-two percent are from low-income families. The student population is ethnically diverse: sixty-two percent Latinx, eighteen percent African American, ten percent Asian American/Pacific Islander, four percent Caucasian, three percent Native American and three percent multiracial.

A full-service community school, Community School provides mental health services, a monthly food bank, free extended-day activities until six in the evening every day (including summer school). Extended-day programs are laced through with watercolor painting, circle time, and main lesson book work. A signature feature of the school is deeply networked in community, in fact, the school serves as the community hub; it is not separate or disconnected.



“THE HOUR IS NOW FOR WALDORF EDUCATION TO STEP FORWARD AND TAKE A SEAT AT THE TABLE AROUND CUTTING-EDGE SOLUTIONS TO CONFRONT THE DEFINING QUESTIONS OF OUR TIME: DIVERSITY AND EQUITY IN OUR WORLD AND IN EDUCATION.

**OUR COMMUNITY:  
ITS RICHES AND CHALLENGES**

We reside in a community that is among the most diverse culturally vibrant neighborhoods in diverse Oakland. Vietnamese, Mexican, and Cambodian restaurants vie for attention. Art from different cultures and religions decorates neighborhood walls and floats as notes through the air. In contrast, the community of which we are a proud part is also known for human trafficking, drugs, and violent crimes at four times the state's rate (and a rate one third higher than the city itself).

**OUR SCHOOL CHARTER AND  
OUR LEADERSHIP**

The idea for an urban public Waldorf school took shape when in 1984, Henry Barnes, founding teacher of the first US Waldorf school in NYC

1928, contacted Ida Oberman when he heard of her intention to start a public Waldorf school in an inner city setting. Henry told Ida, “we have to go where the children are.”

Over the course of the years, the idea became reality. In 2007, the work to form a planning group led to a carefully-crafted school charter document in consultation with veteran Waldorf educators Betty Staley; Dr. Linda Williams, PhD; Mr. Christof Wiechert; renowned scholar Ms. Zaretta Hammond; and the encouragement of Professor Linda Darling Hammond.

In 2017, the seventh year of the school's biography, Principal Monique Brinson and Executive Director Ida Oberman created a formidable leadership team. Grounded in the school's charter, we have been focused, together with the school community, to further develop our urban intercultural

Waldorf model to advance equity, ever aimed at returning to the original intent launched with the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart 1919.

## Three Pillars of Community School and Three Early Fruits

Community School rests on three critical pillars: our community; our Waldorf inspired, standards-aligned, equity-focused program resting on the foundation of the arts; and our adult research and education. Among fruits we count in this early phase are first and foremost our students, then our families, and finally our academic gains.

### *Pillar One: Community*

Our community lives inside and outside the walls of our school. The year is laced with festivals from Day of the Young Child, to Lunar New Year, to the Birthday of the Venerable Prophet Mohammed, to Black History Month. For each festival, families join to bring food, celebrate, decorate, share, learn stories from each other's cultures, and learn to cook each other's favorite foods.

With our families and our community outside the walls of the school, we have done monthly safety walks for example, dear John go home, to fight human trafficking and lift human dignity. Our students, families, and staff have partnered with a nearby district high school to make a mosaic to adorn the outside of our school building. This



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by **Bertram von Zabern**



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beautiful artwork faces the street, exemplifying birds escaping a cage to freedom. Included in the art is a phone number for those who want to seek protection from human trafficking.

At the ribbon cutting of this mosaic, the children from Community School and youth from the nearby high school were surrounded by staff families, while the nearby Oakland Cambodian Buddhist Temple chanted songs of peace. Pastors from nearby churches offered prayers. Community leaders spoke up for the power and promise of our neighborhood. Our children were at the center of the celebration, while the chief of police held a watchful, benevolent eye to make sure all traffic slowed, which marked moment of community unity.

Elected officials frequent our halls as readily as do the police or members of the faith community. The mayor of Oakland came to speak to our children on Lunar New Year, as we greeted a revered group of educators from the Waldorf School in Chengdu, China. We were invited to join festivals at the nearby Cambodian Buddhist Temple and received the honor of being allowed to stand a revered distance from the head monk for a picture. We are invited for the festivals of our OH lone brothers and sisters on Indigenous People's Day.

While the police in our community all too often instill fear in children, the sergeants and lieutenants and officers come to us as we celebrate the Day of the Young Child, to read with the children.

## *Pillar 2: Waldorf Inspired, Standards-aligned, Equity-focused Program Resting on the Arts*

### **THE ARTS: FORMING OPENING CIRCLE**

At the center of our work is education as an art. Every morning we open as a whole school community with children, staff, and families, to recite:

“this is our school, let peace dwell here. . .” first used by Cecil Harwood (1898-1975) in the first Waldorf School in an English-speaking country, Michael Hall. Using drums and song and verse in at least three languages, the children and whole community open the day. Through the intensive work since inception with Mr. Bernd Ruff of Friends of Waldorf Education's Emergency Pedagogy and bolted on brain research, we have grown ever more focused on this opening circle as the moment to invite children to find their place, in relation to their own body, to their neighbor, to the whole community, and to nature. Once this fifteen-minute ritual is completed, children sing, by grade, go to their classrooms, and the day begins.

### **THE ARTS: HANDWORK**

Handwork is a central joyous thread that weaves through the life of the school. Founding community member Ms. Nhan Le works with the lower grades to crochet, knit, and finger knit. In the upper grades, students work in paper origami to adorn the space in accordance with holidays. Veteran Waldorf volunteers join for wreath making, silk dying, and crown making.

### **THE ARTS: CLASS PLAYS**

The power of the class play enlivens the children. The fact that Community School English learners and children identified in need of special education services have outperformed the district for the past five years in a row, we attribute to our language, acting, and song-rich environment.

### **THE ARTS: GARDENING**

A key feature of the handwork is the garden work. Blessed by generous donor gifts, we receive support in extended day and during the day so children can combat the research noted nature deficit and experience growth from the planting of the seed, to the bloom, to the harvest, and to the making of the soup.

### THE ARTS: RECITATION

As we recite every morning, we recite every celebration, lifting up for all the rhythm and ritual and power of art through speech. Students learn one world language, Spanish, from Transition Kindergarten on, and we are now building in the option of Mandarin, from middle school on. The power to learn to recite in different world languages was a goal of Dr. Steiner's that Community School has embraced.

### Pillar 3: Academic Steiner Teacher Education

"I do not want to be adulated! I want to be understood," Steiner admonished us. We know at Community School all practice has to be intimately linked to research. Since inception, we have begun our Urban Waldorf Teacher Training under the guidance of Dr. Mary Goral, PhD and co-leadership of lead teachers Ms. Delano Hill and Ms. Sara Alvarado. At the same time, we have benefited by sending our teachers to the Rudolf Steiner College Public School Institute with the generous support of the late Arlene Monks. Most importantly, as of 2018, the Mills Waldorf Professional Development Certified Program was formed through a partnership with Mills College School of Education and Alanis University in Allfter Germany. The program is now recognized by AWSNA, Alliance for Public Waldorf Education, and WECAN. It offers a two-summer, two-week Mills Waldorf Professional Development Certificate with ten graduate credits, with the experience of Waldorf Education training under Mr. Bernd Ruff in Emergency Pedagogy and Jots Scherer, dean of Flanks School of Education. We are proud to begin our third year this summer.

In 2019, on the state test, our African-American students outperformed all other public schools in

the city (district or charter). Our low-income Latinx students won a high growth prize for being in the top ninetieth percentile in growth in English Language Arts and Math. Finally, our students identified as in need of special education outperformed the district by double for a sixth year in a row.

The hour is now for Waldorf education to step forward and take a seat at the table around cutting-edge solutions to confront the defining questions of our time: diversity and equity in our world and in education. Waldorf education can celebrate its power as a tested model to confront challenges and harness opportunities. We know the power of diversity of head, heart, and hand; diversity of the other and me; diversity of the community and us; diversity of our community and the world. We have the wind in our back. The growing body of research on social emotional learning and brain research confirms what Waldorf education has adapted across time, language, class, and culture.

It is time for Waldorf practice and research to speak as the Steiner-hired Waldorf teacher Erich Gabert did, "Waldorf education is not imitation but inquiry; it is not replication but research; Waldorf is not done but unfolding." As we enter Waldorf education's next 100 years, we are called to the task of an unfolding leader in advancing social justice. 

*Adapted from talks given 09/06/2019 at the Alanus University, Allfter, Germany; and Stuttgart Waldorf School Faculty Meeting, Stuttgart, Germany, 09/12/2019*

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As principal of the Community School for Creative Education, **Monique Brinson** brings 10 years experience as an Oakland Principal and 16 years experience in administration along with 10 years experience as a founding teacher/teacher. An athlete and artist as well as an organic academic and community leader; Principal Brinson has embraced an intercultural lens and is passionate about strengthening and extending a Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework as a leader of the country's first Intercultural Public Waldorf Model in Oakland.

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**Ida Oberman** is Dutch born and German educated. A teacher for ten years, she is the founder and now the executive director of Community School for Creative Education, the country's first urban public Waldorf school, located in Oakland, CA.