

## **A Brief Note on the Nature of Tuition**

The current climate has produced a lot of personal and organizational stress, and for some raised hard economic questions. The pandemic seems to have changed everything rather suddenly—home life, work, school, as well as other basic life rhythms. Situational uncertainty and the tension that often accompanies it seem ever-present, even as we reorganize and recognize new priorities. The linkage between illness and the economy, spatial distancing and employment, working from home with the children present, all have necessitated a shift in consciousness and operating assumptions. None of this is easy.

At the same time Waldorf schools, without students, their primary reason for existing, are having to reinvent how they can still serve the children and families until such time as they can return to school. There is amazingly creative work being done in this regard; and, being done with the same thoughtfulness for child development that one would expect of Waldorf educators given the circumstances. Teachers are turning as quickly as they can to other modalities of teaching where possible and appropriate. For the Waldorf students, “distance learning” really means learning from the archetypes and knowledge of the distant to modern past as preparation for stepping mindfully and heartfully into the present, and further, so that the future they will create is rooted in the fullness of what it means to be human—so they can go the distance. How we as adults model and move forward through adversity is also teaching the children—and this may be a singularly important opportunity to learn what resilience looks and feels like.

Of course, all the sudden change factors have raised real and important economic questions. You might reasonably think: I am busy working, and caring for or teaching my children at home and yet I continue to pay tuition—even if the school is offering online classes. What am I paying for? In a consumer-oriented society, it is essential to understand what tuition actually is because in the end you cannot buy an education. If you look back on your own educational experience whether in public or private school, the economic life of the organization needed to be supported via taxes or tuition so that the actual cultural activity of teaching and learning could unfold unfettered by the quality of financial exchange. In reality tuition is a mandatory contribution or gift to the creation of the daily experience we call school, a kind of contribution that bears fruit outside of the bounds of time. Education, learning does not stop though schooling may have concluded.

The school association to which tuition payments are made is actually made up of all those who are paying, which means that the community (association in this case) shares the risk in supporting the school's ongoing life. This in turn means that tuition makes the life of the school possible regardless of whether your child is home sick on any given day or whether, as in the current situation, children and parents are required to shelter in place.

The current pandemic has made some realities visible that may not have been so evident in the norm. Our assumptions are challenged as may be our patience. Our roles and responsibilities as parents or grandparents have suddenly shifted. But it is also an opportunity to realize what future we are making, not only with the gift of Waldorf education, but also how we think about

how the economy works, what money is, and what it is for. It may well be that some families' circumstances will be so changed that continuing to support the school so that their children can attend is not possible, though I am sure that schools are mindful of this reality and are trying to work with it as a short term issue and longer term as well. This is one painful reality that has become visible, but so too has the true gift nature of tuition.

John Bloom  
©2020