

Reports from Current Projects of the Research Institute

Progress Report on the Waldorf Parent Survey

Martin Novom

Our interactions as members of communities of adults in Waldorf schools are a subject for lively and frequent conversations. How parents view their schools and the teachers and administrators who inhabit them is a perennial subject in meetings, hallways, and private discussions. While we all may have direct experiences and anecdotal data about the perceptions, concerns, and hopes of the adult communities in our Waldorf schools, we lack reliable data. Until we have a better basis for understanding, we can expect to bounce from one issue to another with little hope for improvement.

With the guidance and assistance of the Research Institute, I am conducting a new study on perceptions of parents and their role in Waldorf schools. This article provides a report of the process and describes the background, method, and some of the challenges this research has entailed.

In early 2006 it became apparent that there was an opportunity to use the annual multi-school workshops that I had been presenting under my own organizational banner, that of the Alexis de Tocqueville Institute, to conduct research. Over the previous five years I had experimented with ways to improve adult learning through these workshops. I had introduced a questionnaire, as a teaching tool, at the beginning of each workshop. It functioned as a means of setting the tone and providing an overview of questions helpful to engaging with the workshop topic. The workshop series I was preparing for the 2006–2007 school year was called, “The Role of the Parent: Joining Forces with Your School.”

When I realized that such a questionnaire also offered the potential to collect valuable data, I contacted the Research Institute, and we agreed to work closely on the design and distribution of a revised questionnaire. We recognized that here

was an opportunity to gather useful data and, perhaps, to publish an article of value to Waldorf schools. Since the start of this research project I have discontinued professional work under the Alexis de Tocqueville Institute banner and am now conducting my workshops and consulting as a member of Skystone Ryan, an international consulting firm.

The revised questionnaire became part of four multi-school workshops in different regions of the U.S. between October 2006 and January 2008. Parents, faculty, staff, and trustees from several different schools attended each workshop. Workshop participants were told that their anonymous responses to the questionnaire would be collected at the end of the workshop for possible inclusion in a national research project.

While these four workshops provided a good cross section of a Waldorf school community, they did not provide a large enough sample size. To remedy this, I contacted a number of schools to invite their participation. Since distribution and collection were conducted by intermediaries at these schools, great care was taken in communicating with the contact person at each school. I asked each school to seek a range of participants, not just parents. I attached a cover letter explaining the purpose of the questionnaire and my commitment to keeping all participants anonymous. I was successful in arranging for the distribution and collection of questionnaires from six schools. I also collected questionnaires at a regional conference.

The questionnaire was designed for paper and pen responses, with 32 multiple choice and narrative response questions. At the four workshops and one conference, questionnaires were distributed and collected manually. For the six schools, I distributed an original by email attachment and arranged for a contact at each school to print

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hard copies for distribution and collection. The completed questionnaires were mailed back from the six schools. I collected a total of 313 completed questionnaires.

The purpose of this research is to collect useful data from parents, teachers, administrators, and active volunteers—trustees and committee

members—regarding their perceptions of the role and perspectives of parents in Waldorf schools. As of this writing, the data has been compiled and is being analyzed. We anticipate the publication of conclusions from the analysis in a forthcoming issue of the *Research Bulletin*.

News from the Online Waldorf Library

Marianne Alsop

The Online Waldorf Library (OWL) continues to see an increasing number of inquiries and requests for information. Over the past eight months traffic has increased by 15% over the same period last year.

Daily requests for general information are directed to other web-based resources like AWSNA, WECAN, and the International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education. Direct links to these and other groups working internationally with Waldorf education are on the links page of the OWL site. A new addition is the link to the World Language Teachers in Waldorf Schools website, a helpful web-based community of foreign language teachers and resources.

The current economy has led to a number of requests for homeschooling resources from parents who have had to withdraw their children from independent Waldorf schools. Their requests are heartfelt, and it is obvious that, having made the decision to withdraw their child from school, they want to continue the education as well as they can. The OWL site offers many specific curriculum resources as well as links to homeschooling resource sites.

Included in the many requests for information over the past months are these topics:

- Teaching resources for working with children with special needs, both in homeschool and public school settings.
- Understanding sleep, from physical and spiritual standpoints.
- Research on gender issues specific to curriculum.
- How to work with the Extra Lesson in a homeschool situation.
- The relationship of knitting to brain development.
- Teaching German in a homeschool setting.
- Teaching music in the middle grades.
- Research on the development of handwriting.
- The evolutionary sequence of consonants.

Most notable this year has been the increased use of online or e-books, specifically the titles in the “Foundations of Waldorf Education” series. Other frequently used online resources include the *Science Newsletters*; Guenther Hauk’s *Handwork and Handicrafts*; and back issues of *Gateways*.

The Online Waldorf Library invites your questions and comments, and encourages readers of the *Research Bulletin* to explore this valuable virtual library.

Visit the Online Waldorf Library at

www.waldorflibrary.org.