

**Setting Priorities for Research:
WERI Advisory Board Meeting
Susan Howard, Douglas Sloan, Roberto Trostli**

On March 26th, members of the WERI Advisory Board and a few guests met to review the work of the Research Institute and to consider impulses for the Institute's future work.

Present were Henry Barnes, John Brousseau, Stephen Edelglass, Douglas Gerwin, Antje Ghaznavi, Craig Holdredge, Michael Howard, Susan Howard, Diana Hughes, Douglas Sloan, Chris Schaefer, Eugene Schwartz, Patti Smith, Betty Staley, Roberto Trostli, and Jane Wulsin.

Reports were presented on the various research projects currently underway, including the following:

Attention Related Disorders and Waldorf Education

This is a large research project being cosponsored by WERI and the School of Spiritual Science of the Anthroposophical Society of North America, in partnership with the Alliance for Childhood.

The purpose of the project is to document systematically the approach of Waldorf education in dealing with Attention Related Disorders and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders, to further the understanding of educational and therapeutic approaches most effective for ARD/ADHD children in Waldorf schools, and to find a common language that can help relate Waldorf education and the wider educational community in efforts to deal with such children in a holistic and healing way.

An update on this project is included in this issue of the Bulletin.

The High School Research Project

Directed by Douglas Gerwin of High Mowing School and Betty Staley of Rudolf Steiner College, this project is exploring the needs of adolescents today and stimulating curriculum reform within Waldorf high schools. In its first phase, the project has hosted colloquia on phenomenological approaches to teaching chemistry and symptomatological approaches to the teaching of history in the high school.

The Learning Expectations and Assessment Project (LEAP) The purpose of this program is to develop learning expectations and a model assessment system for Waldorf schools, one that is fully aligned with the curriculum, teaching methods, developmental model of learning, and goals of Waldorf education, and that can provide Waldorf teachers and parents with a detailed qualitative picture of their students' progress towards achieving those goals.

The project leadership team includes Karen Anderson, Ph.D., Bob Anderson, MA, and Freda Easton, MSW and Ed.D. Advisors include Betty Staley of Rudolf Steiner College and Roberto Trostli of the Hartsbrook Waldorf School and Sunbridge College. In its first phase the project is establishing a communication network including teachers in several Waldorf schools, and developing a sample "learning expectations" document. We anticipate this to be a major step in providing concrete modes of assessment of the Waldorf movement, which are fully in keeping with the principles of Waldorf philosophy and pedagogy.

Nature Institute Guide to Technology

Steven Talbott, author of *The Future Does Not Compute*, and editor of the on-line newsletter, NetFuture (<http://www.oreilly.com/~stevet/netfuture>), is completing a book, *How To Begin Thinking About Technology: A Guide for Teachers and Students* through the support of WERI. The book is to be completed in the coming year and it is our expectation that it will be an important and much-used resource for Waldorf teachers, parents and others in determining, and articulating, the appropriate place of the computer in education.

Other Studies

Other studies such as *The Essentials of Waldorf Education*, and the work of the Alliance for Childhood, were also discussed, as well as several new proposals for research in the areas of the role of the arts, phenomenological science, and working with constitutional polarities in children, were then discussed, and many questions were raised for further investigation, including the following:

1. *Longitudinal study of Waldorf students*

The first Waldorf school in this country was established seventy years ago. Now there are approximately 150 Waldorf schools in all stages of development. Waldorf alumni span three generations, and some of their children and grandchildren attend Waldorf schools.

Waldorf education is meant to be an "education for life," with life-long benefits. Despite the considerable number of Waldorf students who are now middle-aged or elderly, very little is known about how Waldorf education affected their life and work. Can study of a sample of Waldorf students be commissioned to begin to fill this gap in our knowledge?

2. *Physiological aspects of Waldorf education*

As the growing child matures, physiological processes are transformed into psychological /intellectual capacities. Today, numerous factors hamper or interfere with children's healthy development.

Many Waldorf teachers have a basic knowledge of the physical, etheric, and astral aspects of the human being, but they need to deepen their understanding in order to meet the needs of a new generation of students, many of whom have physical, emotional, social, and intellectual challenges. How can teachers, remedial educators, therapists, doctors, and artists help each other penetrate some of the physiological and psychological mysteries of children of the new millennium?

3. *Esoteric underpinnings of the work of the teacher*

Waldorf teachers work not only with the physical, sensible realm, but also with supersensible realities realms. In order to meet the challenges of their vocation, Waldorf teachers need to develop their inner life, which creates the possibility of working on earthly tasks in partnership with spiritual beings. How can the inner work of the teachers be supported and sustained? How can the work of the College of Teachers in Waldorf schools be strengthened and intensified? Can Waldorf teachers and Waldorf schools deepen their relationship to the Christ Impulse? These questions bear examination and exploration.

4. Collaborative learning and research in the various spheres of the Waldorf school

Waldorf schools engage in the following spheres: the teacher's individual work, work with the students, the parents, the school and the wider community, the work of the school administration, the work of the faculty, and the work of the College of Teachers. During the last eighty years, Waldorf schools and communities have experienced what works and what does not in these various spheres. In order to make the most of our experience, we need to refine our capacities to reflect together, to learn from one another, and to share what we have discovered with others in similar circumstances.

Many Waldorf teachers and administrators do not have sufficient time to pursue independent research as conceived in traditional forms. We need to develop new forms of collaborative learning and research that will allow the wealth of experience and wisdom gained by practicing teachers and administrators to be gathered and disseminated.

5. Artistic foundations of Waldorf education

Rudolf Steiner challenged Waldorf teachers to develop education as an art. What does this actually mean? Artists have a special approach to life and work. Can they help Waldorf teachers to approach their teaching in new ways?

6. Meeting the challenges of technology

Modern technology has affected every aspect of our lives, changing the outer and inner landscape of our world. Children and adolescents are particularly susceptible to the influences of modern technology, and we have begun to see how it has affected their intellectual, emotional, and social development. Does the Waldorf curriculum need to change to help students adapt to the challenges posed by modern technology? Do we need to work in new ways to help students develop their capacities for observation, memory, concentration? What roles do the fine arts and the practical arts play in helping students developing the qualities needed to thrive in today's and tomorrow's world?

Waldorf education in relation to the broader education movement Waldorf schools were conceived as living laboratories where a new art of education could be researched and developed in order to serve as a catalyst for educational change. Until recent years, Waldorf education has been developed in private schools and has had little outer impact on the broader education movement. Waldorf education is now being practiced in a variety of contexts, including "public Waldorf schools," "charter Waldorf schools," and "Waldorf-inspired schools." What is the Waldorf movement's relationship to these other schools? Are the essential elements of Waldorf education "exportable?" Can we establish a meaningful dialogue between Waldorf teachers and teachers in other types of schools so that Waldorf education can take a more active role in the broader educational movement in this country?

The directors of WERI will continue to consider these topics and questions as a basis for future research projects, conferences, and publications. We invite readers to submit their ideas for the work of the Waldorf Educational Research Institute for the years ahead.

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