

Waldorf High School Research Project: Who is the Teenager Today?

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Since its founding in the summer of 1998, the Waldorf High School Research Project (WHSRP) has been investigating the question “Who is the Teenager Today?” at three levels with an eye to promoting innovation and reform among the Waldorf high schools of North America. These levels include international research conferences, subject colloquia on specific areas of the curriculum, and individual research projects related to academic, extra-curricular, and social aspects of the Waldorf program.

I. Conferences on Adolescence

Most recently the WHSRP invited some 90 Waldorf high school teachers, counselors, and physicians to a retreat at the Franciscan Center, Andover Massachusetts to explore the changing nature of adolescents today and to outline new approaches to educating them. For five glorious October days, participants shared examples of the physiological, psychological, and spiritual changes to be observed among the most recent generation of young people. A picture emerged of a generation of students highly active in their nerve/sense system and correspondingly stultified in their metabolism and powers of volition.

As part of this research conference, Michaela Glöckler (Head of the Medical Section at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland) shared a wealth of insights into the diagnosis and treatment of today’s youth. She is especially anxious to view this generation not simply through the lens of pathology but also through the lens of what she calls “salutogenesis”—or what it means to be a healthy human being in the world of today.

Beyond the shared sessions with Dr. Glöckler, the conference broke up into seven special interest groups each morning as well as eight subject areas after lunch. Late afternoons and early evenings were devoted to panel discussions with counselors and physicians as well as samplings from the practice of Waldorf education.

On the final day, each group was asked to produce a summary of nine recommendations: three aspects of the Waldorf high school curriculum to be retained, three to be let go, and three to be transformed in some way. The compilation of these recommendations—as well as summaries of the working groups, an edited transcription of Dr. Glöckler’s remarks, and a collection of articles related to adolescence—will be made available later this year as a *Proceedings* (to be published by the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America).

Further results of this research conference will be shared at the next annual AWSNA conference of Waldorf teachers, to be held at the Kimberton Waldorf School in June 2002. This conference, open to Waldorf teachers from pre-school to high school, will be devoted to the theme of adolescence, beginning with the earliest education of the senses in the young child and culminating in the development of flexible thinking in the young adult.

II. Colloquia

A second level of research sponsored by WHSRP is focusing on the Waldorf curriculum and especially on certain long-standing conundrums. Several colloquia—on phenomenological chemistry, symptomatological history, movement and eurythmy, and high school mathematics—have opened up new approaches to old sticking points in the Waldorf curriculum. The results of these colloquia are already (or soon will be) available from AWSNA as separate *Proceedings*. A further round of colloquia are being prepared to examine new ways of teaching computers and digital arts, world and third-world history, environmental life sciences, fine arts and practical arts, and chemistry in the earlier high school grades.

III. Individual Research Projects and Publications

The Research Project sponsored a third level of activity by commissioning some 25 high school teachers to undertake independent research projects on topics related to the teenager and the high school curriculum. Several of these were presented at the Research Conference in Andover, while others will be shared at the forthcoming teachers conference in June 2002; most of them will eventually be published as separate monographs. For a complete listing of monographs, conference or colloquium proceedings, video recordings of discussion panels and other presentations at the October Research Conference, contact AWSNA Publications. In addition, a selection of articles on new trends in adolescence can be viewed on the Research Project's web page at: waldorflibrary.org/highschoolproject.htm

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