



A Call for Reports on Responsible Innovation

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for the Research Bulletin

Waldorf education must continually renew itself. As Rudolf Steiner told the teachers at the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart:

In the practice of teaching there will awaken in us, out of this knowledge of human nature, the art of education in a quite individual form. In reality, the teacher must invent this art at every moment.*

Two things are woven together in this statement: the need to penetrate the knowledge of human nature and the need to then develop out of it original and “quite individual” teaching. Without grounding the art of education in anthroposophical knowledge of human nature, innovation can become a personal affair; without innovation, Waldorf education becomes a “thing” instead of a creative art.

“Responsible Innovation” is a term coined for a process that attempts to encourage exactly what the name denotes. In a series of workshops in Waldorf schools and at the AWSNA annual teachers conference in June 2014, the process, as briefly outlined below, was introduced and discussed. We would like to invite practicing teachers to send in reports of experimentation and innovation, both successful and not so successful, for what we hope will become a regular section in the *Research Bulletin*.

The process follows (with a nod to the Eternal City) the acronym S.P.Q.R, which in this case stands for Study, Planning and Peer Preview, Quest, and Review.

* Rudolf Steiner, *Balance in Teaching*, GA 302a, Sept. 21, 1920 (Great Barrington, MA: Anthroposophic Press, 2007).

Study

There are six facets to the study:

1. What are the signature aspects of child development for the age of the class you will be working with?
2. What are the experiences you want the children, individually and collectively, to have at this age?
3. What are the skills and capacities you are trying to develop in a child of this age?
4. What is the local flavor of your area? What is the *terroir*, as vintners call it, that can make *this school* and its practices different from other schools?
5. What are your individual talents and skills? What do you love to do? Make what you *love* and what you *do* as synonymous as possible. Teachers who engage in activities they love are filled with infectious enthusiasm!
6. What are the specific needs of this class or individuals within it?

The first three aspects are more or less universal, the third will vary school by school, and the last two are unique to each situation.

Planning and Peer Preview

Plan a whole block, a part of a block, or even just a project within a block that is new and unique. Map it back to the six facets of study; in other words, prepare to justify what you are planning in terms of child development, locale, and so forth.

Now present your plan to your peers and ask them specifically for honest reflection on appropriateness, scope, and missing and/or extraneous aspects. This step will not only help you improve the plan, but it will also build collegiality and support among your peers.

It is entirely possible that, after consulting with your peers, you will decide to abandon this particular idea. That can be a good thing. Part of being responsible is the ability to recognize the shortcomings of an idea, even your idea.

Quest

If you decide to go ahead and try your idea, then do it with gusto. Dare to err! Like a medieval knight, get on your proverbial horse and go after it. Bring conviction and enthusiasm to your work, and leave doubts behind for the duration of the experiment. There will be time for reflections, corrections, and refinements afterwards.

Review

It is crucially important to review any innovation after the fact. However, this phase of the process can be fraught with the danger that one can fall in love with one's idea, precisely because it came out of a more individual source. But try to ask whether your innovative idea accomplished what you were hoping to achieve. Solicit peer, parent, and student impressions, as appropriate. A new idea rarely emerges "fully incarnate"—that is, fully fleshed out—the first time. It is likely that some aspects went well, others less so. Be as honest as you can, and if possible draft a report for your peers outlining what you did, why you did it, how you did it, and how you would recommend or not recommend doing something similar in the future.

Finally, send us a copy of your report. It would be wonderful to create a clearinghouse for examples of Responsible Innovation, both through periodic publication of articles and through postings on our website.