

Reports from Current Projects of the Research Institute

Progress Report on the Waldorf Parent Survey

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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*.