

Stephen Keith Sagarin

On one hand, there's the superficial use we make of things like the word "Waldorf." I recently counted sixty-one uses of the word Waldorf as a qualifier, as if, once we get past Waldorf school, Waldorf education, and Waldorf teacher, we still know what we mean when we talk about "Waldorf values" or a "Waldorf home." And that doesn't include the unattached, free-floating "Waldorf" to which someone recently drew my attention: "In Waldorf we..." In Waldorf we trust?

George Orwell, in *Politics and the English Language*, famously drew our attention to the ways in which we were in danger of draining meaning from language—and from there it's a very short step to draining meaning from life itself. As he wrote, "The slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.... Orthodoxy, of whatever color, seems to demand a lifeless, imitative style," and, "If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought."

When we use "Waldorf" in a way that creates insiders—those who we believe know what we mean, and who agree with us—and outsiders—those who aren't in the know—we undermine our meaning, our connection to others, and our relationship to the world in which we live and teach before we have said anything further. We create, inhabit, and perpetuate a jargon that simply works against whatever good we hope to do in the world.

On the other hand, associated with the word "Waldorf" as it pertains to education, deep wells of meaning await anyone with a bucket and a rope long enough to reach them. By comparing the words that Rudolf Steiner spoke to the teachers of the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart during the last six years of his life with the life of the school during this time, Christof Wiechert, in this issue of the *Bulletin*, creates a historical context of meaning in which we can understand Steiner's words with greater clarity. As Steiner and the first Waldorf school teachers wrestled with bringing the school to being, they confronted realities of school life that are still true for us today.

Martyn Rawson connects teacher self-education and the work of groups of teachers (faculty, college, or council) in Waldorf schools with Steiner's contemplative or meditative research method and with the work of Arthur Zajonc and others who currently see the value—if not the necessity—of reflection in educational research.

Marisha Plotnik offers her understanding, based on years of experience and study, of "child study" in Waldorf schools, one area in which a contemplative method is consistently used. Plotnik, too, connects her study with the work of educational researchers outside of Waldorf education and with work she has done with Jon McAlice and other teachers.

We may believe that "Waldorf" doesn't combine grades or ages, but Lori Freer demonstrates not only that schools are doing just this—often out of economic necessity—but that this need not be the compromise we may assume it to be. There are advantages and strengths to mixed-age classrooms, and we may investigate, work toward, and emphasize these when life hands us a school or a class of mixed-age students.

Similarly, we may believe that "Waldorf" doesn't acknowledge or single out gifted students for special programs, but Ellen Fjeld Kottker and Balazs Tarnai connect Steiner's work with gifted students in the first Waldorf School with research and programming for gifted students over the past decades.

One area in which Waldorf schools have perhaps had an advantage over the past decades is in what is now called Social Emotional Learning (SEL), illustrated here in Linda Lantieri's article about SEL in a public school district and a public school. Lantieri is an international expert in SEL. Waldorf school teachers may learn from Lantieri's approach and may also refer to David Mitchell's article in the last issue of the *Bulletin* ("Social Emotional Learning and Waldorf Education," Vol. XIV, no. 2, Autumn 2009), which examines SEL from a Waldorf teacher's perspective and offers

an SEL curriculum outline for middle and high school years.

In Susan Johnson's brief but informative article, readers will find connections among medical science and education in support of teaching children to read and write only when they are physiologically and neurologically ready to do so. This is not an issue of "Waldorf" or "not-Waldorf," but of children's health in a world that too easily—and irrationally—succumbs to political pressure and performance anxiety in considering the education of its children.

Regular readers will note that the *Bulletin* usually contains more in the way of research, book, and conference reviews and reports. Travel schedules, challenges with translation, time crunches, and re-writes conspired to make this issue article-heavy and report-light. Our next issue should see a return to a better balance among contents.

Other than our usual report from Marianne Alsop, the cheerful yeo-woman of the Online Waldorf Library, we present Martin Novom and Jean Jeager's results of a brief survey of Waldorf school trustees. Their research demonstrates the great commitment of trustee volunteers across the

country and also the great lack of thorough, consistent trustee education. Waldorf schools may recognize this research as a platform on which to build stronger trustee orientation and education, honing trustees' tremendous idealism and willingness to improve their schools.

If we take our work seriously and think it through, we can speak about it without jargon and without abusing the over-worked word, "Waldorf." Our concepts will become ever clearer, our practices less opaque. We will find a world of friendly fellow-travelers, ready to work with us on the daunting task of educating children well in a complex world too often divided by a lack of understanding.

Correction

In our last issue, Thomas Patteson and Laura Birdsall's article, "Changing Old Habits: Exploring New Models for Professional Development" (Vol. XIV, no. 2, Autumn 2009), referred to charts that had, in fact, been removed in editing. We apologize to those readers who sought the charts in vain, and we regret neglecting to remove reference to them.