

# Waldorf Education Research Institute The First Three Years: Taking Stock

The Waldorf Education Research Institute (WERI) at Sunbridge College began three years ago as an initiative to strengthen Waldorf education in North America through research, dialogue of various kinds, and communication of ideas within and beyond the Waldorf education community. It has seemed to the editors of this Research Bulletin important to review the work of the Institute to date, looking at what has been accomplished, and taking stock of what must yet be done, if the Institute is to meet fully the tasks that confront it.

## **I. The Purposes Of The Waldorf Education Research Institute**

The first issue of the Research Bulletin (January 1996) set forth the research needs the Institute would seek to address and the kinds of activities and work by means of which it would attempt to meet those needs. We identified at the time five major areas requiring basic and on-going research as special priorities. The first research area was that having to do with the Waldorf Curriculum and Understanding of Child Development. This area was seen as embracing: a) the principles of curriculum design and development, b) the needs and tasks of the Waldorf kindergarten and early childhood care in the changing conditions of modern life, and c) normal and disturbed patterns of childhood in our time, and the ensuing pedagogical requirements posed by each. A second main research priority pertained to several issues frequently described under the general heading of “Multiculturalism,” requiring attention to the principles of Waldorf education that guide the full human development of the child in response also to the unique needs and gifts of the many cultures now represented in Waldorf schools in North America and world-wide. A third main research area had to do with the development of an imaginative and humanistic Science and Mathematics education, and an ongoing inquiry into the appropriate nature and place of Technology in education. A fourth research area addressed a central, defining characteristic of Waldorf education, “Education as An Art.” This area was seen as having two main focal points: a) the role of the arts in the full development of all the human capacities, including especially the cognitive, as well as the affective and the social; and b) the therapeutic power of the arts as especially relevant to our times. A final research area, basic to all the others, related to the research questions posed by “Life in Schools,” including the tasks of school administration, work with parents, and the healthy, inner-life of teachers.

The types of activity envisaged for the institute as chief means for pursuing its research goals included:

Identification and support of actual research efforts already taking place;

Self-study and evaluation of Waldorf education and documentation of the effects of Waldorf education;

The review, correlation, translation, and publication of existing research results (drawing upon work done both in this country and elsewhere, especially in Germany and England);

Engagement and dialogue with the wider cultural and educational community through conferences, research consultations, and published materials;

Regular publications, including this *Research Bulletin*, proceedings of conferences and consultations, articles, curriculum guides and discussions, and other types of materials.

During its first three years the Institute has been able to address certain of the five main research areas in some depth; others it has only touched upon, if it has been able to deal with them at all similarly with the

associated research activities. The research agenda as envisaged still appears sound, though it too must be periodically reappraised with an eye to determining new challenges and changing priorities. The extent to which the Institute can mobilize a full research program, which it is as yet unable to do, will depend, as always in such matters, largely on two things: 1) the availability of knowledgeable persons able to conceive and carry out the needed research; and 2) the availability of resources of time, energy, and funds necessary for the work.

## **II. Work To Date: Taking Stock**

### **A. Funding:**

- 1) Initial support for the founding of the Research Institute was provided through the Waldorf Schools Fund and Sunbridge College.
- 2) The Institute has received \$5,000 from AWSNA to help cover basic operating and publication expenses.
- 3) During its first three years, the work of the institute was further supported by grants from AWSNA and from the Waldorf Education Foundation. This grant, along with the support of Sunbridge College, made possible the continued, regular publication of the Research Bulletin, and provided essential support for the Institute Research Conference on "Disturbances of the Will."

### **B. Publications**

#### **1) The Research Bulletin**

The *Research Bulletin* has been published twice yearly since January, 1996. This present issue is No. 1 of Volume 4. The *Bulletin* has included significant articles on brain research, issues of school organization and leadership, the physiological basis of education, and multiculturalism, and has presented reports on ongoing research consultations and conferences.

The grant through AWSNA from the Waldorf Education Foundation, which paid for hardware and software for desktop publishing, administrative support for production, and printing costs through Mercury Press, has been crucial to the continuing publication of the *Bulletin*.

Subscriptions to the *Research Bulletin* are increasing, especially since a number of Waldorf schools have made group orders as well as individual subscriptions for teachers, school libraries, and parents. International interest is also growing with bulk subscriptions planned for the Steiner Schools Fellowship in England and reprints for the Waldorf movement in Europe. The number of educators, researchers, and other interested individuals from outside the Waldorf movement subscribing to the *Bulletin* is also growing.

AWSNA Publications has now taken on distribution of both current and back issues, and is receiving an increasing number of requests for both. The *Research Bulletin* is also on sale at the Sunbridge College and Rudolf Steiner College bookstores. Subscriptions and sales have helped to offset the costs of printing and distribution.

The Waldorf Education Fund/AWSNA grant also made possible the distribution of complimentary copies of the *Bulletin* to member and sponsored schools of AWSNA, and also to key educators and researchers with whom the Waldorf movement is in dialogue, both in North America and internationally.

## 2) Research Report: Urban Waldorf School of Milwaukee

In 1993-94, the Research Institute Steering Group invited Professor Ray McDermott of Stanford University to review and document the work of the Urban Waldorf School of Milwaukee. With the help of the Research Institute, Professor McDermott assembled a research team which visited the school in the spring of 1994. The report of Professor McDermott's research group, *Waldorf Education in an Inner-City Public School: The Urban Waldorf School of Milwaukee*, was published by the Research Institute and Parker-Courtney Press. (Copies are still available for \$5.00). A version of the Milwaukee report was subsequently also published as a lead research article in the professional sociological journal, *The Urban Review*.

## **C. Research Consultations**

The Research Institute has collaborated with the Center for the Study of the Spiritual Foundations of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University; in holding two invitational, research consultations at Sunbridge College. Each of these consultations -addressed the question of what is required for an education that genuinely meets the needs of the developing child in face of the daunting challenges of our times. The consultations brought together leading Waldorf educators from both this country and abroad to meet in dialogue with leading non-Waldorf educators and developmental psychologists.

The first consultation, devoted to the theme, "Towards Wholeness in Knowing: The Renewal of Thinking, Feeling, and Willing," was held at Sunbridge College, June 12-15, 1996. The second consultation, on the theme, "Pathways of Healthy Child Development and Its Obstacles: Meeting the Educational Challenges of the 21st Century," was held at Sunbridge College, Feb. 19-21, 1998. Non-Waldorf educators and scholars participating in these consultations included, among others, such persons as Jane Healy, author of *Endangered Minds* and *Failure to Connect*; Barry Sanders, Professor at Pitzer College and author of *A Is for Ox*; Jerome Bruner, Professor of Psychology at New York University, and most recently author of *The Culture of Education*; William Cram, Professor of Psychology at City University of New York; Edward Joyner, Director of the School Development Program, Yale University; Thomas Hatch, Director of Research in Howard Gardner's Project Zero at Harvard University; Cynthia Dillard, Acting Dean, School of Education, Ohio State University; and David Elkind, Director of the Department of Child Development at Tufts University, and author, among other books, of *The Hurried Child*; Kate Moody, President's Office, University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston; and Joseph Chilton Pearce, author of *Evolution's End* and *The Magical Child*.

Among the Waldorf educators participating were Michaela Glöckler, Director of the Medical Section of the Anthroposophical Society; Dornach, Switzerland; Felicitas Vogt, former Waldorf teacher and currently researcher on drug addiction and treatment in

Germany; Dr. Bruno Callegaro from Kassel, Germany; Dr. Gerald Karnow, Rudolf Steiner Fellowship Community; Joan Almon, Chair, Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America; Eugene Schwartz, Director of Teacher Education, Sunbridge College; Susan Howard, Director of Early Childhood Education, Sunbridge College; Astrid Schmitt-Stegman, Faculty, Rudolf Steiner College; and Gayle Davis, Faculty, Rudolf Steiner College.

Proceedings from both the consultations are being prepared. As readers of the Research Bulletin will know, editing of these proceedings has taken longer than we expected; nevertheless, we are hoping to have them completed and available by January, 1999.

A third research consultation is currently being planned for February, 1999 as a follow-up of the first two. A detailed description of this consultation will appear in the next issue of the Bulletin.

#### **D. Research Conferences**

The Research Institute has sponsored two research conferences on the subject of “Disturbances of The Will” for teachers, doctors, and therapists. Guest participants included Felicitas Vogt, Joan Almon, Dr. Bruno Callegaro and Georg Kühlewind. Those taking part expressed gratitude for the opportunity for such interdisciplinary working conferences in which teacher research is stimulated. Again, the grant from the Waldorf Education Foundation helped underwrite the second conference planning, publicity, mailing, honoraria, and travel costs.

### **III. Meeting The Future**

In order to continue its development the Research Institute needs to find major funding which would make possible the following activities:

#### **A. Development of An Active Advisory Board**

A number of individuals have accepted our invitation to serve on an Advisory Board for the Waldorf Education Research Institute. This Board would help identify and set priorities among research needs of the Waldorf movement, would offer recognition and support for ongoing research, and would increase our interconnections and dialogue with researchers within the movement and within the wider education community. Further funding would allow to bring the members of the Board together.

#### **B. Funded Position of Director of the Research Institute**

A major need of the Institute is for a Director who can devote significant time to directing the activities of the Institute to make it a major center for Waldorf educational research worldwide. The responsibilities of the Director would include the development and coordination of actual research studies and publications around fundamental issues of Waldorf education, social issues, and child development, and the development and coordination of continued dialogue with the wider educational-cultural community, as well as individual research and writing.

### C. Research Associate Stipends

Such stipends would allow the Waldorf Education Research Institute to identify and review existing research studies within the Waldorf movement, as well as current research from the wider educational community which has relevance to our work. Reviews of such research would then be published in the Research Bulletin as resources for the Waldorf movement.

### D. Translation of Existing Research from German into English

The Waldorf movement in Germany has produced a copious literature dealing in depth with many dimensions of Waldorf education. Much of this literature offers rich resources, both conceptual and descriptive, which would prove of great value to Waldorf education in this country if it could only be made available in English. One much-needed task for the Research Institute is to identify and arrange for the translation and publication of the most valuable materials now available only in German.

### E. Review and Financial Support for Worthy Research Initiatives

A major task of a Research Institute is to identify and find support for important, individual or group research projects. This task would fall primarily to the Director, working with the advice and counsel of the Advisory Board, the Pedagogical Section of the School of Spiritual Science, and the teacher education institutions.

Research for Waldorf education has been identified as one of the main priorities and burning issues for the movement. The Waldorf Education Research Institute could respond to this need and play a significant role both in the deepening and renewal of Waldorf education and in its ability to participate in the issues and dialogue of our times. We welcome your suggestions and support for the development of the Waldorf Education Research Institute.

Susan Howard Douglas Sloan