From the Editor

Elan Leibner

Dear Readers,

Waldorf education will soon enter its ninety-fifth year. There will be much taking stock and assessing the whence and whither of the movement over the coming months and years.

In some respects, Waldorf pedagogy arose like a force of nature seemingly out of nowhere in 1919, and few educational experts would have given it much chance of surviving for a hundred years, let alone spreading into every continent and dozens of countries. But it is this very act of spreading into cultures far removed from Germany of 1919 that is challenging Waldorf pedagogues to distinguish essential principles from non-essential, if entrenched, practices.

This is a very beneficial exercise. An educational movement that wants to draw its strength from the spiritual activities of individual teachers (as well as from circles of teachers) must allow those activities to bring new manifestations out of the spiritual wellsprings of its fundamental insights. If practices rather than principles become enshrined as "the way to do Waldorf," then creativity ceases in any deep sense, and what passes for creativity is mostly tinkering around the edges. By contrast, when fundamental principles are studied and meditative life is cultivated, what the education will look like in practice becomes surprising and unpredictable, in the best sense of those words.

In recent years several leaders within the Waldorf school movement have been advocating for a re-evaluation of practices and for the courage to make the schools more "local and organic." There is something both reassuring and distressing about visiting a Waldorf school in some location one has never visited before, and finding it so like every other Waldorf school. If you can take a school in Northern New England and essentially transplant it to Southern California (or to somewhere in the UK) without having to change much, can you claim that the creative spirit is truly present in it? Have the teachers and staff made it local enough, rooted enough in place and environs?

The next phase of Waldorf education may well need to take its direction and formulate its practices based more on the specific students and the school's locale, its "terroir." This will entail a willingness to experiment, and occasionally make mistakes, with the process of "incarnating" the principles of Waldorf education into a specific time and place. Such experimentation is already happening all over the world, as Waldorf schools open their doors in cultures where the traditional European model cannot be copied as readily as it has been in North America. Schools in other parts of the world can take heart from what Chinese, Israeli (both Jewish and Arab), Native American Indian, and other Waldorf pioneers are doing in their respective cultures, not because it is superior to what exists in "old Waldorf" settings but because it points to new possibilities.

In this issue, we bring you several articles that can help move Waldorf education toward new possibilities, while cultivating a relationship with the wellspring of the pedagogy.

Frederick Amrine's series on "The Philosophical Roots of Waldorf Education" reaches a climactic and moving conclusion with a discussion of Rudolf Steiner's philosophy-transcending philosophy, if you can excuse the appropriate oxymoron. Circling back to the original ladder of Wittgenstein, Amrine brings us full circle to an appreciation of just how profoundly the philosophical underpinnings of Waldorf education lead directly into the pedagogy.

Jost Schieren, our European colleague and Board member of the RIWE, writes about the spiritual dimensions of Waldorf education. He addresses head-on the attacks on the anthroposophical foundations of Waldorf pedagogy as an outdated spiritual philosophy, showing that anthroposophy is uniquely successful in bridging the gap between the universality of thinking and the potential freedom of the human being. Schieren pleads with us to cultivate anthroposophy rightly in our schools, rather than to abandon it or approach it as dogmatic truth.

Roberto Trostli's second article on the teaching of science picks up another important philosophical question: the oft-discussed conclusion–judgment–concept sequence from Steiner's *Study of Man*. In an exceptionally clear elucidation of this riddle, Trostli brings us to a full realization of just how profoundly the methodological principles given to the original Waldorf teachers support the healthy development of our students' cognitive and moral potential.

Craig Holdrege takes up the challenge of approaching Waldorf education with the notion that "preparation" for a later stage of education is the wrong approach, and that the curriculum is a task, an ongoing process, rather than a thing. Debunking a few "Waldorf myths"—or at least showing them to be rooted in choices made by individual teachers that somehow became enshrined as eternal principles—Holdrege challenges teachers to begin teaching students to meet life; what he calls encounter-based education is a way of cultivating resilience and confidence in young people, qualities which are, he argues, the only meaningful ways of preparing them for a future no one of us can see. What's more, this way of educating can better tease out of these young people what the world is not fully ready for, the unexpected.

My own contribution to this issue is a contemplation of the Second Teachers' Meditation as a new impulse in the history of Waldorf education, forming what I consider to be a "course-correction" brought by Rudolf Steiner after the first four years of the original Waldorf school. Taken together with the three lectures by Steiner that immediately preceded it, this meditation points towards a crucially important task in education and at the same time to a potential of profound transformation in the meditating teachers themselves.

Melissa Borden, a kindergarten teacher from Seattle, sent us a charming and informative article on animals and the young child. Bringing together deep insights into the development of children, the nature of the relationship between human beings and animals, and a wealth of practical experience born of many years of teaching, Borden describes the gestures that different animals bring to her daily work in the kindergarten, pointing the way towards much research that has yet to be done on this topic.

At the other end of the developmental spectrum, Douglas Gerwin, Executive Director of the RIWE, presents the introduction to his new book of guiding thoughts for teaching human sexuality in Waldorf schools. This book has been a project of the Research Institute for several years now, and is at last nearing publication. Gerwin describes the essential tasks and principles that should undergird this delicate subject and points toward what should, and should not, drive the curriculum decisions.

Stephen Sagarin, my predecessor at the editorial desk of our *Research Bulletin*, contributes a book review of Craig Holdrege's newly released book, *Thinking Like a Plant*. A modified chapter from this book appeared in the previous issue of the *Bulletin*, and we thought it appropriate to solicit a review of the book itself. Sagarin singles out the process-nature of the book, and describes how Holdrege attempts to lead the reader into an experience, rather than submit a sum of knowledge for the reader to enjoy and/or assess.

A brief update from the Online Waldorf Library concludes this issue.

Happy reading to all. Please remember that your reflections and suggestions are always welcome. My contact email is to be found toward the back of this issue.