

Report on the Research Institute for Waldorf Education

Patrice Maynard

Director of Publications and Development

This year, 2023-2024, marks the tenth anniversary of the transfer of Waldorf Publications (WP – formerly AWSNA Publications) to the Research Institute for Waldorf Education (RIWE). This year also marks the twelfth anniversary of the passing of David Mitchell (1946-2012) whose steadfast pursuit of resources for teachers led to the Delegates' Circle of AWSNA's asking David in 1987 to begin a publishing endeavor to produce books and monographs that would serve Waldorf teachers and Waldorf schools.

It was David's long-standing wish that Publications be conjoined with RIWE, the two strongest loves of his work (after teaching, of course!). Before he passed away, Ekkehard Piening was a partner in the development of resources with David for two years. The original Publications Committee included Patricia Livingston, Jan Baudendistel, and James Pewtherer. Today's Publications Committee comprises Natalie Adams, Alice Groh, Elan Leibner, and Patrice Maynard. Reading prospectuses to find the highest quality resources, authentic to Waldorf education, is the mission of the Committee. Literate, committed, and insightful, with Waldorf education central to their experience, these dedicated participants guide the decisions about which books Waldorf Publications will publish.

RIWE was likewise developed in 1996 out of repeated requests from Waldorf teachers to document the value of practices on behalf of children and young people. Henry Barnes, in particular, saw the value of substantial research to reassure the world – and parents – that the unique approach to education practiced in Waldorf schools is effective. Susan Howard and Douglas Sloan were the first team of RIWE Directors, followed by Roberto Trostli, and then, as a team, Douglas Gerwin and David Mitchell.

Having Publications in service to RIWE as well as to Waldorf school communities offers possibilities in producing results of research undertaken and completed by the Institute. The publication this year of *The Community Speaks: A Survey of Current Waldorf Parents*, the result of a multiple-year study, is one good example of this benefit. The book offers a summary of responses to a nuanced series of questions about being a "Waldorf parent." Graphed illustrations showing the many facets of this survey along with insightful analysis make the research visible and useful to our Waldorf communities.

Meta-research is the newest, years-long effort to provide pithy research for Waldorf schools and for other educational organizations, underscoring recent research into elements of child development and educational approaches that verify the effectiveness of 100 years of practice in Waldorf education. The effect of sleep, of breathing, of block teaching, of music, of poetry, of handwriting, of the Waldorf approach to teaching reading and teaching math, are some examples of topics being pursued.

The Online Waldorf Library (OWL) uses all materials produced by RIWE and WP, making them available for free download. So abundant are the resources on OWL that a current re-mastering of the site is underway. "The shelves of OWL are full!" exclaims Marianne Alsop, curator, with Dave Alsop, of this generous and growing collection of supportive manuscripts. In recent years, translations into Spanish and Mandarin have added to the wealth of available material.

The Research Bulletin provides articles – many of them – to the OWL. As each new issue of our journal is published, the previous issue is added to the OWL, article by article, simplifying the search for needed materials by topic, author, or title. Each issue of the Research Bulletin works to focus on a single theme to identify supporting materials for that topic. "Social Emotional Learning" is the current focus, providing techniques, imaginative support, practices, and research to inform and support Waldorf educators in their endeavors to meet the social and emotional needs of their students. Previously, special issues of the Bulletin were devoted to Learning Support, as well as to supporting diversity, with the latter theme prompting articles from around North American Waldorf schools describing the efforts to raise consciousness about how the Waldorf curriculum, and Waldorf teachers, can transform systemic racism while protecting the distinct stages of children's development.

From the stated needs of the AWSNA Delegates for resources and research, through the creative vision of David Mitchell to today's OWL, WP, and the Research Bulletin, the ongoing efforts of these endeavors under the wing of RIWE give life and depth to the unique approach to educating the young with confidence, surety of heart, and truthfulness – heads, hands, and hearts – as human beings of body, soul, and spirit.