

Report on the Work of the Pedagogical Research Center of the German BUND

Executive Group of the Pedagogical Research Center

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What is the PRC and what does it do?

If the Waldorf school movement in Germany is to have a voice in discussions on education and the educational needs of our time, it will require a venue where this discussion is taken up and where these needs are met by a pedagogy oriented toward the human being. But it must also have a place where all those who work toward the further development and deepening of Waldorf pedagogy find partners for dialogue and support. The Pedagogical Research Center would like to be such a place.

Research and conversation on the questions of our time require “free spaces” and there are not yet enough of these in our movement. Aside from the most important factor—human resources—ample material resources are also necessary. What does it take to enable a few people to work on the issues of early childhood education? Where can important cooperation with university research institutions take place, supported by independent financial resources? How can we organize colloquia and find sufficiently qualified participants to discuss the question of the media in early childhood? There is much to do if the means are available.

The Pedagogical Research Center

Ernst Weissert called the Research Center into existence in Stuttgart during the 1960s. He had a particular interest in research, especially with regard to hygienic aspects of Waldorf education. The original name of the Center translates as The Scientific Institute for the Development of Pedagogy Based on Rudolf Steiner’s Anthropology. Its first constitutional meeting listed its objectives as follows:

- a) Renewal of teaching and educational institutions;
- b) Further development of Waldorf education;
- c) New methodological and didactic approaches to linguistic, mathematical/scientific and artistic subjects;
- d) Modern biology in technology and sociology;
- e) Cooperation between medicine, sociology and pedagogy for the deepening of anthropology;
- f) Curative education; and
- g) Training the next generation of teachers.

First Projects

Dr. Mathiolius, the school doctor at the Uhlandshöhe Waldorf School, led one of the first projects—on children’s physical development—in keeping with the goals set by Ernst Weissert. Later, Manfred von Mackensen spent a year in Stuttgart before moving to Kassel, where he founded the Kassel section of the Pedagogical Research Center. A few years later, the Mannheim section was added, with larger projects on History Teaching under Albert Schmelzer and Math Teaching under Ernst Schuberth.

The three sections in existence today see themselves as a unity but with different emphases: Kassel’s center of gravity lies in research on the natural and cultural sciences; Stuttgart covers a wide spectrum of assignments; and, to this date, the focus in Mannheim remains on the teaching of history and mathematics.

The Organs of the Pedagogical Research Center

The organs of the Pedagogical Research Center are the Executive Council, the Advisory

Board, the Board of Trustees, and the Member's Meeting.

Members of the Research Center include members of the Independent Waldorf Schools and supporting members. They elect the executive and advisory boards at biennial members' meetings, initiate new work, and formally approve the board's performance.

The Executive Council is answerable for legal and economic aspects of the association, convokes panels, and conducts day-to-day business.

In joint meetings with the Executive Council, the Advisory Board discusses proposals, reports on commissioned projects, and ensures publication of results at the conclusion of projects. When discussing proposals, the Advisory Board acts as a granting body. It assesses the feasibility of planned projects, informs proposals' authors of the Board's mission, and keeps in touch with the progress of the work. This means that the Advisory Board must be composed of experts in various areas, joined as needed by professionals with expertise in the field. Very different competencies are required. The most recent expansion of the Advisory Board, through elections, brought about a much-needed addition of younger colleagues.

Working Group

The Working Group meets at least three times a year and serves as an organ of perception for questioning and renewal within the German school movement. At their best, these meetings can assume the character of an "academy."

We have discussed the need for a more proactive research policy, meaning that particular research goals should be publicized within the Waldorf school movement and colleagues encouraged to work in that direction.

Proposals to the Pedagogical Research Center can be directed to any one of the three sections, in Kassel, Mannheim, or Stuttgart. As a rule, proposals are collected by Hans-Jörg Hofrichter, the acting business director,

and transmitted to the members of the Executive Council and Advisory Board for discussion in the Advisory Board's meetings.

The results of individual projects are published by the sections of the Research Center and made available to teachers.

Until now the Board of Trustees has led a shadow existence. According to original intentions it is meant to connect the work of the Pedagogical Research Center in the sciences, arts, economic and public life with the broader world of Waldorf education. It also aims to provide intellectual and material support. We would like, soon, to organize a Board of Trustees in line with these intentions.

Members' Meetings

Members' Meetings take place at two-year intervals in the framework of the congresses of the Waldorf Schools Association. Their significance lies predominantly in the encounter among schools, their needs, and researchers. We wish to expand this area in the future.

Financing of the Pedagogical Research Center

Financing of the PRC comes from schools' contributions and also from grants and foundation support of particular research projects. The financing for a research project often demands intensive activity by the leadership of the secretariats to allow others to devote themselves to research. We need to be conscious of this.

The Future

For the future, the Research Center should increasingly be a meeting place for teachers interested in research and a place for critical and stimulating discussions to grapple with concrete questions of education in the spirit of anthroposophical pedagogy.