

David Mitchell and Douglas Gerwin

Each year seems to be a bit busier than the last for the Research Institute, and the following tally of our recent, ongoing, and projected work supports this hypothesis.

Wide Reading for Work on Alternative Assessment

We have joined the debate on educational assessment and testing by presenting papers and information to the transition team of President Barack Obama. Also, the AWSNA outreach office has sent our paper, "Assessment without High-Stakes Testing: Protecting Childhood and the Purpose of School" (*Research Bulletin* Vol. XIII no. 2, Autumn/Winter 2008), to members of the congressional sub-committee on education. The paper will also be printed in the *Pacifica Journal* from Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii. It has been translated into German for Swiss and German periodicals, and has been posted on the web pages of the European Council of Waldorf Schools and the Freunde der Erziehungskunst. It is also slated to appear in the winter edition of *Independent Education* magazine. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) has placed the paper on its website, and a Russian translation will appear in the *Pedagogical Journal of Bashkortostan*. David Mitchell will travel to Moscow in late spring to speak about this research.

Teaching Sensible Science

To date, the Research Institute has co-sponsored three cycles of the acclaimed program, "Teaching Sensible Science," for class teachers in the upper elementary grades who wish to deepen their understanding and practice of phenomenological science. Two cycles have taken place on the East Coast and one on the West Coast.

We are currently surveying participants in this program to assess its lasting impact. Initial responses have been uniformly positive, with comments focusing on life-changing aspects of the course. In the words of one respondent, the course "will shake up, at least, or revolutionize, at best, your way of viewing the world."

"It inspired more than just my science teaching," another respondent reported. "I can imagine more subjects using this approach."

Asked to recall a moment in the course that had lasting influence, one East Coast respondent described "looking into the pond in the park in Saratoga Springs and seeing the watery world with fresh eyes, allowing preconceived notions to float away." Across the country, standing in another body of water, a West Coast participant recounted how, "standing ankle deep in the American River, I was able to understand how, by watching the eddies and currents, sensory-based science is the real path to knowledge."

A fourth cycle of "Teaching Sensible Science" is scheduled to begin in Saratoga Springs, NY, in 2009. Details are available from the Research Institute. Further reflections on this program by Michael D'Aleo, who, with three other Waldorf teachers, founded this course, can be found in this issue of the *Research Bulletin*.

More Research on Waldorf School Graduates

Another ongoing project of the Research Institute involves our survey that spans 60 years of Waldorf school graduates. Phase III of this survey, completed in the latter part of 2008 and available through AWSNA Publications, includes an analysis of data gathered in the previous phases, with a comparison of the North American survey and similar studies of Waldorf high school graduates conducted in Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden. A separate pamphlet, *The Results of Waldorf Education*, summarizes some of the chief statistical findings of the survey and reprints key statements from professors who have taught Waldorf school graduates. The booklet sold out its first printing and has been reprinted.

A final Phase IV of this graduate survey is planned to compare Waldorf school graduates with non-Waldorf graduates. This study will offer a first glimpse into how Waldorf school graduates compare to other populations with similar socioeconomic backgrounds, from both public and independent schools.

Sex Education for Waldorf Schools

During the 2002 Kolisko international conference of Waldorf teachers and anthroposophical health practitioners, a working group of physicians, nurses, counselors, and Waldorf teachers, including Douglas Gerwin, examined how sex education is conducted in Waldorf schools worldwide. Several participants reported on innovative approaches to this subject in schools around the world, but the overall impression remained that Waldorf schools are not doing an adequate job in this area of the curriculum. On the whole, with a few remarkable exceptions, Waldorf schools either ignore changes in this field or turn to manuals and curricula drafted outside Waldorf schools without regard to the developmental perspective that should underlie all aspects of Waldorf education.

From this conference, a group headed by the physicians Bart Maris and Michael Zech undertook a thorough review of this subject, which had resulted in a book, *Sexualkunde in der Waldorfpädagogik (Sex Education in Waldorf Schools)*. Prepared by leaders in medicine and education, this is a first sex education source book, for Waldorf school teachers. It brings together broad essays on the development of sexuality and specific practical suggestions on how the subject can be introduced in a developmentally appropriate way as early as fourth grade. Basic to this approach is the imaginative use of the arts—in particular, clay modeling—to bring students to a healthy relationship with their sexuality.

A first step in developing a comprehensive English language sex education program based on the principles of Waldorf education involves selecting and translating portions of the German book. Another step will be a survey of Waldorf schools in North America that have experimented with new and comprehensive approaches to this subject in the middle and upper grades of the elementary school and the first two years of high school. Interviews with experienced teachers about their approaches and a survey of older students will also form part of this research. This project will also collect material from non-Waldorf

sources that are consistent with the principles of Waldorf education, and gather Rudolf Steiner's indications on sexual development. Part of this research, too, will focus on the problems posed by the ever-earlier onset of physical puberty, on the one hand, and the apparent slowing of psychological maturation of young adults, on the other.

Other Projects

- Our collaboration with key individuals in Europe continues. Michael Holdrege will represent the Research Institute at a conference in Kassel, Germany, to advance phenomenological science in Waldorf schools.
- Rudolf Steiner College recently hosted a colloquium, co-sponsored by the Research Institute, that focused on Waldorf school physics curriculum; a proceedings will soon be available through AWSNA Publications.
- Anne Greer's long-awaited book, *The Power of Grammar*, arising from her stimulating colloquium for high school English teachers, is now in print and available from AWSNA Publications.
- A study on parent volunteerism in Waldorf schools, guided by Martin Novom, is still gathering data. In order to increase the range of the data additional schools have been asked to survey their parents. We hope to have a report available later this year.
- The Research Institute has been awarded a grant to produce a new collection of electronic books. This will consist of books currently out of print but of significance for teacher preparation. We are eager to hear your thoughts on this project, including titles that you recommend we consider.