

Stephen Keith Sagarin

“*T*eaching is so much more complex than I thought it would be,” said a friend, a writer and journalist who had guest-taught a course at a local college. He has children in school, he is a Steiner school trustee, and he has many friends who are teachers. He knows the value of good teaching, but he had not fully appreciated the many, many executive decisions that a teacher makes each day, the organization, preparation, negotiation, and decision-making that go into teaching.

Given, then, the even more complex job of a Waldorf school teacher—continual meetings, coming to terms with anthroposophy and Waldorf education, facing a different curriculum year after year—it may be easy to get lost in the details. We may feel we are dealing well with parents, faculty meetings, study, preparation, and our students. After the mononucleosis-inducing first year, we settle down, find a rhythm, and, possibly, begin to take our lives as teachers somewhat for granted. The pace of our work and its rewards may be enough to distract us from too much reflection. But the big questions—what is education, at root, and how and why do we do it?—don’t go away, and answers that may have satisfied us in our twenties may not satisfy us any longer. As more mature persons, we may seek more deeply for what it means to teach.

This search for essentials, this wrestling with deeper questions of education, is what several of the articles in this issue of the Research Bulletin have in common.

Arthur Zajonc, for example, asks: “What should be at the center of our teaching and ... learning?” He answers, “Love.” Taking examples from history and from his own teaching as a physics professor at Amherst College, Zajonc shows the value of loving engagement with and in our studies. Without this fundamental interest of interests, he demonstrates, our disconnection from the world and from meaning threaten to cripple us.

Christian Rittelmeyer tackles the subject of brain research and its implications for education, a broad and challenging topic. From neural plasticity to environmental sensitivity, brain research is a blossoming field, which has and will have many insights relevant for education. Everyone’s brain is different and each student deserves to be treated as an individual. On the other hand, we should not mistake a brain for a human being, and the metaphors we choose to describe ourselves and our children powerfully influence how we treat each other.

Similarly, Arthur Auer examines sleep research and its implications for education. Waldorf teachers may be behind the curve and justifiably skeptical of some of the claims made for the relevance of brain research to education, but they are more likely to applaud recent advances in sleep research that demonstrate the role of sleep in learning. Many of Steiner’s claims in this area remain to be validated empirically, but, increasingly, the complexity of sleep processes and their importance for teaching and learning demonstrate the prescience of Waldorf education.

Renate Long-Breipohl examines the “essentials” of early childhood education using the first four symbols of the zodiac as a guide to powerfully understanding children’s incarnation, growth, and development. The necessary self-development of early childhood teachers, who accompany young children on this journey, mirrors beautifully the development of young children. What occurs outwardly for children occurs inwardly for teachers. The images in this article of cosmos, children, and adults as part of one whole are beautiful and moving.

For several years, I have been working toward an understanding of Waldorf education, and the third of three articles on this topic, one that examines the essentials of what Waldorf teachers do, appears here. Based on Steiner’s work and the work of other Waldorf school teachers, and on reflection on my years of teaching, it attempts to

show that the heart or core of Waldorf education, separate from more temporal techniques and practices, has to do with creativity, properly understood.

Michael D'Aleo, a founder of the "Teaching Sensible Science" seminars, reflects on the value of and necessity for a qualitative, phenomena-based approach to science, one that appreciates interactions and relationships as much as statistical significance, correlation, and mechanical cause and effect.

The work of the Research Institute brings three responses in this issue. First, the work of the Institute on testing and alternative assessment provoked a thoughtful letter from Cat Greenstreet, who urges us to see the struggle against high-stakes tests as one that requires systemic change and that encompasses all children and schools. This work also provoked an article from Patrice Maynard, who illustrates a number of ways that Waldorf education, its light well hidden under a basket for some time now, may contribute to a "constructive revolution" in our ways of teaching

and learning. Third, Calisa O'Keefe, a participant in the "Teaching Sensible Science" course, writes about her experience in the program, coming to it from a background in mainstream science. She describes the ways in which her own perception and thinking have changed, as well as the ways in which her teaching has improved.

Finally, I would like to draw your attention to Douglas Sloan's brief memorial to Henry Barnes, life-long champion of Waldorf education, who long supported research in Waldorf education and the Research Bulletin. Henry died in 2008, but we will long remember him.

I am writing this in frozen February. Blue ice, iron-hard, coats the ground, covered by sheets of gritty white snow. The sun is shining, but the wind is bitter. And I read in Steiner's *Calendar of the Soul* that, roughly translated, "There will arise out of the world's womb, [my] senses quickened, joy in becoming." Turning to the essentials in our work is like breaking the hard ground from which seeds may sprout. Any day now.



If the strengthening of Waldorf education through research is important to you and you would like to give financial support to the the Research Institute to continue and to expand this work your contribution would be gratefully received. Please contact David Mitchell or Douglas Gerwin for more information at:

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