

Freedom Funding and Accountability in Education Workshop

“Who says?!” was a main theme of our workshop on the last weekend of April this year. Twenty-four of us gathered in Hudson, New York, to explore burning issues facing education today. We counted nine other major events happening on the same day, perhaps underscoring the recognition in those who came of the importance of the assault we all face in the world of education. The workshop participants were affiliated with nine schools from five states.

Eight participants were members of a “think tank” initiative group called, “Freedom and Funding in Education.” (See accompanying photo.) We have been meeting for close to two years to work together on the issues identified in the title of the workshop. One of the objectives of the group is to build up a body of informed ideas to share with the world so that thinking can be realigned based on facts and observation rather than on political and economically manipulated information. We do this with the understanding that thoughts are deeds, and they can be powerful in re-directing of ideas and actions for education.

Patrice Maynard presented on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and their impact on contemporary education. She raised the question: Who says these standards will help education? Who says children must read by age five? Who says children need algebraic skill in Kindergarten? In many cases the answer to, “Who says?” ends up being corporations and political machines!

The controversies in all states about CCSS, indicate the level of discomfort they cause many. The disheartening use of testing to “prove” things and further economic and political agendas that are not educational is deeply hurtful, and most standards are not purposeful of goals we would endorse. Measuring the CCSS against the standards we hold as Waldorf Educators, wishing for children to be received with reverence and love, Patrice emphasized that it is more urgent than ever before to take a stand and hold it firmly.

Gary Lamb then presented on social threefolding and the interplay among the three spheres and how they influence education. Pointing to the spiritual grounding of Waldorf Education and the urgent need for freedom in education at this time, Gary answered the question, “Who Says,” by directing us to not who says now but to “Who *should* say?” Answer? Educators!

Gary instructed on different kinds of funding strategies for education in the United States and carefully described why educational tax credits are the preferable solution to adequate funding that allows citizens and parents to have a level playing field in choosing educational approaches for families; and for tax payers to choose a portion of where their educational tax dollars will be directed. He concluded with describing our image of the Freedom and Funding in Education Think Tank, with its task and future plans.

Abundant discussion times were left after each presentation. One goal of the workshop were to enhance the think tank with experiences from different schools and individuals, and begin to open up dialogue about these burning questions. Questions ranged widely and helped the initiative group of eight in their discussions after the workshop to forge new ideas of how to re-claim education for the cultural sphere.

The afternoon was spent in two groups of continuing discussion in which Gary shared his experiences with CAUSE NYS, a New York State-based activism group devoted to promoting education tax credits and assisting advocates in the independent school community to get such legislation passed in New York.

Patrice's group focused on accountability and alternative thinking to inspire new means to

assess how and how much learning is taught and assimilated. There was discussion in these groups of the importance of longitudinal studies because the results of Waldorf Education are most impressive when graduates become adults.

Administrative staff from the Philadelphia Waldorf School reported on their school's experience with the Pennsylvania corporate tax credit law in place there now for many years. Though there are some difficulties it does provide tuition support to some.

All in the workshop seemed to agree that independent schooling is under extreme challenge at this time.

The workshop generated some calls to action. One suggested using social media to keep people informed and to communicate together. Another at the event wanted to use the information gathered in the day to assure teachers and administrators that they are on the right track. Several participants reported this last reaction in different forms: inspiration to continue managing the stress to make Waldorf Education possible; gratitude for being made aware through the workshop of all that is actually happening on the ground; heightened awareness of the level of imbalance in our culture's imagination of what schooling is.

The Freedom and Funding in Education initiative group, in meeting afterwards, felt very uplifted at the dedication, open-hearted thinking, and intensity of commitment in all participants. There was a call for more informationally-based workshops like this one with more brainstorming about how our Waldorf schools can survive in these economically pinched times.

The Research Institute for Waldorf Education (RIWE) and the Center for Social Research collaborated with the Freedom and Funding in Education group to accomplish this workshop. Funding which made the day possible came from RIWE, the Rudolf Steiner Charitable Trust, and private donors. Gary and Patrice were grateful to be recognized in their work out of the Social Science Section in offering this workshop.

If you would like to be put on our event's mailing list to keep informed about the Freedom and Funding in Education initiative's activities, you can email Gary Lamb at glamb@thecenterforsocialresearch.org.

Report prepared by Patrice Maynard



L to R: Gordon Edwards, Andrew Gilligan, Val Mello, Michael Lapointe, Chaddie Hughes, Patrice Maynard, Gary Lamb, Jane Ried

**It's wrong.
So how do we not get carried
away?**



Slide from Patrice Maynard's presentation on Common Core Standards and the assault on childhood and authentic learning.

The Interplay Between Education and Economic Life



“In every generation, through the children whom we teach at school, something is given to us, something is sent down from the spiritual world. We take hold of this in education—this is something spiritual—and incorporate it into the economic life and thereby ward off its destruction. For economic life, if it runs its own course destroys itself.”

Gary's slide on The Interplay between education and economic life