

## David R. Olson

### A Year in Berlin



David R. Olson instructs Cognitive Science at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. His research on the cognitive implications of writing and reading are best represented by his much-reprinted paper “From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing”, first published in 1977 in the *Harvard Educational Review*, and by his book *The World on Paper* (Cambridge, 1994). He completed a draft of a book on schooling, *Mind, School, Society*, during his stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and holds honorary degrees from Universities of Gothenberg and Saskatchewan. – Address: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6, Canada.

This was my first extended experience of Europe. Both through its location in Berlin and through its distribution of Fellowships, Wiko provides an important meeting ground between Eastern Europe and Western Europe. The Wiko experience helped push my understanding of Europe past the traditional boundaries of “the West” and between the Anglo-Saxon and Continental traditions.

My intellectual horizon shifted in a parallel way. As a psychologist concerned with education, my ideas have been largely individualistic – the Cartesian mind thinking its thoughts. The social theorists – economists, sociologists, political scientists, and historians – helped me to see schooling as an institution much like any other institution in a modern society, with responsibilities and accountabilities not unlike those of the individuals who participate in them. I hope that this new understanding is reflected in the book I completed during my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg, which is to be titled “Mind, School, Society”, perhaps with a subtitle “The Study of Education”.

Berlin offered much more than a site for the growth of mind. I enjoyed the music – especially Gielen’s “Norma”, the exciting shops and colors and textures of Potsdamer Platz, the Pergamon Museum, and, when the sun showed its face, the sidewalk cafes.

The German tradition of treating scholars and scholarship with the respect that other countries, including my own, reserve for wealth or power was a joy to discover. I shall try not to let the privilege of being at Wiko go to my head.

Canadians of my generation come to Berlin with two fixed ideas – the war and the Wall. It is wonderful to get to know Germany with the knowledge that there was, is, and undoubtedly will continue to be so much more.