Welcome to our Winter Newsletter for parents and friends of Steiner Waldorf education.

**How Can We Positively Promote Steiner Waldorf Education?**

Steiner Waldorf schools have been here for nearly 100 years. That’s older than me, and even older than my granny who recently celebrated her 92\(^{nd}\) birthday. Of course the social and economic landscape of 2014 has vastly changed since the time Steiner (and my granny) were young, nearly a century ago.

Despite the passing time, Steiner schools are still going strong. There are over 1,200 Steiner Waldorf schools worldwide and more than 2,000 Early Years settings across 60 countries. That’s testament to the global reach of Steiner Waldorf education, as it touches and transforms the lives of thousands of children across the world.

But is it enough? Those of us working across the schools, say no. The Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF) PR group has been meeting for the past four years. Aside from our core group, representation at our meetings has been varied with different schools and people participating each time. That means we have had different skills and expertise around the table, yet the key issues remain the same. We all agree we are sitting on a pot of gold. We just need to work out how to dig it up and let the world know of its riches.

Let’s face it. Job security is a thing of the past. The current economic and social landscape is shifting tremendously. Change is happening fast, whether we like it or not. There is also a paradigm shift in the world of education, with question marks raised about teaching to tests, and making our children jump through hoops to achieve a longer (and increasingly de-valued) string of GCSE’s. Steiner Waldorf education however, is perfectly situated to offer a genuine alternative choice to what’s currently on the table.

But how do we create the right conditions for pupils to grow up into free-thinking and well-rounded individuals? For so long (especially in the UK), educational policy has placed a primacy on achieving academic excellence. While academia has its rightful and vital place in our schools, it must sit alongside other important aspects of human development, including our moral, cultural and social growth. Lord Richard Layard, Professor Emeritus at the London School of Economics (LSE), has recently produced a controversial report that clearly states: "By far the most important predictor of adult-life satisfaction is emotional health, both in childhood and subsequently.”

In today’s climate, parenting is hard enough. So how do we foster emotional health at home and in our schools? As a parent, I am grateful that my children can benefit from supportive relationships at school, with both their peers and teachers. Lessons learned at school also enrich my parenting at home.

As a PR group we have to constantly ask: what makes Steiner Waldorf education so special? We have to take a step back from our busy lives and notice what is so easy to take for granted. How are we making a unique difference? What are the key features of this education that can address some of the incredible struggles faced by today’s educators and parents?

The SWSF PR group - like many of our schools - struggle with a lack of resources. Yet despite these challenges, over the past few years our group has participated in shared advertising and articles in national publications (including The Green Parent and The Guardian) and we have taken more serious steps in building our online presence across a host of social media platforms. Last year, we initiated an awareness raising campaign called Ripple Day, that reached just over 51,000 people online (plus a further 10,000 families offline, with physically distributed leaflets). We are taking small steps, but are increasingly making them together – across all our schools.

What was key at our meeting was how vital it is for us to influence the educational debate. When topics like
delaying the school starting age, or the importance of spending time outdoors as a springboard for developing cognitive skills are raised in the national media, we have a wealth of evidence-based examples from the classroom, to contribute to these conversations. In our meeting we began the process of identifying key topics to write about that would highlight unique aspects of the education and the specific ways we can make a difference. Another area discussed was the importance of speaking with confidence and positivity in our communications about shared messaging, including tackling difficult questions in times of crisis. The debate was extensive and the energy and enthusiasm in the room was palpable. We came away determined to increase our visibility within our local communities, and share positive news stories about pupil success.

I imagine a world where Steiner Waldorf education is a household name, and access to this education is for all children, no matter their social and economic backgrounds. When I am a grandmother, my grandchildren can then benefit from the unique aspects of an education that has proven its intrinsic value through time. Change in life is inevitable, but supporting children with the inner resources to navigate these changes with confidence, no matter what the future brings, is a key feature of Steiner Waldorf education. Just consider for a moment, if the parents of those hundreds of thousands of children who will be in full-time education during the next century, were presented with the choice: do the unique aspects of a Steiner Waldorf education, suit my child? Can this education really improve my child’s life and the world in which we live?

For those of us already connected to our schools, our experiences answer that question with an emphatic yes! But for the thousands of parents and families who know nothing or little about us, offering them this fundamental right to choose an education that is centered around the developing child, feels like a truly worthwhile cause to be part of.

If you have any great ideas or want to get involved in positively promoting Steiner Waldorf education, please contact me on pr@steinerwaldorf.org

Priya Mahtani

SWSF FACEBOOK PAGE https://www.facebook.com/pages/Steiner-Waldorf-Schools-Fellowship/205679936204387


Report on Goderich Waldorf School Sierra Leone (A SWSF foreign affiliate school)

Dear Friends,

I have received many requests to give you update about the Goderich school. Sorry for my slow response. Given the prevailing health emergency it is not possible for me to reach the school community or even travel 5 km out of my home. Since July, my family and I continue to stay at home and only visit the supermarket to purchase food on a monthly basis. It is wise that everyone limits contact. I live in Liberia a country seriously affected by EVD and borders with Sierra Leone and Guinea. Country borders have been closed to stop the spread of EVD in the region.

In the school community in Sierra Leone, households are quarantined and visitors are not welcome. The school has instructed staff and families to stay at home. Monthly salaries are paid to them in order to support their families. To provide you with this update, I have read through local news from Sierra Leone and contacted staff and community members. Quite recently, 35 people have been affected by EVD in the Rokel community, Western Area Rural District where the Goderich Waldorf school is located in Sierra Leone. It has been reported in the Local media that 25 people have died and 10 people from the community are presently being hospitalized at Hastings Ebola Treatment Centre.
Mrs. Yamide Langley, the Head Woman of Rokel Village, encouraged the affected people to stay at their homes until after their 21 days of quarantined period. She continued by saying that this measure is being done to protect them and the entire community and if anyone of them falls sick, they will be taken for medical treatment. These quarantined households were provided with food by NGOs to keep them indoors for 21 days. The police are tasked with the responsibility to enforce monitor movements and quarantined areas in the Rokel communities.

As people are terrified and movement restricted, we don’t know whether children at the Waldorf Goderich school have fallen victims. Certainly, people are very closely related and shared resources—so the EVD outbreak has not only destroyed family network and support system, but the pain of stigmatization, abandonment, loss of lives, mistrust and inability to bury their dead in a culturally appropriate manner have sparked up conflicts and further divided households in the communities. Moods expressed in the community are that of desperation and death. Mr. Robert Bendu a faculty member has this to say: ‘In times like this, when we observe the extermination of households in days, when we see any other as a potential carrier of this deadly virus, when one family member is infected, all are sentenced to premature death, when affected households are abandoned to die without help for fear of transmission ... It is worrying to start school or support any form of education for children in this kind of situation ... No parent will allow his or her child to go to school, not even me. Lots of work needs to be done on awareness raising, trust building and putting protective measures in schools to get things back up and running after the EVD epidemic is over.’

Finally, we appreciate and thank you all for your many prayers and support at this very challenging chapter in west Africa. Thanks to the Waldorf schools for their WOW-Day contributions through Freunde der Erziehungskunst (Friends of Waldorf Education Foundation, Germany) that keeps our school staff salaries running as always. Also we acknowledge the invaluable contributions in cash and kinds from individuals, schools and institutions over the past years.

‘One truth that inspires hope in the face of hopelessness is the belief that the world cares and the only choice we have as individuals, is to foster the courage to live and not to succumb to the threats of death in whatever form or shape...’

Shannoh Kandoh

Shaping Everyday Life around the Needs of Young Children... Slow down!

A REVIEW OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CONFERENCE WITH HELLE HECKMANN

‘We are here together. We have time – plenty of time. It’s oh so lovely on earth’

Three deep breaths – eyes closed, peace. What a way to bring home the message of time – by giving us exactly that. In our current society, children and adults too, seem to lack this time to breathe, to be. As early year’s practitioners, our focus is on how best to meet the needs of the young child today. I was hoping for inspiration and insight and was not disappointed.

The conference, organised by the SWSF, took place in October at the Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley. It was attended by over 100 early childhood practitioners, and began with beautiful singing led by Jill Taplin and an introduction by Janni Nicol. Helle Heckmann (from Nokken daycare centre in Denmark) gave an inspiring talk which addressed how the conditions have changed in the last 30 years, and how not only children but the very family structure itself has been affected. Helle’s life experience of working with young children and her extensive travels throughout the world as consultant, gives her a unique and vital insight in observing the change in children and childhood. She presented a global perspective of the condition of the contemporary family and how best to cater and adapt our methods to meet their needs in the most appropriate manner, underpinned at all times by our understanding of young children and Steiner pedagogy. The issues are the same wherever you may be!

Lunch was followed by group discussions where colleagues had the opportunity to discuss the mornings talk together. These gave rise to colleagues attempting to judge how best to implement these adaptations and changes within our settings and it was truly remarkable to see the inspiration at work – everyone was alive and buzzing with ideas and further questions arose which Helle addressed in the afternoon session.
It was a privilege to obtain Helle’s insight into matters relating to daily practical application of ideas and changes.

The modern child, it seems, has little time left to be simply that—a child. Life in all corners of the world is becoming faster, filled with information to learn and goals to achieve. Our greatest gift to them as Steiner practitioners seems to be time—to be a child, to enjoy childhood and to breathe. While meeting this need has its challenges, I do know one thing for certain—I will give them time, in a world where time seems to be running out.

Samantha Sebestyen, Michael Hall Steiner School

**Early Years Trainings:**

I am pleased to inform you that the first part of our qualification has been accepted by Ofqual and should appear on the Register of Regulated Qualifications. ‘Cache level 4 Diploma in Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Studies (Early Years Educator)’. We are now having the Level 5 mapped.

Thank-you to all those who have donated to help the courses, we have raised £7,576.55 so far. This has enabled us to begin payments to Crossfields for the revision work. The accreditation process for the Level 4 element of the programme is now completed. The original estimate for all the revision work was set at £8,000 by Crossfields, but they have emphasised that this may rise. This leaves us with a small shortfall. SWSF is administering this appeal, and is happy to receive further donations, see: [donations](#)

Jill Taplin

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