Welcome to our Winter 2018 Newsletter.

Trustees of the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship:

At our recent AGM two new school trustees were elected:

Ringwood Waldorf School College and trustees nominated Sinead Devane-Wilson
Sinead is an ex Waldorf pupil, her parents are Waldorf teachers and she is a trustee at Ringwood Waldorf School.

Steiner Academy Frome College and Trustees nominated Paul Georgiades
Paul has worked at York, Devon and Elmfield Steiner Schools and is Vice Principal at Steiner Academy Frome

They join Nick Brett from Edinburgh, Michaela de Winter from Brighton and Erika Taylor from Bristol Steiner School. Constantin Court is an independent trustee. The Executive Group thank Rob Strafford (Iona) and Marianne Law-Lindberg (Wynstones) who stood down at the AGM for all their support and hard work.

News from the movement

On Saturday 8th December, 17 schools met in Steiner House, London to look at the recent inspections by Ofsted of 5 schools usually inspected by The School Inspection Service (SIS). This follows the closure of Kings Langley and the Ofsted report on Steiner Academy Exeter.

Safeguarding is paramount in all schools and should be robustly and regularly reviewed. Every school knows they should be inspection-ready at all times. Ultimately the regulations are there for the benefit of all children. There must be a strong evidence-base behind the way we meet inspection.

From this meeting several working groups have been formed:

- Assessment of children’s learning
- Appraisal of teachers

Participants expressed a strong will to work together as a fellowship of schools.

ACTS in the USA!

Acknowledging Creative Thinking Skills (ACTS) Erasmus project is an EU-funded partnership between educators in Norway, Finland, Denmark and the United Kingdom.

Gordian Knot exercise at Southern Oregon University Creativity Conference by Michael Davis (2018)

The ACTS project is presented at a prestigious Creativity Conference in Ashland, Oregon.

Academics in America convened an international Creativity Conference at Southern Oregon University, this summer, from 3-6th August. Over 300 delegates travelled from 28 countries across the world, to attend. The keynote speakers were Mihaly Csikszentmihaly and Robert Sternberg and other invited speakers included Michael Mumford, Mark Runco, Marjorie Taylor, and Vlad Glaveanu alongside many more.

Presentations included the latest in creativity research, representing a wide range of academic fields. There were also applied workshops for professionals to engage with activities designed to develop and enhance creativity in education and the workplace.

It was a great privilege to be asked to present the ACTS project and the Creative Thinking Skills Spec-
Mark Runco, the Conference organiser and a world expert in creativity, informed us in an email that the Spectrum of Creative Thinking Skills was possibly the most comprehensive that he had seen.

What was particularly rewarding, was to see Steiner’s ideas resonate in a very modern context as current and forward-looking, simply by using modern language.

Elaine Holt

See the ACTS book here

Working with Fellowship: Class 6 visit to Hadrian’s Wall

Last May five Steiner Schools came together to visit Hadrian’s Wall. The schools were Elmfield, Brighton, Michael House, Edinburgh and Greenwich, albeit we were blessed with a guest appearance from Drumduan for one of the afternoon’s activities.

I had experienced a previous trip with fewer schools, and, with the help of the Fellowship, we began planning from the Class 5 Olympics in June 2017, for the following years class trips.

In 2018, we clarified where we were all staying (In hostels near to each other) and roughly what the programme of activities would look like, based on the last time that I had been to Hadrian’s Wall.

However, once a commitment is made things start to happen and with some negotiation and willingness to understand each other’s points of view, we were able to find solutions – from how to get there and back, to the main museums and walks to be done, plus evening activities and how to manage the children whilst we were out in the daytime or together at the hostel.

When everything had been organised, we suddenly had a request to join us for some activities, from the Drumduan Class 5/6 teacher who would be staying at a hostel about 45 minutes away. As she was accompanied by an experienced games teacher, we included a games session in a field close to our hostel, which involved 6 Steiner Schools (nearly 80 students and about 12 adults).

Through the week, we received many compliments on the interest in the exhibits and activities from our children. I particularly remember our welcome at Hexham Abbey, where we experienced a medieval Abbey and evensong. From comments I overheard whilst watching some classes in the courtyard (other classes were rehearsing for Evensong); there was great excitement amongst the staff and volunteers at Hexham to receive a visit from “Steiner pupils from all over Britain”.

The trip proved thoroughly enjoyable and beneficial on all social and educational levels. When we returned, the children were so eager to keep in contact with their new friends, that they created a ‘Hadrian’s Wall’ WhatsApp group. This was a mixed blessing since they were certainly developing their skills in making and learning about new friends. However, it also caused them to meet some of the pitfalls of social media. An opportunity to learn and grow, you might say!

What was particularly inspiring to me was the trust in each other that all the adults brought to the venture. We communicated very effectively before and during the trip. I could not have asked for a better group of colleagues to work with and thoroughly enjoyed my time, getting to know them. From my heart, a massive thank you for trusting in the idea and going with me. I really hope that we manage some more collaborative ventures in the future.

Trudy Coutinho

Class 7 teacher, Greenwich Steiner School

A bespoke training for new Steiner Waldorf teachers

At the Steiner Academy Hereford we have been fortunate to receive a small grant from the Software AG to set up a pilot scheme for qualified mainstream teachers who wish to convert to becoming class or subject teachers in our system. Last year we supported two trainees and this year we could extend the scheme to four new colleagues, two of whom are serving class teachers as of this September. Essential to the programme is that the trainees embark on the two year WESTT course. What they learn there and their experience in our schools is deepened in intensive mentoring and tutoring sessions. All trainees have a study and child observation programme which they follow at the Academy, under the guidance of a staff member with the specific remit to supervise their training.
There were 30 applications for these positions, which are remunerated modestly for the interns and with a trainee teacher salary for the class teachers. This shows there is a real appetite for working in an environment which encourages imagination and creativity. The trainees are now in their first term with us and are beginning to realise that, while it is hard work to be in a Steiner school, the work can be so satisfying that it becomes its own reward. We hope that other academies and indeed the movement as a whole may benefit from our work in this field.

Sven Saar

For details of CPD courses see: https://www.steinerwaldorf.org/steiner-teachers/professional-development/

Expansion at the Kildare Steiner School
New senior kindergarten class

Due to very strong demand for places in our Kindergarten, this year we have expanded to offer two new classes. Younger children will continue to attend our junior class, while the older children (aged 5-6 years) now have their own “senior” class and programme.

New “Baby Day” added to our Parent and Child programme

Our Parent and Child group has been steadily expanding and now runs Tuesday to Friday each week for children Birth – 3 years. A new “Baby Day” has started on Friday mornings. The session brings a gentle beginning to the daily life of infants and babies, introducing a practice of care that is deeply respectful of a baby’s own will and allowing time for free movement.

30th anniversary celebration - We will be celebrating 30 years of the Kildare Steiner School (formerly the Dublin Steiner School) on 29th September and are looking forward to rekindling old connections and forging new ones for the school’s next 30 years...

News from St Michael School

In July 2018 we at The St Michael Steiner School bid farewell to our second group of Class 12 students. Our graduates left with their Level 3 Certificates of Steiner Education completed and, for many of them, over ten years of Steiner education behind them. We are proud to say that they all achieved their Level 3 certificates at Merit or above, and that every student who applied to higher education courses was offered a place at a university of their choice. Some have deferred for a year, whilst others are going to spend a year working. Meanwhile several have already taken up places at university and are just starting their courses at York University (for English), Birkbeck College, University of London (for Theatre Studies) and University of the West of England (for Product Design). Other students have gained places at Manchester University (for Physics) and King’s College, University of London (for Liberal Arts with Languages).

News from Somerset – Steiner Academy Frome

The Steiner Free School in Frome began its seventh year in September and we now have over 400 children and young people registered. With an annual budget of just under £2 million, we are at 100% capacity with waiting lists at every level. ‘That’s a lot of money!’ I hear the murmur. If you ‘do the math’ it’s about £4,800 per pupil per year. We have problems galore and challenges a-million, yet that places us in a boat alongside many others on the educational seas of the 21st century.

The school has grown to a point where we have nudged into Class 9. And our GCSE programme covers Art, Drama, English/English Literature, Geography, History, Mandarin, Maths, Religious Studies, Science and Spanish.

The teaching and learning of literacy and differentiation is a theme that we are pursuing with energy and we are working with the Sounds Write programme to develop and improve the phonics strand within the literacy warp and weft.

Now we are seven, we have been granted a place in the Frome Learning Partnership, which is a town-wide...
network of schools, working in partnership on issues of shared interest and common concern.

Our work and collaboration with the Confucius Institute (working out of the University of Southampton) continues and our Mandarin provision covers Class 1 to Class 9. Finally, we are working to foster forest school activities and elements on our edge-of-town site. This work has been given a considerable boost by two things: talented and motivated colleagues and a wonderful parent-funded and parent-constructed outdoor learning space.

Trevor Mepham (Principal)

Book Reviews:

Foundations of Creative Literacy in Classes 1 and 2
Writing to Reading the Steiner Waldorf Way

This book will be welcomed by colleagues, especially those starting out with class 1 or 2. It contains a wealth of ideas and information and each chapter opens helpfully with a series of bullet points listing its key topics. The appendices, which are extensive, include some useful basics about the structure of the English writing system. We must hope that the price, at over £30, does not put teachers off. Colour is used for illustration of children’s work throughout. The value of its contents makes it well worth its cover price: it is to be recommended.

The authors provide excellent examples of exercises and games that can help prepare the footing for literacy, including the important matter of pencil grip, so often overlooked today as can be seen from a quick look at people writing in everyday life.

One of the core aims of Waldorf method is to help children meet obstacles to healthy development and learning, obstacles that our adult world continually erect, some of which need to be removed, some encountered in a context of support. The aim is always to enable children to grow into adults with a firm grasp on life and with the knowledge and initiative to create a more humane future. Literacy is a fundamental achievement for a self-reflective society and how we learn these skills is not incidental. Passive learning, merely receptive acceptance of fixed symbols and random rules and a restricted type of decoding, discourages curiosity for what stands behind the words. The approach advocated by the authors of Writing to Reading is a potential antidote to that.

Critical listening, writing and reading are vital skills today, often found lacking in contemporary university students. I would suggest that the way in which the standard literacy curriculum is taught, or "delivered", plays a part in creating that problem. The principle that children write and then read what they have written is a small but profound shift to more active learning. The analytical method proposed by Rudolf Steiner involves delving into the roots of language in an age-appropriate way. My main reservation about Writing and Reading is that its account of the analytical process is rather vague. There is no single "best method", both analytic and synthetic methods are needed. The principle of "whole to parts" deserves greater attention. A future book might provide a more comprehensive account of the development of literacy from early years to school leaving, especially one with more to say about the phase leading from independent writing to independent reading. Where writing is concerned it is perfectly possible, as some Waldorf teachers do (and the original curriculum plan of Caroline von Heydebrand suggests) for children in class one to engage in independent writing.

I would suggest a small change to the title. The creativity of Waldorf colleagues must be close to infinite and there are further approaches to teaching literacy in Steiner education that are successful and have merit, some yet to be discovered. Publisher, please note, the method for teaching writing and reading in this book describes a Steiner Waldorf Way, not the Steiner Waldorf Way.

Kevin Avison

The Meadowsweet Year

This book provides an A-Z manual for parent and child leaders and parents. The Meadowsweet Year is divided into six half-term chapters, and contains a snapshot of timings, displays, rhymes, verses, tunes, craft ideas, recipes and pictures to guide and inspire. It is written and photographed by Caroline Ackworth directly from her Steiner inspired Parent and Child initiative in Somerset. It is filled with love and blessings, and includes photos, descriptions, rhymes, songs, tunes, displays and crafts ideas, this compilation will hopefully give inspiration and guidance to many.

Janni Nicol

www.troubador.co.uk

https://www.troubador.co.uk/bookshop/mind-body-spirit/the-meadowsweet-year-volume-1/
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