Kolisko Conferences

This year there have been Kolisko conferences in India, Taiwan, South Africa, Philippines, and more are forthcoming during the summer in Ukraine, Australia, Mexico, Sweden and France. The basic theme for all of them is “Understanding the Developing Child: Education and Medicine in the Service of Learning”. These conferences, held approximately every four years since 1989, are organized for teachers, doctors, parents, therapists and curative educators who together explore and seek to develop the health giving properties found in Waldorf education. As the last two will be held in August and within reasonable travelling distance from the UK some readers might be interested in participating. The one in Järna, near Stockholm, will work on “Education as Preventative Medicine” and runs from August 6th to 12th. More details can be found on www.kolisko.se.

The event in Paris www.steiner-waldorf.org/kolisko which runs from August 21st to 25th, is exceptional in that UNESCO are hosting it in their headquarters and the participants and contributors will come from a very wide array of interested people. As in the last such conference, in Finland four years ago, there will be a contribution from the Alliance for Childhood at both occasions as Janni Nicol and I will be running workshops on themes drawn from the work of the Alliance.

Working in Europe

The European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education (ECSWE), which is a registered international charity in Brussels and operates out of Forest Row, was a founding member of a permanent European lobbying platform last year. This group, the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL), has ten members who are active in 40 European countries, operate in 54,500 training venues, represent 2,350,000 professionals and volunteers and affect some 62 million people. All the members, except ECSWE, are primarily concerned with adult learning. ECSWE joined them in order to accentuate the fact that, when discussing lifelong learning, the experiences of children and attitudes formed in childhood must be taken into account and to advocate the importance of a sound and nourishing education.

The platform’s role is to contribute to the debate on the future objectives of education and training systems in the countries of Europe that are collaborating on an increasing scale through the Lisbon process. It has a commitment to further a popular and civic commitment to the concept of lifelong learning as a framework for personal development and will serve as a partner and voice for the European Commission. The Commission has for the first time produced an action plan for the rights of the child and aims to set up an umbrella of coordination of EU activities in this realm, which ECSWE has been pointing out for a long time has been much neglected in EU policy making. This action plan, which includes early childhood and education, is intended to operate on a global level and involves cooperation with international organisations.

Klagenfurt School in the News

Klagenfurt Rudolf Steiner School, Austria, was one of 3734 schools in Europe that registered for the “European Spring Day”. Out of all these schools it was the one chosen as the subject of a TV-Euronews programme as it had been intensely active and successful in incorporating EU programmes into the Upper School, thereby enriching the curriculum and building up active educational contacts throughout the world.

Publications

The European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education, in collaboration with the Comenius MA project, was financially supported in publishing a book with EU Comenius funds. It is a translation of an earlier work by Johannes Kiensch which has been substantially revised for the English edition. It is entitled “Becoming a Teacher: Steiner’s Indications for Teacher Education, Development and Training”. The book deals with Steiner’s evolving ideas regarding the training of teachers for Waldorf schools and professional development combining freedom with academic research, inner development, conscious responsibility, effective collegiality and artistic sensibility and skills. It is distributed by SSF publications at modest cost (£6) from the Fellowship office.

Nairobi School

The following request has recently been received from the Nairobi Waldorf Trust which has two Waldorf kindergartens and one primary school with upward of 100 children from over 20 countries. Would any UK school like to take up the challenge?

“We were thinking of twinning up with a few schools throughout the developed world and setting up a relationship whereby some of our sponsored students could be assisted, perhaps even by Alumni...... This special relationship would also open up cultural exchange between our two countries and we could, from our side, establish pen pal relationships, and perhaps send crafts for sale.... I am sure this is already being done in many Waldorf Schools in the UK and we were wondering if you, as the umbrella association, could give us some pointers with regard to any schools who are not yet involved in such a project and might be willing to consider it...or how we may go about it best.

Furthermore, trying to avoid ‘re-inventing the wheel’ which seems to be a global (Waldorf) hazard, we would be able to get feedback from that school on the many issues that come up in evolving Waldorf communities, particularly such things as what sort of fundraising event ideas they’ve had that were successful!. As a fledgling school with little awareness of Waldorf in the country, we have our work cut out just keeping things going and attracting new pupils, and, as in most schools no doubt, there is really only a small core of parents who do pretty much everything. Any inspiration from fellow Waldorf schools gladly accepted!”

Mandy Parkin. holhealth@frontiermedics.com

Christopher Clouder. SWSF
Public Funding in England

The Hereford Academy project is progressing well, although there are still some issues around design that need to be resolved. Otherwise, the project is on track and things are looking set to go ahead to the implementation stage. There is a mood of optimism and David Donaldson, a teacher at the Hereford Waldorf School, says: ‘We entered this feasibility study with an open mind but wary of compromise and feelings of becoming restricted by inappropriate demands. This far, we have been pleasantly surprised! The compromise we have had to make regarding SATs feels workable and particular: not indicative of a wider regime which will inevitably compromise our integrity. In fact, one of the results of this study so far, has been to make us aware of the amount of ground we need to make up in order to live up to our own best practice. In this respect, the potentially thorny issue of a ‘principal’ has come to be seen as a means of helping us focus on tasks we have had neither the time nor the resources to get to grips with ‘adequately as yet. So at present, moving as we are towards the end of this feasibility study, we feel the process has been positively enabling and that the freedom is there for us to develop our understanding and practice of Steiner Education and to feed that into the mainstream.’

The Hereford Academy’s feasibility stage has focussed on how the requirement for accountability can be put into place without undermining the integrity of the Steiner curriculum, ethos and values. This has been at the centre of the discussions and many people have been involved both from the Steiner schools movement and from the DfES. The outcome is a set of agreed terms that achieves the original hope that this Steiner academy project would resolve the special terms that are needed for maintained Steiner schools. This progress will have significance beyond Much Dewchurch. The terms that have been agreed go a long way towards paving the way for other Steiner schools to be able to consider the option of public funding. However, there are still some other and separate issues that need resolving. As several of the city Steiner schools well know from experience, the school’s lack of an adequate site and resistance from the Local Authority on the grounds of surplus school places have discouraged them from publishing proposals to join the maintained system. These ‘barriers’ still need addressing and we are discussing with DfES officials how the reforms outlined in the 2005 Schools White Paper might resolve these problems. The discussions centre on St Pauls Steiner School in London. One of the first tasks is to test out the transferability of the terms that have been established through the Academy project. The main focus, however, will be on issues related to capital funding and the new responsibilities of local authorities. It is anticipated that this work won’t impinge on the daily life of the school as much as the feasibility study has done on the Hereford Waldorf School. The outcome, however, will be highly relevant to those city Steiner schools that would like to plan to join the maintained sector.

Kevin Avison. SWSF

A Twinkle in Irish Eyes

Waldorf education in Ireland is beginning to flourish, or at least take root, in spite of the many difficulties faced by our Irish colleagues. The organisation of the school system in Ireland is still strongly influenced by the Catholic Church (the original school law was the result of the combined efforts of Emmon Devalera and the Archbishop of All Ireland) and there is no tradition for independent education equivalent to the UK. This established the constitutional position that the task of the State is to make provision for education, but left non-government organisations (initially the Church, almost exclusively) to organise schools and design curricula.

Raheen Wood have carried the Waldorf flag for schools in the south and providing mentoring and support for many emerging projects. The Kildare School began in Dublin before moving south westwards into buildings belonging to Camphill, Dunshane. The school has now moved onto approximately eight acres of its own land, nestling among beautiful green, rolling pasture, but within reach of a number of population centres mainly serving the growing number of people who work in Dublin, but who want to live close to the Irish countryside. Now the school is preparing to lay down its first permanent buildings. Those who know about building developments in schools will understand how much work is involved in all this. This new beginning for the Kildare School will represent the dedication and commitment of parents, staff and trustees. It is also a development that could hold powerful positive consequences for the growth and acceptance of Waldorf education in the south of the island of Ireland.

Kevin Avison. SWSF
The new Fellowship DVD “What is a Steiner School?”

I am a parent, filmmaker and have a strong interest in experiential education. The Steiner schools and their pedagogy fascinated me and I wanted to know more. I began the Teacher Training course at the Edinburgh School. The more I learned, the more I was convinced that Steiner schools followed a curriculum that had been deeply conceived and researched... Yet, there was so much resistance to Steiner Schools from many people I came into contact with. I got strange looks when the local grocer heard my daughter went to the Steiner School. My godfather asked me what the matter was with my daughter if she was going to a Steiner School. Even my parents were concerned until my mother went to a parents’ meeting when I was away. She was transformed by the wisdom of my daughter’s Kindergarten teacher and is now an avid supporter.

I wanted to show people what Steiner schools were about, so I asked if I could make a film of the Edinburgh Steiner School with the pupils. There was a resounding yes. We put posters around the school and were expecting a few interested pupils. There were 21 volunteers and not wanting to turn any away, we gave everyone a role. The filming took a term and the result was a great success. The finished film is now on DVD and is given to all prospective parents and shown at every open day.

When the Fellowship saw the film, they invited me to 'pitch' for the job of making their DVD having got a grant from Drayton Manor Trust. The brief was to make a film to explain what Steiner education is about to politicians, journalists, policy makers, teachers, educationalists, parents, potential Steiner teachers, etc.

We chose four schools; urban, rural, established, pioneering - St. Paul's, London, South Devon, Michael Hall, and Edinburgh. We decided that we wanted some outside opinions and invited Prof. Richard Pring who is one of the UK’s leading educationalists, (and the Director of the Nuffield Report advising Government about the 14 to 19 curriculum) to Michael Hall.

Having toured the school with Christopher Clouder, Kim Leys and Ewout van Manen, Prof. Pring could not have been more complimentary. He felt that there was a lot to be learned from Steiner Pedagogy and even said that he wished he had been to a Steiner School himself.

Then we went to interview the head of King Edward the V Community College. This is one of the Schools that South Devon Steiner graduates go to at 16. It has 1,700 pupils. Steve Jones, the Head Teacher took his role very seriously and interviewed many of the Steiner pupils the day before we arrived. They told him that they had not found the transition difficult. In fact, they found the work easier here than at the Steiner School. Steve told us that he thought that the Steiner pupils were actually better prepared for A-Levels than his own students who had followed the national curriculum. He said that the national curriculum spoon feeds children whereas the Steiner pupils knew how to engage in independent study and how to think creatively. These are just some events from the film and everyone we spoke to was glowing with heartfelt positive comments.

Saskia Anley. Red Point Productions

The DVD is now available from the SWSF office at £6 per copy incl p&p and £5 for bulk orders

Conference in Edinburgh

On March 9th 2006 an international conference was held at the Filmhouse, Edinburgh. The conference was convened to raise awareness of the value of artistic learning to young people who have been victims of trauma. Amongst a host of influential and high profile speakers were: psychologist Helen Myers; linguist and Professor of Slavic at the University of California at Berkeley, Ronelle Alexander; Christopher Clouder of the SWSF; and former cardiologist Dr Svetlana Broz, head of the internationally renowned NGO Gardens of Righteousness.

About 100 delegates and members of the public, including staff and pupils from the Edinburgh Rudolf Steiner School, were treated to some fascinating and poignant presentations, the majority of which focused on the human aftermath of the war in the former Yugoslavia. Dr Broz, a native of Yugoslavia, has achieved recognition throughout Europe for her efforts to achieve cultural reconciliation between Bosnians, Croatians, Serbs and other nationalities in the region. Her first book, Good People in an Evil Time, collected the testimony of people who had either resisted the temptation to perpetuate interethnic acts of cruelty during the war, or who had witnessed acts of civil courage against a background of brutality.

In her presentation, Helen Myers provided delegates with a stark picture of the debilitating effects of trauma on the brains of young people. Later, composer Nigel Osborne recounted his experience of working with children during the siege of Sarajevo. Here he discovered that music, movement and song can ‘unlock’ the frozen consciousness of trauma victims.

In her own presentation, Dr Broz articulated the aim of her work: to overcome prejudice, bigotry, violence and inhumanity. A short film was shown which featured a workshop run by Dr Broz showing her counselling young victims of the war. Since she started her work it has been her conviction that there is intrinsically very little which divides the peoples of the former Yugoslavia, and that the war contradicted hundreds of years of inter-ethnic harmony. This point had already been illustrated by Professor Alexander, stated that there are only slight differences between the languages spoken by Bosnians, Croats and Serbs. Indeed, Dr Broz summed it up perfectly when she told delegates: “people only realised they had different tongues when they started sticking them out at each other.”

Christopher Clouder concluded the session by drawing together many of the morning’s themes. Peace, he said, should not be regarded as the mere “absence of war”; it must be cultivated by active humanity, good will and genuine relationships. For Mr Clouder, ‘civil courage’ meant resisting the artificial divisions imposed by those - in all walks of life - who harbour prejudice. Implicit in his comments was undoubtedly the message that where trauma and inhumanity have been common currency, Waldorf education can contribute to the healing process.

Alistair Pugh. Edinburgh Steiner School.
The Changing Need for Child Care

Eighty Steiner Waldorf early childhood teachers met at the Kings Langley School on 13th May for a conference entitled “The Changing Need for Child Care - how do we meet that need with mixed age kindergartens, play groups, nurseries, parent and child groups, day-care and child minders?” Uplifted by singing with Anne Ayre, and nourished by eurythmy with Eve McGregor, the heart of this event was a talk by Geseke Lundgren, Swedish kindergarten teacher and trainer, and co-ordinator of the International Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Association.

Geseke painted us a picture of the Scandinavian mixed age kindergarten - a small group of children aged between 2 and 7, for the state insists that parents return to work very early, and traditionally children enter class 1 a year later than they do here. Geseke spoke honestly of the benefits and disadvantages of such a group, and continued with some deeper insights into the significant thresholds in the development of the child’s sense of his own ego, at the age of 3 and 6, and how to support the child at these points.

We intend to compile a full paper on this conference, which will be sent to all our early childhood centres and schools, along with the results of a detailed survey of the Steiner early childhood provision in this country - a snapshot of what we have now. However, our day ended with a report from Geseke on international work that includes research of key themes, and also support for projects that bring early childhood education to places in special need. Thus we were helped to look beyond our own immediate problems and challenges, and sent home with a broader vision of our work.

Jill Taplin. SWSF

Review - The Pampered Child Syndrome by Maggie Mamen (Jessica Kingsley, 2006)

Adults have a duty to look after children, but that “looking after” is needed to support and encourage the development of the child without being over-protective. The idea of the over-indulged child is not new. Alfred Adler wrote about it in the 1930s, but Dr Maggie Mamen’s book places the problem in a clearer light, one that is significant for parents and those who work professionally with children.

Her account of the research indicates that some children said to be suffering from ADHD, depression or anxiety, or even some learning disorders may actually be showing symptoms of “Pampered Child Syndrome”. While it seems unfortunate to further medicalise this, the author shows the situation can occur in a wide variety of family circumstances. This is not exclusive to the well-off. But the results of adult reluctance to exercise proper authority, or impose suitable boundaries, can have dire consequences.

Mamen illustrates through a host of real examples that fear of damaging a child’s self-esteem and over-anxiety about unhappiness or discomfort can deprive the child of opportunity to learn how to manage disappointment and frustration, or take responsibility for her or his actions. The word “syndrome” is perhaps apt when this results in characters unable to feel that their actions have consequences and who become unhappy, anxious and aggressive.

Fortunately, this book is not simply another hand-wringing exercise. It contains practical remedies and the author has the commonsense to ask the obvious, whatever happened to the word, “No”?

Kevin Avison. SWSF

World List

Every spring the Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen prints the new list of schools worldwide. There are now 921 recognized Steiner schools in 58 countries. This world list can be found at www.waldorfschule.info

Validation of Edinburgh Teacher Training Course

The Edinburgh Rudolf Steiner School is delighted to announce that funding has been secured for the first step toward validation of their teacher training course by a higher education institution. The ES Calate partnership includes the universities of Bristol, St Martin’s College and Stirling. It disseminates resources for staff and students in Higher Education and Further Education and supports and advises on pedagogy and curriculum enhancement across Foundation, Undergraduate, Masters, PhD and EdD Programmes.

ES Calate—part of the Higher Education Academy—has awarded a grant of £5000 to identify how the Edinburgh course might be adapted to meet the requirements of validation by the University of Stirling, including QAA criteria for quality assurance. The project team, which includes staff from the Edinburgh school and academics from Stirling, will also produce an audit tool and a report to allow the school and University to decide whether or not to proceed with the actual validation process. This audit tool will have a wide application and may be used by other organisations who are planning to approach higher education institutions in search of validation for their training courses.

Alistair Pugh. Edinburgh

Alliance Conference: Detoxing Childhood

The next Alliance for Childhood one day conference will be held at the Early Childhood Learning Centre, London on the 3rd of October. Sue Palmer, whose recent book “Toxic Childhood” raised wide media interest in the last few months, and Richard Watts, the Children’s Food Bill campaign coordinator at Sustain - Alliance for better food and farming, will be the key note speakers. For further information see www.allianceforchildhood.org.uk or through the SWSF office.

Christopher Clouder. SWSF