

MICHAEL ROSE, Living Literacy: The human foundations of speaking, writing and reading

Out of his years of experience as a class teacher and teacher trainer, Michael Rose offers his important new book's mixture of reflective and practical writing "equally to parents, teachers, teacher trainers and all who acknowledge literacy's central significance in shaping our world." In turn, I would like to offer this review as an expression of gratitude for such significant work, as well as a shameless recommendation that everyone reads it! The questions that the book raises are universal ones and we are each addressed personally from the beginning: "Dear Reader, you are highly privileged. You are literate. You hold the master key to the kingdom of the written word, an ever-extending dominion of the articulate human mind reaching to the boundaries of the world and beyond. You can read records, recipes, poems, narratives, operating manuals, scientific theories, newspapers, candidates' names on ballot sheets, letters from loved ones and the communications of gods and angels." But, he continues, it is different for others. "In a world that has acclaimed universal literacy as its goal, endless droves of young people embark on the established roads to its attainment but increasingly fail to arrive....For these young souls the written word remains an empty oracle – and they seek their compensations elsewhere. "From the high ground to which you and I still have access, ... not all of this will necessarily seem so urgent and apparent – yet. But when a child we know, maybe even our own loved child, starts to 'turn off', to lose interest and motivation in whole areas of life, including and perhaps especially school – then we are faced much more immediately with what's going on right now". We can look at the rise of illiteracy in inner city wastelands "and relate it to a more generalised and obvious social and economic malaise, for which literacy alone offers no real remedy. But why has it started to happen to the rich kids too? What are the common denominators between (for example) a boy who drops through

the bottom of school into an inner city gang and one who drops to the bottom of the class and is only held from further descent by a more intact relation to home and the security that goes with it?" For Rose, in "the complex tangle of our times three main strands appear to be strangling the life out of literacy, and out of much else besides": communication in the home, television and education. While education is the focus of his book, he encourages us to look in the widest contexts at what is actually happening and at what can and might happen, to try and establish what really counts in the healthy development of literacy. The central argument is "that literacy should remain from beginning to end a HUMAN activity, springing and flowing from human needs and purposes and developing through the channels of human relationships." What is actually thought and done in Steiner Waldorf schools is cross-referenced with current mainstream principles and practice, assuming that these approaches have something to learn from each other and potentially challenging "the 'Waldorf world' as much as any other safe haven." The first part of the book investigates the different elements of literacy, how it has evolved in and changed the world, and how it relates to and can affect child development. Then follows a more practical exploration of how to prepare for the transition from instinctive to conscious language acquisition, in particular through conversation, story, song and play, and from there how to introduce writing and reading formally in a relevant and living way. There is a discussion of children's learning differences and different teaching responses to these, "of the nuts and bolts that hold it all together and ways of helping to tighten these up, of different contexts in which literacy properly belongs and the different styles and forms of expression appropriate to them, of other activities that can continue to support literacy, of telling the truth

and telling lies, of communication generally and electronic communication in particular." In the last sections of the book Rose draws all these considerations together to turn to the future, as well as discussing the fulfilment of literacy, in all that has been written down and read as human literature. "The writing and reading of books is a profoundly human and potentially miraculous affair", he writes, "Properly understood, encouraged and enabled, it can bring the linguistic labour of ages to a golden harvest"(p.187). These words are not only inspiring for those, like myself, who work to nurture the love of reading and writing literature for more advanced learners. They bring together the whole picture of healthy literacy development that Rose has described through his book. At whatever stage of that process one is currently working, this book helps to anchor the work in "tangible, physical experience" as well as in "imaginative, heartfelt sensibility"(C. Clouder, Foreword). I think it is essential reading for parents, as well as for teachers and teacher trainers. It is courageously truthful and supportive, offering new insights, interesting perspectives on established practice and questions for the future. It has a most helpful bibliography and resources section at the end, with practical appendices on issues such as school readiness and child study. The style is both formal and friendly, like the printed equivalent of an enlightened human conversation. This makes the book intensely engaging. It is rare to find a book on literacy which is a 'good read' and 'hard to put down', but this is Michael Rose's gift to his readers; it seems to work as a good friend as well as a good book! It is also engaging because it involves us in one of the crucial issues of our time. Christopher Clouder writes in the foreword, "In recent years the word (literacy) has assumed connotations beyond just reading and writing, and is now used generally to describe the competencies we are thought to need in fulfilling our responsibilities as citizens of the modern world. 'Literacy' in these contexts suggests a way of finding our potential.... Nothing in our lives is static, and literacy is not a state but a process which can make our lives infinitely richer and more fulfilling"

JOSIE ALWYN – MICHAEL HALL SCHOOL
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Research Resource

As Steiner Waldorf education gains more prominence both nationally and internationally the SWSF/ ECSWE office in Forest Row is increasingly asked about academic research into its effects and practice. To accommodate this demand ECSWE has set up a new website www.interwren.eu which makes such research and that of related educational studies more readily available. WREN (Waldorf Researchers' and Educators' Network) is a form of collaboration that responds to this attention, arranges conferences and exchanges on relevant themes and engages with others in looking into areas where further research would be of value. The website is work in progress but already has items on it that would be interest to anyone looking for information in this area.

CHRISTOPHER CLOUDER – ECSWE

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SWSF 2007 Easter Conference

After a week of dusting, sweeping and polishing in preparation for the Easter conference, I felt ready for a holiday! Instead, I found myself welcoming some of the 100 plus participants who had come from all over Britain to discuss and learn more about 'The Millennium Child'. Tiredness and grumpiness were soon replaced with a genuine warmth and excitement at coming together. In many ways, the mood of the whole conference was set by the daily school service and eurythmy performance of the 'Calendar of the Soul'. These created a feeling of reverence and a moment to pause and reflect. After a busy end to term, I appreciated the call to come together inwardly as well as outwardly, and to make a new relationship with a verse I had struggled with. Lectures by Christopher Clouder, Christoph Wiechert, Sue Palmer and Ginni Maggs provided me with rich food for thought. Two questions Ginni Maggs saw our children posing really made a strong impression on me – 'Can you see who I am?' and 'Do you know who you are?'. When I think of the young children in my care, this is what they are

asking of me. More than ever truth and authenticity really matter. Christoph Wiechert drew a hammer on a chalkboard to demonstrate the character of education from the 15th century onwards. He stressed that human beings are no longer strong enough for such methods. The 'Millennium Child' needs to have both the will and the soul engaged for the mind to wake up. Both he and Christopher Clouder gave strong, practical examples of how Waldorf education can do this through art and nature. Most encouraging of all, we ran out of chairs at Christopher's talk on the Alliance of Childhood.

Workshops gave me a timely opportunity for work on myself as an individual and teacher. Evenings were full of conversation, good food and wonderful music, verse and stories. I think I had forgotten the pleasure I get from someone sharing a tale or speaking their own poetry. After a year of working with multiculturalism, I was reminded just how rich and varied my Scottish heritage is. I am grateful to the colleagues who carried the whole conference so beautifully and to all who came and brought so much.

MARGOT LORD – EDINBURGH STEINER SCHOOL

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ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP at The Meadow School

Whilst the national media this year were discussing the nature of citizenship and whether and how it should be taught in state schools, pupils at The Meadow School, Bruton were engaging with citizenship through developing their role in the governance of their classes and membership of the School Association. In October 2007 as part of their studies of Ancient Greece and emergent democracy, Class V/VI set up a Class Council, using the same tools and structures through which the school at large is governed and managed.

Last summer term the School Association held two community days, at which the school's biography was reviewed and the vision re-articulated (building on work which had taken place in 2001). In October, it was the children's turn to review their class history and development. From this came the articulation of their intention for this year "to make school enjoyable whilst being more independent" and a Team Plan explaining the things which they intended to do to make this happen. This was then written up and submitted to the School Management Team for endorsement and inclusion in the School Development Plan, along with Team Plans from the various Support Teams within the school. The class also learnt to run meetings, use the same tools to reach consensus as do the College and other teams within the school, take minutes and present proposals to the Teachers' Meeting, both verbally and in writing.

In January the work continued with the exploration of Ancient Rome and different forms of government and the creation of a Class Constitution. Having been enthused by the pre-amble to the recently developed Iraqi constitution, the class took particular pleasure in drawing up the pre-amble to their own constitution, ending in the assertion that "although the hours of school are depressingly dismal, we strive to find our inner light. We proclaim to thee, this is how we be!" As a result of this work and their own initiative, the class organized a pyjama day for the

An essential part of this work has been to introduce the children to the system whereby the school is run, based on a holarchy or nested hierarchy

classes and sold chocolate eggs at Easter, raising around £80 for the charity of their choice (The Rainbow Trust). They have also introduced new equipment and impulses to their Games lesson, initiated a trip to the Houses of Parliament and are now planning a self-organised (and educational!) class trip in the summer term. They also plan to write their own sketch about their time at Meadow for when they leave in the summer term.

An essential part of this work has been to introduce the children to the system whereby the school is run, based on a holarchy or nested hierarchy. Some of this was done through the teaching of Local History and Geography in Class IV, so the class found it readily comprehensible. The explanation of how the school runs makes it very clear to the children in which areas their input is appropriate, which was useful when clarifying the type of intentions they could include in their Annual Plan and in two of the oldest children awoke the desire to become members of the School Association. They made written applications to do this to the School Governance Team (trustees), who accepted their application (after checking the pedagogical desirability with College!)



Picture: Pyjama Day – The Meadow School

and they recently attended their first Association Meeting.

The foundations for most of this work was laid in the younger classes, based on the Active Citizenship curriculum guidelines on the SWSF website. It provides an empowering and motivating focus for the pupils' energy and enthusiasm and ties in beautifully with the "traditional" curriculum for Class V and VI. Although we have only been able to make a small start with this work (because of the size and closing age of our school) the potential for engaging older pupils in a similar way is enormous and we look forward to seeing this further developed by some of the more established schools in the future.

SARAH-JO ROBINSON – THE MEADOW SCHOOL

An East Anglian Score – and more!

Founded originally in 1980 and moved to Wroxham (north east of Norwich) in 1985, the small Wroxham School is closing its doors with the sale of the school building. The school has maintained the traditions of village schooling informed by Rudolf Steiner's curriculum ideas for over two decades. Those who know the challenges faced in running Steiner schools in England will appreciate the achievement this represents.

The school was a non-accredited, "Affiliate" member of the SWSF, sustained by the dedication of the school's founders, Peter and Roswitha Reeve. Their retirement, however, looks like being an active one; they plan to continue some home education and Peter continues to speak on education for the Green Party. Although some may think of the Wroxham School as having been on the fringes of the UK movement, Peter and Roswitha should be acknowledged as having done much to pioneer the Waldorf method in Norfolk and East Anglia. The Norwich and Raphael Steiner Schools in particular owe much to their groundbreaking work. So, although the Wroxham school itself may be coming to an end, the work to which it founders have given themselves so fully, goes on.

KEVIN AVISON – SWSF

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Public Funding

This new planning application for the academy will go to the Planning Committee on 20 June. The new application addresses the planning concerns raised by the Planning Committee when they refused permission in January. Concomitant with this new application, an appeal has been lodged; but it will be progressed only if the new application is unsuccessful. Hopefully all will go smoothly on 20 June. Generally there is a confidence that the ground has been well prepared this time and that the decision will be informed by correct information about the development. Also, there has been considerable effort on the ground to understand why there has been so much resistance locally to the academy and to address these problems where possible. Much of the local resistance seems to revolve around traffic – Much Dewchurch is intersected by a busy B road that is used by some very heavy lorries – and in many respects the school traffic has become the focus for the wider problem. The intention is to work with the Highways Authority to introduce some form of traffic calming that can benefit the whole village and that intention is made clear in communications to local residents. So fingers crossed for 20 June! All going well, there is still a small chance that the academy will open – albeit in the old buildings – as soon as possible in the school year beginning September 2007.

St Paul's Steiner School is hoping to publish proposals soon to become a maintained school under the new guidance attached to the Education and Inspection Act 2006. This guidance comes into force at the end of May. However, these proposals cannot be published until the Capital Team at the DFES have scrutinised their architects' survey of the building in order to decide if spending public money on that building represents best value. This crucial piece of the jigsaw should be forthcoming in the next few weeks.

Your school should have received details of the **Moving Forward** seminar on 27 June in London. In the morning the Commissioner for Schools, Sir Bruce Liddington, who was recently appointed by the Secretary of State as the Schools Commissioner will be addressing delegates. Sir Bruce previously was involved in the early discussions between SWSF and the Minister about the Steiner Academy. He will address the question: in what ways will the reforms implied by the Education and Inspection Act 2006 /the role of the School Commissioner help Steiner schools to overcome the difficulties that have prevented their progress towards joining the maintained sector? After lunch, there will be an update on the Steiner Academy project before Mike Sweetmore, School Organisation Team, DFES and Colin Seal, Curriculum Policy Unit, DFES both involved with the St Paul's project, speak about making proposals to become a maintained Steiner school and related curriculum matters. It will be a very relevant day for delegates from schools interested in maintained status as well

SYLVIE SKLAN – SWSF

The Alliance for Childhood UK Forum

In March the Alliance for Childhood created a forum for prominent UK childhood experts at the Centre for Early Learning in Whitechapel. This was prompted by the publication of the UNESCO report on the state of children in the top 22 richest nations in the world showing Britain and the USA joint last. 'What is happening to Britain's Children?' is the question which brought a prompt response from around 35 people who were able to make the date and many others who would have been there were it not for previous commitments. Since the November 2006 publication of the letter in the Telegraph asking for action against the toxic childhood which many of Britain's children are suffering, there has been scarcely a day when some new piece of research has appeared in the media showing some other aspect of the illnesses or difficulties experienced by children through today's culture: obesity, attention disorder, junk food, television, computers, childcare, family fragmentation. What is to be done about it?

Joan Almon from the USA, cofounder of the Alliance with Christopher Clouder and Sally Jenkinson, was able to share her experience of travelling the world and has seen changes taking place in children since the 70's. There is an increase in allergies, childhood obesity and for the first time the life expectancy of children is less than for their parents. The mind set has to change. Tim Gill told of his concern about the extent we have become a risk-averse society. In 1971, eight out of ten children aged seven or

eight went to school on their own. By 1990 this had nearly dropped to less than one in ten. This suggests that in a single generation the 'home habitat' for eight-year-old children – the area they can roam around on their own – has shrunk to one-ninth of its former size. Richard Bowlby, son of renowned psychologist John Bowlby who developed attachment theory, stated that babies and toddlers younger than 30 months only feel safe when they are separated from their parents if they are with someone else with whom they have an affectionate bond. The most successful day care centres are the ones which encourage babies and toddlers to develop a long term secondary attachment bond to the childminder. Pippa Smith and Miranda Young, co-founders of Mediamarch, say that child poverty and the environment are much in the news but we hear little about poverty of mind because of the media environment which children inhabit today.

Sally Goddard Blythe, Margaret Edgington, Maria Robinson, Chris Ponsford, Del Loewenthal, Richard House and Christopher Clouder also made excellent contributions. Details of these contributions are on the Alliance for Childhood website or contact the Alliance for a printed report from the meeting.

MARION BRIGGS – ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD

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The Plymouth University Periodic Review

I was recently invited to be an 'external advisor' on the Plymouth University Education Faculty's 2007 Periodic Review. I've been aware for some time of the highly innovative Steiner education courses that have been developing at Plymouth, and this 'adventure' gave me a priceless opportunity to witness this pioneering work at first hand.

I have had growing concerns over recent years about the cultural fate of the modern university, and the trend towards ever-greater knowledge specialisation and 'commodification' of learning. The direction being taken by teaching, assessment and accreditation in the Academy seems to be moving in precisely the opposite direction to that championed by Rudolf Steiner and progressive present-day thinkers, with an academic milieu increasingly saturated by an ethos of measurement, calculation, and control of teaching, research and even thought itself.

The values, qualities and pedagogical practices of a Steiner-based educational experience are very different from these latter approaches, and I feared that the mechanistic 'audit and assessment culture' that is swamping British higher education could well do a kind of terminal 'violence' to the very pedagogical 'soul subtleties' that Steiner teacher training at its best strives to achieve. Certainly, there may be unavoidable tensions ensuing when a course of learning (e.g. Steiner education, or training in counselling and psychotherapy) is located within an institution whose

assessment and pedagogical values are to some extent antithetical to those embodied in the course's core values themselves. The question then becomes whether such tensions become debilitating and ultimately intolerable, or whether they can be creatively worked with and transformed into a learning and professional-development milieu which is sufficiently congruent with the core values and ethos of the course or training itself.

It would be inappropriate for me to go into any detail about the outcome and findings of the Periodic Review process at Plymouth. But I can say, first, that the experience enabled the panel to look very closely indeed at Plymouth's two Steiner Waldorf courses working in collaboration with the SWSF – the Steiner Education BA and the Early Childhood Foundation degree; that the high quality and the innovative nature of those courses, and the commitment of the staff, shone through; and finally and perhaps most important, that the course leaders do seem to have found creative ways of working within the Academy which stays true to Steinerean philosophy and praxis. That this has been possible to achieve at Plymouth surely speaks volumes about the progressive and open-minded attitude of both the Education faculty itself, and of the university authority more generally.

RICHARD HOUSE – ROEHAMPTON UNIVERSITY AND NORWICH STEINER SCHOOL

The Tobias project in Kings Langley

It is now nearly two years ago that the learning support department went to the College of Teachers at the Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley to bring their final proposal of a class for children with specific learning difficulties. The proposal was the result of discussions between a group of learning support teachers, class teachers, kindergarten teachers and school doctors around the question of how we could improve our provision for children who through problems of a dyslexic or dyspraxic nature, seemed unable to develop their skills from our regular Waldorf curriculum.

The college courageously agreed to a pilot scheme of two years. It was a tentative beginning with only four pupils. Now, nearly two years later, the class is working at its full capacity with 12 pupils, some from inside our school others new to the school.

When we started it was not quite clear whether the class would be a permanent second stream in the school or whether pupils could dip in and out of the project. This was one of the questions the initial study group had wrestled with. Progress of the pupils in the Tobias class was considerable. Not only did their academic skills improve, but also their general wellbeing and self esteem. Within months we heard comments such as; "He has more colour in his face." "He seems more confident when meeting new people." "People are commenting my daughter seems a different person"

It became clear that it would not be right to keep the pupils in the Tobias class indefinitely in a separate stream and that (re-)integration would need to be discussed. After discussion with the class 2, 3 and 4 class teachers we took the following decision. The Tobias class would run as a specialist class alongside

classes 4 and 5. Pupils from classes 4 or 5 would be part of the Tobias class for a number of terms (3 to 4 was envisaged) before re-integrating into their old classes. New pupils applying for places in classes 4 or 5 often come to our school with a history of learning difficulties and we can now take those pupils initially into the Tobias class before letting them join our larger classes.

Pupils are suggested for the Tobias class after discussions between the relevant class teachers and the learning support department. Those pupils will have had an individual assessment following the normal whole class observation. Only pupils with difficulties in the areas of reading, writing and maths will be taken into the class. Experience has taught us that the smaller class setting is not necessarily good for pupils who struggle with behavioural issues

The daily rhythm in the class is like any other Waldorf class with main lesson and subject lessons. In our morning routine we do movement work that is aimed to help with issues such as dominance, reflexes and coordination difficulties. We have three maths and three English subject lessons as well as longer maths and English main lesson blocks then one would find in a traditional Waldorf class. The teaching is geared to children with difficulties of a dyslexic, dyspraxic or dyscalculic nature and the children are taught how to use their newly acquired skills in other main lessons; history, man and animal, plants, geography etc. This gives us a way of making sure the children transfer their skills to other subjects and other teaching situations, something that was often not happening when they received individual sessions once or twice a week in the learning support department. To balance the more academic

emphasis we aim to do regular craft and outside activities. We do circus skills and go horse riding once a week. For music, gym and crafts the class joins other larger classes.

The class teacher, school doctor, curative eurythmist, movement therapist and Hauschka massage therapist meet regularly to decide on a therapeutic programme for each pupil and generally pupils will have one or two terms where they receive one therapy session per week.

The whole school was very welcoming towards this new initiative. There were few incidents of teasing and many children dropped in to have a look. The project is still in its pilot stage and will be reviewed in the summer term 07. Generally comments are very positive and I hope we will be able to continue to provide this level of support to the pupils in our school.

NICKY TEENSMAN – TOBIAS CLASS TEACHER



Picture: Tobias Class – Kings Langley

Whose work is music education?

We have always had a problem with music teaching at St Paul's. We have had wonderful kindergarten and class teachers full of enthusiasm for music teaching and with deep understanding of Waldorf pedagogy but who have lacked musical expertise and confidence and/or we have had great musicians and composers, with some experience teaching children, but lacking understanding of Waldorf pedagogy work.

In teaching art, we look meticulously at the developing child and build very slowly skills, appreciation and understanding of colour and form. As a product of this early work in the later years, we have classes full of children who joyfully and skilfully express themselves through painting and modelling. The whole group, even given their differing abilities, have means to collectively express the human capacity to draw paint and model.

In music, by contrast, the class usually has no such experience. The innate musicality of every child is not developed and classes mature into at least two groups – those who have private instrumental and singing lessons at home and those who don't. Neither the curriculum, nor our timetables help the development of musical skills, which need

daily practise rather than a weekly subject lesson. Why, we ask ourselves, does music teaching feel so random? Even those amongst us who have had a three year full time teacher training still feel ill equipped to really meet the musical sense of the children where they are.

It was therefore with a great sense of anticipation and relief that ten of our teaching staff attended the Tonalis Music Education or Singing Child week long workshops. There we were relieved to discover that there exists an anthroposophical music education curriculum which is taught right now in Europe. We were impressed by the absolute importance of the teacher's voice. The larynx, we discovered, is an imitative organ. Our children learn to speak and sing from the way we talk and sing. We had inspiring insights into how to work with adolescent boys as their vocal chords develop and the relevance of traditional world music as part of the pedagogy for this age, we used instruments designed to foster musicality developed out of understanding of the development of the child's hearing sense. We discussed a vision for a new way of teaching music with the school having a music co-ordinator, fully trained in music pedagogy, who

can work with class and kindergarten teachers developing their musicality and helping them in their work with the children. The music co-ordinator could then take main lesson type blocks with each class working deeply into musical development which the class teacher can consolidate during rhythmic times. For this reason we are really pleased to be co-promoting the new year long Tonalis course training class teachers and music coordinators so that at last music can cease to be a problem and take its true place in our pedagogy.

GYDA JONSDOTTIR AND JANE GERHARD – ST PAUL'S STEINER SCHOOL

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