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

In his new book Living Literacy: The human foundations of speaking, writing and reading, teacher and teacher trainer, Michael Rose, draws a hammer on a chalkboard to illustrate the universal nature of the human mind reaching to the boundaries of the world. He writes, "If we do not begin by laying proper foundations, we can never have a building that people will appreciate and in which they will develop a genuine love of reading and further their own intellectual and emotional development.

Weighing in at 600 pages, this is not a quick read but it is a read that will engage teachers, parents, teachers, teacher trainers and all who work closely with children. It is a read that will challenge everyone to think about how they teach and learn. It is a read that will challenge everyone to reflect on what they have been teaching so far and how they can improve.

The central argument is "that literacy should be considered a living and breathing process that happens, to try and establish what really is happening and at what can and might happen in all areas of life, including and especially school – then we are faced with the human mind reaching to the boundaries of the world."

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 child’s transition from instinctive to early language acquisition, in particular through curiosity, story-telling, games, rhymes, and songs. The focus is on growing the child's unique identity by finding their own way to communicate.

There is also a call to think about the children’s learning differences and different teaching responses to these, “of the needs of each child,” and the importance of helping to tighten up these, of different concepts which are all needed in literacy. He also encourages us to understand 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 political communication in particular.

Wendy Martin, founder of The Nourishing School: "This is a book that will challenge everyone to think about how they teach and learn. It is a book that will challenge everyone to reflect on what they have been teaching so far and how they can improve."

The book is a must-read for anyone looking for information in this area. You will not be disappointed.

SWSF 2007 Easter Conference

After a week of dusting, sweeping and polishing in preparation for the Easter weekend, I felt ready for a holiday! Instead, I found myself welcoming some of the 100 plus participants who had come from all over the country to discuss and learn about "The Millennium Child: Tiredness and grumpiness were soon replaced with a genuine warmth and enthusiasm and an excitement at coming together. In many ways, the mood of the whole conference was set by the daily school service and eurythmy excitement at the beginning of the year. The women, the men, the children, the teachers and the artists, the theatre, the music, the art, and nature. Most encouraging of all, we ran out of chairs at Christopher’s talk on the Alliances of Childhood.

Workshops gave me a timely opportunity for work on myself as an individual and teacher. Everyone has been full of creativity and a moment to pause and reflect. After a busy end to term, everyone has been able to come together inwards as well as outwardly, and to make a new relationship with a verse I had struggled with. I found myself engaged in a different way with the text, the themes and the music, and noticing a deepening love for the work that we do and the children we work with.

STEINER WALDORF SCHOOLS FELLOWSHIP (The Association of Steiner Waldorf Schools in the UK and Ireland) Registered Office: Kallewes Park, Forest Row, Sussex RH18 5JA. Tel 01342 822115 Fax: 01342 826004 www.steinerwaldorfs.org.uk info@swsf.uk.net Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship Ltd. Produced by Christopher Clouder.

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**The Alliance for Childhood UK Forum**

In March the Alliance for Childhood created a seminar for prominent UK academics, presenters at the Centre for Early Learning in Whitechapel. This was prompted by the publication of the UNICEF report on the pace of progress of the top 22 richest nations in the world showing Britain and the USA joint last. What is happening in this country? A key question which brought a prompt response from around 35 attendees, who were able to air their concerns and many others who would have been there were it not for prior commitments. Since the November 2006 publication of 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 uncomfortable truths. Illnesses or difficulties experienced by children through today’s culture: identity, attention disorders, junk food, television, computer, childcare, family fragmentation. What is to be done about it? Joanne Almon from the USA, co-founder of the Alliance with Christopher Clouder and Sally Jenkinson, was able to share her experience of educating the world and has seen changes: taking place in children since the 70s. There is an increase in ailments, 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 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; now less than one in ten. This suggests that in the UK the ‘home habitat’ for eight-year-old children – the area they can roam around on their own - has shrunk to one in 20. This is a significant area - if we can be sure about the size - and it is a concern about why there has been so much resistance locally to the academy and to addressing the problems we have identified. It is a matter of concern that the local resistance seems to revolve around traffic flow. Much Dewalden is intersected by a busy road that is used by very heavy lorries and in many respects the school traffic will become the focus for the wider problem. The intention is to work with the Highways Authority to introduce a 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 20th June all going well, there is still a small chance that the academy will open - albeit in the smaller building – as planned from the school year beginning September 2007.

St Paul’s Steiner School is hoping to publish its proposals soon to the planning committee. The school under the new guidance attached to the Education and Inspections Act 2006. This guidance comes into force at the end of May. However, these proposals cannot be published until the new planning rules are made. The DEE 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 is about to be forthcoming in the next few weeks.

Your school should have received a copy of the Moving Forward seminar on 27 June in London. In the morning the Commissioner for Schools, Bob Eddleston, introduced by Peter Tatchell recently appointed by the Secretary of State as the Commissioner for Schools, should be visiting your school. He will address the question: in what ways will the reforms implied by the Education and Inspections Act 2006 affect the role of the School Commissioner. Help your Steiner school to overcome the difficulties that can arise when Steiner school’s progress towards joining the maintained sector? After lunch, there will be an update on the Steiner School network. Alan Swettmore, School Organisation Team, DEE will talk about the implementation. The School’s support team, both involved with the Steiner project, speak about making proposals to become a maintained Steiner school and the curriculum matters. It will be a very relevant day for delegates from schools interested in maintaining status as well as new Steiner schools. **STYVE SKILN – SSVE**

**The Plymouth Review Periodic Review**

I was recently invited to be an ‘external reviewer’ on the Plymouth Review Periodic Review of the Education Faculty’s 2007 Periodic Review. I have 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 their pioneering work at first hand.

I have had growing concerns over recent years about the cultural fate of the modern university and of the trend towards creating knowledge specialisation and ‘commodification’ of learning. The direction being set by current 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 at Plymouth. But to say first, that the experience enabled the panel to look very closely indeed at Plymouth’s two Steiner Education BA and Early Childhood Foundation degree; that the high quality and innovatively sustained research and teaching courses, and the commitment of the staff, shines through with evident pride, is not to demean the fine work we have done. It is important, that the course leaders do seem to have found creative ways of working within the Academy which stays true to Steiner’s philosophy and praxis. That this has been possible to achieve at Plymouth surely speaks volumes about the pro-active and open-minded attitude of both the Education faculty itself, and of the university as a whole. **RICHARD HOUSE – ROXHAM AND NORWICH STEINER SCHOOL**

**The Tobias project in Kings Langley**

It is now nearly two years ago that the two headteachers of the school, who work together, approached this College of Teachers at the Rudolf Steiner School Kings Langley to bring their final proposal for a community-based school, for pupils of primary, secondary and older ages, to be looked at by the local education authority in the inspection process. It was in early 2007 that the suggestion was made to provide additional Steiner primary classes for those pupils who would otherwise be coming into the regular Waldorf curriculum. The polygonally courageous agreed to pilot a Steiner classroom for two years. It is now three years, our school having begun with only four pupils. Now, nearly two years later, the class is working at its full capacity of 12 pupils, being taught within our school, together with other classes.

When we started it was not quite clear whether this would be a permanent Steiner education project or a temporary learning support project. 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 lessons and English main lesson blocks then one would find in a traditional Waldorf class. The old building was geared to children with difficulties of a dyslexic, dyspraxic or dyscalculic nature and the children are taught how to manage with the help of a different approach. There is 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 in 20. This is a significant area - if we can be sure about the size - and it is a concern about why there has been so much resistance locally to the academy and to addressing the problems we have identified. It is a matter of concern that the local resistance seems to revolve around traffic flow. Much Dewalden is intersected by a busy road that is used by very heavy lorries and in many respects the school traffic will become the focus for the wider problem. The intention is to work with the Highways Authority to introduce a 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 20th June all going well, there is still a small chance that the academy will open - albeit in the smaller building – as planned from the school year beginning September 2007.

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**Whose work is music education?**

W e have all had a problem with a weekly subject - music teaching at St Paul’s. We have had wandering kinder or world music groups which made a lot of enthusiasm for music teaching and with deep understanding of Waldorf pedagogy but who had no real understanding of the curriculum and/or we have had great musicians and composers, with some experience teaching primary children, but lacking understanding of Waldorf pedagogy work. In today’s world, we look meticulously at the developing child and build very small skills, appreciation and understanding of colour and form and develop a ‘powerful intonation’ in the first years, we have classes full of children who have not received full expression in painting and modelling. The whole group, even their giving different abilities, has means to measure. They can measure their human capacity to draw and paint model. In music, by contrast, the class usually has no understanding of the ‘life’ of the larynx, we discovered, is an imitative organ. Our absolute importance of the teacher’s voice. The right now in Europe. We were impressed by the absolute understanding of the teacher’s voice and take its true place in our pedagogy. So that at last music can cease to be a problem and take its true place in our pedagogy. **GYDA JANSDOTTIR and JANE GERARD – ST PAUL’S STEINER SCHOOL**

**The Advancing Failure of Children – A New Multidisciplinary Foundation Training for Teachers in Music and Movement Education**

Nursery Nurses’ Conference. Stourbridge – Thursday 26th February 2009. The key to our development is that children can only learn to learn when they are full of energy and well-being, when they are ready to learn, when they are happy. Afternoon: Music and Movement, Children’s Movement with Haushalts massage therapist meet regularly to decide and develop the curriculum. Support to our pupils 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 all children dropped in to have a look. The project is still in its pilot stage and will be reviewed in the summer term. Children’s movement programme is very positive and I hope we will be able to continue to provide this level of support to the pupils.

**NICKY TEESEMA – TOBAS CLASS TEACHER**

**Picture: Tobias Class – Kings Langley**