BALAMITRA SCHOOL, INDIA

The Balamitra Model School in Sagar Nagar is a Waldorf-inspired school that acts as a model for 40 other schools that lie scattered around the province of Visakhapatnam, in Andhra Pradesh. These schools are offering an education for the children which takes into account their cultural origins. As most of their parents are farmers, their contact to nature is close.

Two Waldorf Education student teachers, Anna from Plymouth University and Freya from Bristol, visited for six weeks of voluntary work with the children and the teachers, as part of their teaching practice. Together with a qualified teacher, Anna Steilmacher from Germany, the idea arose to perform a play out of the Mythology which the children had been studying. Children and teachers chose "Pandora’s Box" which was performed in November.

Further information about the school can be found at www.balamitra.org

BHAMU KALLURI - BALAMITRA SCHOOL, INDIA

CHILD’S PLAY; how we risk giving our children everything except the freedom to play.

I was with the words of Maxim Gorki that Christopher Clouter opened the first Alliance for Childhood event in Scotland, at the Scottish Parliament on 23rd April.

After music and singing from the pupils of Edinburgh Rudolf Steiner school, Christopher went on to tell the audience of politicians, policy-makers, academics, teachers and play-workers how vital play is for fostering imagination and creativity as well as the ability to relate to ourselves, others and the world around us.

Sue Palmer, tireless campaigner and author of ‘Toxic Childhood’ shocked us with facts on screen saturation and the power that commercial forces and marketing have gained over children and childhood and the lightning changes that the digital age are bringing. In 2008, the average screen time for children in the UK was five hours 20 minutes each day. This year that has increased to six hours.

We heard from Marguerite Hunter Blair, chief executive of Play Scotland, about their work to ensure that play is firmly embedded in the national Early Years Framework as well as in the wider policy areas governing things such as planning and health. Green MSP Robin Harper, convenor of the Scottish Parliament cross party group on children and young people supported the event by placing a motion in Parliament congratulating the Alliance for Childhood on its first event in Scotland and calling for a review of planning policy in Scotland to ensure that play is fully taken into account.

Organised by the Scottish Association for Steiner Waldorf Education, the Child’s Play event also happened to coincide with the launch of the Scottish Government’s year-long, nation-wide debate on play and risk, which will further explore how we risk giving our children everything except the freedom to play.

LIZ MURRAY - EDINBURGH RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL.

Also in this issue...
- Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship
- UK Parent Network Meeting
- Training Project in Liberia
- Balamitra School, India

STEINER WALDORF SCHOOLS FELLOWSHIP [The Association of Steiner Waldorf Schools in the UK and Ireland]
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ASSOCIATE ADVISERS

The Steiner Waldorf Advisory Service welcomes its first three Associate Advisers: Andy Phelps, Gabriel Kaye and Jonathan Wolf-Phillips. Associate Advisers offer non-pedagogical support in areas such as administration, regulation and governance. Arrangements for Associate Advisers would normally be negotiated individually between the school and the Associate, as for classroom practice, though they would normally meet the costs involved from their own budgets.

I do wish other parents from our school had been able to attend. It was a lovely day and an ideal freely open environment for whatever was on your mind... and maybe contribute with some answers. Of course, I also had my own private thoughts to take along, of some which I will share here. There were around 21 attendees in all and Christopher Clouder from the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship joined us. Canterbury, Cambridge, Greenwich, North Yorkshire, North London, St Paul's, Bristol, Kings Langley and Michael Hall all had representatives from their parent body attend. Representatives introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their school. The themes of the ‘small, struggling’ schools became apparent and the shared issues of lack of money, too little parental involvement, lack of communication between the schools/teachers and the parent group was brought into discussion, with examples of the contrary giving us great encouragement.

The Steiner Waldorf Academic Service, welcoming its first three Associate Advisers: Andy Phelps, Gabriel Kaye and Jonathan Wolf-Phillips. Associate Advisers offer non-pedagogical support in areas such as administration, regulation and governance. Arrangements for Associate Advisers would normally be negotiated individually between the school and the Associate, as for classroom practice, though they would normally meet the costs involved from their own budgets.

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The project is new and is therefore possible to cover part or all of the costs. There are many anthroposophically orientated and other types of consultancy offering support to schools and settings. Staff and Trustees may make their choice as to those with whom they wish to work. Associate Advisers, however, have signed up to the SWAS Code* and by working closely with our pedagogical advisers will be able to offer services that are tailored and integrated to the needs of our complex organisations. More detailed information is available from the SWAS co-ordinator, or in broad terms Associates Advisers offer the following:

- ANGELA PHIFFS - Offered advice and advice on matters of behaviour management and safeguarding.
- GABRIEL KAYE - All areas of school administration and marketing.
- JONATHAN WOLF-PHILLIPS - Governance, Associative Leadership (including student associations) and individual time-management skills training.
- KEVIN AYISON - SWSF
  * See www.sternewaldorf.org.uk

WE SHARE A LETTER FROM HEREFORD SIXTH FORM COLLEGE...

I felt that I should just write and say what an absolute pleasure it was for the three of us to meet your students last Friday during their progression interviews for Hereford Sixth Form College.

All the applicants, without fail, were articulate, thoughtful, inquisitive - and eager to make the most of their individual time with us. As I said to you in passing as I rushed off at the end of the afternoon - I don't quite know what you do to them... but the output is certainly pretty amazing! You must be very proud of those young people.

The most impressive feature was the reference which Carol and Karin had written for each student. Year on year, your references are some of the most insightful we have received.

I attended the inaugural UK Parent Network Conference and Research Day at Michael Hall school in Forest Row.

I do wish other parents from our school had been able to attend. It was a lovely day and an ideal freely open environment for whatever was on your mind... and maybe contribute with some answers. Of course, I also had my own private thoughts to take along, of some which I will share here. There were around 21 attendees in all and Christopher Clouder from the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship joined us. Canterbury, Cambridge, Greenwich, North Yorkshire, North London, St Paul’s, Bristol, Kings Langley and Michael Hall all had representatives from their parent body attend. Representatives introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their school. The themes of the ‘small, struggling’ schools became apparent and the shared issues of lack of money, too little parental involvement, lack of communication between the schools/teachers and the parent group was brought into discussion, with examples of the contrary giving us great encouragement.

One view presented was “Parents often get more involved (too involved?) because the ‘school’ is not clear enough. Parents can seek contacts because the ‘school’ isn’t clear enough. So they seek to clarify and initiate change where it ‘may’ not even be needed, simply because the original vision and purpose of the school had not been better communicated at the beginning of the parent’s relationship with it.” I have had a personal experience of this where our school had a chance to become a free school. At that time a curriculum issue has led me to doubt our teaching methods’ efficacy... then upon attending one of our school-based courses I have found my doubts to be unfounded and actually the concerning point has been clearly explained and presented. To me, this has just reinforced my need to make a personal commitment with teachers to keep up to date with our pedagogy whenever possible. I would however, enjoy an opportunity to discuss this on a wider basis, maybe a D & E. A evening, or maybe this is the remit of the regular Parent’s Evenings. However, if I have a question on a wider-based issue or a question on the ‘middle school’ years an opportunity to enter into respectful and logical discussion on these and other matters would certainly be welcomed by me.

Christopher Clouder gave a wonderfully inspiring talk on the ‘nature’ of school. Linking it to a river, with its main currents and branches, it is constantly being created by those involved in it. Its environment ‘enters’ it... local stones, minerals, rain, plants and animals all add to its identity. And like a river, a school is constantly being created by those involved in it, even by those who ‘don’t appear’ to participate at all.

Therefore, with this metaphorical river we were able to start a very open discussion of the nature of our current environment, i.e. the 21st century and how many factors from our age are now penetrating the walls of our schools. Some welcome and others not so. As part of the evening’s programme and whether there was room to initiate other valuable interactions and debates about education and the 21st century child. Could we look outside and further on from Steiner’s foundation and engage other benefactors into our schools to help our movement flourish and benefit others? The Steiner Academy Hereford was discussed and where it seems the government will, in the future, require more adherence to National Curriculum initiatives it was felt that a good relationship was being formed within leading educational think tanks. There will be a time when Waldorf Education will help influence the educational systems that they are exposing. Waldorf educationalists who influence policy through their publications (IOED - Innovating to Open Educational Domains) are actually the experts of explaining the virtues of Waldorf education as a pioneering alternative to the mainstream, and to what extent that can happen.

So we’re part of a larger movement, working to improve the educational experience of all children. “Many of the corrosive aspects of life have their genesis in the quality of childhood we experience... bringing about the need to change the reality of childhood” Is our school part of this? Do we want to be? It was acknowledged that parenting today is very different to that of 20 years ago and we face huge difficulties in being able to maintain our children’s Steiner education. Pioneering or not, this can often put a very great strain on individual parents and their wider families. We need to work together with our teachers to create new avenues of learning and even in some cases a few schools are pioneering new curriculum initiatives to reflect their modern surroundings.

In working with and supporting our teachers we can allow more movement and more appropriate, organic change, through trust and hope-filled activities. By teachers supporting and working to understand the double bind held by parents we can meet in the middle and find solutions, moving from conflict to creativity.

As Jeremy Smith from Kings Langley said on being a ‘Waldorf parent’. ‘Congratulations. It takes courage and a strong sense of will to be a Waldorf parent. To help create free individuals, unhindered by governmental interference, to create a society of free young adults.” It also takes a strong sense of purpose and big heart to become a Waldorf teacher, so lets look after one another.

Where do we stand in the world? How do we serve the children born into the 21st century? Do ‘I’ want to be part of this? I was left with these questions to ponder.

I recommend most highly that others try and attend the next meeting (September details to follow) where we can explore the value of which is closer to the nature of school.wondering on the brink of great change we have a (potentially) once in a lifetime opportunity to create the blueprint of a truly exceptional educational environment. Yes, this poses us great questions and will require fortitude and endurance and yes, just getting the Summer Fair on is a feat in itself, but this is our chance."

I still have very many questions and I look forward to finding the answers, hopefully here at the Waldorf School of South West London."

PARENT, WALDORF SCHOOL OF SOUTH WEST LONDON.