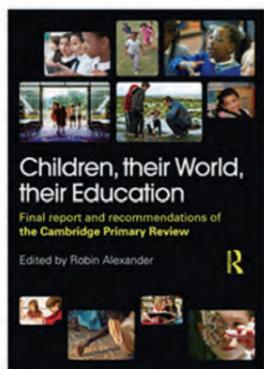


THE CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW IN THE FLESH – WHAT DOES IT ADD UP TO: What does it mean for Waldorf education?

Readers of this newsletter will recall the press release we included in our autumn issue. That set out our general response to media reporting of the Review and reactions to it. Since then we have had contacts with some of the authors of the report and I attended one of the around a dozen dissemination events for Head Teachers, LA representatives and those from other educational organisations.



It is one of the small tragedies of modern political life that a research study with 14 contributing authors, involving nearly 3500 researchers drawing on more than 4000 published sources and witness sessions that were part of nine "community soundings" around the country; that produced 31 interim reports and a final summary of nearly 600 pages, could be dismissed on the day of publication by the Department for Children Families and Schools with one side of A4 paper. Such behaviour suggests that the government's use of the phrase "evidence-based policy" really means, "The evidence that confirms doing exactly what we were already planning to do". Unsurprisingly, some of the recommendations of the "independent" Rose Review funded and tightly circumscribed by the Department, are being rushed into law as we speak.

Predictably, CPR's findings do have a great deal of support among educators. At the meeting I attended (mostly Heads and education officials from the south west) there was a strong consensus of agreement with it and one Head Teacher spoke passionately about her children and the work her teachers were doing, "We simply need to stand up for education and refuse to accept half-baked initiatives". As one so often finds at events of this sort, a large number of delegates knew something about

Waldorf education and are positive towards it. It is humbling to acknowledge that "mainstream professionals" are by no means shop stewards for the status quo; children, concern for them and the challenges they present us with are rarely far from their thoughts.

It is right that such occasions also invite questions about our own practice and principles. Although the review is concerned solely with primary education, many of its perspectives also apply to our "all age schools", for example:

- While we have welcomed the recommendation for a debate about the Early Years' Foundation Stage and the idea of extending this upwards into the first year of Primary education, in line with recent reforms in Wales, what other implications would there be if this were implemented?
- In particular, if formal school age was raised to age six, in line with Steiner's suggestion that the seventh year is the appropriate one developmentally, how would SWSF schools respond? In the light of this, could schools bring the current variable notions of "Class One readiness" into a more unified approach: on the one hand, consciously preparing the foundations for school readiness and on the other, becoming clearer that what happens in Class One builds on those foundations by enhancing and then applying that readiness to a directed learning that is thorough, not delayed, (i.e. optimising development, not waiting for it to happen)?
- The report questions the suitability of the "Victorian model" of the generalist Class Teacher. In spite of the introduction of ICT specialists (in particular) and Learning Assistants, most Primary schools continue to arrange their timetables around Year Group teachers. The Waldorf model rests upon the principle that the relationship between teacher, the adult authority, and each developing young person, is the core process between the seventh and fourteenth years, a fundamental that humanises and provides an effective learning model for the children. Nonetheless, we should always be prepared to see that essential principles can be expressed in more than one way. Could schools, and especially smaller ones, make

better use of the expertise within the whole teaching group without losing the principle intention? Could there be more cross-over between teachers, especially in the later stages of class teaching? Given the different expectations and the complicated world our young people will have to work within, do we need to think about integrating specialist teachers into the timetable earlier than has been usual?

- Following on, from that point, but widening it to the school community, could we ask ourselves the same question put in the report, viz., could we make better uses of the resources we have?
- Can we learn from what the report has to say about the need to enhance the ability of teachers, through initial training and continuous professional development to work with and support diversity, positive differentiation and equality of value in the classroom?
- How do we ensure that young people are at all stages encouraged to be active learners, rather than recipients of educational delivery?
- Could we accept the humane and thoughtful set of aims set out in the review and add to them a practicality with regard to "spiritual values", something the authors see as central to Primary education, but about which they have little to say?
- Can Waldorf schools work together to share good practice in designing coherent and effective, movement-wide, processes for evaluation for learning and assessment?

In the larger scheme of things, it is clear that the analysis I offered in my essay on the English inspection system (published by CIVITAS, Inspection, Inspection, Inspection!) is widely shared. Without some change here, schools will continue to be gripped by the consequences of a problem the review puts succinctly and directly, "...politicisation of primary education has also gone too far". I offer this, briefest of summaries, as a stimulus to further discussion and, I hope, good work.

KEVIN AVISON -
STEINER WALDORF ADVISORY SERVICE

Newsletter

SPRING 2010



NATIONAL EARLY YEARS – Conference and meeting with IASWECE

"It is always great to get together and meet old friends and make new ones, to share our work and to find new inspiration."

This was a very special occasion for the National Steiner Waldorf Early Years Group (SWEYG). Our annual conference in October 2009 was attended by IASWECE (The International Association of Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education and Care) who came to England at the invitation of Janni Nicol, who is the UK representative and board member of IASWECE council, for their autumn meeting. The IASWECE delegates were staying at Gaunts House and came over to Ringwood Waldorf School for the day conference. Dinner and an evening ceilidh was arranged to give them a treat and a break from their work. There were 32 people from around the world including Australia, America, Brazil, Israel, Africa, Russia, Ukraine and Europe. Early Childhood workers came from all over the country for the day and some stayed for the evening. It is always great to get together and meet old friends and make new ones, to share our work and to find new inspiration.

The theme for the conference was 'Moving

with Soul' and the speaker was Renate Long-Breipohl from Australia who inspired us all with her opening lecture. After lunch, organised by our masterful Community Group, there were workshops on the theme, and the afternoon was rounded off by a lively plenum.

For many of us the most moving moment of the day was when the IASWECE representatives stood up in a long line across the front of the hall. We had read articles about the work of IASWECE but this was the first time we had seen them standing together in this way. It was a moment of connection with the men and women all around the world working with and on behalf of young children in Steiner Waldorf early childhood.

At the end of the conference, and when many people had said goodbye, the IASWECE council met the UK National Group (SWEYG). We were able to share with them the challenges and joys of early childhood in the UK.

While we were meeting, the hall was being transformed. We walked out into the 'restaurant' with fairy lights, beautifully laid tables and soft harp music!

It was a good opportunity for us all to try out other languages in our conversations, but how lucky we are that most people speak English so well!

After the marvellous meal there was dancing. It was a lovely way to end the day.

What Ringwood Waldorf School provided by hosting this conference, and helping with the organisation of the IASWECE visit, was truly a gift for the worldwide community of Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education.

JULIE NEWNHAM -
KINDERGARTEN TEACHER AND
REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE
RINGWOOD WALDORF SCHOOL

On behalf of SWEYG, IASWECE, and the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, thank you Ringwood Waldorf School for making this a very special occasion.

Janni Nicol, SWSF Early Childhood and IASWECE Representative.

For further information on the work of IASWECE, see www.iaswece.org



Picture: IASWECE participants

ELIANT

One of the provisions within the newly ratified Lisbon treaty is that one million European citizens from a "significant number" of countries will be able to ask the European Commission to put forward new draft laws in areas where it has competences. This citizens' initiative was inserted in order to bring about more direct democracy into the EU because of the democratic deficit that is plainly visible. It enables issues to be put on the agenda but does not actually oblige the Commission to do anything. However, it is a step towards creating a democratic debate that crosses borders and could influence future policies. How such initiatives will work in practice is still a matter of debate and negotiation. Fortunately, ELIANT, as one of the first of such initiatives and because it is on the

verge of gaining the required million signatures from EU citizens, is in a position to participate in the consultation and has made proposals at the invitation of the Commission regarding how these possibilities will be implemented in the future. The present number of such signatures as of 4/02/2010 is 907,412 so with only 92,588 to go our target will be reached.

ELIANT www.eliand.eu is an alliance of ten European associations working with applied anthroposophy in the fields of agriculture, medicine, health, mainstream and special needs education. The European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education is the member that represents the 650 European Steiner Waldorf schools in 23 countries. ELIANT calls for a legal framework in Europe which acknowledges and supports the citizen's rights for a diversity of lifestyle and

cultural choices within the areas it represents. Although the Commission's competences within the matters concerning of education are limited, compared to say agriculture and medicine, sharing a platform with our colleagues gives us a stronger voice and enables our schools to be more readily taken into account in forthcoming debates and consultations. If you have not signed up yet and also believe that the EU needs a human face that provides for the dignity of its citizens, respects fundamental rights and freedoms, and protects its minorities, then please sign up on the website. We have made excellent progress and already notice that we are taken more seriously in EU matters, so the sooner we achieve that million the better.

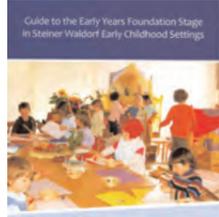
CHRISTOPHER CLOUDER -
ECSWE

THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE IN STEINER WALDORF EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS

Although this new guidance was initiated by ex Children's Minister Beverley Hughes in order to help both those familiar with the Steiner Waldorf approach (Steiner practitioners, parents etc) and those who are not familiar, but are now working with Steiner Schools since the introduction of the EYFS (Local Authorities, Inspectors etc) to understand how the EYFS can be interpreted within the Steiner early childhood approach to education and care. National Strategies and the DCSF were involved in seeing it through to publication. It offers the Steiner perspective on all aspects of the EYFS Principles, themes and commitments, as well as on those Learning

and Development requirements which are compatible with the Steiner framework.

Great care was taken in developing this booklet to minimise any compromise to the well known and highly respected Steiner Waldorf curriculum, and it makes clear those areas in which it is recommended that the Steiner kindergartens apply for exemptions, such as ICT and programmable toys (Steiner kindergartens use what is termed 'warm' hands on technology), and the early introduction of formal literacy and numeracy. (Children enter into



FREE Copies may be ordered (postage only to be paid) from the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship, info@swsf.org.uk and more information as well as a downloadable version can be found on www.steinerwaldorf.org.uk in the early years section.

MEETING THE CHILD – Approaches to Observation and Assessment in Steiner Kindergartens

A report by Mary Jane Drummond and Sally Jenkinson with the Faculty of Education, University of Plymouth and the Steiner Waldorf Early Years Research Group.



contains challenging insights into the practice of observation and assessment, and will make stimulating reading for anyone with an interest in early childhood.

For more information, please contact Janni Nicol jannisteiner@swsf.org.uk Tel 01223 890988

For publication information and prices please contact SWSF Publications: Tel: 01342 825005

Email: publications@steinerwaldorf.org or online from www.steinerwaldorf.org.uk

JANNI NICOL – SWSF

AT THE HEART OF TEACHING – A full-time inservice teacher training at Michael Hall

Now in its third year, "At the Heart of Teaching" has six student teachers, all of whom have previous teaching qualifications or experience, plus colleagues coming and going to study sessions according to their respective CPD needs. Two graduates from the first two years are now employed at Michael Hall (though that is neither guaranteed on joining the course nor a condition for participants), one as a class teacher and the other as a KG assistant.

Applications are currently arriving from people who have done a State or Steiner Waldorf teacher training and who now wish to gain experience in the classroom with a variety of age groups and subjects before going into full-time teaching.

One new and very welcome development is that a sister school, Kings Langley, is enabling one of our students to gain experience by following a block of practical/woodwork training.

Whilst it is undoubtedly a challenge for the teaching staff at Michael Hall to meet the training needs of the students in terms of reviews, previews, lesson planning etc, the benefits far outweigh the extra input in terms of help with duties, lesson cover, classroom assistance with individual pupils, not to mention steadily increasing mentoring skills in the collegiate body as a whole.

We could imagine a new role evolving in support of our sister schools, whereby colleagues employed elsewhere could be enabled to spend some time At the Heart of Teaching either to develop a new string to their bow or strengthen existing skills by working alongside other experienced practitioners.

WILLIAM FORWARD – MICHAEL HALL SCHOOL

formal education at age 6+ in a Steiner school).

It gives a clear explanation of Steiner practice, and makes clear the Steiner interpretation of a 'play based' education, and how Steiner practitioners support each child to develop at their own pace in an unhurried and nurturing environment.

EYFS EXEMPT Wynstones School achieves outstanding inspection report

Wynstones school was one of the first Steiner Waldorf schools in the country to be granted exemptions from some of the EYFS learning and development requirements and has been graded Outstanding in its inspection. Wynstones was inspected by the School Inspection Service, which inspects some independent schools, including those with Kindergartens and nurseries affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship.

The school had been granted exemptions from some of the communication, language and literacy and ICT early learning goals, and modifications to some others.

Teacher Ken Power said "We're relieved, happy and delighted about the report". He said the school had been very open with the inspectors that the teaching in the Kindergarten had not changed in any way to fit in with the EYFS.

The inspection report states:

"The outcomes of children in the kindergarten are outstanding within the context of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. In particular they enjoy their learning; they feel safe and are well aware of healthy lifestyles. Children make a good contribution to the Kindergarten; they are able to set out and tidy away materials and equipment and to support, look after and care for one another. They develop good skills for the future, especially in their social skills and their attitudes towards developing new ideas."

"Partnerships with parents and carers and the Kindergarten's engagement with them are outstanding. Parents commented extremely positively about the high regard which they have for the Kindergarten staff and their work, having chosen Wynstones for its approach to early years education. They have a detailed awareness of the workings and purposes of the provision and continue to fully support the applications to disapply and modify the EYFS."

KEN POWER – WYNSTONES SCHOOL

(Part of article taken from the Nursery World and part from the inspection report)

LOGGED OFF?

The South Devon Steiner School recruits its 'digital residents' to challenge the screen.

"Dear classes 9 and 10, to remain in our upper school you will have to commit to zero use of all screen technologies. No more TV, no more DVD's or cinema, no more social networking. Collect your contract from my desk and return it to the office by the start of next week. Any questions?"

They didn't buy it for a second. The nonsense of such a Screen Policy was obvious to all. Beyond a smirk, an 'in your dreams' and an amused curiosity these young people knew they were being set up for a discussion rather than being informed of the school's latest means of shooting itself in the foot. But they were ready for the argument and equally ready to share their concerns at how their lives are being colonised by a stunning array of screen technologies.

The debate that we are resuming with our older pupils is not new. Mary Winn's *The-Plug-In-Drug* was published in 1977. Jerry Mander in 1978, Martin Large in 1980 and more recently Aric Sigman's *Remotely Controlled* have given Steiner Waldorf teachers plenty of academic and populist back-up for endless parents' evenings on the subject of TV. Aric Sigman, one of the speakers at this year's Easter conference spoke in Devon last year and stirred anew the indignation, anxiety and sense of responsibility all parents and educators should be feeling as the three 'platforms': mobile phone, lap-top and TV fight it out for supremacy. In the South Devon Steiner School we are trying to tackle this old chestnut in a new way. Parents have asked for guidelines that will help them manage their children's exposure to screen time. We have taken the discussion and consultation to the older pupils. Interesting new perspectives emerge: 'It's too late for me' one pupil said,

'but I wouldn't want my little brother playing computer games at the age I did!' 'You can't keep us away from films and stuff' said another. Our class eight bemoaned the passing of books: 'We want a library' they said, more than they wanted Internet access. 'Energy use', said another, 'people need to know about data centres and the carbon footprint of the Internet.'

At the end of February the journalist/writer Carl Honore, author of *In Praise of Slow* and *Under Pressure* will be speaking to parents of the school in the evening and leading a discussion with upper school pupils the following day. Upper school assemblies and sponsor lessons provide another opportunity for the debate to be engaged. Academic research and common sense have long since supported our 'Low Screen Exposure' ethos but it is the thoughts of our techno-savvy teenagers that are informing the move towards a Screen Policy. More than anything else these young people want to take their place in the real world, both as digital residents and as free individuals. They are on the front line of a compromise and know it. If you are one of them and can take time out from Face Book, the latest film release or the addictive delights of YouTube and you would like to contribute your thoughts to the formulation of guidelines to help parents and children the Devon school would be delighted to hear from you. It is time to make a vigorous and up-to-date Steiner Waldorf contribution to one of the biggest issues of our time.

ALAN SWINDELL – SOUTH DEVON STEINER SCHOOL

Alan is writing as the Education Co-ordinator at the South Devon Steiner School. He also teaches on the Plymouth University Steiner Waldorf BA and will be joining the Steiner School's Fellowship Executive Group in September. alan.swindell@steiner-south-devon.org

REACHING FOR THE SKY

The latest addition to the site at the Steiner Academy in Much Dewchurch is a giant crane. A casual passer by would be forgiven for thinking that a major skyscraper was being built here. In fact the crane is to enable materials to be lifted into the area where the new hall is being built. Speller Matcalfe won the contract to build the hall and classroom extension and to refurbish existing buildings last October and they are rapidly transforming the old school site beyond recognition. New play areas seem to spring up overnight between the hoardings and break times are an affirmation of the creativity and adaptability of children! Their delight in playing doesn't seem to be in the least bit dampened by the

mud. It's the parents and the washing machines back home that have to cope with that!

It is remarkable that progress now is so rapid, especially after the many years of delays caused by the planning difficulties that this project had encountered. It is hard to believe that we can all look forward to these new facilities being ready by the end of this year.

SYLVIE SKLAN – STEINER WALDORF SCHOOLS FELLOWSHIP



Picture: Building work at Hereford

BOOK REVIEW

The Spoilt Generation by Dr Aric Sigman, Piatkus. London 2009

Many will know something of Aric Sigman's work and reputation. He is a widely travelled lecturer and pundit on matters to do with children and families. His previous book *Remotely Controlled*, explored the effects of TV and screen-based media. This one pinpoints what Sigman sees as a lack of authority in modern life and the effects this has on the development of children and society in general. It is not a message that makes comfortable reading, though it also provides some practical remedies.

Sigman writes with a rhetorical style that drives the writing forward, but there are rapid shifts from authoritative psychologist to opinionated columnist. In the latter mode, his research-base can sometimes seem less than convincing. He makes much of "speaking for the child", for the good of the child and there is no doubting the passion of his argument. At times that results in some wild swipes at the ills of the contemporary ways and laws, especially in support of the role and value of fathers.

Nonetheless, his message is an important one. This book has its heart in the right place. Many of our children today are adrift, lacking orientation in their path towards adulthood, bewildered by the mixed messages they receive from us, the adults who are responsible for them. In that sense, *The Spoilt Generation* is a useful corrective, especially to those who counter every concern about children today with a tired, all-embracing, "It was ever thus". It wasn't, it isn't. Aric Sigman provides plenty of food for thought.

KEVIN AVISON – STEINER WALDORF SCHOOLS FELLOWSHIP