

NEWS IN BRIEF

Friday 1st May 2009

Dates for your diary

Thursday 14th May – Summer Fayre planning meeting

Monday 20th May - Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Tuesday 2nd June – Open Steering Group meeting

Wednesday 10th June – Kindergarten parent's evening

Saturday 13th June – School Open day, 11am-3pm.

Wednesday 24th June – St John's festival

Saturday 4th July – Summer Fayre

Friday 10th July – end of term picnic

May Day Festival

By Jo Sawfoot

"I am standing

In a sacred way

At the Earth's centre

Beheld by the people

See the tribe

Gathered around me"

Song of the can-wakan - the sacred pole, from Sioux Sun Dance Festival

May day celebrations are always so welcome for both teachers and children. After the long gloomy winter months, and the inevitable outbreaks of contagious sniffles, we emerge, blinking, into the brilliant sunshine and spend a heartfelt week of prancing and cavorting in glorious chaos around our maypole. Recently reading an autobiography of a Sioux Indian medicine man (as research for class 2 lesson material), I came across the above quotation of a Sundance Festival song, and I was struck by the startling similarity of sentiment from American Indian culture to our humble May Day celebrations.

These indigenous celebrations of fertility and Earth's abundance are universally celebrated, often in ways which bear a family resemblance from one culture to another. It seems that the spontaneous celebration of the Sun's central place in our physical and spiritual existence is a universal impulse, and one from which the children derive much nourishment and satisfaction.

Of course there are great pedagogical benefits to the ceremonies with which we celebrate our universal

humanity at this time of year. The sheer technical mechanics of the Maypole dance involves the children in a rhythmic circular criss-crossing dance, taking the crucial elements of the form drawing exercises so beloved in the Steiner curriculum and bringing it right down into the feet, hands and bodies of the children, under a wide blue, spring sky. It is fascinating to observe how the curriculum of the different year groups is embodied in this simple festive dance. The Maypole is an enduring symbol of the Pagan reverence for concepts of the 'World Tree' – the magical tree which the tribal shaman would climb in order to achieve contact with the gods. This is the same tree which manifests for class 4 as Ydrassil – the tree from which Odin hangs for three days in order to win the sacred knowledge of the Runes. The Runes in turn form the symbolic basis for the magical letters which are the key to mankind's struggle towards literacy, and greater independence of consciousness – a struggle which is mirrored in the work of class 1, 2 and 3.

Class 4's response to the criss-crossing of the ribbons has been utterly characteristic of their total involvement in the form drawing curriculum element of Celtic knots. Their overwhelming impulse has not been to dance, but to stop and analyse the tangled mess at the top of the pole – trying to work out who went wrong where. Of course this fascination has greatly contributed to the increasing disorder which ensues!

Young class children who have trouble holding themselves in stillness, have a therapeutic chance to experience the utter stillness and stability of the Maypole, at the heart of the whirling wheel of hubbub. This stillness and stability harks back to the unrelenting steel of Michael's raised sword, which the children experience at Michaelmas – the wild fluttering ribbons reminiscent of the powerful astrality of the Michaelmas dragon. So there is a satisfying sense that these two colourful festivals at opposing points in the year partake of the same crucial energies – teaching the same simple lessons to our children in ways both enriching and fun. Enjoy your Maypole dancing this year – mindful of the fact the year's wheel is ever-turning and Michaelmas will be upon us in the blink of an eye.

Building the school 'gift economy'

By Noel Longhurst

Anyone who attended the recent governance workshop had a fascinating insight into how an 'ideal' Steiner Waldorf could operate. This year the Norwich Steiner School has entered a new phase of growth and development and it is going to take time for our structure to evolve. Indeed, we will probably never get 'there', as healthy organisations need to keep evolving and adapting as time and life moves on.

However, one important lesson from the workshop was that the ability of the school to survive and thrive is very much dependent on the support of parents, particularly their contributions of skill and time. Of course, there are many positive benefits of parental involvement, but the bottom line is that without their support the school simply does not have enough resources to function effectively. In other words, the reason that Steiner Waldorf schools in the UK are able to keep their fees lower than other non-state schools is because parents fill that 'gap' with their voluntary effort.

The issue of parental involvement was the topic of discussion at the last Open Steering Group. The basic questions that were discussed were:

- What is the right amount of input a parent should be expected to make on a voluntary basis?
- How do we encourage people to become more involved?
- Should we expect more of parents?
- What is the minimum we should expect parents to do?

There were three reasons that I asked for this item to be put on the agenda. The first is that the current expectation that the school puts on parents is lower than many other established Waldorf Schools. So the question arises, should we be asking for more? The second is that the fantastic new premises considerably raise the expectations that surround the school. It is therefore important that new and old parents understand that their help is needed if we are to meet those. Thirdly, the school has only got where it has today through an immense amount of hard work from parents and staff, many of whom have made considerable commitments to the school. However, if it is to continue to prosper and develop this weight needs to be carried more evenly and across a wider number of people.

The discussions at the meeting were the subject of a wide-ranging and interesting debate. Whilst there was broad agreement that we do need more support from

parents there was no firm agreement on exactly how much should be expected, so that question hangs in the air for the time being. However, there were some steps proposed to make it easier for parents to help out, based on the idea that often people don't know how best to help, or what exactly needs doing.

Therefore it was proposed that we should consider implementing the following ideas:

- Phone trees to facilitate better communication with parents. A phone tree works by parents passing on messages to the next person in the tree. Each class would have its own tree.
- Establishment of Class Representatives to help coordinate support from parents in that class, e.g. for workdays or special events. The Class Reps would also be the starting point for the phone trees.
- A higher fee for those who just want the education but no additional responsibility. This remains open to discussion.
- Support the development of more mandate groups with leaders, e.g. with responsibility for fundraising, gardening etc. Also, make it clearer what groups already exist, what they do and how to get involved. Over the coming years, the mandate groups will be required to take more responsibility for key areas of the school.
- Look at workdays, how they are run, organised and how we make it clear that it's an expectation that people need to help. For example, next year we hope to fix some dates at the start of the academic year, making it easier for parents to plan their attendance.
- Identify more specified roles - discrete jobs with boundaries - for people who don't like or can't attend meetings. The cleaning rota, payroll, website and bookkeeping are examples of jobs with clear limits that have been taken on by volunteers.
- Make the school needs and current roles more visible, so that everyone can see what everyone else is contributing, and appreciate the vast amount of effort that brings the school to life.

The other interesting point that was discussed at the meeting was that it can be counterproductive to try and 'force' people into helping. If people are not motivated to help then sometimes their presence can be more of a hindrance. It was this concern that has since made me think about the notion of the 'gift economy'. We all participate in gift economies; they are just harder to 'see' than the real economy because they are not based on monetary transactions. Every time that we do something to help out our family or friends by giving or sharing our time and

resources we are working in the realm of the gift economy. Human life depends on such giving.

Therefore perhaps what we need to do is build up a gift economy which helps the school to thrive, and if we can get it to flourish then the more that everyone gives, the more everyone also benefits. That requires us all to say to ourselves, 'What is it that I can give the school?' and 'Am I giving enough?'

Parents can give in many different ways: joining a support team, making something, helping raise funds, taking on a specified role. Or you may have a specialist skill which would of benefit to the school. A list of 'Fifty things that you can do to help the school' is being updated and will be circulated soon. Perhaps if we can build a gift economy in this way then we won't need to set more rules and guidelines, but of course, that will depend on how much people are prepared to give. To this end, we are planning a survey to ask parents what they can do to help the school.

Anyone who has any comments on this issue, or any other thoughts or ideas is welcome to contact me either by email (noel.longhurst@yahoo.co.uk) or by phone 01508 558928. Or, if you would like to volunteer to be a class rep, or would be willing to help with the parent support survey then please also get in touch.

I would also be interested in people's views on using 'social networking' technologies such as Facebook and Twitter. These can be powerful communication tools but accept that there might be reservations about using them.

When we do the parental support survey, the basic question that the survey will ask:

"What can you give the school to help it thrive?"

So perhaps, in the meantime, everyone can start asking themselves that question.

Introduction to the new class teacher

By Jeremy Nowell

My journey into Steiner education has felt very natural. My eldest daughter, Thea, somehow found her way to Raphael [Steiner School] and she was later joined by her sister, Esme. I followed them there, and my own direct experience began when I was invited to teach both French and Woodland Studies to Class 4 in September 2007.

I was somewhat surprised to be invited to apply to become the next Class 1 teacher by both of the Lower

School teachers. I lived with the idea for two months before deciding, and I now know that it was the best decision I have ever made.

I have at times been surprised at how readily I have taken to Steiner education, but the more I study, the more I realise that for me it really was a case of stepping into warm water. Over time I have come to understand that anthroposophy is really all about intent; about a commitment to understanding the human being in its wholeness. This is something I have been committed to for a number of years, initially as a process of self-knowledge and, more latterly, as something I have experienced as meaningful direction in my life. It is this that led me, in time, to become a class teacher.

The actual experience of being a class teacher has taught me many things – above all, that the teacher's own creative efforts are always rewarded. For this reason I try as far as possible to use my own stories and songs. I have always loved both writing and music, and being a Class Teacher has afforded me ample opportunity to express myself in both mediums.

The first time I sat in the staff room with teachers and staff, it suddenly felt very 'right' – as though the same warm wind that had blown me to Raphael was blowing me all the way to Norwich. And it did feel so warm, in so many ways, on that cold February evening. Something intangible, but relating to the sense of opening without fear into what the future might have to offer. It seems to me that the Norwich Steiner School is sitting on the edge of so much that is possible.

My appointment as the new Class 1 teacher is, for me, about much more than the job being offered – it carries with it great responsibility, demanding a long-term vision and sincere commitment. Bringing my own children to the school is an important and joyful part of that commitment.

Encouraging healthy eating & reducing planetary waste

Staff would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the guidelines in the parent's handbook concerning the content of lunchboxes and ask you please to refrain from including items such as chocolate bars and packets of crisps in your child's lunch.

Apart from the poor nutritional value of such food, the waste generated from packaging of these foods

fills the bins in the classrooms each day. As we don't have a commercial waste disposal facilities at the school (a few parents & staff regularly take home the schools' waste) we have decided that from now on, all uneaten food and all lunch packaging will be sent back home for families to dispose of or recycle themselves. We would greatly appreciate your cooperation in helping to provide more environmentally sustainable lunches!

"Our Twelve Senses - How healthy senses refresh the soul" – book by Albert Soesman

Article by Angela Smith

The Study Group meet every second term-time Wednesday evening at one another's houses. Our aim is to study works by or about Rudolf Steiner in order to deepen our understanding of his teachings. We have just finished *Human Values in Education*, a series of lectures he gave in Holland in 1924 which helped to give us a greater insight into Steiner's marvellous ideas about education. We are about to start reading *Our Twelve Senses* by Albert Soesman, a retired Dutch family doctor. If you are interested in joining us; as we are starting a new book this is a good time to do so.

Steiner believed that people have not five, but twelve senses. An idea recently explored in an (I think) unconnected Radio Four series. The twelve senses are; touch, life, self-movement, balance, smell, taste, vision, temperature, hearing, language, the conceptual and the ego. The senses are discussed in physical, soul and spiritual/social groups, contrasted as polarities, distinguished as "inner" or "outer", and each sense is related to the signs of the zodiac. With an expanded understanding of healthy senses, our inner life and our experience of the world around us will be enriched. This book offers a lucid introduction to the anthroposophical image of the human being and gives a lively way of both experiencing and understanding the human senses.

We are all learning and you do not need any specialist knowledge to join the study group. If you would like to come along, please speak to me, Angela Smith. I can be contacted by phone on 01603 454770 or email at; williamandangela@talktalk.net

A message from Maple Kindergarten

By Sarah Higgins

Maple Kindergarten would particularly like to welcome the new arrivals from Raphael Kindergarten

who have settled in so well that it feels as though they have been with us since the beginning.

Forthcoming Open Day.

By Charlotte Duffield

The next School, Kindergarten and Parent & Child Group Open Day will be on SATURDAY 13TH JUNE from 11am – 3pm. There will be talks given by the teaching staff, displays of work in the class rooms, activities for children in the Maple Kindergarten, storytelling and delicious refreshments served all day. There will be an information area in the hall, and books and seasonal crafts will be on sale. Please do come along and enjoy the day – friends and family are very welcome.

If you would like to help set up or run the Open Day there are a number of ways to get involved. We prepare and decorate the school on the Friday evening from about 7pm onwards. All donations of foliage or flowers are gratefully received and help to make the school look really beautiful and colourful. Bakers and cooks will be required to stock our popular cafe, which raised around £300 at the last Open Day.

On the day we need help to run the cafe, serve on the book and craft stall and supervise children in the playground. A clearing and cleaning team is needed from 3pm in order to get the school up and running again for Monday. As usual rotas will go up around the school a couple of weeks before the event, please add your name if you can help. If you would like more information about how to get involved you can ring Charlotte on 01508 495033 or email the Publicity and Events Team at publicity@norwichsteinerschool.co.uk

If you would like to find out more about what the Publicity and Events team do you are very welcome to come along to one of our meetings. They are open to everyone and held roughly fortnightly. The next meeting is on Tuesday 19th May, venue to be confirmed. If you are interested in coming along, please contact Charlotte, as above.

Class Reps

By Noel Longhurst

As detailed elsewhere in this newsletter plans are outlined to introduce class reps in the school to help improve communication and co-ordinate class support for events. Class reps would normally serve for one year. The details of their roles are still being worked out but they would liaise with teachers to

ensure that messages are passed on through the planned phone trees and would also work with the events team to support the Open Days. For example, a class might be asked to help arrange a particular activity. We are planning to have a meeting for those people who are interested in this role and are interested in starting the role now and then doing next academic year too. If you would like to hear more please contact Noel Longhurst on 01508 558928.

School Summer Fayre – 4th July 2009

By the Publicity & Events team

Plans are being developed to hold a Summer Fayre on 4th July. This should be a wonderful event which will draw people to the school and hopefully raise some funds but we only have a couple of months to prepare. Therefore there is going to be a meeting on Thursday 14th May at the school at 7:30pm for anyone who is interested in helping to arrange the Fayre. All ideas and contributions are welcome so please come along. A sub-group will be formed just to co-ordinate the Fayre. If you can't make the meeting but would like to be involved please ring Heidi Longhurst 01508 558928 to see how you can help.

Joining School Support Teams

By Noel Longhurst

We are currently in the process of strengthening the school support teams. Publicity and Events are being separated into separate teams and both would welcome more members. In particular we would welcome more people who could help with generating and co-ordinating publicity for the school at what it is a critical point in its development. We would also like to see if we can get a fundraising team established that focuses on non-event based fundraising, e.g. funding bids, sponsorship, hire of the site and building etc. If anyone is interested in joining any of these groups (or the others such as premises, gardening, crafts) please contact Sandie (at the School office) for more details.

Travel Planning

By Shelley Folland

Since last year I have been working with staff, parents and Norfolk County Council's Travel Plan Officer on creating a Travel Plan for our school and it is now nearly complete. All Norfolk schools have a Travel Plan and although (as an independent school) we do not have to have one, we agreed that we would

create one as part of taking on the current school site. The aim of the plan is to encourage sustainable travel to the school (including kindergarten and parent & child groups) and the main piece of work that I did was to establish how we all travel to the school and identify any issues that currently stop people travelling sustainably. This was largely done through surveying parents and the results of this survey have then been incorporated into a Travel Plan detailing our current travel, any problems and issues and actions that need to be taken forward to help.

Doing research is one of my speedier activities and writing up one of my slower ones but the full Travel Plan will be available soon (honest!) for everyone to see. In brief it shows clearly the wide and scattered catchment area for our school community and that because of the distances involved most travel by car. It also reflected the community nature of our school in that there was a lot of interest in car sharing and the council have very kindly produced some excellent maps showing dots for the rough area where all our families live. They are going to provide us with laminated copies for our notice boards and this should help everyone identify potential car sharing options.

Many people also noted that cycling, walking and bus routes needed to be improved and comments and suggestions for specific routes are included in the Travel Plan and will be taken up with the Highways Agency by Emma Harrison, the council's travel plan officer or fed back to relevant bus companies. Emma has also arranged for us to be part of the Norwich Schools Travel Cluster Group and at their next meeting they will be looking at cycle and walking routes that need improvement. By getting together with other schools in this way we can apply more pressure for improvements in problem areas.

Next year the plan will need to be reviewed and another parent travel survey carried out to see how our travelling habits have changed. The work this year has been largely to establish a base line of information and the next bit is the more exciting bit where we could really make progress. With a new baby expected in August I envisage my involvement in the Travel Plan becoming minimal so it would be great to have some new people involved. There are varying aspects that you could be involved in, from doing the next survey and being available to chat to parents about their travel issues, writing a Travel Plan review, or being a part of the Travel Cluster Group on behalf of the school. It would also be wonderful if we could offer personal travel planning to new families on joining the school – this would involve advising them on their local bus/cycle/walking and car share options. Please do let me know if you're interested and I can tell you

more. The next Cluster Group meeting is on Wednesday 12th June at 12.15 at Notre Dame School so if anyone is particularly interested in this aspect then it would be great if they could attend.

New Yoga Class at Norwich Steiner School

Bhava from The Yoga Tree

Tuesdays From 19th of May 2009

6pm - 7.15pm

At Norwich Steiner School, Hospital Lane

Norwich. Cost £6/lesson or 6 for £30

Contact Joss Guin on 07598 937665 or

contact@theyogatree.co.uk to reserve a place

The Yoga Tree offers you a new Yoga experience.

'Bhava' is the name of a unique series of Yoga classes which gives you a great workout while you experience the genius behind the yoga postures and meditations. Suitable for Beginner to Teacher Level and Children welcome by agreement

Bring your own mat and a thin blanket.

A Labyrinth for Norwich.....

By Michael Higgins

As part of the class 4/5 children's development of form drawing and geometry, we have been working from an English labyrinth design which derives from an existing turf labyrinth in Saffron Walden of unknown origin. The Saffron Walden labyrinth is more or less 1 mile to walk and was traditionally used as a display of suitors' tenacity and maidens' purity.

Whatever the form a labyrinth takes even though there is only one path to be followed, there is always the sense of a journey or quest, which is often missing from the more open structure of the maze. For the 10-11 year old child, the labyrinth is satisfying, as it leads to an eventual centre or 'truth' by means of veering temporarily away from it:

defiance + compliance = the goal!

The hope is, now the children have drawn this both on paper and in chalk on the playground, that we can go on to build a brick labyrinth in the west field of the school premises. This would be a wonderful project for the children and a landmark gesture for the school, drawing possible income through guided labyrinth walks etc., especially considering that this does exist in Saffron Walden and potentially here.

If anyone in the school community has any ideas or practical advice concerning the construction of a brick

path labyrinth on grass, then please do not hesitate to become involved.

Parent & Child group news

By Sylvia van Bruggen

As the Parent and Child groups continue to welcome new families, any spaces are quickly filled. We have full groups (12 children with carers) on every day, Monday-Friday. Those families who have been coming for a while seem to really have settled into the room, the rhythm and in their groups. Parents are sharing the joys and questions of parenting, as well as all kinds of things that life can bring. The calm space we aim for, and the gentleness of our sessions creates an atmosphere in which people seem to open up. The children keep playing with the familiar landscape round the river, the kitchen area, the playhouse (clothes rack), blocks, all of which we usually set up for them in a similar manner each morning. Friendships between the older toddlers are sometimes formed too, with children eagerly anticipating a little friend's arrival. It is a joy to observe them all, witnessing their growing and changing.

The playgroup on Friday has seen some children leave to start in Kindergarten, and if you are a parent attending one of our other groups, you might like to know that children are welcome from the age of 2 years to join the playgroup. Playgroup has a similar rhythm, and parents do still come along with their children, but it offers a slightly longer ringtime - with the lovely continuous story/puppet show of Gnomey Bluehat and Gnomey Redhat - the possibility of joining in the cutting of fruit by a child, and most importantly the company of peers. Please ask your group leader for more information if you are interested. Some of the crafts we have been doing during our mornings include felting, knitting chicks, sewing hen-shaped egg-cosies and beanbag-frogs.

As I am writing this, it is the eve of the May Day Festival, and we are very pleased to be included by the school in this celebration of spring and fertility. If the weather will allow it, we will have a lovely time tomorrow.

Lastly, we would like to put out our wish-list, if you can help us with any of the following that would be wonderful: (leftovers of) 100% wool/yarn, plain coloured pillowcases (for our changing table), wooden cheese boxes, books for our library. Which reminds me; if you do have a book at home that you've had for a while, please return it for others to have a chance to borrow it, as we have a limited supply for now, thank you? best beltane/mayday wishes, Sylvia