

NEWS IN BRIEF

Monday 8th November 2008

Dates for your diary

Friday 14th November – Martinmas (the lantern festival), to which all school & kindergarten parents & children are invited, starting at 4pm. On this first Martinmas festival, we are having a simple lantern procession (see article below)

Thursday 20th November – Parents evening for class 3/4 children, 7.45pm start.

Saturday 22nd November – Parents morning for class 1/2 children; times to be confirmed.

Sunday 30th November – Advent Garden/Spiral

Saturday 6th December – mini advent/Xmas fayre

Thursday 29th January 2009 – ‘Games lessons in Steiner Schools’ an evening talk by Martin Baker from Michael Hall Steiner School

Welcome to Priscilla and Melody

Newly started as afternoon care supervisor, we are delighted to introduce Priscilla Gibbons. Many parents may already have met Priscilla as she is also currently working on a supply basis most Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays in Maple Kindergarten with Sarah whilst Anna remains on sick leave.

We would also like to introduce Melody, who is studying to become a Steiner teacher and is in her first year of training at Emerson College. For the next year and a half, Melody will be travelling up from Colchester on Mondays to spend a half day a week observing main lesson in the school as part of her training. True to her name, Melody is also a piano teacher and has started playing in the morning Eurythmy lessons for class 1/2.

Martinmas

By Miss Jo

*“My lantern, my lantern
Shining near and far
Shining like the sun
Shining like the moon
Shining like a silver star”*

Our ongoing planning and preparation for the forthcoming celebrations have led this year more than ever, to a deep questioning about the real nature

of the experience of this festival for the children. Martinmas is one of the most visually ‘spectacular’ festivals and culturally has some connections with our other November celebration of Guy Fawkes night – those ‘bonfires’ being a valedictory offering to the fast-fading sun. But the significance of each child’s individual lantern is much more enduring and powerful than the collective celebrations of light so prevalent in more Northern countries at this time of year – it is the *inner* sun we wish to share, cherish and carry.

Our children make and then carry their own lanterns out into the glooming of a November evening. Each individual light feels the comfort and support of the many other lanterns around them, but, as the darkness draws in, it is the act of cherishing and transporting their own ‘little light’ which demands all of their energy, concentration and courage. As adults we may have the gift of greater vision – the overview – how beautiful - all these lights dotted about in the darkness.....

But for the children, the act of carrying their own light has supreme importance. As with all of our festivals, it is not the spectacle which has impact for the child, but the gesture itself – the very real act of carrying a frail, flickering light out into a huge, dark world.

Unlike Michaelmas, this festival is a social one, involving the whole community; the more little lights there are, the less big and scary the darkness. And we also have the reassuring connection with the St Martin story – strength is in the sharing of resources. There will be enough for each and every one of us if we take care of what we have. Generous hearts and helping hands will always be there when the way is most dark and difficult. The story also encourages children to put themselves in St Martin’s shoes: more than enough means enough to share without fear of cold or want for ourselves. Interestingly this is a lesson which the developed world seems to find infuriatingly hard to learn – as our children symbolically break bread to share half with parents and guests, perhaps we are sowing the seeds for a more generous and expansive world for all mankind.

It’s rather an ambitious note to end on, but Steiner himself emphasised continuously that greater social change cannot be achieved without the correct

education of the child. These little lights in the dark carry all our hopes with them onwards into the future.

Information books

We have some lovely new colour cover information books/prospectuses available. Whilst we are providing them free of charge to new enquirers, we unfortunately can't afford to hand them out to existing members of the School community. However, if families would like to obtain copies for their children's scrapbooks or just to send to grandparents, we'd be very happy to order additional copies and sell them on to you at same price as it costs the school to reproduce them, which is £1.25 per booklet. Please let Carol in reception know if you wish to see or purchase any copies.

News from the Kindergartens

We are getting ready to celebrate Martinmas. The first week back we made swede lanterns which were a very messy job indeed! The children have helped to plant two window pots full of bulbs and in the coming week they will be collecting leaves to make their lanterns. It will be a pleasant surprise for the children during Martinmas week, when the school children come to sing for them some of the songs for the festival. In return, the Kindergarten children will be making some biscuits for the school children.

Class 3/4 curriculum in the run up to half term

By Michael Higgins

In the run up to half term, class 3/4 has been doing numbers within their main lesson block. This block has an emphasis on geometric application of number and the different qualities that number has. To begin with we looked at the origins of schools of mathematics in ancient Greece, where a picture as to what it might have been like to study numbers in those times was formed for the children through a retelling of history.

In Ancient Greece, numbers were considered a mystery and so only those who were considered sufficiently mature would even be invited for an interview to the Pythagorean School to study mathematics, so students would have been at least 30 years old before they studied number. At interview the candidate would have been asked whether they could count. Once the candidate reached 4 in their counting they were asked to stop and then were given the tetractis (see dot diagram below) and they then were sent into the woods on their own for a night,

with the wild animals roaming around them and work out what this meant.

This story was played out in the class and then the children worked in their main lesson books to show how the tetractis forms a representation of the world, with human beings at the top, but supported by all the different realms below. It demonstrates how everything 'stands' on the earth, how everything in the world is interconnected.

Factors were introduced to the class by playing a little number game where elves, gnomes, giants and dwarfs had to cross a stream with their different sized strides across 12 stones (jewels in the class). So the Dwarf is able to take one step at a time, the gnomes 2 steps, the elves 3 steps and the Giant 6 steps.

Following the introduction of factors, the class then went on to explore jovial numbers, perfect numbers, prime numbers and deficient numbers. The class has also been studying triangular & square numbers.

As the number block progressed, magic squares, which were first introduced in class 2, were studied again, this time to see if they have any practical or geometric application. The children learned that in the eleventh century, architects used magic squares based on the number 5 to design the west front of Lichfield Cathedral; they went on to try this out in their main lesson books. They went on to look at different magic squares based on other numbers to see what geometric patterns they reveal and to get the children to design their own building based on these.

This way of looking at the beauty of applied number provides a foundation for later more abstract arithmetical work the class cover in the number block.

As well as the theme of the main lesson block, the class have been continuing on their song series from around the globe, including a song about a disgruntled cowboy trying to round up a motherless calf, a Japanese hymn to Buddha and songs for the Michaelmas festival.

In painting, in addition to our work with watercolour on wet paper, the class have been working in a more geometric, precise manner to reflect the related work in number. In clay the class are still working on figures from Norse myths, with a natural focus on Michael and angel for Michaelmas, and the god, Thor with his hammer.

“Human Values in Education”

Ten lectures given by Rudolf Steiner in Holland in 1924 written by Angela Smith and Claire Byrne

The Study Group are at present reading the above lectures. Rudolf Steiner gave many lectures which have been transcribed producing a large body of work on his spiritual and pedagogical beliefs and insights. Reading from the original lectures is probably the most authentic way of learning about anthroposophy which is why the study group often choose to do so.

Much of what Steiner says is as relevant now as it was more than eighty years ago. In lecture one, Steiner talks about how there is a great gulf between theory and practice. He says; "However paradoxical it may sound, the separation may be observed, perhaps most of all in the most practical of all occupations in life, in the business world in the economic sphere. ... (Such a theorist) enters into business life and with a heavy hand introduces his thought-out ideas. If sufficient capital is available, he may even be able to carry on for a time, after a while, however, the concern collapses, or it may be absorbed into some established business. Usually, when this happens very little heed is paid to how much genuine, vital effort has been wasted, how many lives ruined, how many people injured or impaired in their way of life. ... he has introduced something into reality without considering the conditions of reality." Steiner was, of course, speaking a few years before the Wall Street crash and the depression of the 1930s which followed. The parallels with the present world economic situation are striking.

Steiner goes on to say that; "this kind of thing has become rampant in the cultural life of today." He remarks that the only sphere where it is understood that such a procedure does not work is in mechanical science. It is essential to apply mechanical knowledge when building a bridge; otherwise the first train which uses it will plunge into the water below. However, in education it is not always possible to see whether the child is being educated according to their needs. "if this mechanical thinking is carried into education, if, for instance, the child is asked to write down disconnected words and then repeat them quickly, so that a record can be made of his power of assimilation, if this is the procedure in education it is a sign that there is no longer any natural gift for approaching the child himself. We experiment with the child because we can no longer approach his heart and soul." There seem to be direct parallels here with the test-driven, SATS culture of today's mainstream education.

Steiner continues; "Knowledge of man can only be won if love for mankind - in this case love for the child - becomes the mainspring of our work." He says that in each individual child a whole world is revealed to the teacher, that the teacher perceives as many aspects of the world as they have children in their charge. The teacher must not form each pupil according to his or her educational ideal. Sometimes a pupil may be more gifted than a teacher; the only way to work with this is to be like a gardener with plants. The gardener does not know all the secrets of each plant and yet is able to nurture them. A teacher in a Steiner school must be green-fingered, able to cultivate the inner gifts of each child. "He achieves it by an out-pouring love which permeates his work as an educator. It is his attitude of mind which is so essential."

The Study Group meet every second Wednesday evening during term-time. The aim of the Study group is three-fold:

- * To read and discuss Steiner's lectures in order to educate ourselves on his principles of anthroposophy and system of education.
- * To inspire individuals to connect with our threefold nature – head, heart and hands.
- * To understand the unique nature and impulses of our children.

It really is fascinating stuff! Please do not think for one minute the group is terribly serious or intellectual – far from it! It's just a forum to give people an opportunity to get more to the root of Steiner education and what it means. The group is made up of parents, staff and others with a keen interest and no-one would consider themselves an absolute "expert"! The study group is open to anyone wishing to understand more about anthroposophy, the philosophy that underpins Steiner education and it would be great to have more members. If you would like to find out more, please contact Angela Smith on 01603 454770 or williamandangela@talktalk.net

Premises

By Sandie Tolhurst

Over the coming months, we are looking for help to continue with the refurbishment and redecoration of the rest of the premises. The aim is to have as much done as possible by the end of May, by which time the school is expecting its next Ofsted inspection. In addition, we are receiving interest from various groups interested in renting the premises on an occasional or regular basis, so this is also a spur to continue redecorating and beautify the whole building.

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It is likely that Norfolk County Council's adoption and family finding unit will be renting a room on the upstairs floor to for play therapy for children they are about to place in new adopted homes. This involves one-to-one work with one child at a time and their new parents-to-be. NCC is most interested in the large upstairs room at the opposite end to the classrooms.

Renting to NCC in this way will not necessarily preclude our using the room during weekends or evenings for other purposes.

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The other group we have provisionally agreed to rent a room to every third Saturday of the month (from midday to 4pm), starting in January, is the Bruno Grunig spiritual healing group. Interestingly, Bruno Grunig himself lived in Germany around the same time as Rudolf Steiner and it appears they shared many common ideals. This group will be meeting in Maple kindergarten. As normally the group size is only around 8-12 people, this will involve minimal disruption to the kindergarten set up.

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It's essential to the future financial security of the school, that we raise money by sharing use of this magnificent building, particularly in these early years whilst we grow to fill the building. If you are able to spend a morning helping to paint walls, fill cracks, rub down windows etc – please contact Sandie. Your help is much appreciated.

German Curriculum

By Miss Anka

Class 1/2 - has been introduced to many German songs and poems. The emphasis has been to sing and speak along intuitively and to engage into acting little stories without talking about and explaining them too much. This is because children up to 8-9 years still take advantage from their inborn ability to imitate and to understand emotionally rather than intellectually. We have thus also learned the parts of our body, the days of the week and to name our clothes. Besides, class two was proud to be allowed to refuse to lay their hands on their heads when I eventually forgot to say 'bitte' (please). Our lessons are also supported by a verse connecting us to the earth and the sky and pulling our consciousness to ourselves and a circle where we sing a song accompanied by guitar.

Class 3/4 - During the last half term we became familiar with the parts of our body by means of poems, verses and songs. At the same time we came across the seasons, the days of the week and the colours we especially find in nature. Our lessons have been framed with a verse in the beginning, to connect

us to the earth beneath us and the sky above. It has ended with a funny song, accompanied by guitar, about a cowboy and his rescue by his little flea and a more philosophical one about our way into the world.

We have also started to write a bit but so far only songs or verses we already knew by heart so that the following reading was quite easy still. However, during the next half term we will not only widen our horizon from our own body to the things around us, especially in the classroom, but we will also come across texts we do not know yet.

Handwork curriculum

By Miss Anka

Class 1/2 has begun the year by following in the steps of Pelle getting a sheep fleece from his uncle, cleaning the wool together with his great grandmother, carding, spinning and dyeing it. At the same time we learned to use our hands and fingers in a creative manner by e.g. teasing wool. Additionally, we heard a story about Little Mr Fieldmouse whom we took as an inspiration to form our own mouse out of a fir cone and raw wool, to shape him out of beeswax, to make a nice wool picture of him in his hole and to knit him (only class two). Finally, we drew a picture of him in our books and decorated the picture with leaf rubbings using wax crayons (class 1). During the next term class one will move slowly towards learning how to knit and class two will have the chance to knit lots and lots of animals until Easter, when class one will learn to crochet and make their own ball nets.

In order to be able to knit as many animals as possible, class 1/2 would be very happy to have a bit more wool. We would therefore be inclined to accept as much wool as parents might possibly find and be willing to share with us...

Class 3/4 - In our handwork lessons we have started to learn the cross stitch. We began with a story about the cranberry which the devil has created but poisoned. But then God sent his angels to make little crosses on them to make them edible and tasty again. We thought about where we find more crosses in the world until we realized that we can stand as crosses ourselves. We then tried to transfer the cross onto our fabric and to stitch each cross as accurately as possible with always the upper stitch in the same direction. When we finish our little training-square we will start to make a big cross stitch pocket which might well take until the end of the school year.