

# Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School, Kindergartens & Parent & Child Groups

5<sup>th</sup> December 2011

## Dates for your diary

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December – Break up for Xmas holidays  
Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> January – Inset day  
Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> January – Return to school

## Workdays this holiday (11am-3pm)

Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> January – cleaning day

## Oak Class

By Jeremy Nowell, Oak class teacher

This has been a productive, if slightly disjointed term for both Oak Class and myself. A lower-back injury left me bed-ridden for the two weeks immediately following half-term and I am very grateful to colleagues who covered for me and who were able to provide such a rich range of activities for the children.

Since I cannot remember a time before half-term, I shall begin this overview with the visit, apparently dressed in a space suit, of the beekeeper. A big thank you to Claire Whittenbury for both living next door to such a fellow and for organising the visit. Not only did he bring a jar of his very own honey for us to sample; he answered a range of distinctly Oakish questions that might have baffled a lesser bee-ing. Once the obligatory hive-related questions were done with, we got onto the serious business of stings! The poor beekeeper had to reach deep into his knowledge-base of all things painful. He had all despaired when someone noticed his 'smoker', and for a few blissful minutes minds were turned from stings to the business of tricking bees into thinking their forest was on fire.

We began the term with a look at the Tower of Babel and the birth of Abraham. In some ways the story of the tower is a fitting metaphor for Oak Class as it has expressed itself this term. With the movement towards Class 4, a number of different tongues and cultures have inevitably arisen in the classroom. The boys have begun to notice that there are mysterious beings called 'girls' in the class, and vice-versa. New friendships and alliances have sprung up, old ones have been tested. Individual voices, not heard so clearly before, have begun to be heard, often expressing themselves in new and

exciting ways. A new, imaginative quality has entered into discussion and writing. The opportunities presented when language breaks down have proved to be as important and exciting as the study of the structure of language and its rules. As has been observed by our many visitors this term, there is a pervading sense of joy, purpose and focus in Oak Class at the moment which is a real pleasure to experience and work with.

May I take this opportunity to extend a big Oak Class welcome to Miss Jess - our new learning support assistant. May your journey with Oak Class be a long and enriching one Jess.

## Global connections

By Jessica Carey, learning support in Oak class

My first encounter with Steiner methods of education was in the context of a shack with a tin roof and compost toilet. The building sits on top of a hill amongst vast plains of acacia trees, with a perfect view of the beach below. This is Acacia Tree Nursery School, in Chinsta, South Africa. It is an even newer Waldorf Initiative than Norwich Steiner school, having only opened in 2009. It is run by Tom Muller, who trained and worked in England for ten years, together with his wife, Madeleine, an anthroposophical doctor (also UK trained) and his mum, Barbara, who has worked in Steiner schools in Johannesburg for many years. Tom is sorely missed at the annual Steiner Olympics, held at Michael Hall School, where his talent and enthusiasm were great features. The school is a non-profit organization and welcomes children from local Xhosa villages, where there are limited resources; some homes are without electricity and running water. These children need sponsoring in order to fund their pre-school education and the school are actively fundraising in order to give these children the best possible start in life. There are various ways you can support the school, including buying locally crafted bead necklaces, partially or fully sponsoring a child or by a one off donation. Donations are made through the Hermes trust and qualify for gift aid. If you are interested in helping support the school please either visit their website: [www.acaciatreenurseryschool.org](http://www.acaciatreenurseryschool.org) or contact me, Jess Carey (LSA in Oak class): [careyssej@hotmail.com](mailto:careyssej@hotmail.com)

## Green woodwork

Martin Dyer, woodwork teacher

During the coming months, I am hoping to focus our lessons more on the area of green woodworking. I am hoping that we all be able to tackle projects requiring a range of sizes and species of wood. There is very limited scope for finding suitable material on school premises and we would be very grateful for any contributions you might be able to make. Anything, preferably above 1" diameter and ideally straight and relatively knot free would be great. If there are difficulties with transport, I might be able to help.

Thanks in anticipation

## A question of faith

By Jeremy Nowell

What is a faith school? I ask the question because I have heard Steiner schools referred to as 'faith' schools. I always associate the term, for some reason, with Tony Blair and yet another kind of selectivity in mainstream education. I've also seen the term attached to Steiner schools as a prelude to criticising them for their cultish religiosity and their indoctrination of young minds. Although nothing could be further from the truth, it is perhaps important to consider the reasons why this is so and why Steiner schools should consciously engage with questions relating to faith.

Is our school a faith school? I don't think so. Do the children in my class have any idea what I or any of the other teachers believe? I hope not. Is there any such thing as faith in the school? Yes there is, lots of it, and it relates to the fact that, on the whole, Steiner teachers believe and trust in the unique path of each child. This has profound implications for the child. It means, for example, that he or she doesn't need to be measured or assessed at each moment of the day to make sure he or she is 'measuring up' to some kind of 'standard' imposed from on high. It means that the child is allowed to experience spaciousness, is able to explore the world imaginatively and artistically, is able to develop at his or her own speed. It means, above all, that each child is succeeding; that life is encountered as a series of opportunities waiting to be explored rather than as a series of hurdles waiting to be tripped over.

A faith school must, to some extent at least, be governed by certain parameters, be they religious or more broadly moralistic, which would in some way pre-determine the child's environment. Religion, morality and education tend to make particularly poor bedfellows. Steiner talks about morality as being an essentially human quality that arises when

a human being is able to experience genuine moral freedom. Belief systems imposed from without, whether to do with religion or even the *only proper* way to tie one's shoe laces, can only diminish a child's capacity to experience the essential quality of freedom. If Steiner education is about anything, it is about creating an environment in which each child can thrive in an atmosphere of utter acceptance, and so have the opportunity to develop an inner and imperishable sense of their own authority; authority which must underlie any movement towards freedom and freedom of expression in later life.\*

One of the positive aspects of a small school such as ours is the lack of an established authority system or overbearing set of traditions. Individual members of staff are often challenged to step forwards and take responsibility for aspects of school life - to find answers to problems and questions as they arise. In line with other Steiner schools, teachers are asked to develop their own lessons, based on the need of the child that comes through the door in the morning, rather than the needs of a standardised curriculum. All this means that a great deal of authority is invested in individuals rather than being built into the fabric of the institution. This creates a real, dynamic and often creative environment for the children, in which the teacher's sense of their own authority and responsibility means that he or she is experienced as *authentic* by the child.

Where it doesn't work so well is outside of the classroom, where the demands of running a modern school place great administrative and managerial pressures on those who are asked to take responsibility for day to day issues as they arise. The demand for accountability that increasingly comes from outside the school would seem to work directly against the emphasis on individual authority. The associative leadership model, which was heralded as the cure-all for Steiner schools some years ago, cuts little ice with hard nosed inspectors and solicitors. One of the biggest challenges facing this school as it moves forwards is to find a balance between the essential elements of a Steiner education and the increasing demand for accountability demanded by the world we live in. Finding this balance is not a perfect science and will always present a challenge to the school. Such a challenge, if approached thoughtfully and compassionately, is in itself able to nourish the school at every level, for it leads us inexorably towards a deeper understanding of the nature of authority.

\* It is worth noting that Steiner himself did not want most of his lectures written down and distributed. Like a good class teacher, he tailored his lectures for the audience before him and was concerned that, for a

*different audience, his words might create powerful authority structures. One hears an echo of such structures when someone says something like: 'I didn't know Steiner schools did that!' or 'Aren't you supposed to do this in a Steiner school?' It completely misses the point. There is no such thing as a 'Steiner' way of doing things - he himself would have been appalled by the idea and the implications for the development of individual freedom. When we talk about a 'Steiner' way, we risk creating yet another box into which our children must fit.*

## **This term in kindergarten**

Debora Walker, teacher in Chestnut kindergarten

We have had a very busy term so far, welcoming new children as well as celebrating the changing seasons through our festivals. We have, in our ring-times, activities, stories and nature tables, gone all the way from a will-filled celebration of harvest-time (Michaelmas), travelled through the darkening of the days when we have needed to find an inner light and purpose (Martinmas) and are now being reassured and strengthened by the reflective mood of Advent. At the time of writing, we are looking forward to the Advent Garden with its spiral of light-filled greenery. We feel truly connected both to the Natural World and Humanity.

On a daily basis, our children have all settled well into the steady rhythm of the kindergarten – the younger ones supported by the older children. Rhythm, repetition, imitation and reverence are the four cornerstones of kindergarten. Our Sun children have really grown into being wonderful leaders as well as fine helpers to the teachers and younger children and are enjoying the extra responsibilities and privileges that come as a result. We look forward to watching all the children grow, in all senses, as the New Year unfolds.

We enjoy celebrations, especially those connected to birthdays, and thought you might like to try a recipe we have often used in the past:

### **Banana and Honey Tea Bread**

250g plain flour  
Pinch of nutmeg  
125g caster sugar  
3 level teaspoons of baking powder  
75g clear honey (leave out for vegan version)  
25g margarine or butter  
2 medium bananas  
Grated rind of one lemon (the juice can be used to make icing)

Mix dry ingredients together.

Gently heat honey and margarine in pan with 125ml water to melt, and allow to cool.

Mash banana and then stir into melted liquid.

Pour into flour.

Stir until blended.

Add lemon rind.

Pour into greased loaf tin and bake in centre of oven for 65 minutes 350f, 180c, gas mark 4.

Turn out to cool.

## **Request for books and wool**

From the Parent and Child Groups

We need more books for our Parent and Child Group library . We would therefore be very grateful for donations of any books which you no longer need ,on Steiner/Waldorf education and Steiner perspectives on child development and parenting . Please leave any donated books with staff in the school office ;clearly labelled for the Parent and Child Group library . Reading an informative text about Steiner education or perspectives on child development or parenting when your child is still very young can be very inspiring and helpful so we believe that having a well stocked library is important and worthwhile .

We are also asking for donations of any 100% wool or wool-rich yarn that you may have , as even quite small quantities are useful for our craft activities and we need to constantly replenish our supply . Please leave any donated wool in a labelled bag with the staff in the school office .

## **Lessons in French**

From Madame Lizier, French teacher

“Foreign language learning has always been an integral part of the Steiner curriculum. Learning other languages gives us a window into the soul of other cultures, other rhythms, other ways of feeling, thinking and being. Through our knowledge of other languages, our ability to communicate is developed, our connectedness to our world strengthened.”

It is with great joy that I took on teaching French in the lower school. Here is a snapshot of what has been happening this term...

Willow children have been learning a poem about autumn they all became different coloured leaves..

Petite feuille verte, bouge dans l'arbre

Petite feuille jaune, vole dans le ciel

Petite feuille rouge, dort dans l'herbe

Chut! C'est l'automne!

Oak class sang “Savez vous planter les choux” and “Jean petit qui danse” to remember as many parts of the body as possible.

Birch class has been busy with time and timetable subjects they all became a different day of the week

in a little play.

Elder class has been writing together a poem about dragons, here is an extract:

Le feu du dragon est chaud,

Le dragon n'est pas beau,

Le feu de son haleine,

Sort comme une fontaine.

Ses yeux brillent comme un pot de cheminée,

Se queue est courbée comme un coup de fouet,

Même si vous êtes courageux

Son estomac sera votre tombe!

## **Willow class update**

Nina Scaife, Willow Class teacher

Willow class is a combined class now with 6 class 1's and 9 class 2's. We have settled into a nice routine now after this big transition for everybody.

I have enjoyed getting to know the children, families, school and Norfolk over the last three months, having moved from another county.

We have been practicing form drawing, focusing on straight lines and curves, horizontal and vertical mirrored images and running forms, which help the children to prepare for cursive writing.

In Literacy, we used stories to illustrate each letter and as a springboard by which to develop writing words and sentences. We have used alliteration poems to encourage the first steps towards reading and creative writing.

In Numeracy, we have been learning the Roman Numerals and getting familiar with number bonds and the four processes.

I am looking forward to practicing for our Advent play in the next few weeks and sharing this with Willow families.

## **Reflections from the Collegiate**

Sarah Higgins

There is much talk in Waldorf education about the threefold nature of the Human Being, and how we aim to educate the head, heart and hands or the thinking, willing and feeling in each child. Rudolf Steiner also refers to the three 'I's' that humans make use of when they develop a relationship to the world – Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition.

These three distinctly human qualities evolve in children and are nurtured by the Waldorf curriculum over the three 7 year periods of a child's education – (0-7; 7-14; 14-21).

During the early years, children experience the world predominantly through their imagination. This is observed most in their play, where natural, everyday objects can become any number of things. In the lower and upper school, children are inspired to work with the content of the lessons. This is why there is an emphasis on the artistic and the musical in the Waldorf curriculum. From the imaginative engagement with subjects and songs, children are then encouraged to work with creating pictures and reproducing, over time, the sounds they receive together each morning. Intuition is that highest state of the human condition and comes about whenever we make a conscious moral decision, or take a detour from the instinctive way we are used to. There are moments in the classroom when children make intuitive comments which seem to come through them, rather than from them. This happens often. The school day flows best when we, as teachers, are ready to respond imaginatively and intuitively to what a child brings. We know, then, that we are truly working with the wholeness of each child, as well as delivering the lesson.

## **Religion in Elder and Birch Classes**

Sarah Higgins, class teacher for Birch

Throughout the term we have been studying the life of Helen Keller. She wrote her first autobiography at the age of 12, no easy thing at the best of times, much harder, it would seem, when you are deaf and blind. The first few years of her life were spent in sensory isolation, a numb darkness where she describes herself as a sleeping beauty. Her awakening came from a patient teacher who showed her the world of words through touch. Thus there followed a passion for language and an urge to inform others of her experiences.

Helen Keller's other senses were heightened to such an extent that she could smell the approach of a thunderstorm 2 hours before its arrival and feel the character or temperament of a person just by shaking their hand. Her main message was that some people have perfect vision and hearing – yet they cannot see or hear much at all. She stressed that what we experience through our senses means nothing if we don't draw upon an imaginative connection and understanding to those experiences.

The older children found her story both fascinating and daunting, particularly when she speaks of human creation stemming from illuminated imaginative thought. 'Close your eyes,' she says, 'and for that brief moment you are what you long to be.'

## The Elder-est Class

Michael Higgins, Elder class teacher

When Rudolf Steiner was originally developing the Waldorf curriculum in 1919, it was his hope that the class teacher period would run for 7 years. Due to the school leaving age being 14 however, a final year was added to prepare the children for their entry into the world of work. Ever since, it has thus been expected that the Waldorf class teacher takes his/her class for 8 years. With this in mind, Elder class' curriculum this academic year has been designed to gradually bring in new and varied teachers and approaches to teaching that are more in line with upper school demands; seeking to develop qualities of objectivity, self-discipline and self-reliance with the hope that this will prepare the class for what is required of them in the years to come.

So far this year, the class have had teaching blocks with 3 excellent and experienced teachers. Back in September, Mr Rob Sim, games and woodwork teacher from Michael Hall took Elder for 2 weeks and supervised the construction of a beautiful and gratefully received seesaw for the Kindergarten children and 2 sturdy benches for the use of all in the school playground. Mr Sim also worked with our games teacher, Ms. Sandie Tolhurst in assisting the children in their attempting the somersault; an important part of the child's physical development at this age. Mr Martin Dyer continued the construction work with the class in their building of a greenhouse in the corner of the playground where the Elder children have taken up residence in the cold playtimes!

Even though the science curriculum could be said to begin in the Kindergarten sandpit, by Class 7/8, the children are expected to be forming a real understanding of the dynamic existing between observer and observed in the scientific realm. This term the class have been working with Ms. Claire Whittenbury on the 2 chemical processes of burning and fermentation, and have also been having an introduction to nutrition. This complements the Acoustics and Optics block that the children have already received and looks forward to next term when we shall hopefully be welcoming another peripatetic scientist/science teacher to bring an in depth study of Anatomy, Physiology and Physics to the children.

At present, Elder are frantically learning lines and Cockney vowel sounds for their presentation of 'A Christmas Carol' at the end of term. This is the first time the class have worked with a published drama script and is proving an exciting challenge for all.

## Vacancy for Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)

This is a new half time post, with flexible working hours and a salary of £9,000. The ideal candidate will have previous experience in teaching and administration, and will already have good knowledge of the Steiner School curriculum and ethos. Attendance on a one-year training course is essential (see below). For full details of the post, please contact the school office or download a job description and application form from the website.

**Closing date for applications is Friday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2012 with interview dates between 9-18<sup>th</sup> January 2012.**

Please send both a paper and an electronic copy of application forms; our postal service in holiday times is erratic, so an electronic copy will ensure we receive your application by the closing date.

For details about the one-year training seminar, which starts on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2012, please contact [swda@another.com](mailto:swda@another.com). The school has paid for one place on this course, for the successful candidate; serious applicants must ensure they are available to attend all weekends and intensive weeks of the course, as this will form a condition of their contract. The course dates are: (weekends Friday 8pm- Sunday 12.30pm) 20-22<sup>nd</sup> January; 24-26 February; 23-25 March; 13-18<sup>th</sup> April Easter Intensive; 18-20 May; 15-17 June; 20-24 July Summer Intensive; 14-16 September; 19-21 October; 16-18 November; 7-8<sup>th</sup> December. The course will be held at Michael Hall Steiner School in East Sussex.