Steiner Education Australia

Annual Newsletter

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Five Gifts of Steiner Education
False Dawn?
Design Technology Journey
Impulse to Intention
Indigenous Culture and Connection
Diverse Alumni Careers
NAVIGATING THE UNKNOWN WITH CLEAR DIRECTION & PURPOSE

There is much discussion and concern about where education is heading in the future, resulting in continual sweeping changes. Steiner schools continue to navigate these tides of change, but our firm goal remains steadfast; that is, to prepare young people to be able to set out with purpose and direction in order to navigate their own boat on a changing sea.

Has Steiner education influenced other schools engaging in more holistic education? In general, more students today are able to attend schools where there is a stronger focus on learning for all faculties, not just intellectual. However, there is a difference in Steiner schools; it is the ‘art of education.’ Whilst we engage the students in many artistic pursuits, teaching through the arts is not the true meaning of the ‘art of education’.

When a teacher evokes the artist within, they are inclined to carefully craft lessons where they have inwardly and artistically developed the subject material to deeply engage students in learning. In the early childhood years this means the teacher must be worthy of imitation. Rudolf Steiner expected teachers to fill their lessons in the primary years with imagination, heart, warmth, and purposeful activity, as well as developmentally appropriate intellectual activities.

Steiner emphasised the importance of community life, of harmony between teacher and child, with teachers presenting the material in an imaginative and fresh way. He asked that teachers be filled with enthusiasm and have an interest in the world.

As teachers, it is our task above all to encourage what is hidden at the core of every human being: the individual capable of exercising independence. It is also our task to make sure that this can develop in a healthy way. To be able to do this, we must be familiar with the developmental conditions which apply, since each unique individual . . . manifests differently at different stages, thus necessitating different modes of approach.

HEINZ ZIMMERMANN, 2001

The high school teacher must be passionate about the subject they are teaching in order to truly inspire their students. A Steiner high school teacher recently had a student teacher from the local university in their classroom, watching a history lesson unfold. At the end of the lesson, as the students were leaving the classroom, several of them came up to their teacher and said ‘thank you’. The student teacher was amazed and asked the high school teacher if he had told the students to do this. He was surprised at the question, but explained that students’ gratitude was their own.

These students were freely demonstrating their appreciation, and their desire for learning. These moral qualities have been developed since the kindergarten years.

The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that they can fit the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.

PAULO FREIRE

This is our point of difference in Steiner schools.

There are many new trends in education, some excellent and long lasting, some fads which will be gone tomorrow. However, the real essence of education is to inspire life long learning, to build community, to foster healthy relationships and provide students with the opportunities to question, to ponder, to create, to imagine, to wonder and then to act in a moral way with integrity, courage and purpose.

Steiner schools have this vision in mind as they accept each new student into their community. It will not always be perfect, as working in human endeavour is complex, but as each new individual enters a Steiner school, whether child or adult, this becomes a new journey for the whole community.

Tracey Sayn Wittgenstein Piraccini
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FIVE GIFTS OF A STEINER SCHOOL EDUCATION

A Steiner school gives its graduates five gifts. Primary school parents and graduates will recognise these gifts, but they will also recognise that they do not come to fruition by 7th or 8th grade.

1. **The first gift is the gift of ideas and ideals.** A Steiner school does not provide beliefs or a worldview. Belief, knowledge, and worldview may be ‘about’ spiritual matters, but are not them. The school provides a pathway or method for discovering profound ideas and ideals, should a student wish later in life to pursue them.

In fact, all we can give with regard to spiritual realities – the realm of ideas and ideals – is a path that can be followed or retraced. In geometry, I can show you how the steps of a proof lead to logical proof, but you must take that final intuitive leap yourself. If you do not ‘see’ that these steps constitute a proof, all I can do as a teacher is retrace the path with you, perhaps using different language or different symbols in order to help you again to the brink of intuitive understanding.

2. **Second, a school addresses its students as developing human beings; beings uniquely capable of inner transformation.** In nature, metamorphoses and transformations are primarily visible. We can see a plant grow from shoot to leaves to flower, each stage presenting unforeseen changes of form. No one looking at a caterpillar for the first time would guess that it will soon be a butterfly. In human life, especially after childhood, transformation and development are not so visible. For Steiner, all cats belong to the same species, but each human being is a species unto himself or herself.

3. **Third, a school introduces students to different ways of knowing and being, three in particular.** Psychologists recognise these with terms like ‘cognition’, ‘affect’ and ‘behaviour’). You can ‘know’ cognitively, you can live in your head. You can contemplate or reflect, observe or compare, analyse or synthesise.

But you can also ‘know’ with your heart. I call this aesthetic knowing; knowing in which you are awake to beauty, to an ethical understanding, and even to truth. The path to truth may be cognitive, but the recognition of truth is a feeling. Playfulness is the true expression of aesthetic knowing.

One way to understand what I mean is to contrast aesthetic knowing with its opposite, ‘anaesthetic knowing’. This is something that anaesthetises you; puts you to sleep. You cannot know anything. In contrast, the aesthetic awakens you.

Lastly, you can ‘know’ in your body and in your senses. Michael Polanyi calls this ‘tacit knowing’, knowing more than we can say. You can read a book about playing the piano or performing heart surgery, but I hope you would not say after you put the book down that you knew how to do these things.

4. **Fourth, a school can provide profound examples and guidelines for a healthy life with others.** If they choose to, Waldorf school graduates know how to care for others in brotherhood and sisterhood, and in solidarity. They know how to respect the equality of any man or any woman. They know where their individual freedom lies, the sort of freedom that laws and conventions cannot touch, and how to accord others their own freedom and dignity.

5. **Fifth, students receive a reverence for life and for the world; a concern for the environment, however defined.** I mention this last because as a society we have probably embraced this gift more fully in the past 50 years than we have the others.

Any school, any teachers, may give these gifts. But the sad truth is that in our world today only in Steiner schools can you regularly find teachers united in common purpose to give their students as fully and consistently what I have outlined here.

(This article is based on part of Dr. Sagarin’s talk, “What Makes Waldorf, Waldorf? Separating Myths from Essentials and Making the Future Bright,” a keynote address at the annual Governance, Leadership and Management (GLaM) Conference, Steiner Education Australia (SEA), Shearwater, The Mullumbimby Steiner School, NSW, Australia. May 2, 2015. Read more of Dr. Sagarin’s work on his blog, ssagarin.blogspot.com.)
THE MAN BEHIND THE PORTRAIT: RUDOLF STEINER

JOHN DAVIDSON
EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR
THE ARMIDALE WALDORF SCHOOL

In many ways our education remains unknown to the wider community. We name our schools after Rudolf Steiner, or after the Waldorf cigarette factory, where the first school started. The work of this man stands strongly behind much of what we do in our schools. This article attempts to capture some of the remarkable contributions Rudolf Steiner has given to the world.

As a child, Steiner was fascinated in everything of a mechanical nature. He went to school in Austria and then on to the Vienna Institute of Technology where one of his teachers recommended that the chief editor of Goethe's works take Steiner on (at 23) as the editor of Goethe's scientific work (1882).

"the areas of his interest and expertise are almost endless"

In 1891, Rudolf Steiner graduated with a PhD in Philosophy. His thesis was titled ‘Truth and Knowledge.’

“A philosopher, a theologian, an educationalist, an agricultural expert, an architect, an expert in medicinal plants, a dramatist, an authority on Goethe and a blessed artistic trendsetter, the areas of his interest and expertise are almost endless. If he had lived in this age, a world, which always respects specialisations, would have created a separate niche for him. The productivity of Steiner’s life is mesmerising — 6,000 lectures, groundbreaking approach to education, art, medicine, and agriculture and dozens of books.”


Steiner’s work is probably best known for the many published lectures that he gave. He also wrote on the subjects of philosophy, education and medicine and published plays.

EDUCATION

In 1919, Steiner described in detail how education should address the developing stages of childhood, outlining a curriculum for each developmental level. He gave teachers an educational philosophy and pedagogy that would incorporate the early childhood, primary and high school years.

AGRICULTURE

Rudolf Steiner gave indications to farmers from which biodynamics developed globally. This has played a significant part in the development of modern organic farming. He also warned about ‘farming’ practices with bees that are now (100 years later) manifesting as bee colonies die out.

MEDICINE

His work has led to the development of a wide range of complementary medications, as well as supportive therapies and artistic and biographic treatments for people and organisations.

ARTS

While in Berlin, Steiner produced plays and then went on to develop the art of Eurythmy, speech and drama. His work influenced drama studios in the United States and film producers. He was also connected with artists like Joseph Beuys, Franz Marc and Vassily Kandinsky who were inspired by Steiner’s ideas on colour. An exhibition of Steiner’s blackboard drawings in Berlin in the 1990s drew more people than an exhibition of Andy Warhol’s.

ARCHITECTURE

The first Goetheanum that Steiner designed was timber and arsonists destroyed it by fire on New Year’s Eve 1922-23. The second Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, is a unique building and was accepted as a masterpiece of modern architecture. It was completed after Steiner’s death. He was also a wood sculptor and carved with Edith Maryon a huge nine metre high piece entitled ‘The Representative of Humanity.’

SOCIAL REFORM

Steiner’s views on social reform in education and the role of the College of Teachers was an attempt to free schools from the encumbrances of a remote bureaucracy and connect the direction of each school to the needs of the students as observed by the teachers who were in contact with them each day. He published a paper describing the notion that cultural, political and economic realms would be separate as well as independent. Steiner pioneered the idea of ethical banking and several banks in the UK and Europe are set up with these ideas.

Rudolf Steiner left a legacy in education, agriculture and a diverse range of fields. Some of his scientific work and philosophies are only now being researched today. One school, which started in 1919, has seen a growth to over 1,000 schools in more than 60 different countries. In Australia, the first Steiner school started in Sydney in 1957; there are now over 50 schools (independent and state Steiner streams) across Australia.
FALSE DAWN?

NEIL BOLAND
SENIOR LECTURER, EDUCATION
AUT UNIVERSITY, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

It is not often that an overseas policy document features in this newsletter. However, one was published earlier this year by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which may well affect Australian children, families and schools in the future and it is good to be aware of larger-scale trends in education.

The OECD’s influence on education is significant; it is best known for its analyses of Programme for International Assessment (PISA) assessments since 2000. To date, these assessments have measured and reported on cognitive skills in many OECD member countries. The impact of putting the results into league tables of national educational ‘achievement’ can hardly be underestimated; it has polarised educational opinion worldwide.

In March this year the OECD published a report entitled *Skills for Social Progress: The power of social and emotional skills*. This represents a marked departure from its usual focus on cognitive attainment and it is reassuring that this new report highlights a more holistic approach.

Steiner and Montessori schools are singled out as world leaders in this field. The authors talk about the importance of developing the ‘whole child’ with a balanced range of cognitive, emotional and social skills (p.13). From a Waldorf viewpoint, this is heartening reading, though educating the ‘whole child’ would need to include physical and active skills, as well as cognitive, social and emotional ones.

This all seems like a positive step, but to me there are underlying issues. The primary concern is the perceived value derived from these social and emotional skills. My reading of the report is that a rounded education is worthwhile because it develops skills that leverage productivity at a time of financial uncertainty. It accomplishes this while maintaining the social status quo, which places the needs of the global economy as paramount. The report states that the current socio-economic climate is calling out strongly for innovation through imagination and creativity. However, the ‘divergent thinking’ (p.36) which is likely to create these skills is not investigated in the report. The focus is more that emotionally literate workers are productive workers.

I am left thinking that the title, *Skills for Social Progress*, is a misnomer. This is not a report which offers a vision of social progress towards a more equitable and human-based future. Over the last 20 years, educational debate around the world has been increasingly distracted by what Keri Facer calls the “neurotic comparison of statistical evidence” and “the quantification of educational attainment”. Reports from the OECD are a major factor in this distraction.

What seems inevitable from this report is that there is going to be an increase in the assessment of children, this time of their social and emotional capacities, and that new league tables will result. For whatever reasons, this can only increase pressure on teachers, parents and students.

Steiner education is a well-established model that facilitates the development of the qualities the OECD is highlighting. In the course of the coming years, it will be interesting to see if holistic approaches begin to enter mainstream education thanks to this report. I can only hope that they will be introduced for their own merits and not the ones stressed by the OECD.


[This article represents the opinions of the author. A more comprehensive book review is available on the SEA website.]
More than 30 years ago, Mt. Barker Waldorf School began its pioneering exploration of what a ‘full’ Waldorf curriculum could look like in Australia. With their first group of Class 10 students in the high school, Peter Glasby and Dennis Millar developed ideas from their own experience and from Steiner’s indications for the 15/16 year old, into what is now fondly known as the ‘Surveying Camp’. Mt. Barker’s success in this prompted many other schools around Australia (and the world) to run this camp – and we rapidly discovered it is quite a challenge to organise and run. At Samford Valley Steiner School (SVSS), students have participated in the Class 10 surveying camp for eight years, and a few years ago we had Peter Glasby here to help.

We have been able to connect with several universities and more recently the Queensland Museum and currently have a wonderful collaborative project creating high resolution digital maps of the internationally important Pliocene Megafauna fossil site near Chinchilla, Queensland. The project is in close association with Jo Wilkinson from the Queensland Museum, Dr Julien Louys from Australian National University, Canberra and Dr Gilbert Price, from the University of Queensland. Queensland University of Technology has also helped a great deal with the equipment.

This rich fossil site has been of interest to paleontologists, amateur and professional, for more than a century; however the research scientists were using a few rough ‘mud maps’ of the area to locate their finds. Over the last three years, SVSS has surveyed and mapped three overlapping regions of the Chinchilla site and produced a map tailored to the needs of the paleontologists, showing terrain and more importantly the strata to help with dating. The SVSS map is becoming a central resource for the work on the site.

Our surveying camp follows on from the Class 10 trigonometry main lesson, and consists of two weeks field work followed by two weeks back in the classroom drawing the map. The camp itself is a substantial workload for the students, requiring tight planning and attention to timelines to ensure we collect the data we need in the time available. The students work in the field, learning new theory and skills they require to complete the mapping work.

The students work in pairs with a theodolite which is just perfect for students in the battle of late adolescence, as these instruments are unforgiving in their demand for attention to detail. One tiny lapse of concentration an hour into the measurement may mean starting all over again. With all the teams measuring the angles, there is also no way to fudge the numbers – honesty is basically enforced. These things have great power in the development of judgement and fostering emerging morality. My favourite moments on surveying camp are when data is being calculated and shared. If it is done in the right way with respect and humour, the students have fun doing math.

Upon returning to school, students convert their field work into computer files for uploading and manipulation with QGIS software, industry standard digital mapping software.

In the Class 10 year in our high school, we strive to bring learning experiences that strengthen intellectual judgement. The opportunity to carry out a ‘real world’ surveying job allows students to meet a serious level of responsibility. Each day on camp, the students develop a real relationship with the natural environment. They systematically use thinking and focused attention to create a fairly accurate abstraction of their landscape in the form of a digital map; a great example for them on the power of thinking.
From kindergarten, children are taught how to use their hands in fingerplay, craft, drawing, painting, cooking, play, music and games, before they enter Class 1 and learn writing and other fine motor skills.

Throughout the primary and high school years, the importance of handcrafts and design technology continue, with skills overlaying each other in soft and hard crafts such as knitting, crochet, sewing, woodwork, sculpture, metalwork and more.

In Steiner schools, handcraft activity is purposeful and relevant, with items made by students, which are not only practical and useful, but also beautiful. Students are encouraged to complete what they begin, to foster determination and well-developed intelligence. Handcrafts and design technology is an opportunity to engage students in learning new skills related to other topics they are working with in the curriculum and to build upon previous skills taught in earlier years.

Handcrafts develop strong capacities; task completion, perseverance, determination and achieving a sense of satisfaction with the fruits of one’s efforts. Students learn how to work with new tools, combined with practical skills. They learn to take care and pride in their work. If it is not correct, they do it again until it is. Mistakes are encouraged as opportunities to learn, to think of new ways to create or innovate. They are not protected from ‘failure’ as there is no such thing as ‘failure’ when in a creative, artistic process, but each step is a time to consider, reflect, question or evaluate; to discover a new way.

At Melbourne Rudolf Steiner School, Class 10 embarked on a shoemaking journey with their teacher, Tom Hungerford. Tom decided upon shoemaking, as it is a traditional handcraft in danger of becoming lost in today’s world. It was an opportunity for students to test their design skills in a practical way, making something beautiful, useful and durable.

The shoemaking lessons provided endless opportunity for Tom to allow students to gain an appreciation of what they can achieve when going on a new journey. Just as shoes take you on a path, in this particular journey they further developed skills in artistic, aesthetic, technological and functional design.

Tom said, “It is both a rewarding and humbling experience to make our own shoes. There is tremendous amount of work that is hidden from the casual observer. Ask any of the Class 10 students!”
The connection between the Noosa Pengari Steiner School and our indigenous brothers and sisters began in 2011 when former student, Keturah Tracey visited an Aboriginal people’s community in Katherine. Keturah witnessed firsthand the chronic disparities between Indigenous Australia and ‘Noosa’ Australia. Although worlds apart, she recognised that Indigenous Australian voices were not being heard and that questions of human rights and dignity were deemed unimportant.

Keturah was a member of our pioneering Class 12 and chose to address these issues for her Independent Research Project (IRP) in 2012 by producing a book entitled ‘Listen’. Listen tells of the life experiences of six local Indigenous Australians. Keturah’s stunning portraits in various mediums of the six contributors to the book were part of her IRP. She gifted these portraits to the contributors at the book launch.

Coinciding with Keturah’s journey with her project, during 2012 three of our high school teachers heard Tjilpi Randall speak at a Steiner teacher conference and were moved to bring what they had learned to the school.

In early November last year, our school was blessed with a visit from Tjilpi Randall, who sadly passed away recently. The official launch of ‘Listen’, was held in conjunction with this event.

Tjilpi (special teaching uncle) Bob Randall, of the Yankunytjatjara Nation from Central Australia, member of the Stolen Generations and former Indigenous Person of the Year, is credited with bringing to light the issue of forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families. His song, ‘My Brown Skin Baby They Take Him Away’, written at the time, is described as an ‘anthem’ for the Stolen Generations.

Tjilpi Randall instilled his message of Kanyini in the hearts of all who heard him speak. Kanyini is an Indigenous word conveying the principle of connectedness through caring, love and responsibility that underpins Aboriginal culture.

At a recent high school event, Class 6 students were privileged to be invited to attend the ‘Welcome to Country’ and speeches given by Aboriginal elder Tjilpi Randall, Lyndon Davis and Peter Mulcahy. It was a timely event for the class, as they were embarking on a history Main Lesson, which covered the early colonisation of Australia by Europeans and its effect on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

The event brought the local Indigenous community to the school and was a launching pad to build relationships, enabling us to imbed cultural Indigenous Australian studies into our educational programme across the school. As one such example, we have incorporated separate Men’s Business and Women’s Business sessions with our senior students as part of our Sexuality and Relationships education. These sessions have been enthusiastically received by students.

Many of our primary school classes have received visits from local Indigenous custodians. Classes 1 and 2 were thrilled and delighted with a visit from Lyndon Davis who shared stories and artefacts with the children and later strolled the grounds with many of them as they made their own discoveries on Gubbi Gubbi land. This is an example of the foundational studies of science and humanities in a Steiner school; full of wonder and appreciation for the natural world and Indigenous culture that will be built upon in the years to come.
As part of their Main Lesson, ‘Our Country, Our History’, Class 5 invited two Indigenous Australians who brought their picture of our area and the multiple uses of nature. Children and staff were captivated in depth knowledge and thoroughly enjoyed learning some traditional dances.

During 2014 and continuing into 2015, high school students have been participating in workshops with renowned Indigenous artists, including Peter Mulcahy and Jandamarra Cadd (2014 Archibald finalist) to illustrate stories written by Tjilpi Randall.

Students have worked under the wise guidance of Peter Mulcahy to illustrate 10 pages of the story ‘Hey You Mob’, about the Yeperenye caterpillar and its transformation into a beautiful winged creature. Peter made sure that the students approached the work in the right way, asking for permission to paint Tjilpi’s country first, before being dabbed with ochre and beginning the work.

In the most recent workshop, students guided by Jandamarra created illustrations for the story ‘Tawny’. This children’s story is both darkly humorous and profound: Tawny, a thorny lizard, is born just as atomic testing is happening in the sacred Australian desert. Both books will be published late 2015 by Kanyini Press.

It is hoped these continuing projects will expand so that our cultural education becomes real, our connection to the land deepens and we more honestly respect and honour the indigenous people and ancestors of this country.

Noosa Pengari Steiner School is also now the home of the Biggest Bark Picture in the World, a title bestowed by the Guiness Book of Records in 1985.

The work depicts Kata Tjuta formally known as the Olgas and means ‘many heads’. Kata Tjuta is sacred to the Anangu people. A Kata Tjuta elder is depicted on the right side of the picture in the banner.

The picture is made from the bark of Melaleuca trees. These trees shed their bark almost continuously throughout the year and two or three layers can be collected without harm to the trees. All colours in the picture are natural and no paints or additives are used in the creation of bark art.

The Art in Bark Association of Australia had been struggling for many years to find a permanent home for the artwork when Principal Allen Kloeden heard of the picture’s plight on local ABC radio. After consulting staff and taking measurements of the school hall, Allen approached The Art in Bark Association to offer to install and care for the picture in a respectful and loving environment.

The unveiling of the Bark Picture in March 2015 was attended by some of the original artists, with the official ribbon cutting by Barbara, Joyce and Ruth from Art in Bark Association of Australia.

The award winning documentary film, ‘Kanyini’, can be viewed on YouTube.


Further details of artist and educator, Peter Mulcahy, can be found at: www.aboriginalaustralianart.com/index.php

Jandamarra Cadd’s website: www.jandamarrasart.com

Student paintings.

Celeste and Shela.
“With young children this will force is unconscious and very potent. With adults, too, the will is at times unconscious, e.g. when driving a car or, more undesirably, in outbursts of violence . . . Rudolf Steiner defined the will and outlined its potential for being refined and strengthened with increasing consciousness; from the most basic, physical (body-bound) expressions of instinctive and impulsive behaviour through stages of growing self-awareness of one’s behaviour and a longing to take more purposeful, responsible and positive action (a stage of moral development) . . . Consciousness is the defining element.”

FREE TO LEARN, LYNNE OLDFIELD
I taught in mainstream education for 14 years, but was unhappy with the age-inappropriate curriculum and sought an alternative. I trained as a Steiner teacher and finally I knew I had found a wonderful education. I now know how to teach, what to teach and when, based entirely on the child’s needs.

While casual teaching in mainstream and tutoring a ten-year-old I put my new knowledge and understanding into practice.

As a casual teacher, I had a class of seven-year-olds for a month at a school in an area with a very low socio-economic demographic. It was exciting to see the children’s response to what I had learned. They were so engaged and happy, brimming with excitement and confidence. They lost their apathy, their mood lifted and they loved coming to school. Attendance rates increased – this was a school where some children simply didn’t turn up for school if they weren’t interested. As a teacher, I felt elated to be giving the children what they needed, and in this case, craved. These little seven-year-olds responded enthusiastically to the poetry and singing, painting and craft. There was a comforting rhythm to the day.

The children loved learning new verses over the month and beginning and ending the day with familiar ones, improving their memories and motivating them; creating a storehouse of literary treasures. Theory was indeed working in practice!

I will be honest. When I first saw what was happening in a Steiner classroom, I was unimpressed. Were they learning? Or were they just painting rainbows and having a lovely time? I was unaware of the huge benefits a Steiner education has on a child in ways that are not overtly noticed and don’t necessarily reveal themselves until the child is older. The ‘hidden curriculum’ includes having a good sense of self, which is nurtured by a Steiner education. Mainstream education has focused on what can be measured, to the detriment of the child. Tutoring a 10 year old I came to realise what else mainstream education engenders. This young boy was highly intellectual. He had trouble switching off his racing mind. But with Steiner-based tutoring he was no longer fixated by his intellectual thoughts, which had dominated him. His soul opened up as he learned to admire and find beauty in the world; simultaneously, his one-upmanship lessened and his anxiety began to diminish.

Anxiety and apathy are two of the biggest problems I see in mainstream education. Modern life and modern mainstream schooling play a big part in both pathologies. As anxiety-related disorders increase in the world, the need for Waldorf education becomes more obvious. When I first heard it was a healing education, I wasn’t sure what was meant. But I have seen anxiety and restlessness dissipate when students receive a Steiner curriculum. Similarly, the class I took for a month in a mainstream school went from listless and slouchy to upright, engaged and far happier, as soon as my Steiner based learning was in full swing.

My journey into Steiner education is young, but already I have learned a great deal that makes me such a huge advocate for it. The proof is in the pudding. Theory has translated into practice and I have thoroughly enjoyed watching the children lap-up the Steiner curriculum and teaching methods.
Can a Steiner High School aim towards academic excellence? What does this actually look like? Where does a focus on academic excellence fit into the developmental picture of the senior student?

When we refer to academic excellence, there can be a tendency to simply talk about the elite-school, competitive version of this. However, there is clearly room in our Steiner schools for a different kind of conversation about academic excellence, particularly in relation to the senior years. Academic excellence in a Steiner High School means each student striving to achieve their absolute best, working to develop a depth of understanding and breadth of skill and doing it within a healthy life balance. It can also mean striving to gain academic results needed to provide the freedom of choice in post-school options.

Our curriculum allows us to gently educate our students through the early years of imitation and imagination and then through the awakening of the intellect in the High School. Having spent more than 10 years working with our students, supporting them, walking beside them and carefully considering their developmental needs, when they reach the final two years of schooling the learning landscape may suddenly include a real focus on academic rigour. This is developmentally appropriate for students whose learning and experience of the world has gradually moved from willing to feeling to thinking.

Year 12 is an appropriate time for a student to experience some pressure, to find within the courage, strength and will to work through some difficult challenges, to struggle with tasks which may initially seem irrelevant and to find new strengths, new abilities and a personal insight into the capacity to develop deep understandings. The will forces which have been developed through activity in the early years can now be brought into the intellect as the student has to meet the challenges of increased workload, rigid deadlines and sometimes complex course requirements.

As Steiner schools, we know our students well, we understand their developmental needs and we are able to approach their education from the perspective of body, soul and spirit. Given all of this, we are very well placed to support our students through the more academically and personally challenging years of their schooling.

Recently a young student approached Cape Byron Rudolf Steiner School from a neighbouring, ‘elite’ independent school. She is a very high achieving student who wants to gain excellent results, but she wanted to complete her final years of schooling with us as she said, “I want to do my Higher School Certificate (HSC) in a school where I can be cared about, I want to have balance in my life and I want to get good marks.” She is now in the final months of her schooling with us, is working at a very high academic level and feels that she is supported to do this in a balanced way.

Steiner schools are proud of their graduating students, their ability to meet new challenges and strive for academic success. Academic excellence is highly important, but not the end result; it is only the beginning. Students have the capacity and the will to achieve their absolute best so that they are ready to step out into the world, able to meet what the future brings them.
Mia Westcott is a senior resident training in paediatrics, Joe Purves is founder and creative designer of a digital design company, Blair Nicholls runs one of Australia’s biggest insurance companies and Julian Brenchley owns and runs an award-winning architect firm. What do they have in common? They’re all alumni of Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner School on Sydney’s north shore.

Glenaeon holds a special place in the hearts of many alumni and this year, the school is holding 10, 20 and 30-year reunions at the Middle Cove campus for former students and their teachers.

Class of 2005 graduate, Mia Westcott, now works as a paediatric trainee at a major Australian hospital, having worked at Tamworth Hospital after qualifying. During her medical training, Mia conducted research in remote area medicine in the Pilbara and the Solomon Islands. Reflecting on her 13 years at Glenaeon, Mia says the school gave her an education for life, and saves special mention for her teachers’ never-ending support and encouragement. “The beautiful bushland environment, the teachers, the students and the subjects all made my years at Glenaeon a fantastic and unforgettable experience,” she says.

Joe Purves (1995) runs Digital Media Group, a creative agency with digital media professionals who specialise in digital design for the web and apps. He attended Steiner schools from kindergarten and says Glenaeon had a big impact on his career choice. “Without a creative education, I’d not be a Creative Director today … Art, Design and Music have a huge focus in the school curriculum and I know my path would have been completely different if it was not for this school.” He has been working in Asia, UK and USA, but is most excited to be back working in his hometown of Sydney.

Blair Nicholls (1985) also attended the school from kindergarten. His career trajectory took him from an economics degree at Macquarie University, via chief actuarial roles in London for QBE, to now heading up the Australian and New Zealand arm of a major insurance company. Among his many fond memories of Glenaeon, Blair particularly recollects the beautiful bush setting and his caring teachers.

Julian Brenchley (1985) is creative director and architect at Brenchley Architects. Julian started at Glenaeon in Year 5 in 1978, graduating in 1985. He continued his education at Sydney University - studying philosophy and pure mathematics and finally architecture at the University of Technology Sydney where he graduated in 1994 with Honours.

Julian Brenchley Architects have won a stream of awards for innovation and sustainability on their commissioned projects, including the 2013 Yarra Sustainability Award for 142 Park Street, the building which is better known as TV’s The Block Series 7!

Reflecting on his time at Glenaeon, Julian says, “I think on reflection that Steiner education for me formed a way of thinking about and ‘seeing’ the world. I like to think that my formative years led me to architecture as a means to continue to explore and express my creativity.”

Julian’s favourite memory was about learning to learn, and coming dux in 3 Unit HSC English, which was a huge personal accomplishment, “I learnt about self-motivation the hard way and won!”
A standing ovation. That is how the conference ended. For several days prior, over 260 teachers and leaders from across the country gathered at the Cape Byron Steiner School to listen to a series of eminent presenters in Steiner Education.

The program was full and varied. There was everything from practical workshops such as bush dancing and games to play with your class, through to how to work with the new geography curriculum and practicing mindfulness in teaching.

Concurrent lecture series were also on offer from education professionals in Steiner Education nationally and internationally. Neil Boland, Senior Lecturer from AUT, New Zealand, challenged us to look at the importance of place in Steiner Education. John Burnett from the UK addressed the question of transforming Steiner education for the Southern Hemisphere. Lecture topics were just as varied as the workshops.

There were over 30 presenters at the conference covering topics from early childhood to senior secondary. But if you were to ask anyone what the highlight was, they would say Christof Wiechert, our keynote lecturer from Holland and prior leader of the Pedagogical Section in Dornach, Switzerland.

Christof treated us to two sets of lectures. One was on child studies in the early, primary and adolescent years. This was an incredibly insightful and highly pragmatic look at one of the central practices in Steiner Education. Child studies remain one of the critical elements within our education that truly sets us apart. Christof’s insights on this topic have the potential to really revitalise our practice.

His second series of lectures were his keynote addresses. In these three lectures Christof expanded the theme of the conference, Transforming understanding into action, as his central tenet. In his opening address Christof asked us to re-look at balance in teaching. How are we meeting the needs of the individuals we teach? In the second keynote he opened with perhaps the biggest question facing Steiner education today. How do we transform our practice to meet the needs of modern times? Christof encouraged us to look hard, reflect and ask challenging questions about our practice. This sparked many teachers to have long and involved conversations during the breaks.

There were evening activities of music, skits and dancing to refresh ourselves at the end of each day. The culmination of the conference on the last day was Christof’s final keynote. It was, to my mind, a call for a rejuvenation of our art of education. And it got a standing ovation.
WE HAVE A VISION AND YOU ARE IN IT!

DEE WHITBY, PRINCIPAL
ORANA STEINER SCHOOL

Orana is the only Steiner School in Canberra, but many families did not know about us, or had misconstrued views. Our numbers were stagnant and we did not have a sense of moving in the same direction. We set about forming a new vision that provides a fresh sense of motivation. We created our strategic plan in one term so that it was not drawn out but still alive once we had completed the process.

Our community is at the heart of our plans and is the key driver of getting the message out. We cannot do it alone and we needed our parents and students to be our strongest marketing voice. We began with the theme of Celebrate Orana to ensure that our students felt proud of their education and to ensure we are well recognised for the right reasons in our home town.

We have opened our doors and warmly welcomed the community into the life of our school. We took every opportunity to speak about what our students are doing, advertised widely, used social media and put articles in school newsletters, giving parents key messages so they could help spread the word.

Community re-enlivenment was launched with Orana Day. We worked hard at promoting the day and aimed for high attendance. The School Board, teachers, school clubs, senior students and other groups put up stalls so parents and children could wander around and find out more about what is going on at our school. Families brought neighbours and friends and picnicked together on our school field.

We have opened our doors and warmly welcomed the community into the life of our school. Help with playground duty, traffic duty, knitting in the school grounds or at home, fixing furniture – any way they can be involved is actively encouraged. Parents are expressing a new connection and feel more empowered to speak about the school.

This year our theme has been Stepping Up for Orana and it includes ways that every child, no matter how little, can participate in the life of the school and be visible in the community. Our children have responded to our call in more ways than we could have imagined. Children in our school are coming up with their own ideas now for celebrating the school and we have provided a forum for them to bring proposals. Our kindergarten children go for long walks in our local area every day picking up litter as they go. Our students are engaged in regular community service at Canberra Hospital and other worthwhile services and they lead our open days.

We started with the idea of building community that would promote our school. An outcome has been the strengthening of our own humanity with each other and our wider community.
2016 EVENTS

GLENAEON CLASS
TEACHER INTENSIVES
Venue: Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner School,
Sydney
Date: 10-15 January 2016
Contact: peggyd@glenaeon.nsw.edu.au

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WORLD TEACHERS
CONFERENCE
Venue: Goetheanum, Dornach,
Switzerland
Date: 28 March – 2 April 2016
Contact: www.goetheanum.org

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SEA EDUCATIONAL
LEADERS FORUM 2016
Venue: Sophia Mundi Steiner School,
Melbourne
Date: 5 May 2016
Contact: sea@steinereducation.edu.au

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SEA BUSINESS MANAGERS
MEETING 2016
Venue: Sophia Mundi Steiner School,
Melbourne
Date: 5 May 2016
Contact: sea@steinereducation.edu.au

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SEA GOVERNANCE,
LEADERSHIP AND
MANAGEMENT
CONFERENCE 2016
Venue: Sophia Mundi Steiner School,
Melbourne
Date: 6-7 May 2016
Contact: sea@steinereducation.edu.au

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SEA NATIONAL
EDUCATION
CONFERENCE 2016
Outdoor Classroom: Strengthening
the Will
Venue: Orana Steiner School, Canberra
Date: 3-6 July 2016
Contact: www.sea-conference.edu.au

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VITAL YEARS
CONFERENCE 2016
Australian Association for Rudolf Steiner
Early Childhood Education
Venue: Tarremah Steiner School, Hobart
Date: 5-9 July 2016
Contact: annettef@tarremah.tas.edu.au
or sallyport321@hotmail.com


There is no wealth like peace of mind.
Ok, lots of money would be nice too.

We all know money can buy us freedom.
But nothing can free the mind like knowledge.
That’s why we’re dedicated to educating our
members. It’s all about empowerment. From the
start of your career through to retirement, our
people are there to guide you along the way.
We have dedicated professionals available to talk
over the phone even late into the evening.
Our online education tools and services will also
allow you to build your knowledge at a pace that
suits you.
We offer seminars and workplace sessions
right across the country. If you wish, we’ll
even come and talk about your financial plans
in person at your workplace.
True wealth, as our members will tell you,
starts with a wealth of knowledge.
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