What does quality childhood look like today? How does a child’s life today differ from your childhood? Is it better or worse? What does it mean to have a quality childhood?

Answers to these questions might depend on generational factors, parental, school and cultural values, mental health, emotional well-being, resilience, social/economic context, or a variety of individual circumstances and relationships affecting young people.

Steiner educators understand what a quality childhood might look like and contributors to this newsletter pondered this question. We hope readers find the opportunity to reflect on their own circumstances and experiences, thinking deeply about what childhood in Australia may look like in the future. The aim of this newsletter is to provoke interest, thought and discussion as Steiner educators and parents examine the quality of childhood.

In 2012, the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) held a Global Summit in Washington DC. At this event, the Decade of Childhood (2012-2022) was launched, with the vision of creating global interdisciplinary dialogue about the experience of childhood both internationally and cross-culturally. Conferences will be held around the world to facilitate discussion and collaboration between sectors of society. It is hoped these will bridge different perspectives, in both practice and research, of the ways children relate to themselves, others and their environments.

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The next Global Summit on Childhood will be held in Vancouver in April 2014, and will explore the current state of childhood, focusing on education, mental and physical well-being. These conferences aim to examine societal changes that may provide positive childhood experiences and future opportunities for children.

Professor Fiona Stanley, AC states in the 2013 Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) Report Card for The Wellbeing of Young Australians:

The needs of our children and youth are well beyond the capacity of any one government to address. Federal, state and local governments, along with business, schools, health systems, non-government agencies, parents, the general community, as well as young people, will make a difference if we work together towards a shared agenda.

Steiner Education Australia believes in the importance of supporting the Decade for Childhood. We encourage those who work in education, health or social organisations that support children and youth, to engage with professionals in other fields, parents, and politicians to debate and discuss issues affecting childhood and youth. Together we can create positive change, make a difference and create opportunities and experiences for quality childhood in Australia.
In 2009 Pamela Simon, the Aboriginal Early Intervention Coordinator at the medical service on the outskirts of Sydney, invited our organisation, the Spirit of Childhood Foundation to run an early childhood education program for children in the local Indigenous community. This was the beginning of a four-year partnership with Pamela, introducing elements of a quality Steiner early childhood education.

The program provided valuable tools and resources for transformation in a challenging environment, addressing physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. The children and parents learnt and played together in a quiet, calm, nature-based environment, free from technology and plastic. The change in the children’s behaviour from the first day was unbelievable. ‘It’s like magic walking into the room’, said Natasha, one of the Aboriginal assistants.

Children who were seen as ‘problem children’ and parents who struggled with self-esteem and confidence, responded to the warmth provided by co-facilitators, Pamela Simon and Angela Rivas. The sensitivity of the newly created nurturing environment – delicious home-cooked food, freshly baked wholemeal bread and the simple, nature based toys and activities – increased the well-being of both children and parents.
I learnt from Pamela and from working in Aboriginal communities that the concept of a ‘parenting class’ is a Western concept that was foreign to the Aboriginal parents. There was justifiable fear from parents that they would be judged, or their children removed if they came to an organised group.

Our work in various communities has contributed to raising awareness of the effect of diet, lifestyle, environment and mindfulness of children’s well-being. Working in communities also led me to interrogate my own world view, assumptions and belief system, looking at the importance of practical intelligence as a foundation for the development of children’s spiritual intelligence. For the Aboriginal child, relationships are not only with people, but also with their environment; the land, animals, plants, sky, water, weather and spirit.

One of the simplest, most easily replicable ‘culturally appropriate’ element we reintroduced was the acknowledgment of the powerful connection that nature can contribute to healing. As part of our intervention, Pamela ‘radically’ decided to go ‘cold turkey’ and throw out all the plastic toys and equipment. Delta Kay, another Aboriginal early childhood family support observed, ‘When we packed away all the plastic and brought out all the wood everything changed. The children’s behaviour changed and I watched how the parents changed. Parents couldn’t believe their children’s behaviour by putting plastic away’.

There is no greater need for an holistic understanding of the human being than in the realm of early childhood. The understanding that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts needs to be ever present when working with children. Along with connection to nature, the core enrichment elements of the Eco Inspired program are: Holistic Understanding of the Human Being, comprising body, soul and spirit; Free Imaginative Play; Food as Thought, Healthy Nutrition; Love Made Visible, the Healing Power of Arts and Craft; Music and Stories; Rhythm and Repetition; Experiential Learning, and Community Engagement.

All parents want their children to be happy, successful learners and grow into loving, caring and responsible adults. I have learnt that Steiner’s insightful elements into early childhood development can enable transformative positive changes in the physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being of children and parents.

http://www.spiritofchildhood.org

When we are children we seldom think of the future. This innocence leaves us free to enjoy ourselves as few adults can. The day we fret about the future is the day we leave our childhood behind.

Patrick Rothfuss, The Name of the Wind, 2007
Adrian Voce, OBE, is a UK writer, trainer and consultant specialising in the politics of children’s play. He recently summarised a composite of UK policy comments made between 2002 and 2010 highlighting the importance of play for a quality childhood:

We know that outdoor play is critical for physical health. Studies have shown … how it [also] de-stresses the mind. Play makes children more sociable, developing their communication and language skills and basic social skills such as sharing and negotiation. Play and recreation are critical in the development of children’s cognitive and emotional skills – potent tools in raising happy, healthy and productive members of the British economy.

The creative and social skills that children develop through play help them to develop lateral thinking and emotional intelligence that are becoming increasingly important in a globalised, non-hierarchical economy. Play … leads to higher self-esteem, better inter-personal competence, higher aspirations, and a heightened motivation for learning and self-efficiency.

We must allow our children to be seen and heard. In particular, children playing outdoors … [is] a very good way to do this. But it is not just children who benefit from outdoor play. When parents take their children to the playground … they meet other parents and friendships are forged, communities are created. We have to find the means of re-establishing the cycle of responsibility, recreating the neighbourly society … safe for children to play in the shared spaces [that] parents may gather around. This is the start of community. The more opportunities children have to play, the more different people meet and the safer a neighbourhood becomes.

However, the outside environment for children is much worse than it was even a generation ago. There is more traffic and it is faster. Streets are … felt to be more dangerous. Today, just one in five children regularly play outside in their neighbourhood. The rest are denied the chance to get out of the house and have the everyday adventures that – to people of my generation – are what childhood is all about.

Adrian is disappointed that nothing but a modest advance of a high-level statement on risk-benefit in play from the Health and Safety Executive has materialised as UK government policy. He strongly advocates the importance of play in accordance with the United Nations General Comment on Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that national governments have a duty to both legislate for and finance whatever range of measures may be necessary to recognise, protect and promote children’s play.

In Australia the issues are similar. We must all be advocates for a quality childhood that promotes play, as the benefits are far-reaching and enduring.

www.policyforplay.com

The Importance of Play

Tracey Puckeridge, CEO, Steiner Education Australia

At the ‘Global Summit on Childhood’ conference held in Washington DC in 2012, ACEI and the Alliance for Childhood, launched the Decade for Childhood, a 10-year initiative that provides opportunities for individuals and organisations to disseminate knowledge, consider best policies and practices, and support a global conversation about childhood.

The understanding of child development grew tremendously during the 20th century. Today, however, we feel a growing unease about the state of childhood. Too often, nations have been unable

Because children grow up, we think a child’s purpose is to grow up. But a child’s purpose is to be a child.

Tom Stoppard, The Coast of Utopia, 2002
to translate new knowledge into actions that promote children’s health and well-being. Rapid cultural and technological changes combine with age-old problems of poverty, neglect, and abuse to thwart the healthy development of huge numbers of children.

Current conditions pose a threat to childhood, and the need to address them is urgent. The Decade for Childhood is a multi-year initiative to explore what is eroding in childhood and to create new opportunities for childhood’s future – our human future.

www.acei.org

Steiner/Waldorf schools educate children and young adults in more than 65 countries, with over 40 schools in Australia. Steiner education focuses strongly on the quality of childhood, and children in Steiner pre-schools and kindergartens experience a different form of early childhood education than in most other school environments. In a Steiner kindergarten or early childhood centre, the atmosphere is warm and friendly. The child engages in self-initiated play with natural, aesthetic materials and outdoor creative activity in the elements of nature.

The Steiner kindergarten, for children between five and six years old, is aligned with recent recommendations of the Cambridge Review, which notes that five is too young to leave behind active play-based learning and embark on formal subject-based curriculum.

The Steiner early childhood curriculum is based on the understanding that young children learn mainly through imitation. It recognises two main forces at work in the young child: the capacity of the child to imitate the world around them, and an inner impulse to engage with the world in a unique, creative and potent way. Young children love to play, therefore they are offered many opportunities for self-directed play. These are interwoven with their participation in activities that might take place in a home. Cooking, crafts and gardening bring order and a sense of beauty; caring for others, washing and sculpting are all part of Kindergarten work. The imitation of care, purpose, dedication and gratitude in these processes is as important as the work itself.

This Steiner early childhood world is one of exploration and real work; for example, through impromptu plays and games, cutting up fruit and vegetables, and baking. While it is true that the children are protected from technological noise and computers in a Steiner kindergarten, they are not protected from energetic, lively play and robust physical activities of building, gardening, crafts and enthusiastic exploration of the natural world. The young child’s ability to absorb every experience is nuanced by their openness of their reverence, allowing deep learning to occur. Through their imitation of kindergarten work and activities and the teacher’s stories, they learn authentic skills, develop artistic and musical capacities - and a growing consciousness of the world emerges.

Activities in a Steiner early childhood setting also take place rhythmically throughout the day, week and year, which create a feeling of well-being and a sense of security in the child. This repetition of authentic tasks supports healthy habits and the child’s memory is strengthened by recurring meaningful events, such as festivals. Memory is also strengthened by participation in choral speaking, singing, movement and listening to stories.

Children who engage in socio-dramatic play (make believe, transformation of objects and verbal expression) develop cognitive and creative capacity, intellectual competence and socio-emotional skills. The Steiner kindergarten environment and teacher’s stories, foster socio-dramatic play and stimulate the child’s powers of imagination, inspiring them to transform natural materials into any kind of toy. If one observes children playing with toys that have a great deal of detail or predetermined form, one can see the play has a different quality to when they are using simple materials such as wood and cloth: the play is limited only by the children’s imagination.

Strengthening their physical sense of balance through play, not only helps them to develop neurological readiness for literacy and numeracy but also its counterpart – an inner balance at an emotional level. Through play, children develop movement, creativity, language, artistic and imaginative skills and expression, as well as social and emotional skills and a sense of well-being, a necessary state for the ability to think well and reflect.

A bridge is carefully built from the kindergarten world to the primary learning environment that gives security and trust, and provides a harmonious and gentle transition. (Note: parts of this article have been adapted from the Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework and the December 2012 Nurture magazine)
My response to this often asked question, is because it is kind and allows children to have a childhood. It seems that Rudolf Steiner was a visionary who conceived principles for education which, one hundred years later, most closely concur with many values and findings espoused by leading researchers in neuroscience and psychology.

As an artist, I have a deep appreciation for the life-nurturing stimulus of the sensual world of colour, texture, aroma and sound. I’ve attributed this appreciation to a personally rich childhood on a farm that was peopled with multiple generations employed in practical rural activities, growing and nurturing animals and plants, observing the atmosphere of the seasons and always fixing and making. Grandparents also fostered a respect and practical interaction with the arts and craft skills. Steiner education replicates many experiences for which I am grateful. As a sole parent more recently isolated in a city apartment I sought ways of recreating my own childhood enrichment for my son, through school.

My first wander into a Steiner Preschool was met with the scent of essential oil, combined with the distinctive smells of wool, hewn wood and freshly baked bread! The aroma of chlorine and laminex sanitised with petrochemicals was absent! My eyes met with an array of baskets, rainbow silks and hand crafted toys of real aesthetic beauty. A ‘nature table’ featured objects of marvel that have enthralled children for aeons and across cultures. Children were treated with kindness and honoured for their uniqueness. Nuts, seeds and butterflies on their nature table were held to be full of life’s potential.

I felt my child would belong and feel nurtured and enriched in this community. I was in heaven.

I have read in the mainstream media about a crisis around creative thinking in schools. A Steiner education nurtures a child’s sense of wonder and enhances a child’s natural, unfolding exploration of their whole world while connecting them to nature and each other. This generates creative and empathetic beings who respond innovatively to life experience. Certainly the place our children will inhabit in the future will hold extraordinary challenges, both environmental and social, and our success as humans will largely depend on our capacity to respond creatively to change.

A quote from J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* beautifully encapsulates the magical quality of a child’s perception:

> If you shut your eyes and are a lucky one, you may see at times a shapeless pool of lovely, pale colours suspended in the darkness. Then, if you squeeze your eyes tighter, the pool begins to take shape and the colours become so vivid that with another squeeze, they must go on fire. But just before they go on fire, you see the lagoon …

It is hard to imagine why we would deny our children available parents, wholesome food, access to and exploration of nature. Yet our society is short on family time, fast on food, addicted to screen technology as entertainment, and increasingly urban and bereft of nature. Steiner predicted some of what the future would hold for human beings. His ideas in education deserve real attention more now than ever. They are kind.

**A Peruvian Winter Festival Experience**

*Demi Payne, Class 10, Perth Waldorf School*

‘La Fiesta de San Juan’ is the Peruvian winter festival that takes place on the winter solstice. I am a Class 10 student from the Perth Waldorf School who had an amazing opportunity for student exchange for a term at the Lima Steiner School in Peru and this festival was a highlight for me. The preparation began over a month before the event, with lantern making, learning songs, dances and general organisation.

From the classroom we could hear drum beats and singing. We watched boat lanterns sail past the windows. A few days before the solstice, the wooden skeleton of a fire started to form. People started talking about hot chocolate, dancing and the rest was in Spanish. However, I knew something big was being prepared.
On the night of June 21st everyone seemed to know where to go and what to do. High school students gathered on a platform as shivering on-lookers watched primary students walk the spiral. As high school students began to sing, everyone stopped and listened. Voices spread like the light from the amazing lanterns which every student held. These lanterns led the way on the lantern walk to the unlit fire.

The graduating class performed with drumbeats, dancing and gymnastics. Between fire crackers and noise the wooden skeleton began to grow a blanket of flames. Flames soon covered the wood and began tinting the faces of onlookers. When the heat became too much the crowd moved: to talk, or line up for amazing hot chocolate, apparently the main reason some people were there.

Soon the dancing started. There were old Peruvian dances, with dancers wearing bright colours and dancing like that was what they were born to do; casual dances, which had most people up and dancing and a few dances that everyone just seemed to know. No one seemed to lose energy. The dancing didn’t stop until about 11pm instead of the scheduled 9:30pm.

‘La Fiesta de San Juan’ was a brilliant experience and sight that I will never forget. The drum beats, the light of the fire on the faces of laughing and smiling people enjoying the company of everyone around them, and the general atmosphere will be a memory that will stay with me for ever.

The Gift of Class 10 Student Exchange

From a very grateful Mum, Lisa

So often I am reminded about what a privilege it is to have my children at the Perth Waldorf School. It is constantly balanced with a healthy dose of trust as a parent, but the benefits are incredible. My shy little girl, Demi, who battled socially during early primary school blossomed and grew in confidence and love for life’s challenges and has just returned from a three-month student exchange to Lima, Peru.

Towards the end of last year the students were told about the opportunity of a one-term exchange during Class 10 and my daughter was excited from the beginning. She spent months emailing students who had contacted the school and emailing and skyping their contacts too. Demi eventually announced that she had found a girl with whom she really connected and wanted to exchange with her … BUT she would have to learn Spanish very quickly!

In second term she set off on her (36 hour flight) adventure. The first week was full of exciting meetings and greetings; the second full of trepidation as she battled to communicate and get into the new rhythm. Lima Steiner School seems to be a hub of exchange as she met students from around the world. The teachers were supportive and accommodating and after an emotional bump all was well again.

Demi immersed herself in the culture, which she loved and the touching email I got from her host Mum said (in broken English) that she feels Demi was her daughter in a previous life.

Demi loved the people, music, environment and the food, although I did get a message, ‘I politely declined to eat the guinea pig because they served it with its head on!’

Demi also travelled to Machu Picchu and Cuzco.

In school she was part of all main lessons, the dance programme and attended the social dance night. The winter festival was quite an experience and she took part in Eurythmy and a poetry recital. Highlights were teaching English in the primary school and eating lunch with the kindy children. Demi found it difficult to say goodbye and I can only imagine the emotion she had to deal with on her own all the way home. I am so very proud of her.

I do keep reminding her that she has an amazing Mum to encourage her to experience all this (and she nods and humours me). I am aware that we are very fortunate to be part of this amazing Steiner movement that is so deep and true with its humanity. I hold great gratitude for her teachers and the curriculum that has held and guided Demi. Thank you to the Perth Waldorf High School staff for all your striving and all that you are, and all that you provide for these fortunate students.
Island (Waiben). I had read about this seemingly unique celebration of a definitely unique cultural world and boldly contacted the Tagai State High School on Thursday Island and to ask if we could come and stay! Our trip was an experience that lives on strongly in those of us who shared our rich immersion in this beautiful part of the world and its wonderful cultural life – a celebration of a vibrant, rich, living cultural world through song, dance and feasting that was neither contrived or forced in any way, just alive and real.

In 2012, I had my lovely Class 9 with which to share the world. The ‘red centre’ has traditionally been a destination for our Classes 9 or 10 at Linuwel Steiner School. But, in 2004, I ate the fruit of the Wongai tree, and as local tradition states, this means one day you will return to the islands. This thought had remained with me and as I contemplated what Australian landscape and cultural experience I could bring to fruition for my class, the Wongai kept calling!

So, in 2012 I planned to take my Class 9 students on the same route as I had travelled earlier, once again spending the week as guests of Tagai State College. At the festival’s end, we planned to fly back to Cairns, pick up our bus and spend the next week heading home via the coast with some magic Great Barrier Reef experiences on the way.

We departed Linuwel and headed northwest, visiting the lovely Artesian waters of Moree, the Cosmos Centre and Observatory at Charleville; Longreach and Porcupine Gorge National Park. It is always a bonus on a class trip to spend some time with other Steiner communities and the Candlenut Steiner School near Cairns was no exception.

We flew over the beautiful north Queensland coast to Horn Island where we excitedly travelled to our ferry connection for Waiben. We were greeted by a warm welcome on the big school billboard and by Lyn-Anne Chandler, the head of campus of Tagai State College.

Torres Strait Islanders are the second group of Indigenous Australians and a minority within a minority. Torres Strait, which lies between Cape York and Papua New Guinea, is legally part of Queensland. Its islands within 60 nautical miles (97 kilometres) off the coast were annexed in 1872, the remainder in 1879. At annexation, the Islanders became British subjects and their islands became Crown lands. At Federation they became Australian citizens although until comparatively recently they were denied the rights and benefits that their fellow Australians took for granted.

Torres Strait Islanders are not mainland Aboriginal people who inhabit the islands of Torres Strait. They are a separate people in origin, history and way of life.

I begin with this as, in all my planning and retelling of our wonderful experience, I have come to find just how little is generally known about this part of our country’s story.

My first experience in taking a school group to the Torres Strait was back in 2004 when I ventured, with my then Class 10, to the cultural festival held on Thursday Island (Waiben). I had read about this seemingly unique celebration of a definitely unique cultural world and boldly contacted the Tagai State High School on Thursday Island and to ask if we could come and stay! Our trip was an experience that lives on strongly in those of us who shared our rich immersion in this beautiful part of the world and its wonderful cultural life – a celebration of a vibrant, rich, living cultural world through song, dance and feasting that was neither contrived or forced in any way, just alive and real.
preparing festival food (including traditional turtle) and even a radio interview. We laughed, and at times cried, with the joy of celebrating the rich and living culture of the Torres Strait Island people. The festival opening ceremony and traditional welcome by the chief elder of the Kaurareg Nation was a most beautiful, honest and heartfelt experience.

We felt and remain blessed to have shared such a time together. These opportunities provide important ‘big picture’ perspectives that Steiner educators can explore and offer our students.

Thank you to my class parents, the school community and my great emerging young adults with whom I have the pleasure to travel with along the educational highway; and last but not least, a ‘big esso’ to all our friends in the Straits and long may you dance!
Surveying Camp 2013 –
The Afghan Cameleers Settlement at Marree

Giulius Canteri, Mount Barker Waldorf School

The Class 10 Surveying Camp has featured for over 20 years in the curriculum of the Mount Barker Waldorf School. The camp is a practical approach to application of the mathematics of Trigonometry that develops physical sensitivity and precision in the motor skills of 16 year old students. The camp often integrates other disciplines such as Geography, Geology and History. Indigenous stone carving sites have been mapped for over 10 years, and in 2012 the South Australian Museum enthusiastically accepted copies of these maps. Based on their quality, they gave us our task for 2013. Following many telephone arrangements and reconnoitre, Class 10 began their 14-day camp. The bleakness, the warmth and gratitude of the people and a great sense of meaningful work struck us all. Over the nine days of surveying, our relationship with the site grew, along with our appreciation of the generosity and wisdom of Reg Dodd, a local Arabunna elder. This helped us observe more about the place and what had previously been there. It was amazing to see what had been made invisible by the changes of time. Interestingly, some local people approached us to gain insight into their own heritage, as their common knowledge of the settlement had diminished. We were left with a sense that this was a first step in uncovering this part of Australian history, and we did not have the archaeological expertise necessary for the next step. The Main Lesson finished, but the mapping work continued, with the South Australian Museum and the people of Marree awaiting the results.

Following the fieldwork was a final three-day bushwalking component of the camp. We left Wilpoorinna Station, where we had stayed, and drove south to the Flinders Ranges. Here the class split into two groups and navigated their way from Glass Gorge Road to Narrina Pound, up Patawarta Hill, and back. Emphasis was placed on self-reliance and interdependence, with experiences of the whole camp developing strength, grace and skill within the participants. Our return trip on the bus was filled with song, a great sense of satisfaction, achievement and the joy of returning home.

Six Amazing Australian Weeks

Class 10, Abhaya School, Hyderabad, India

We, the Class 10 students of Abhaya Waldorf School in Hyderabad, India, were invited by Samford Valley Steiner School in Australia for a Surveying Main Lesson in April/May 2013. Almost as soon as we reached Samford, we were off in buses to learn surveying in Chinchilla, Queensland. We pitched our tents at the local showgrounds and slept out in the open, using the kitchen and a big hall for dining and our classroom work. Erecting the tent was an interesting experience as it was the first time for us, besides staying away from our families in another country for a long period of time. Miriam who was our cook and quartermaster was quick to crack the whip if any of us slacked off in our wash up roster duties, after each meal. Anupama, a parent of Abhaya School, who accompanied our group, helped Miriam in the kitchen and we were truly grateful for the Indian curries that she made for us.

Every morning we had to make our breakfast, pack our lunches and head to the Chinchilla Fossil Reserve, our surveying site. Peter Glasby, Tim Dunn and Mark Piper were our teachers who guided us through surveying and taught us the tricks of the trade. We were taught various aspects of surveying, such as triangulation, finding true north, tacheometry and vertical profiling, using theodolites, dumpy levels and surveyor’s bands, during the day. Using the theodolite and measuring angles was initially a challenge but eventually, being Indians, we mastered it in no time. After dinner, we learnt how to apply the principles of trigonometry/optics and basic mathematics to generate numbers for use in the final map making, at a later date. We also started preparing our main lesson book during these post-dinner sessions.

After a week of working at the site, we were dropped off at the beginning of a long bush walk. The two-week camp had a three-day bush walk in between, to accommodate shooting enthusiasts who used the rifle range near our site during weekends. We were given a map and compass and asked to figure out a way to walk to the end where the bus would pick us up. Much to our glee on the first day itself, we surprised our teachers, who were keeping a watchful eye on us from a distance and found them hiding behind the bushes! After walking for a day, we found a flat piece of land to camp. We pitched our tents, set up our stoves, made dinner, collected water from a creek and slept in our sleeping bags. It was a unique experience for us Indians, though the Aussie students may have felt it was just another ‘camp’ and all of us seemed to enjoy our time without any of the adults snooping around.
After two days of walking with our huge packs, we reached our destination covering approximately 32 km. At the destination, we all jumped into a pool of flowing water. We returned to Chinchilla to fine tune our raw data, drew maps, worked with GPS coordinates and obtain more tacheometry data, for making the vertical profile/map of the site. After the camp we were back in Brisbane for the weekend and went gallivanting around the city, watched movies, went shopping and generally had loads of fun.

The next week some serious work was in store for us back at school. It was time for calculations, calculations and more calculations. We made a digital version of our maps on the computer using Quantum GIS software. During four long breaks at school, we played a cricket match against the Samford Valley High School team. It was a thrilling nail biting finish which required Umpire and Match referee, Mark Piper, to bring out his calculator to decide who won at the end. A couple of war cries from the Indians and many hugs later, all of us went back to class to work on the more mundane issues of math and maps.

On the last day of school, we watched a popular Bollywood movie, ‘Three Idiots’, with a group of Aussie host families, teachers and students of Samford Valley Steiner School. We cooked an Indian dinner which we shared with them and at the end, thanked them for their kindness and generosity for putting up with a bunch of garrulous Indian adolescents for a couple of weeks. The next day after tearful goodbyes to all our friends and hosts, we left for Byron Bay to round off an excellent visit to Australia.

The Scuba Diving course was a once in a lifetime experience for us. Our instructors Giac, Liz, John and the others at Sun Dive, Byron Bay, were warm and friendly and we enjoyed learning how to dive. We saw placid Wobbegong sharks on the ocean floor, manta rays, turtles and many more iridescent multi-coloured fish whose names we did not know. Diving at Julian Rock in the Pacific Ocean was a fantastic experience. At the end of the training, many of us received an open water dive certificate, resulting in happy smiling faces.

We spent most of our time at Byron Bay learning to dive, watching a few Hollywood movies, shopping, eating out and boogie boarding at the beach. Some of us cycled to the Cape Byron Steiner School and spent an afternoon with the high school students and teachers, on the penultimate day. The week at Byron Bay and the journey back to India taught us how to handle money and take independent decisions which affected each one of us, as well as the whole group. The weekend came much too quickly. With our final goodbyes to Australia, we returned back home with amazing stories to treasure for the rest of our lives.
This year will be the tenth Wearable Arts performance at Shearwater, The Mullumbimby Steiner School. It all began in a small way on an open air stage in 2001, then moved in under a big top two years later and now is held in our own purpose built hall, becoming a much anticipated event in the community. Textile artists, musicians, choreographers and designers have been invited to participate over the years. This is important to students who become co-creators in the artistic process with adults as mentors and role models – giving a real world dimension to their learning.

In 2013 there are three categories: Our Lady of Infinite Dreams, the forever young category; Our Lady of Temporal Voyagers, the steampunk category; and finally, Our Lady of Clear Sight, an open section for the recycled, fluorescent and ‘beyond’ category.

The story woven into the stage representation has, as its inspiration, three aspects of soul: sentient, rational and the consciousness soul. These soul expressions provide the framework for each of the sections and the storyline reflects a journey that encompasses states of being. The audience experiences a sense of the deep mysteries of human existence and an appreciation of the multi-dimensional expression of the human soul states of development, lit up on stage in costume, pageantry, music, colour, lighting, movement and song.

The motivation for Wearable Arts is innovation in education and cultivation of imagination and creativity through a fusion of the arts; a complete artistic process blending music, design, textiles, hard and soft crafts, dance, movement, colour, sculpture, and sound. Deirdre Korobacz, the show’s artistic director, states that:

Contemporary relevance is found in response to the needs of teenagers seeking identity in a trans-globalised world, which can be both stimulating and exciting as well as being confusing and disorienting. Adopting the language of visual design, fashion and street art, the postmodern idiom breaks down the barriers between art and everyday experience. Precedence is given to cultural analysis, relationships and interrelationships, and issues of social and personal transformations. Contemporary identity has the characteristic of fluidity and is suggestive of codes and conventions, which create iconic images, ideas and themes in the pursuit of a new universal vernacular. Wearable Arts offers students an opportunity to participate in contemporary popular culture and the allegiance it attracts.

For the audience, students, teachers, performers and designers, it is an opportunity for immersion in the complete creative process and a culmination of the intention to continuously reinvent the Steiner/Waldorf curriculum out of its underlying principles.
At Willunga Waldorf School, children grow up climbing trees, digging holes and building cubbies, much as children do in Waldorf Schools around the world. But ‘just’ climbing a tree, however important, is not a sufficient challenge to engage most adolescents, especially boys.

In 2011 a group of Class 6 boys at Willunga Waldorf School in South Australia made their presence felt around the primary school by the ‘tricks’ they performed on and around handrails, fences, balance beams, trees and other obstacles around the grounds. They were ‘into Parkour’. Their teacher encouraged their interest, and even suggested to others in the class that they should participate in the Sunday training sessions in Adelaide offered by the Australian Parkour Association. We agreed to support this interest by creating a ‘Parkour park’ within the school grounds’.

Parkour is an holistic training discipline using movement developed out of military obstacle course training. Practitioners aim to move quickly and efficiently through their environment using only their bodies and surroundings to propel themselves, negotiating obstacles in between. They try to maintain as much momentum as possible without being unsafe. Parkour can include running, climbing, swinging, vaulting, jumping and rolling ... Parkour involves “seeing” one’s environment in a new way, and imagining the potentials for movement ... It teaches us to touch the world and interact with it, instead of being sheltered by it. It does NOT require leaping from tall buildings, a misconception one might acquire from a quick Google search!

Parkour originated with French naval officer Georges Hebert who in the early 20th century promoted athletic skill based on the beauty and skill in movement of indigenous peoples he had encountered in Africa. He recognised they were flexible, skillful, and resilient, despite having had no other tutor in gymnastics but their lives in nature. Sadly, in the 21st century, few western children are able to develop these qualities. They spend more time sitting than standing, with very little climbing, swinging, running, jumping or being physically active in any other way.

Although Waldorf students in early years at school have many opportunities to engage in a wide range of physical activities, both structured and free, the time spent at desks and just standing around increases with age. We wanted to support our adolescents, particularly the boys, to continue being active into their adolescence. One of our students was quoted in the local paper, saying, ‘Before I started Parkour I was a really lazy kid ... I love that I can say I’m someone different, I can do all different things with my body that most people can’t.’

We invited members of the Parkour Association to visit the school to share their ideas about how we might pursue the idea of developing a Parkour area, primarily for middle school students (Classes 6, 7 and 8). Ewan Rourke, Class 6 parent and maintenance staff, took on the role of co-ordinating the area’s development, in consultation with PE/Bothmer Gymnastic teacher Andrew Lines and Evette Sunset who had begun work on our grounds master plan. Ewan was also assisted by Fraser Betley, a student from Mt Barker Waldorf School who was building a Parkour area there as part of his Class 12 project. There were challenges in meeting playground safety regulations, and integrating existing trees with new elements, both solid and flexible. However, the result was an area where trees, thick ropes, movable and vertically-propped tyres, horizontal bars and a wooden ‘wall’ provided endless possibilities for both simple and challenging manoeuvres.

Since 2012, members of the Parkour Association have been invited to run introductory sessions for middle school students on the safe use of the area. Its use during school time is restricted to students from Class 5 and above. After school, with parent supervision, it is well used by younger children. A search for ‘Parkour Willunga’ will enable you to see a short clip of Association members and students in the space.
Learning Through Experience

Jane Blomkamp, Class 3 Teacher, Noosa Pengari Steiner School

Class 3 learnt many new skills during Measurement Main Lesson and were more than ready to apply them practically. Lengths of rope and wood were supplied and children arranged themselves into four groups, working with people with whom they felt they could work well. Fantastic choices were made!

The following instructions were given to make a ladder:

- Rungs must be 30cm long
- Length between rungs must be 30cm
- A knot must be tied at exactly the same point on each side, underneath each rung
- All children must have a turn at everything
- Share, work safely and kindly, be inclusive

After providing the instructions, I noticed I was fairly redundant. I stepped away and watched in wonder how well the children worked as a group. The children carefully measured the lengths of wood. They placed the wood in vices, sawing with enthusiasm, noting how they would saw the second time around. They experienced great delight in drilling holes with the augers employing great precision in tying and securing knots. What the children learn in these situations is priceless and cannot be gained from a textbook, a computer or even being told about a ladder being made. This is learning through experience.

Healthy relationships

Kirsten Herbaut, Parent, Moreton Bay BIRALI Steiner School

It's been an amazing journey being one of the parents helping open the new Moreton Bay BIRALI Steiner School. I read an article in the local paper about a ‘Steiner based’ playgroup and something inside me said I had to take my then 18-month old son, and so my adventure began.

This journey has enabled me to meet many wonderful, inspiring, loving individuals and that is just the children! What stands out about their parents and the Steiner educators I have met, is their tremendous heart and their seemingly unending dedication to making a positive difference.

I was listening to Chris Jack, Education Administrator from Samford Valley Steiner School, as he gave a talk at our first information day on Why Steiner Education For Our Children? He talked about the balance between head, heart and hands that Steiner Schools achieve through their well-developed academic, artistic and practical programmes. This is part of the reason why Steiner graduates have a very sound and positive sense of who they are and how they can contribute to the world.

Steiner Education offers a teacher-student relationship that lasts. It takes a very special teacher to walk with their students through their five, six or seven first years of school. Where there is this kind of love envelopes the class, respect and trust grows, which is shown to relieve stress and promote feelings of well-being, thereby improving the immune system and teaching how to give and receive. I am so glad my son is going to go to a school where trusting, warm relationships thrive!

Virtual Environments and Stress

Shelley Davidow, High School Teacher, Noosa Pengari Steiner School

Virtual environments have measurable effects on children's developing brains, their nervous systems and ultimately on their emotional, cognitive and physical development. The risks of exposing children to ‘screen time’ outweigh the imagined benefits.

Children spend an inordinate amount of time in front of various screens. After fifty years of research on the effects of television, a groundbreaking article entitled ‘The Violent Face of Television’ consolidated findings over several decades to conclude that after fifty years of television, there is an inarguable connection between violence on screen and violent behaviour.

A diet of screen violence influences our neural patterning and stress responses to the world. Young children are at high risk because they don’t possess the cognitive ability to make the distinction between their reality and screen reality. In addition, they live in an imitative world and emulate all they see and hear.

Dr Mary Burke, associate clinical professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at the University of San Francisco,
found that screen media has demonstrable effects on brain activity, behaviour and function. She found that youngsters who spent more than twenty hours a week playing computer games, regardless of the type of game, showed increased glucose metabolism in certain parts of the brain, and decreased metabolism in other parts of the brain after playing; patterns similar to those seen in drug addicts.

Having screens at home means we have to be extraordinarily vigilant as parents. The way media affects the brain goes beyond addiction. It affects the way our children learn and consolidate memories during sleep. When we sleep, something incredible happens that is worth remembering; the all-important consolidation of skills happens. This takes place primarily during slow-wave sleep (SWS). It’s as if the brain rehearses new things learned and consolidates that learning. Children who play computer games show a disruption in slow-wave sleep. They spend less time in slow-wave sleep, which then affects the prefrontal cortex and results in impeded learning capacity and memory. Children who watch television also have reduced sleep efficiency, according to research from the Institute of Motor Control and Movement Technique at German Sport University in Cologne:

> Excessive television viewing and computer game playing have been associated with many psychiatric symptoms, especially emotional and behavioural symptoms, somatic complaints, attention problems such as hyperactivity, and family interaction problems … Television and computer game exposure affect children’s sleep and deteriorate verbal cognitive performance, supporting the hypothesis of the negative influence of media consumption on children’s sleep, learning, and memory.

Children’s brains are being formed every second of the day, so it matters enormously what they repeatedly do. As our children sit quietly in front of a screen, behaving themselves and thankfully not causing any trouble, their hearts might be racing and their bodies are potentially flooded with stress hormones. They are glued to the screen in what is often a virtual life-or-death battle with real physiological consequences. In our busy lives as parents, this is disconcerting and inconvenient information, but it’s information we should take note of and acknowledge, whether we like it or not. Over the past fifty years, research has confirmed that violence on television affects viewer behaviour, resulting in aggression, desensitisation and fear. Parents are the moderators and are those in control to protect younger children from the media and actively educate older children so they become empowered and discerning viewers and participants.

Children can be engaged in many other activities other than screen time. I tell my high school students that technology is there to be our slave and to assist us, not the other way around. If we find ourselves ‘enslaved’ to a game or a program or things such as Facebook, we need to be conscious enough to rescue ourselves.

Consider this: if our young children do not watch any television or play a single computer game, the absence of those activities will not affect their lives negatively.
OCEANOGRAPHY AND METEOROLOGY MAIN LESSON AND MARINE ART WORKSHOP
With Peter Glasby, Jayesh Pillarisetty and Van James
Havelock Island, Andamans, India
2-18 January 2014
Contact: jayesh_1958@yahoo.com

GLENAEON CLASS TEACHER CURRICULUM INTENSIVES
Glenaeon Rudolf Steiner School
12-17 January 2013
Contact: curriculum.intensives@glenaeon.nsw.edu.au

ANNUAL WALDORF EDUCATION CONFERENCE
Developing Living Thinking: Science and Art in Waldorf Education
Honolulu Waldorf School, Hawai‘i
15-17 February 2014
Contact: www.honoluluwaldorf.org

MARCH DELEGATES’ MEETING
Orana Steiner School Canberra
14-16 March 2014
Contact: sea@steinereducation.edu.au

SEA BUSINESS MANAGERS’ MEETING
Venue TBA
8 May 2014
Contact: sea@steinereducation.edu.au

SEA GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE
Venue TBA
9-10 May 2014
Contact: sea@steinereducation.edu.au

AUGUST DELEGATES’ MEETING
Candlenut Steiner School, Kuranda, North Queensland
15-17 August 2014
Contact: sea@steinereducation.edu.au

SEA NATIONAL TEACHERS’ CONFERENCE
Venue TBA
2015
Contact: sea@steinereducation.edu.au

WHAT’S ON IN 2014

SEA MISSION IS...

• to promote nationally, the educational principles of Rudolf Steiner
• to represent member schools and their views at a political level
• to safeguard the integrity of Steiner Education in Australia
• to support best practice, both educationally and operationally, in member schools
• to assist with planning and support in the establishment of new schools

SEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Chairperson: John Forman, Kamaroi Rudolf Steiner School
Treasurer: Bernard Thomson, Willunga Waldorf School
Executive Member: Matthew Cunnane, Noosa Pengari Steiner School
Executive Member: Kelley McGlashan, Chrysalis School for Rudolf Steiner Education
Executive Member: Bruce Thurgood, Warrah Special School for Rudolf Steiner Curative Education

SEA SECRETARIAT

Chief Executive Officer: Tracey Puckeridge
Administration: Nicki Radford

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Steiner Education Australia (SEA) is an incorporated body representing member schools throughout the States and Territories of Australia.