



STEINER EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

Educating the Whole Child
~ Head, Heart and Hands

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CLASSES AT MILKWOOD

KINDERGARTEN

Bush Apple Kindergarten:

Children 4 years of age turning 5 attend 4 days a fortnight.

Water Lily Kindergarten:

Children 5 years of age turning 6 attend 5 days a week. (This is the compulsory age for full time schooling as set by the government).

PRIMARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

Class 1, Class 2 /3, Class 4 /5, Class 6 /7

For composite classes, each class teacher delivers two curriculums; one for each class. Classroom assistants and specialist teachers contribute to the activities the teacher is delivering.

ENTRY AGE:

Class 1: Turning 7 sometime in the year.

Class 2: Turning 8 sometime in the year.

Class 3: Turning 9 sometime in the year.

Class 4: Turning 10 sometime in the year.

Class 5: Turning 11 sometime in the year.

Class 6: Turning 12 sometime in the year.

Class 7: Turning 13 sometime in the year.

PHILOSOPHY

Steiner schools have a unique and distinctive approach to educating children, aiming to enable each stage of growth to be fully and vividly enjoyed and experienced. They provide a balanced approach to the modern school curriculum. The academic, artistic and social aspects, or *'head, heart & hands'*, are treated as complementary facets of a single program of learning, allowing each to throw light on the others.

This is implemented by using art as a practice, and language to develop the feelings, by nourishing the children with the rich heritage of wise folk tales, histories, fairy stories, poems, music and games that are part of our world civilisation. This creates the cultural atmosphere in which the children are taught reading, writing, arithmetic, nature study, geography, science, languages, music and other subjects. Steiner designed a curriculum that is responsive to the developmental phases of childhood and the nurturing of the child's imagination in a school environment. Steiner thought that schools should cater to the needs of the child rather than the demands of the government or economic forces, so he developed schools that encourage creativity and free-thinking. His teaching seeks to recognise the individuality of the child and through a balanced education, allows them to go into the world with confidence.

"The need for imagination, a sense of truth and a feeling of responsibility – these are the three forces which are the very nerve of education."

~ Rudolf Steiner

The unique quality of human beings is our capacity for conscious thought. Steiner schooling strives to support the development of well-rounded human beings who are able to feel deeply and broadly, to think penetratingly and clearly, and then to act rightly out of conscious and free choice.

"Our highest endeavour must be to develop individuals who are able out of their own initiative to impart purpose and direction to their lives".

~ Rudolf Steiner

THE STEINER EDUCATOR

Steiner defined 'three golden rules' for teachers:

"To receive the child in gratitude from the world they come from;

to educate the child with love;

and to lead the child into the true freedom which belongs to man."

~ Rudolf Steiner.

The reverence and respect felt by Steiner teachers for the special qualities of each stage of childhood shapes the school environment, the way teachers communicate with the children, the materials used, the activities undertaken and the approach to learning at each developmental stage.

Teachers are dedicated to creating a genuine love of learning within each child. By freely using art, craft, music and language in conjunction with the teaching of academics, learning becomes a living, creative process. The academic subjects are enriched and enlivened in a way that meets the developmental stages of the children, offering both sensory and intellectual nourishment.

Steiner educators believe that children should not be rushed into adult consciousness but allowed to savour their childhood. To assist the young people to learn to know and love the world in childhood, to begin to develop good judgement in adolescence, to freely take responsibility for life's journey in adulthood; these are our tasks as teachers and parents.

Close co-operation of the teachers as a group is an important aspect of the provision of care to individual children. When a teacher encounters a difficulty with a particular student, this will be brought to the attention of colleagues at a staff meeting, and through the pooling of experience and insights, a solution can more quickly be found. While specialist teachers are involved in music, foreign languages, Eurythmy and physical education, the class teacher takes responsibility for the major part of the class work, including the *main lesson*.

Class teachers will have hold a Teaching Degree and Diploma or extensive experience in Steiner Education, or a studying towards this Diploma.

KINDERGARTEN

(Bush Apple and Water Lily)

During the first seven years children are physically forming and live very much in their imagination. This great capacity to enter into imaginative pictures and stories is a good place to begin the process of learning. Free, creative play is considered the best preparation for self-realisation in adult life.

The teacher endeavours to create an environment that gives children time to play and encourages them to exercise their imagination so that learn to conjure up ideas from within themselves. Simple homely tasks and artistic activities to both do and see are balanced with storytelling, singing games and generous play times. A rich supply of natural materials provides scope for imagination in play, which refined toys often deny.

Activities offered for the four to six year olds are based on the home and garden. These include sweeping, gardening, cooking, building cubbies, looking after animals, singing, listening to stories, helping to prepare the meal table, cutting fruit, painting, wax modelling and drawing. Children learn to enjoy building, using the natural materials in the room to make their own constructions and patterns. Practical experience helps the child develop confidence and capabilities. Steiner education seeks to nurture the senses through water-colour painting and singing, beeswax modelling. The teacher works consistently to provide rhythm and structure to the day, week, year and whole curriculum, to harmonise with the child's natural rhythms.

At this age, children are discovering how to relate socially with a peer group and take part in fundamental life tasks. Through meeting and playing creatively together, children learn vital interpersonal skills. The teacher plays an important role in enabling relationships between children to strengthen through play.

Young children develop primarily by doing, learning through imitation and physical activity. The role of the teacher is to provide a model for the children and a secure space in which to discover the world. They are not yet ready for more formal classes. Thus, the teacher reserves the formal teaching of numbers and letters for the child's next developmental stage, signalled physically by the change of teeth, at about the age of seven.

TEACHING METHODS CLASS ONE TO SIX

A central part of the class teacher's task is to intimately understand the needs of each child, and to nurture the development of a real spirit of sharing and community within the class. In a loving, structured environment, with the encouragement of their classmates and teachers, the children develop and appreciate their strengths and work at their difficulties. The social and moral learning that takes place in childhood is as important as the academic.

In the younger grades, all subjects are introduced through artistic mediums. This promotes abilities such as creative and flexible thinking, imagining ideas and problems from different perspectives and layering one thought upon another as part of a process of problem solving. Children can attain greater levels of achievement in all subjects through this method, than from dry lecturing and rote learning.

Mastery of oral communication is integral to all learning. Hearing, re-telling, acting and illustrating stories enrich the child's imaginative life and grasp of language. The ability to generate ideas, communicate them and bring them to fruition is essential to future success in adult life. Reading and writing are taught from Class 1. The child first learns to write using the shape of the letters to suggest meaning, i.e. M for mountain, V for valley, W for waves. In addition, they may walk the shape on the floor in the classroom and draw pictures that include the shape. This allows a deeper connection with, and an understanding of the letters, rather than just memorising the abstract shapes. The children write words and read their own writing before working with printed literature.

An understanding of numbers is built on the basis of concrete, real-life tasks - such as dividing a cake to share, estimating, measuring and through counting aloud, chanting of tables, musical rhythms and skipping games. These learning experiences are real and meaningful. The children may also learn games such as chess, which enhance thinking and mathematical ability.

We aim throughout the classes to share the finest literature with the students, which is appropriate to their age. The stories told by the teacher change as the child develops, correlating the era of human history with the developmental stages of the child. For six – seven year olds, the teacher may draw mainly on folk and fairy tales, moving on at age 8 to fables and legends, to Old Testament stories at age 8-9. Norse stories and sagas are presented at age 10, Greek myths and legends at age 11 and the Roman period at age 12.

CLASS SEVEN

In Class Seven, the children move from the consciousness of Rome to the consciousness of the Middle Ages. This special year marks a transition for the students as they begin to lose the attributes of childhood and take on those of early adulthood or adolescence. Of course, this is not a straightforward development but rather to-ing and fro-ing between the comforts and security of childhood and the changes in feelings and actions that mark the young teenager.

Children would also receive separate classes in Craft, Art, Physical Education, Drama and Music, Gardening and a language other than English. All of these classes are chosen to support the development and consciousness of the child. As well as the Main Lessons, the class teacher teaches subjects in the Humanities and/or Maths and Science areas during daily periods. The classes chosen are dependent on the knowledge and specialities of each teacher. Often the teacher will take the English, History and Geography classes for example and a specialist teacher may come in to assist with the Science and Maths classes.

But it would be expected that, along with the Main Lesson, the students would do four lessons of English and Maths per week and a differing amount of History and Geography classes which may be taught separately or together under a general social studies heading. The class teacher would also deliver the other areas of the curriculum as are done in classes one to seven.

THE MAIN LESSON

The Main Lesson is one of the basic elements of the Steiner curriculum. It involves the thorough working of the main subjects (such as geography, science, history, mathematics or literature), taught in main lesson blocks of about two hours per day, usually over 3 weeks. It is always conducted in the morning, when the children are fresh and is followed by a change of activity.

The topics are approached through stories, painting, recitation, a physical group project or a game, until the children have made some connection to it with every part of themselves. It is then set aside to 'digest' and a further topic is taken up. This pattern is natural to children, as anyone who has observed the success of 'crazes' in a playground will know. The result is a thorough and satisfying assimilation of knowledge, thus maintaining the child's enthusiasm for learning.

There are no textbooks as such in the primary school years. All children have 'main lesson books', which are their workbooks that they create during the year. They essentially produce their own 'textbooks', which record their experiences and what they've learned. Upper grades use textbooks to supplement their main lesson work.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN LESSON CURRICULUM

Class 1:

- Form Drawing
- Introduction of Numbers and Letters (2 Main lessons)
- Moving from letters to text
- Mathematics: The Four Processes
- Epoch Study: English: Fairy Tales
- Nature Studies
- Roman Numerals

Class 2 /3:

- English: Grammar
- English: Story Writing
- Nature Studies, Animal Fables
- Epoch Study: Celtic Legends, Lives of Saints
- Russian Fairy Tales
- Home Surroundings
- Old Testament Stories
- Farming and Gardening

Class 4 /5

- Epoch Study: Nordic Mythology
- Man and Animal
- History of Writing
- Geography of Local Environment
- Mathematics: including fractions and decimals
- English: Poetry
- English: Parts of Speech
- Epoch Study: India, Persia, Greece

Class 6 /7:

- Epoch Study: Study of Rome
- Astronomy
- Botany
- Heat, Electricity and Magnetism
- Geometry
- Simple Machines
- Epoch Study: Study of the Middle Ages
- Geography - Mountains, Maps of Continents
- Drama – Shakespearean Play (A Comedy)

SPECIALIST SUBJECTS

MUSIC

Music is a very important form of expression and brings balance to the day. Exercises for training the musical ear are practised, providing a solid base for subsequent musical accomplishment. Singing and choral work are developed throughout the school years. Children learn the recorder from Class One through to Class Six. Individual tuition of a stringed instrument and music notation is taught from Class Three, and by Class Four children participate in orchestral work.

ART & CRAFT

Art and craft are an integral part of the curriculum and are used as a way of engaging the children in the current topic from every angle. This complements and enhances the intellectual aspects of the class work. Learning through the arts promotes multiple skills and abilities and nurtures the development of cognitive, social and personal competencies. For example, in a Class Four history main-lesson the children may learn Nordic dancing, construct a Nordic ship and paint a Nordic shield.

Art includes recitation and drama, wet-on-wet painting, form drawing, beeswax and clay modelling, and handcrafts such as sewing, knitting, weaving, woodwork and carving. The primary school child experiences life as a world of pictures and feelings. This promotes a rich inner structure enabling the later development of conceptual thinking. Children who learn to make practical things in an artistic way, for the benefit of others as well as themselves, will be able to form their lives and their relationships in a social and artistic way when they are older, thereby enriching their lives. The training through art in school is not for the purpose of producing artists but in order to educate young people for the art of living, based on disciplined exercise.

"Joy and happiness in living, love for all existence, a power and energy for work, such are among the lifelong results of a right cultivation of the feeling for beauty and art". ~ Rudolf Steiner

RELIGION AND FESTIVALS

Classes in religious doctrine are not part of the curriculum. The Steiner curriculum is non-denominational and respects the individual beliefs of families. Students of any ethnic or religious background are welcomed. Spiritual guidance is aimed at awakening the child's natural reverence for the wonder and beauty of life.

Festivals originated in ancient cultures yet have been adapted over time. Seasonal festivals serve to connect humanity with the rhythms of nature. We celebrate the major Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter, the summer and winter solstices, as well as other festivals relevant to the locality. This provides an opportunity for participation of the whole school community. There is joy in the preparation, the anticipation and the celebration itself. The activities, songs and rhymes used in class also relate to the seasons.

LANGUAGES

Ideally, a foreign language is introduced in Class 1 and continues throughout all classes. For younger classes this may take the form of songs and games and simple vocabulary introduced through stories. This teaching becomes more complex as the children develop. We are currently endeavouring to present a language other than English that will support other learning and introduce the children to a more open world view. Without a specialist teacher at this time, the children learn simple songs and vocabulary dependant on their teacher's knowledge.

EURYTHMY

Eurythmy is a dance-like art form, which involves the expression of sound through movement: specific movements correspond to particular notes or sounds. It enhances coordination, strengthens the ability to listen and reinforces social connections. Eurythmy is introduced in Kindergarten and continues throughout school and the teachers have at least four years of specialised training. Each year a visiting Eurythmist returns to Milkwood to present a 2week block of Eurythmy for each class.

COMPUTERS AND TECHNOLOGY

Computer skills of all types are becoming more necessary in today's world and using these tools is comparably easy for each new generation. We believe there is a time to use computers in life, but not replace the human instruments such as the teacher's voice in story, the student's hands in writing and drawing and the depth of colour and eye movement in nature, to name a few. Electronic devices and computers are not teaching instruments at Milkwood, and we strongly request parents avoid making them available for children at home.

Our focus is on nurturing sensory development and providing the environment and lessons for flexible free thinkers. This development occurs predominately between 0-14 years. When we consider the sensory impact of computers we notice eye and limb movement is limited, sound and tone is compacted, colour is segmented, breathing becomes erratic rather than rhythmical and concentration levels are shortened. We have confidence that fantasy and imagination, which are natural to the young child, form a firm foundation for creative thinking that will enable them to discover the depths and breadths of the world.

We encourage each child to discover their own physical ability, their own feeling life and imaginative thoughts then later the computer can become an instrument to discover thoughts belonging to the rest of the world.

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

The Steiner educator sees the child as consisting of body, soul and spirit. The belief of an indwelling soul in a child evokes within adults a reverence and sensitivity for that child's being. The child deserves respect and dignity. It is the responsibility of the parents and teachers to guide the child during the early years of life. Behaviour management is set out in the Milkwood Discipline Policy and includes the reflection on the part of the teacher on how he/she manages the children. Could we have handled a situation more effectively? What positive strengths can we build on? Have we really thought through the kind of things we want to draw out of the child or allow to unfold in the child to help him/her overcome the difficulty?

The following three principles form the basis from which discipline procedures are determined:

1. Respect for all human beings (including oneself and others).
2. Respect for all living creatures and plants.
3. Respect for school and personal property.

In both the classroom and the playground, we wish to foster respect for other human beings in an atmosphere of peaceful co-operation.

Procedures employed by the teacher to promote a harmonious atmosphere beneficial to growth and learning are as follows:

Creation of rhythm in the day. Being worthy of imitation. Re-direction of children to another activity, i.e. working alongside an adult. Separating by removing children from a potentially dangerous situation. Support both aggressor and victim by giving a few minutes 'time out'. This is for the children to recover and regain their grounding. Verse or song may be used to lighten and heal the situation.

Parents will be told of any difficulties at the end of class. Time will be made for longer discussions with parents if required.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do children fare when transferring from a Steiner class to a mainstream class?

Generally, transitions are not difficult. The most common transition is from primary to secondary school, and usually takes place without significant difficulties. This education releases capacities, keeps the mind and imagination fresh, and awakens life interests. Middle school teachers have conveyed that the children carry these qualities with them to middle school. Transitions in the lower grades, particularly between the first and third grades, can potentially be more of a problem because of the differences in the timing and approach to the curriculum. These issues can be discussed with the class teacher on an individual basis.

How does the Steiner approach challenge the children who enter first grade already knowing how to read? What will such children learn, won't they be bored? How can we encourage a balanced development? In working toward balanced development, it is necessary to consider more than intellectual achievements. What is the child like emotionally? Are they happy being a child? Do they relate well with other children, or almost exclusively with adults? Are they comfortable in their body and well-coordinated?

The approach to writing and reading involves the child's mind, body and feelings, which provides a meaningful connection with the work that maintains the interest, involvement and delight of even the most intellectual of children. Imaginative play and the arts can have a healing influence on the child's life forces. Images from fairy tales are deeply nurturing to the unconscious elements of the young child. Early intellectual awakening can result in a weakening of the child's vital forces, manifesting in frequent colds or other illnesses. The dreamy state of childhood is an essential element in the healthy formation of the physical body during the first seven years. Because the job of the intellect is to analyse and exercise critical judgement, very bright children may have difficulty relating emotionally with other children, a problem which can intensify as the child becomes older. If parents want a child's power of imagination to be nourished and cultivated, if they have faith that not learning to read as quickly as a neighbour or relative expects is fine, the child will retain the openness necessary to enjoy and benefit from the Steiner approach.

RUDOLF STEINER AND EDUCATION

Rudolf Steiner (1864-1925) was an Austrian philosopher, scientist and humanitarian who has profoundly influenced Western culture. He worked with scientists, artists, and doctors, ministers of religion, teachers and industrialists to help transform our civilisation. His work is best known through Steiner Education, Bio-dynamic Agriculture, Anthroposophical Medicine and Architecture. His background in history and civilisations coupled with his observation in life gave the world the gift of Waldorf Education. It is a deeply insightful application of learning based on the Study of Humanity that helps develop consciousness of self and the surrounding world. Steiner's perception that although external conditions in our time are changing as never before, the essential nature of humanity remains; in particular, the stages of human development through childhood follow a natural pattern unaffected by short term social change.

The task of educators remains to prepare children for an unpredictable future by nurturing healthy development 'from the inside', to provide the right nourishment at each stage of physical, emotional and spiritual growth. This kind of education had its origin in the first school established by Rudolf Steiner for the children of workers at the Waldorf cigarette factory in Stuttgart in 1919. He developed a flexible curriculum that has evolved with time and has been adapted to local conditions in the various countries where Steiner schools are found.

Steiner schools now form the largest and fastest growing group of independent private schools worldwide. There is an international group of over 800 schools and 1200 kindergartens in many countries including Australia, Britain, Sweden, Austria, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, China, Japan, Chile, U.S.A. and Canada. There are currently over 50 schools and Kindergartens throughout Australia. Although Steiner education has already stood the test of time, many believe it will show its full promise in the 21st century. The significance of its rapid growth around the world indicates that it may well be an education coming into its own because it fosters a thinking that is appropriate for our age.

RECOMMENDED READING

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