



TARREMAH SCHOOL

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

Steiner Education: Principles and Practice

Steiner Schools offer a child-centred curriculum and method of teaching which addresses the developmental changes of the growing child is recognised as unique individual and teachers seek to create an environment in which the individual can develop in harmony and confidence. Each child's inner life of imagination and moral striving is protected and cultivated with as much care as are the more easily discernible aspects of academic and physical skills. The innate creativity and joyfulness of healthy children is encouraged through using an artistic approach to all learning situations.

The development of the child is seen in three separate seven year stages, from birth to 21 years. During the first stage the priority for development is the physical body of the child, when children are educated by 'doing', by imitation (will activity). The second stage is between the ages of 7 and 14, when a rich inner life of feeling and imagination unfolds (feeling activity). At this stage, thought is not analytical and critical, but pictorial and discursive. The third stage begins at around 14 with clarity of thought and capacity for analytical thinking as the intellect develops (thinking activity).

Kindergarten

In the Kindergarten, the children are given no formal academic instruction. Kindergarten days are filled with music, verse, singing, painting, drawing, modelling, cooking, gardening, dancing and creative play. To encourage the child to enter the world slowly at a natural pace, an inviting environment is created which is warm and safe, with the security of routines and the beauty of natural materials. These nurture the development of the sense through natural forms, textures and perfumes and light-filled colours.

Stories and fairy tales are told and acted out. The children live vividly in these pictures and the teacher makes sure that the stories are both morally and culturally worthy of imitation. They also help to foster the sense of wonder and delight, bringing the child into a joyful and caring relationship with the natural world. Meanwhile the practical tasks of daily life go on, for the Kindergarten is, above all else, a reflection of the home. The actions of the adults are permeated with meaning and purpose, and the needs of the children are taken care of so that they can become fully engaged in their own work, imitation through play. In this way, the child's whole being is imbued with order and harmony and is supported by security and routine.

Primary School

In the seventh year the child enters the primary school. The Class teachers stays with the class right through the primary years, developing a relationship of confidence, security and trust. The teacher becomes the loving authority for each child, caring for each through careful observations, understanding, profound thoughtfulness and consistency.

Structure of the day

The School day is divided into three parts: the Main Lesson, artistic/rhythmic/practice lessons and practical/craft lessons.

The school day begins with a short session of group activities: music, recitation of poetry and verse, singing and movement. This is followed by the Main Lesson on a subject which is explored for a period of three or four weeks. The teacher re-tells for the children, in as pictorial a way as possible, what he or she has 'made his/her own' with deep interest, sincerity and enthusiasm. The children make their own books on the subject, with care for the beauty of presentation of the work. The time devoted to each Main Lesson makes possible an in-depth treatment of each subject. Main lesson themes are based on the content appropriate for the children of each age. Mathematics, the Sciences and English occupy the central positions in the academic program. An artistic approach through story, drama, music, art and creative writing brings all subjects to life and answers the special needs of children. The natural cycles of the day and yearly seasons have great importance in the curriculum.

The 'middle' lessons are comprised of a practice component (for academic skills), and an artistic lesson which includes: instrumental music, singing, poetry, painting, foreign languages and dancing.

In the afternoons, the practical activities include knitting and crochet work, carpentry, basket weaving, pottery, construction and gardening, as well as structured physical activities and games of a non-competitive nature. The whole class will participate in each activity: for example all boys and girls do knitting and carpentry and are encouraged to do well in these activities.

Middle School

Over the past ten years the concept of middle school (linking early primary with upper, high school), has gained much credence in educational thinking. Many state schools, and in particular many independent schools, have actively embraced the middle school concept and have spent time and money establishing buildings, curricula and pastoral care programs, aimed specifically at catering for the needs of this age group. This movement has been in response to research and studies, which highlight the poor transition, managed by many children from primary to high school. It has shown that the traditional demands of high schools (many changes of teachers and rooms within a day, bigger campuses, new peer groups, higher expectations for independent work habits, with a greater reliance on technological aids to replace much of the teacher's role), can be quite overwhelming for many. That this transition must take place at sometime is obvious in a state where a Steiner education cannot yet take students to high school and tertiary studies. But the timing of this transition can be critical, and needs to be considered very carefully by parents.

By expanding Tarremah to Years Seven and Eight, it has been possible to offer security and dependability in the educational institution, which the Class Teacher format provides. Links to the curriculum of previous years also support this security.

During the final stage of the second seven-year period (classes 6-8), the child's physiological development and psychological upheaval cause a loss of balance and equanimity which was acquired during the 'heart' of childhood. The continuation of the mode of education adopted during the lower primary years will assist in the harmonious development of emotional life, bringing to a natural conclusion, the second seven-year phase.

Year 8 concludes the second phase of development in the child, according to the educational indications given by Rudolf Steiner, which are followed by all Steiner schools including our own.

The Task of the Teachers

Steiner School teachers aim to assist children to enter fully into life with understanding and courage. They do not teach Anthroposophy to the pupils and aim to avoid indoctrination of any sort, developing in the students the ability to think for themselves. Steiner teachers do study Anthroposophy and work to develop the special insight and regard for their pupils which is fundamental to their teaching practice.

A Steiner school is managed by the teachers themselves. The teachers as a group form the College of Teachers and as such meet weekly to discuss pedagogical and administrative issues, and to undertake in-depth study of individual children. Faculty members also meet weekly to discuss education matters.

Class teachers offer at least one evening per term for parents of their class to share an artistic activity and talk about the curriculum and other matters of general interest. Individual parent-teacher interviews are held every year, and written reports are provided from Class 4 onwards.