

Book Review

Teaching with spirit – New perspectives on Steiner Education in Australia

Edited by Leigh Burrows and Tom Stehlik

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As a Principal of a K-12 Waldorf school in South Australia, I seek out practical ways to not only promote Steiner education but also to develop it for the challenges of our time. I aspire to work with the principles that are the foundation of the education as well as create relevant and effective practices. Recently, I was handed a book that is filled with stories from others who seem to have similar aspirations as my own.

Teaching with Spirit – New perspectives on Steiner Education in Australia is an anthology from a broad group of writers that tackles some controversial topics facing Steiner education today. Although the book is written in reference to the Australian context, the issues it raises are most likely relevant for Waldorf schools throughout the world. Recent up-to-date experiences that expand on current accepted practices are shared. The writers deliver an honest approach to the difficulties facing Steiner education today as well as innovative practices to invigorate the Steiner curriculum.

The real life experiences draw in the reader to be a part of the research in action. The candid viewpoints of the various writers stimulate the reader's imagination to question and consider alternative approaches in Waldorf education. I don't necessarily agree with everything that is written in the book, however the book's strength is the fact it presents non-conventional viewpoints that question age-old practices and elicit thoughtful reflection by the reader.

It covers a wide variety of topics organised in a way that it can be read as a whole, yet the reader can also easily access individual entries according to one's interest. Its structure covers innovative practices in early childhood through primary to high school and administration. Teachers, parents and board members will find interesting ideas within its pages. It provides a springboard for people involved in Steiner education to seek and consider alternative approaches. Most importantly, it is one of the only books that I have read on Steiner education that offers a refreshingly honest and practical approach rather than a purely theoretical insight.

The editors Leigh Burrows and Tom Stehlik have managed to compile a group of articles from present day educators who endear the readers with their personalised accounts of special experiences in a Waldorf education. Each article begins by the writer describing their own environment from which they share their experiences and insights. The writer shares their positive experiences as well as the way they've addressed challenges in their unique set of circumstances.

From this book, it is clear there is not just one way to provide a Waldorf education and there are many ways to be involved in a Steiner school. The book not only covers the teaching/learning experiences from early childhood through to high school but also presents innovative approaches to development of teaching practices and leadership structures in this setting. The descriptions of real life experiences bring the understanding of a Steiner education alive.

I recommend this anthology to anyone looking to build a broader and deeper understanding of a Steiner education. The active real-life perspectives create an easy, interesting and thought evoking read about Steiner education in the twenty-first century.

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