

## *Faith, Love & Hope:*

### **Creative Speech & Drama with Young People & the Community**

Over the last 30 years, family and community life in South Australia has changed significantly, to the point where the conscious nurturing and protection of childhood has become paramount. I imagine that this is a worldwide phenomenon. Something that we took for granted in Waldorf/Steiner communities in the 1980s now needs protecting, much like our environment. This relationship between the wellbeing of the human being and the wellbeing of planet Earth asks us to broaden our vision (think globally, act locally) and to become more awake to the impact of lifestyle and work life choices we make. It reminds me of a quote from Christopher Fry's "Sleep of Prisoners":

*Thank God our time is now,  
When wrong comes up to face us everywhere  
Never to leave us 'til we take  
The longest stride of soul men ever took.  
Affairs are now soul-size,  
The enterprise is exploration unto God.  
Where are you making for?  
It takes so many thousand years to wake,  
But will you wake, for pity's sake?*



*Boy Overboard by Maurice Gleitzman, produced by Ink Pot Arts*

The increasing influence of the spiritual forces of opposition pushes us to awaken. It also asks us to work together more mindfully to support young people. It invites us to observe keenly, listen intently, continue asking questions, to take an earnest interest in the young people's (and our colleagues') destinies, to dive deeper into our meditative and spiritual research practice, to ask for help from their angels. Yet these tasks of a teacher were prescribed by Rudolf Steiner 100 years ago. How is this different today and particularly from when I began teaching three decades ago? I will return to this question.

When I begin to reflect on my experiences in sharing Creative Speech and Drama in public and private sectors, the latent questions that arise and the behaviours of the young people encountered point in many cases to the increase in anxiety and mental health issues in our communities. There are many reasons for people to be fearful. I anticipate readers and colleagues know the causes very well, so there is no need to name them. At the same time, the gifts that Waldorf Education and Creative Speech and Drama can provide are illumined. The sad paradox is that government funding is consistently diminishing for these much-needed services.

I recall an 11-year-old child curled up in a foetal position under a chair, unable to respond to gentle coaxing for comfort during a dance-drama class. Twelve months later, this same girl is pouring out her soul as she sings about saving the planet and the power of love with a group of intergenerational performers, her heart clearly shining with joy. She has discovered her foundation for being in the world, and Arts engagement has been part of what has enabled this.

*How did this happen? We provided a safe space for expressing creativity, worked with the parents to provide support and boundaries, had warm and generous co-creatives and offered a project with a story she needed to hear. We endeavoured to hold her with love, brought the Creative Speech work and nurtured faith and hope in the future.*

I also recall the questions and discussions regarding methodologies with colleagues as we encounter issues of children expressing tantrum behaviour, or not being able to focus in developmentally appropriate ways. We also ponder on why many children are not able to clap in rhythm, or why some have no respect for adults or are beginning to self-harm as early as 7 years old.

*Many questions arise, some we can address immediately and others we hold inwardly with the faith and hope that in due course we will find ways to assist. In this space of not knowing, something new can arise. It is an invitation to those across the threshold to help us.*

Then I remember how a Class One child, unable to focus sufficiently to engage with Morning Circle time (due to family challenges), was six months later enjoying wrestling Laheen the Eagle as an eel in the class' play of the King of Ireland's Son. Soon after, he finds within himself the strength to stand in front of the class to speak his special birthday verse.

*Although still tentative, this child's Class Teacher's consistent love and support has enabled him to feel safer and stronger, providing an opportunity for the Creative Speech work to nourish him. This was enhanced by the joy that the class experienced while creating their Class Play. We now trust that he will gain the confidence he needs in the coming months and years.*

Understanding and consciously incorporating techniques that address anxiety and nervousness, via strengthening the etheric forces, can aid the healing potential for the Creative Speech and Drama artist's work. In Steiner's lecture in Munich, January 11<sup>th</sup> 1912 "Overcoming Nervousness"<sup>1</sup>, he outlines this and provides simple examples for doing so. Pioneer Eurythmist Molly von Heider took these indications and others to provide a helpful overview in trainings she offered Waldorf Teachers worldwide during the 1990s<sup>2</sup>. These can be easily be incorporated into classroom practice with Creative Speech and Drama via poetry recitation with movement and imaginative pictures, drama games and Class Plays:

- All movement that takes the child off the ground – skipping, jumping, climbing, balancing, dancing (not classical)
- Skilful feet and fingers
- Working with anticipation
- Rhythm, repetition (forwards and in reverse)
- Experiencing the language of form
- Engaging the student whole-heartedly
- Memory training
- Bringing order out of chaos

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<sup>1</sup> Steiner R, "Overcoming Nervousness" , Lecture given in Munich, Jan 11<sup>th</sup> 1912, translated by RM Querido & G Church © 1973 Anthroposophic Press Inc, USA

<sup>2</sup> Additional texts recommended by Molly von Heider are:

Steiner R, "Practical Advice to Teachers" Lecture cycle Stuttgart 1919, Rudolf Steiner Press, UK © 1976

Steiner R, "Education as a Social Problem" Dornach Aug 9-17 1919, Anthroposophic Press, New York © 1969

Steiner R, "Art in the Life of Mystery Wisdom" Stuttgart, March 1923, Anthroposophic Press, New York 1935

Steiner R, "St Mark's Gospel" Lecture IV, Berlin, 1910-1911, Rudolf Steiner Publishing Company UK, © 1937

Steiner R, "Conferences with Teachers" Vol I, Stuttgart 1919-1924

Steiner R, "Ilkley Course" Lecture II, 1923

To this, as Creative Speech artists, we can add working with the breath. Supporting the students' unfolding journey of their incarnating individuality via specific breath exercises and speech techniques is a central gift we can offer. In addition, the deepening of the breath improves circulation, can influence blood/breath rates and enables general wellbeing.



So how has this informed my teaching? Knowing the curriculum indications for development, coupled with these learning aides informs the choice of speech exercises, poems, drama games and methodologies. This varies according to the year levels of the students. When working with adults to bring Creative Speech for children, it often involves stepping back to the playful exploration of the living gesture, colour and force of sound, enlivening the breath, engaging the imagination and inner life and providing an experience of how one can be an artist with the spoken word.

*Winter Festival Performance of the "Sacred Flame", Mount Barker Waldorf School*

In the intergenerational situation of Community Theatre, working in a professional-amateur exchange, choice of meaningful stories is important. I have endeavoured to listen to what needs to be told, to sense the needs in community and to find texts that connect participants and audience to pictures that can nourish and enable understanding. For example, in recent years, due to the influx of refugees, we hosted "Boy Overboard" by Maurice Gleitzman. To address the senseless destruction of our environment, we are developing a new work for the 2020 Fringe that invites the audience to consider working with indigenous cultures for the betterment of the planet. Students come from far and wide, from public and private schools, from Homeschool or online learning situations. We have run workshops on storytelling using the epic techniques, enlivened speech and empathy for others through dramatic projects and incorporated poetry recitation in our warm-up times. Through embracing inclusion and inter-cultural learning, we foster acceptance for 'otherness'. With engaging all ages, we nurture positive ageing approaches. Creative engagement thus supports discovering one's capacities and gifts, positively affecting wellbeing.



*A Mid-Summer Nights' Dream by Ink Pot Arts*

So what are the young people asking of us to do more in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? As striving adults, knowing that what lives in us directly affects the young people<sup>3</sup> is an important part of nurturing wellbeing. Our inner work models for the young people what they can embrace and take further, so we cannot be idle. In this age of individualism and egoism, we are being asked to nurture a Culture of Co-operation to ensure a future for this world on both local and global levels. Our teamwork enables healing and includes those across the threshold. As we face tremendous environmental and social challenges, generosity of spirit, compassion and courage to find solutions are essential tools. Moreover, behind all this lies the goal to nurture the three pillars of our existence – Faith, Love and Hope<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> p16 Steiner R, "Overcoming Nervousness" , Lecture given in Munich, Jan 11<sup>th</sup> 1912, translated by RM Querido & G Church © 1973 Anthroposophic Press Inc, USA

<sup>4</sup> Steiner R, "Faith, Love and Hope" Nurnberg Dec 2-3 1911. Translated by Violet G Watkin, GA 130