

# Food for thought from the RSST

## Reflection after Jon McAlice's parent talk

By Jade Kelly, RSST member

At a recent evening talk at the school, Jon McAlice invited us to revisit something fundamental about Steiner education - that it was never meant to be fixed.

Jon spoke about the origins of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart, where more than a hundred mixed-age children initially gathered together in one space. It was not a fully formed system, nor a rigid model to be repeated exactly. Rather, it was an impulse. A living beginning. Something that would continue to evolve in response to the needs of the children and the times in which they lived.

Jon described Waldorf schools not as fixed systems, but more like living organisms - something that grows, changes and responds to the developmental needs of the children it serves. In that sense, no two schools are exactly the same, and no moment in a school's life is exactly the same either.

That idea stayed with me.

Steiner education was not created as a set of rules to preserve unchanged. It was created as a living pedagogy - one that continually asks: What do children need now? What does this moment in the world require of us?

Jon spoke about how many education systems are designed to shape children so they can fit into the structures of society as it currently exists. The task of Steiner education is slightly different. It seeks to educate young people in such a way that they can meet the world as individuals - capable of asking meaningful questions, seeking answers, and ultimately contributing something new.

Another thought Jon shared that resonated deeply was the idea that learning happens through encounter.

When a child meets something - a story, a piece of music, a scientific idea, a craft, a historical moment - something in that encounter has the potential to change them. And when they return to that experience again and again over time, they do not meet it as the same person. Each return brings a slightly different perspective. They see something new. Eventually, something clicks. Meaning forms. And that meaning becomes part of who they are.

In this sense, repetition is not simply practice. It is an opportunity for a deeper relationship with the world.

Jon also spoke about the trust with which children arrive in the world - a kind of angelic trust. They come open to experience, open to encounter. Part of our work as adults is to create environments, or spaces, where that trust can be held safely so that children can grow into themselves fully.

And this is where his talk became particularly thought-provoking.

Jon acknowledged that we are living in a time that is increasingly difficult for children. The pace of the world, the pressures placed upon young people, and the rapid technological and social changes all shape the environment they are growing into.

In that context, holding a space like a Steiner school becomes no small task.

He suggested that to truly protect and nurture childhood today requires something quite bold - perhaps even radical.

Radical not in the sense of withdrawing from the world, but in consciously creating a space where childhood can unfold differently from the pressures of the wider culture. A place where curiosity, imagination, meaningful learning, and human connection are given the time and care they need.

And this work is not carried by teachers alone.

It is something that lives in the community as a whole - teachers, parents, and the wider school community working together to protect and support the conditions that allow this education to thrive.

What I took from the evening was a renewed sense of gratitude for this living pedagogy, and also a reminder that it asks something of us. It asks us to stay awake, to stay thoughtful, and to continually return to the central question:

What do children need from us now?

If Steiner education is truly a living impulse, then our task is not simply to preserve it, but to continue nurturing it so that it can meet the children of today - and prepare them to meet the world as thoughtful, resilient, and questioning human beings.

And that feels like work worth doing.

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**Please feel free to contact the RSST to share your thoughts or comments. [rsst@michaelpark.school.nz](mailto:rsst@michaelpark.school.nz)**