

Teacher Education Institute (TEI)

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4 Learning to Write and Read and its Relationship to Music; the example of Finland

Five videos describe various areas of pedagogy that we recommend. Our approach is eclectic in nature; partly based on over forty years of experience by its author who has worked in education on three continents; partly based on a Waldorf-inspired curriculum relevant to the state sector; partly based on content and methodology used in Finland and New Zealand (students in both these countries outperform UK and USA students); and partly based on current research.

Video 4 Learning to Write and Read was created many years ago when Dr. David Mollet was involved with Waldorf Education in New Zealand. Because of his considerable reservations with private Waldorf education he now has no contact with any Waldorf institution or person. For descriptions of his experience with Waldorf/Steiner people please visit <http://members.cox.net/tei/SomeExperience!.htm>. After such experiences covering forty years it is understandable that David no longer wishes to have such contact.

However, he does believe that many aspects of the Waldorf approach are relevant and appropriate for any education process and indeed Steiner himself explicitly stated that this was the case, "Moreover, I should like to point out to you that the real aim and object of our Anthroposophical education is not to found as many Anthroposophical schools as possible. It is, of course, necessary that there should be certain model schools where the methods are carried out in detail. It is a crying need of our days that there should be such schools. But our education concerns itself with the methods of teaching, and is essentially a new way and art of education, so every teacher can bring it into this work, in whatever kind of school he/she happens to be. There can be no question of creating revolutions in existing institutions. Our task is rather to give indications of a way of teaching arising out of our anthroposophical knowledge of man."

As his followers, in many cases, are implementing the opposite to what Steiner recommends, David authors his own approach and gives reference to sources where relevant. As stated above, David has over forty years experience on three continents and the approach he recommends includes content and methodology from such involvement and the results of his considerable research and his experience with education in New Zealand where he was able to make a significant contribution.

The video covers Introduction, Dangers of Premature Development, Curved and Straight Lines, Forms in Relation to Physical Activity, Involvement of the Imagination, The Forms and Letters of the Alphabet, Learning to Read: The Preparatory Stage, The Consonants, Summary of the Sequence, The First Reading Book, Working from the Whole to the Parts, The Vowels, Conclusion.

Some glimpses of content

Introduction - Learning to write and read are not only matters of acquiring basic skills, however important and worthwhile these are in themselves. Learning to write and read (in that order) forms an integral part of the child's development. Children taught by our approach learn to read later than those taught by other methods. It is true that children taught in this way learn the mechanics of reading slightly later. It should be emphasised, however, that the methods introduce children to the preparatory stage of learning to read around the age of six.

Dangers of Premature Development - Teachers who use our approach believe that the "natural" course of events is for children to first learn to write, then to read their own writing, and only finally to begin to read the printed word.

Curved and Straight Lines - In the first place children are taught to "draw" straight and curved lines; first through physical experience.; secondly, by "drawing" them; thirdly, by converting the lines into letters.

Learning to Read; the Preparatory Stage - The pictorial element of the child's consciousness plays a crucial role at this stage. It starts in the imaginative, pictorial realm; it finds expression in a concrete way, and only then is it taken into the intellect as an abstract concept. The starting point therefore is children's inner experience and it would be quite wrong to frustrate or damage the six year olds imaginative faculties in any way; thus no demands are made to abstract or theorise. Yet this is exactly what will happen if children are forced or coerced into the theoretical task of decoding at the age of six or earlier.