

## HEALING STORIES FOR CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

Susan Perrow, Hawthorn Press, ISBN 1-903458-78-1

Susan Perrow has worked in kindergartens and schools in Australia and Africa, and also as a teacher trainer and mentor. Last year, she was setting off on a world tour, to arrive in England in March 2008 for the publication of this book. I invited Susan Perrow to give a couple of workshops in Co Clare for parents and those working with young children in Steiner kindergartens around Ireland. It was a pleasure to meet Susan, and to join the full classroom of eager parents and teachers, hungry for help in dealing with children's challenging behaviour. In the Steiner schools and kindergartens, a great emphasis is placed on storytelling. A lot of teaching is done through story. We learn about values, ethics, etc through examples of honourable human behaviour, as displayed by story characters, from fairy tales, myths and legends.

Susan explained her way of working - of creating a story that would show the child - without pointing the finger or preaching - the benefits of co-operative behaviour. She shared anecdotes from her own family and teaching life, gave a simple map for story creation, and then had us create our own stories for particular situations.

In her book, Susan expands on these methods, includes sample stories for a wide range of behavioural challenges, and goes on to encourage and empower the reader to create and tell their own stories, emphasising the world of difference between telling a tale and reading from a book!

Susan's model asks us to firstly analyze/describe the 'challenging' behaviour (remembering, of course, that it is the behaviour, not the child, that is challenging!), e.g. child scared of the dark. Then we find metaphors to include in a story, e.g. a star that shines in the darkness. Next there must be a journey, and this leads to a resolution - the restoration of harmony and a positive outcome. It is important that the stories are resolved positively. This way of working with healing story is not about making children feel guilty for behaving 'badly', but of offering them a way to discover goodness for themselves.

For example, a boy of 8 who was using knives in an irresponsible manner, was told a story which described many destructive uses of a pocket knife, and their consequences. In the story, this is followed by a dream and the carving of a wooden castle. In reality, after hearing this story, the boy experiences the joy of creating something beautiful by carving wood, and is motivated to use his knife in a constructive manner rather than to destroy things.]

As a storyteller, I *know* that a story can speak directly to the heart of a matter. Stories really *can* and *do* heal.

Children love stories, and storytelling is such a wonderful way of bonding with your children, it is a gift to treasure. I'd recommend Susan Perrow's book. Give yourself and your children this gift! The book also includes a list of helpful books and supportive websites, to help you find stories and storytellers.

*Reveiwed by Ruth Marshall*