

Something to be passionate about

A review by John Allison,
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A Passionate Schooling

Alduino Mazzone PhD in collaboration with Susan Laing

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Available from www.passionateschooling.com

I knew I would love this book when I first saw its cover and title. It's stylish. Those words have the *sprezzatura* that signifies the true vitality of Steiner education. Alduino Mazzone – in collaboration with his partner Susan Laing – has written a testament both to his life and work, and to Steiner Waldorf education. For a small book, its range is comprehensive; and yet it is accomplished.

In his Introduction, Alduino sets out the core concepts of his enquiry. I'll present them here as a list, noting that in each case Alduino elaborates his meaning. He suggests Waldorf education is based on a number of broad concepts:

- a spiritual anthropology;*
- an epistemological foundation;*
- a clearly articulated metaphysics;*
- a spiritual psychology;*
- a social theory;*
- an educational methodology and curriculum.*

As a list it may seem daunting. In fact, many teachers will know something of the spiritual psychology and a probably a fair bit about the educational methodology and curriculum, but may prefer to leave the rest to the anthroposophists, as it's sometimes said. But these other areas are the source of the originating forces of the education; if we do not work our way into them, the education may be in peril of becoming merely a set of recipes.

I want to enthuse about the way in which Alduino enters those complex territories. The book is lucid, and in this clarity it reminds me that the more original meaning of "theory" is not something invented in the brain but "a way of

seeing". In this sense, Rudolf Steiner's theory is not complicated but it *is* complex.

To help us on our way into this complex way of seeing, in the first section of the book a succinct biography of Rudolf Steiner is presented, placing his development into an historical, social, and intellectual context. The times in which he lived were very interesting; in the humanities, sciences and arts, extraordinary events were occurring. This initial sketch helps us see him both as a man of his time and of the future.

Then, in eight brief chapters Alduino explores the "key ideas underpinning Rudolf Steiner's educational thought". These include the basis of spiritual science; freedom and thinking; the human constitution; human development; evolution of consciousness; the threefold human; the significance of the Christ; and how the schools arose from the seeds of the threefold social order.

This is deep stuff! But the gesture of the author throughout is generous. There is a passage in *A Passionate Schooling* that we all could well reflect upon. Alduino introduces Rudolf Steiner speaking of a particular experience of the presence of Christ: "He suggests that what streams in as grace in this way could be called an expression of the highest self and an early manifestation of the potential of the human archetype ..." And then he quotes Steiner directly: "This that comes from the spiritual world may be called whatever we like, that is not important, only the feeling is important."

In these times when dogmatism and a fundamentalist refusal to think independently are rife, these words are a wonderful reminder of how an open mind can embrace spiritual reality. It also may help those teachers in Steiner schools who find it hard to get to grips with the originating ideas of this education to find their way... Anthroposophy, livingly perceived, is illuminating, inspiring. But a

new teacher may often encounter an ideological tyranny in a Steiner School: “Rudolf Steiner says...” Or “this is how we do it here...” Then, concepts such as the “etheric body” can seem like “autopilot phrases” rather than living ideas clearly seen by the colleague attempting to instruct the new chum. I feel this book is approachable, and hope that those who have had such experiences may be encouraged to read it.

In *A Final Word*, Alduino reiterates his plea “encouraging continuing research into Steiner Waldorf education, with the suggestion for one to ‘unashamedly immerse oneself in the spiritual ground out of which Waldorf education emerges’ for a more profound understanding of how and why it works”. He is talking about the effect of *potentising* that comes through spiritual penetration.

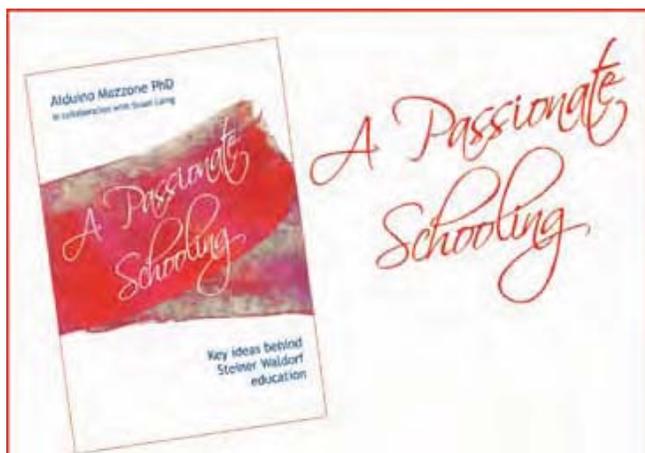
Throughout *A Passionate Schooling* I felt I was engaged in a dialogue; much was familiar, and some of it was contentious for me. It made

me think, and re-evaluate my understanding. I recognised that I was learning, anew or newly, and this was refreshing.

I would recommend this book to anyone who, coming new to Rudolf Steiner’s body of work, feels daunted by the substance of it, or by the way it is presented. Alduino provides a way in. And for those of us who may feel quite comfortable with Rudolf Steiner, Alduino has some original insights, some fresh perspectives on the familiar, and a deeply enlivening approach to anthroposophy and Waldorf Education.

So this book is good for all of us. Schools would do well to purchase copies for their teachers’ libraries and for collegial study. Those parents who want to learn more about the basis of this education would find it accessible, and teachers would find it good holiday reading.

Alduino Mazzone – I salute you for this accomplishment. ♦



At its heart this book is a passionate plea for a deeper understanding of Waldorf education and to provide readers – be they beginning or experienced teachers, prospective parents or other people having a general interest in education – with an opportunity to examine the key ideas which underpin Steiner Waldorf education and the context in which they arose.

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