

ISKA News

An Update for Members and Friends

Autumn 2011

Welcome to the new ISKA NC

Welcome to Sinead Duignan who started as the ISKA National Co-ordinator in September. Sinead studied Early Childhood Education and Applied Social Studies in Dublin Institute of Technology. She then worked in residential care; Focus Point, Women's refuge, among others. Sinead was introduced to Steiner Education about 10 years ago, through a public talk in Co.Sligo. She eagerly enrolled and completed the Steiner Kindergarten Teacher Training, Foundation year in Raheenwood, Co. Clare. Of which Sinead says, "I found it to be a wealth of knowledge, which reignited my passion, by merging my interest in holistic living with education. Serving to deepen both interests". Since then, Sinead has worked for and supported the Morning Star Kindergarten in Co. Sligo, both as an assistant teacher, parent, and committee member, until moving more recently to Co Clare and subsequently taking up the position of ISKA National Co-ordinator.

Many thanks to Audrey Flynn for her hard work and commitment as the National Co-ordinator over the last years and we wish her well in her future path.



Lanterns from www.wynstones.com

What is a Steiner Kindergarten?

While Kindergarten is a term used in other European countries for a variety of early years pedagogies and settings, in Ireland it is exclusively associated with Steiner Education. Frequently a Steiner Kindergarten provides early years care and education for 3-6 year olds, but not exclusively. There are also Steiner based playgroups, childminders, creches, infant classes in National Schools etc. In the Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association, Kindergarten is a term for any Irish Steiner based early years care and education setting for children under 7 years old.

Kindergartens Questionnaire

At the ISKA Council meeting on Friday October 14th it was decided to devise a questionnaire in order to evaluate current difficulties experienced by settings nationally. From this a report will be compiled from which a representation to Government could be composed if necessary, as well as being used in our ongoing involvement with the NVCC & CCC's & other organisations in the Irish childcare sector.

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ISKA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2012

This year the conference was held in the beautiful setting of the Bridge Camphill Community in Kilcullen, Co. Kildare, on the 15th of October. Linda Grant, ISKA Council Chairperson, welcomed us all and opened with a verse from Owen Barefield, with an example from Margurite Devane of the Harmonious Eights Eurythmy movements, in sequence with this verse. Dawn Dickey, then brought us all into tune with each other through singing exercises and introduced us to an Autumn song: 'SUNLIGHT IN YOUR HAIR-October Round' from A Circle of Songs by Colin Tanser
OCTOBER, THERE IS SUNLIGHT IN YOUR HAIR SEE THE COLORS GROW GOLDEN!

This year our conference focused on "Protecting Dream Consciousness in Young Children". The key note speaker Dot Male from the U.K. gently & clearly shared her knowledge from her years of experience and her understanding of the Magda Gerber and Emmi Pikler principles.

Emphasising our job, as parents, carers & educators to be mindfull always, of the delicate balance and flow, between the child's autonomy, their self initiated movement & play, through which they develop their sense of balance & self, and the adults task, ensuring that the child receives this space, and through this understanding, their love and attachment for the child, they enhance the child's sense of touch and life.

Dot showed us footage from the Pikler Institute, Budapest, Hungary - of the time, space and presence of love employed, while the nurse wipes the folds of the baby's skin with oil in preparation for her bath. This being a direct example of the Pikler approach.

"WORLD PEACE STARTS ON THE CHANGING TABLE" Emmi Pikler.

Further footage, brought to our attention the importance of observation, and an unhurried example of how the baby develops through that freedom of self initiated movement, uninhibited by seats, bouncers, walkers etc. Bringing an understanding of how the Steiner and Pickler approaches can weave together...

From our work with children or from our own memories we shared experiences of the dream conscious, bringing home the value that held for us.

After lunch we came together again with Margurite leading our Autumn Circle time in Irish. We then broke into groups, to discuss what we were experiencing individually or in our work place. While feeding back to the whole, Veronica Crombie was invited to give a synopsis of a day in Brigid's Hearth, in her role as educator to babies and children. We spoke of childminding, Dot mentioning the importance of using a designated room and toys for that purpose, when childminding from home with your own child present.

We then had a creative space where Linda Grant & Grace Burton enabled us to make a ball by firstly tightly rolling wool, which we then covered in coloured merino wool, and plunged into hot soapy water squeezing and rounding it in order to make a soft ball suitable for the young child.

It was great to see the number of students from the Fetac 5 Childcare/Steiner Kindergarten Assistants course in Ennis attending the conference, we wish them well in their continued studies and exams!



Photo - <http://www.waldorftoday.com/2011/07/698/>

**Books/Resources mentioned/
recommended at the ISKA Conference:**
Simplicity Parenting - Kim John Payne
www.simplicityparenting.com

**The Child from Birth to Three in
Waldorf Ed & Child-care** -
978-1-936849-00-0 Review-
www.waldorfbooks.com/item_2551.htm

Lifeways North America
website www.lifewaysnorthamerica.org
*Home Away from Home. LifeWays Care
of Children and Families*
Book by Cynthia Aldinger and Mary
O'Connell

"Babies", movie & DVD -
www.babiesthemovie.com.au/

**"Creating a Home for Body, Soul,
and Spirit"** A New Approach to
Childcare Bernadette Raichle

Bob & Nancy's online bookshop
www.waldorfbooks.com

Vaccination

Arising from a query to the office from an early years setting regarding vaccination. - ISKA, similarly to the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education, believe that a matter such as whether or not to inoculate a child against communicable disease should be a matter of parental choice. We believe that families provide the appropriate context for such decisions to be made on the basis of medical, social and ethical consideration, and upon the perceived balance of risks. Insofar as schools or kindergartens have any role to play in these matters, we believe it is in making available a range of balanced information both from appropriate national agencies and qualified health professionals with expertise in the field. Kindergartens are not, nor should they be, involved in determining decisions regarding these matters.



**Autumn grain mandala - Little yarra
steiner school** - siouxdollman.com

Morning Star Kindergarten - an appreciation

In 2002 the Morning Star Steiner Kindergarten was a dream for a few dedicated parents in South County Sligo. In 2004 it became a reality opening with a small number of children. In 2007 we welcomed Dawn Dickey (Zabala) from the Philippines; she left after two years following her marriage in Co Clare but her legacy lived on and we remember her with much affection.

Our maximum number of children in the kindergarten was 15 with 6 in the toddler group but the recent grant reductions and scheme changes coupled with seeming insufficient enrolments for next year obliged the kindergarten to close.

It is not the end for Steiner early years in the area though. The Parent and Toddler group started last year by Sinead Duignan will continue to meet in Boyle, Co Roscommon and have been given most of the furniture and toys. We wish them well.

We thank our loyal staff for all they put into the school and hope they will carry many happy memories with them into the future.

Deb Percival

A reflection on the High/Scope approach to supporting children's ability to plan.

As an experienced Steiner Waldorf kindergarten teacher I was delighted to have the opportunity to return to college and undertake an honours degree in Early Childhood Studies at Cork University College. As part of this degree I undertook a twelve-week work placement at an early years setting. I chose to do this in a High/Scope setting in order to provide me with an opportunity to observe this rapidly growing early-years approach. The following article is part of a reflective report I wrote on completion of my placement. It looks at Children's planning and it's role in Early Childhood Education.

One of the central pillars of the High/Scope active learning approach to early years education is what is known as Plan-Do-Review. This is a segment of the day in which the children spend up to fifteen minutes planning what they shall do in work time, followed by up to an hour engaged in work (play) and finally another five to fifteen minutes recalling their activities. The promotion of choice-making is a significant aspect of Plan-Do-Review. According to the High/Scope Research Foundation, planning encourages children to articulate their ideas, choices and decisions and to clarify their intentions (Hohmann, M. & Weikart D.P. 2002).

Childhood and what it means to be a child is a social construct, a concept determined by a particular society at a particular time in a particular way (Hayes 2002). Children today are beginning to be regarded as autonomous decision makers. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have a right to voice their opinion in all matters that affect them and to have their opinion

considered. (UNCRC 1989). Síolta, Ireland's framework for quality in early years education, echoes this in its very first standard, that is, that *"each child has opportunities to make choices, is enabled to make decisions, and has his/her choices and decisions respected"* (Síolta 2005 component 1.1)

This article will look at how developmentally appropriate it is to encourage young children to engage in planning through the Plan-Do-Review segment of the High/Scope curriculum.

On first hearing about the Plan-Do-Review aspect of High/Scope in my second year lectures I was struck by how inappropriate planning and recalling seemed for young children. As a Steiner Kindergarten teacher I was of the understanding that it is not only ineffective but is actually considered detrimental to awaken a young child's cognition through measures such as discussions, reasoning and planning. *"It is immensely important that we do not consciously or unconsciously call upon the child's intellect prematurely, as people are so prone to do today"* (Steiner, R. 1922).

I was therefore very curious to see this approach in action during my placement and I endeavoured to keep as open a mind as possible. On placement I was struck by how challenging a task it was for the teacher to motivate the children to engage meaningfully with planning. I observed that there was usually only a fleeting connection between what the children planned to do in work time and what they actually did.

Erik Erikson described the pre-school years as the stage of Initiative v Guilt. In this stage children begin to initiate their own activities and take great pride in their own accomplishments. To be prevented from using their initiative can cause children to feel guilty for seeking

independence. (Erikson, E. 1950). This highlights the importance of supporting children's choices during this stage. The question however is whether it is appropriate to encourage children to make more choices through the process of planning rather than simply supporting choices made spontaneously by children.

For Piaget this stage is characterised by children's inability to perform mental operations and their limited ability to consider more than one aspect of something at a time. (Piaget 1972) This must present challenges to young children when trying to plan an activity that they are not actively engaged with. It is through interactions with the environment that new information is incorporated into a child's schema (Piaget 1972).

This suggests that it is the action that allows thought to develop and not the other way round. This concept is supported by Rudolf Steiner (1996) who stated that while an adult's actions follow their thoughts, (e.g. you think it's going to rain so you get a umbrella) for children it is the action that comes first, (e.g. jumping on the bed may make a child think of being a trampoline artist). This reversal of sequences is an indication of the fundamentally different way in which adults and children experience the world.

Children are spontaneous in their interactions. What they see and hear around them inspire action without consideration. *"The moment a child perceives something, whether a movement or a sound, there arises in him the impulse of an inward gesture to re-live what has been perceived, with the whole of his inner nature."* (Steiner, R. 1922) As action occurs less consciously it gives the children's consciousness a dreamlike quality. Today with the help of neuro-imaging we

are better able to understand this phenomenon. As noted in my diary entry on the 22nd March, we now know that before the age of seven theta (sleep-like) EEG brain activity is more active than alpha (alert) activity. After the seventh year this reverses and the more alert alpha activity dominates (Cole & Cole 2001).

My overall observation of the promotion of children's planning within the High/Scope approach was that the children needed much encouragement in order to engage with planning time. I wonder if this antipathy is because planning time is not meeting the children's developmental needs. Today it is almost politically incorrect to suggest that any activity that provides an opportunity to make decisions is unsuitable for young children. Today's socially constructed view of the child is that of the child as a citizen with rights equal to an adult. Equality, however, encompasses diversity. Children think differently to adults. In our enthusiasm to respect the child by promoting what we see are his rights, we may in fact be undermining his right to be a child – to think like a child? Abstract planning, I feel, is an adult activity suited to our adult analytical intellect. Children do not reside in the head but rather are absorbed in spontaneous activity driven by an impulse to imitate. I fully support Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. I believe that children have the right to make choices and to have their choices taken seriously, but I also believe that it is my duty as a teacher to support his choices without hurrying him to make them like an adult. Having completed my placement I am strengthened in my belief that in order to support children's planning and decision making abilities in the future, we need to foster their development today through activity.

Jane O'Sullivan

Bibliography High/Scope Reflection

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Jane O'Sullivan is a Steiner Kindergarten teacher and former ISKA Council member and NVCC Representative. Many thanks to Jane for her valued and valuable contribution to ISKA over the years and very best wishes for her continued studies.

"Come said the wind to
the leaves one day,
Come o're the meadows
and we will play.
Put on your dresses
scarlet and gold,
For summer is gone
and the days grow cold."
- A Children's Song of the 1880's



Report on National Childcare and Education Conference

Last week I attended a conference at the Institute of Technology Sligo entitled "Our Children - Our Future." This was the first national conference of the Pedagogy Learning Education (PLÉ) – a network of degree and masters programme providers who offer training and education for the Early Childhood Care and Education sector in Ireland. The thematic strands were Policy, Practice & Professional Identity. Speakers included the Minister for Children Frances Fitzgerald and CEO of Barnados Children's Charity Fergus Finlay.

I found the most stirring presentation to be the one given by Diane Levin, Professor of Education at Wheelock College, Boston, who spoke on media's effects on children. She has written books including: *So Sexy So Soon: The New Sexualized Childhood and How Parents Can Protect Their Kids* (with Jean Kilbourne), *The War Play Dilemma*, and *Remote Control Childhood*. Diane is also a founding member of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, and has worked with the Alliance for Childhood. Her account addressed the sophistication of today's marketing techniques aimed toward children, and the undermining of the development of a child's sense of self and societal well being.

One of the big challenges facing those interested in Early Years in Ireland today has to do with reconciling the different paradigms held by vested interests in meeting the needs of children, such as Early Years Inspectors (usually trained in public health rather than pedagogy and practice) and the Department of Education (whose key goal for children is the mastery of academics). There is general agreement that the new Aistear curriculum for 0 – 6 is an excellent guide to meet the needs of today's children,

one that compares favourably on an international scale, but there is concern about the scope of its implementation across the sector. Ironically, it has been promoted most actively in the Infant classes of Primary Schools, where it stands beside, rather than supersedes, the 1999 Irish Primary Curriculum.

On this matter I was pleased to be invited to present, along with IT Sligo Lecturer Doireann O'Connor, a paper we had written on the question of at what age should schooling start. In our view, when a child of 4 or 5 is in a centre following something like Aistear, they are experiencing a more age appropriate form of 'preschool'. But if that child is in a setting where the Primary Curriculum is employed, they are in 'school'. We showed that these two curricula are distinct in fundamental ways, most significantly in the fact that the Primary Curriculum places importance on laying foundations for the next stage of learning, while Aistear celebrates early childhood as a time of being rather than becoming. We went on to show how Steiner Waldorf Early Years Education meets the goals of Aistear in uniquely harmonious and organic ways.

The possibility of a Steiner Early Years MA programme offered by IT Sligo was announced (course confirmation pending), and the director of an Early Years BA programme at another Institute informed me that he is interested in developing a Steiner degree there in the near future.

Reflecting on the conference afterwards, I was most surprised by two discoveries:

The first is that Steiner Waldorf Education isn't on the fringe anymore. Although we still make up a tiny slice of the Early Years sector, we are known and respected by the lecturers on degree programmes throughout the country. One such lecturer told me that standard curriculum for Early Years Bachelor courses (which now number 14

in the Republic) introduces four distinct Early Years pedagogies beyond the mainstream: Montessori, High/Scope, Regio Emilio and Steiner. There will be a chapter on Steiner Education in the first Early Years textbook for the Irish third level market to be published next spring. I counted six of the presenters at this two day conference mentioning Steiner Waldorf Education, each in a favourable light. The introduction and welcoming address included a single quotation, and that was by Rudolf Steiner: "Receive the children in reverence. Educate them with love. Send them forth in freedom," chosen by Roisin McGlure, lecturer and conference organiser, and a founding parent at Morning Star Steiner Kindergarten.

The second, less-startling observation was the realisation that the specific concerns for the well being of children and even the possible solutions voiced nationally are effectively met by practices that Waldorf educators have been at the forefront of researching and applying for decades. These include the importance of creative play and interaction with natural environs, social inclusivity and the nurturing of empathy, and the need for protection from influences that call upon children to 'grow up' prematurely. That Aistear mirrors the Steiner approach so well suggests that our beliefs and values are now shared with the sector leaders.

It was an inspiring conference, and a lesson for me that many of the leaders of the Early Childhood sector in Ireland today are open to and interested in the anthroposophically derived view of developmental pedagogy and practice. Rather than an outsider, I felt at home among colleagues.

Jonathan Angus

If you are interested in reading the paper we delivered, feel free to contact me at jonathan.angus@gmail.com

Duilleoga.

Duilleoga deasa, deasa,
Duilleoga deasa, buí.
Duilleoga deasa, deasa,
Ag damhsa ar an gcraobh.

Duilleoga deasa, deasa,
Duilleoga deasa, buí.
Duilleoga deasa, deasa,
Ag imeacht leis an ngaoth.

Duilleoga deasa, deasa,
Duilleoga deasa, buí.
Duilleoga deasa, deasa,
Ar an talamh, ina luí.

Congratulations Brigids Hearth

Brigid's Hearth Community Childcare centre, Tuamgraney, Co Clare were joint winners of the 2011 Design & Conservation Awards Scheme for Best Innovation Award. Brigid's Hearth was designed by Lina Pelaez and Solearth Architects, "in rural Tuamgraney, we saw a creche called Brigit's Hearth. We chose it as a joint winner with the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Centre because although modest, it was a truly innovative development, and a model of childcare that could and should be replicated elsewhere." Excerpt from Irish Times 25th October.

Congratulations to Lina, Veronica, and all those who have been involved in the building & organisation of the Brigid's Hearth, a beautiful haven for our children.

As the ISKA Newsletter is now email only, in order to reach beyond the virtual community, where possible, please print a number of copies of the ISKA Newsletter for display/circulation/placing in your reception area etc. Thank you



How-to: Preserve Autumn Leaves with Melted Beeswax

<http://craftingagreenworld.com/2011/10/09/how-to-preserve-autumn-leaves-with-melted-beeswax/>

Siolta Update

ISKA continues to work with Siolta, the national early years quality assurance programme as the ISKA quality framework through the work of Ulrike Farnleitner, ISKA National Development officer and Siolta Coordinator. Ulrike can be contacted on iskando@gmail.com. Siolta have produced newsletters to highlight areas of interest to the early years sector. So far, two editions - one in December 2010 and one in September 2011 - have been published and can be accessed at this link- www.siolta.ie/whats_new.php

Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association

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