

## Easter for the Child

How do we present Easter to our children? As our celebrations become more and more engulfed by commercialism, we can lose a 'connectedness' to the spirit of the time and so be left with a celebration that has no 'innerness' and has just become an empty shell.

It is through connecting to the true spirit and meaning of festivals that we nurture that connection with Nature and Mother Earth. Children feel such joy and connectedness to the world they live in and it is important for children to retain this innate connectedness, so they may always feel for and respect the world.

With Easter, a little creativity may be called for in presenting the core concepts of death and resurrection to young children. There is no need to talk about them, instead the experience of Festival activities will give them an inner experience of the transformational forces.

Easter falls in Spring – a time of natural new life and rebirth. Easter derives its name from pre-Christian goddess symbols of rebirth, fertility and spring. Ancient symbols of the hare and the egg are signs of the return of life after winter's sleep. The renewal of man's being is celebrated with the renewal of the earth. In a Christian context, Christ transformed his physical body, rose from the dead, ascended to the heavens and by so doing supports us to transform ourselves.

Stories of the hare, an animal who will put himself in harm's way to save another, echo this. The hare is also the bringer of another great symbol of new life, Easter eggs.

Celebrating is an art. There is joy not only in the celebration itself but also in the anticipation, the preparation and the memories.



## Decorating Easter Eggs

The rich colours of natural dyes can be coaxed from the most unexpected places, including red cabbage, onion skins, paprika, and coffee, producing elegant and often unexpected colours when used for dyeing. For more information on natural dye sources, and boil and cold-dip methods of dyeing, see the following link: <http://thecrazymommafiles.wordpress.com/2008/03/20/in-the-kitchen-natural-egg-dyes/>. And for details on ways to decorate Easter eggs, from easy to complicated, using such things as tissue paper, crayons, rubber bands and flowers, see <http://www.dltk-holidays.com/easter/dye.htm>.



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### Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association

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## NCIP National Seminar

*Audrey Flynn, National Co-ordinator, attended the Seminar in Dublin on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2010.*

### Programme Updates

**ECCE** The first of the ECCE payments were issued to services by electronic transfer in January. The payments were advance payments based on a six-week payment in respect of the number of ECCE children that each service expected to enrol. If a service has more or fewer children enrolled than originally expected, the amount due will be adjusted when the balancing payments are made. In February these payments will be based on the electronic returns (before they have been verified by the Dept of Social & Family Affairs) and will consist of the actual capitation fees due for the first 12-week term, minus the advance payment made in January. A further payment in March will cover 11 weeks. This will be the final payment under this contract for 38-week and 41-week services, and the penultimate one for 50-week services. The March payment will take account of any adjustments required as a result of the verification process (e.g. if a child is found not to be within the age range), and any adjustments required as a result of transfers between services and/or new children entering the scheme in the final term. A final 12-week payment will be made to 50-week services in June. Following the verification of the service returns, it may be the case that the advance payment made to a service exceeds the total amount that would be due over the entire period of the contract. Those services – if any – will be contacted by the OMCYA in due course to arrange repayment of the amount of the overpayment. For more information contact your County/City Childcare Committee or see [www.omc.gov.ie](http://www.omc.gov.ie).

**Aistear**, the Framework for Early Learning, supports practitioners in planning for and providing enriching challenging and enjoyable learning opportunities for children from birth to six years. It can be used in different types of settings including children's homes, childminding settings, full and part-time daycare, sessional services and infant classrooms. Developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Aistear reflects key research messages on early childhood learning and takes account of early

childhood in Ireland. The aim of the Framework is to help every child to grow and develop as a competent and confident learner within loving and nurturing relationships with adults and peers. Detailed information on Aistear can be found at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie).

**Siolta** is designed to support practitioners to develop high-quality services for children aged birth to six years and is relevant to all settings where children spend time out of their home environment. Information on Siolta can be found on the reactivated website [www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie). Ulrike Farnleitner is the newly appointed National Development Officer and Siolta Co-ordinator for ISKA. She will provide mentoring and guidance to services that are engaged in the Siolta Quality Assurance Programme.

**Capital Funding** There will be a minor Capital Funding Programme from 2011 for refurbishment-type activity, but not for big capital projects.

**Parent and Toddler** Parent and Toddler grants will be maintained at the 2009 level.

**Childminding Development Grants** There will be funding, but the amount has yet to be set.

To find out more about any of the above, contact your local County/City Childcare Committee.

### Keynote Speaker, Sue Palmer - Caring to Educate

Sue Palmer is the author of *Toxic Childhood* and *Detoxing Childhood*. She spoke at this event specifically at the request of Sylva Langford, who heard her speak at a Galway CCC conference. It was all the more gratifying to listen to Sue because, though her background is not at all Steiner (she is a linguist drawn to this work through her investigations into falling literacy rates), her recommendations confirm what have always been cornerstones of Steiner early years care and education. **These are her five golden rules for children:**

**1 Love** From the moment they're born until they're fully grown, children need to know that their parents and carers really care for and about them. This is essential before anything else.

**2 Discipline** Children need to learn the ropes of day-to-day family life, how to behave beyond the home, and how to abide by necessary rules of institutions. Adults must set clear boundaries.

**3 Play** Active, imaginative, social play is essential (not sedentary, screen-based entertainment). It should be unstructured, preferably outdoors and doesn't need adult control.

**4 Communication** This starts with a 'dance of communication' between parent and babe-in-arms, often accompanied by babytalk. It is severely undermined by placing children in front of TV/computer screens or in buggies facing away from the person pushing. Throughout childhood and the teenage years, children need loving adults to talk to them, and opportunities to talk (and listen) to friends during play.

**5 Education** Given these four essential foundations, almost every child should be able to take advantage of education, starting with literacy. But this should not start too soon. It is generally agreed that, until the age of six or seven, it's better to prepare the ground for learning through play and opportunities for spoken language. The "schoolification" of early years care and education has not improved literacy rates but actually contributed greatly to them falling.



### Sylda Langford - An Appreciation

This was one of the last official functions for Sylda Langford, retiring Director General of the Office of the Minister for Children. Patricia Murray, Childminding Ireland, and Irene Gunning, IPPA, on behalf of the National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative, gave an interesting, humorous, poignant and appreciative look back at the work of Sylda Langford in the area of early years care and education, from its start with unspent DART transport money to today, always with the emphasis on collaboration as the strength in the backbone of the sector.

Pearse O'Shiel founding member of ISKA and former National Development Officer had this to say of his time working with Sylda from the first days of EOCP. *"It was Sylda's foresight and her capacity to see the bigger picture that provided the impetus that has resulted in the transformation of the childcare sector in Ireland over the last ten years or so. She managed to balance the needs of the sector with the very limited room for manoeuvre she had as a public servant. She has many good friends in the childcare sector, who will readily acknowledge*

*that she has managed to achieve what few others could have in that time."*

We at ISKA would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation to Sylda Langford for her important contribution to early years care and education in Ireland and wish her all the very best in her retirement.

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## Valuing Our Kindergartens

*Extracts from a report by Jane O' Sullivan. For the full report, contact the ISKA office.*

Over 30 participants, representing 15 kindergartens, attended the "Valuing Our Kindergartens" workshop on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> January in Cork.

Katherine O'Riordan (Cork City Childcare) opened with a brief talk on ECCE funding. In this regard, the issue of lack of state recognition for our Diploma in Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education is a huge concern for our teachers as all lead pre-school practitioners will need a state-recognised qualification after 2012 in order to receive the funding. To comply, many kindergarten teachers are rushing to get a level 5 FETAC childcare qualification, although Katherine feels this is far from ideal as our own diploma is of a much higher calibre, and should be recognised as such.

Lucy Connolly from the IPPA then spoke about Síolta and Aistear, and specifically Síolta's use as a reflective tool in our work practice. While the implementation of Síolta and Aistear are not obligatory at this point, all kindergartens in receipt of ECCE funding must sign up to the principles contained within. Ulrike Farnleitner is our Síolta co-ordinator and all our kindergartens will be hearing more from her in the near future.

Janni Nicol, early childhood representative for the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship UK, followed. Janni started by reminding us all of some key principles of working with children in a kindergarten. These are:

**Imitation** Who we are, what we do and how we do it, is imitated by the child. Remember that imitating is not the same as mirroring, as each child brings something different.

**Rhythm and repetition** The healthiness for the child of the cycles of the day, week and year.

**Sensory protection** This is healing for children, helping them to cope with today's sensory-overloading world.

**Free play** While play is key in many pre-school pedagogies, we must remember that it is free play or creative play that children need, not adult-led, role-play, "learning outcome" orientated play. We support free play best with natural, simple "props".

**Teacher-led activities** Stories, ring-time, festivals, crafts, remembering always to look at the balance between child-initiated and teacher-led. Are we doing too much? Has our day become too action-packed? Do we leave enough time for the domestic arts? Time to wash our own hands, set the table, help dry the dishes?

Janni reminded us to do very little, but to let that little be beautiful, good and true.

Janni finished by painting us a picture of pre-school policy in the UK and its difficult impact on Steiner kindergartens. She stressed the importance of remaining involved with policy decision-making, to have our voices heard, to share our understanding of the child.

Following Janni's talk we had space for all participants to share a few words about their own kindergarten situations, and the challenges they currently face. There are many common themes: the low level of funding, working with unsupportive parents, especially in disadvantaged areas, and recognition of teachers' qualifications were the major ones.

After lunch we were treated to an informative, entertaining and thought-provoking talk by Pearse O'Shiel, an ISKA founding member, on the importance of communication. Firstly Pearse gave us a brief lesson on the history of education in Ireland in order to better understand the historical context that has led us to our present situation. He then spoke about the need to be able to articulate what a Steiner

kindergarten is and how we work with children. We all know how difficult it can be to do this as some of the images and concepts we work with are unique to this pedagogy and not easy to explain in a few words or even many. However, we need to be able to do this and we have a duty to first understand the ideas ourselves and then practise finding the words to share them.

Pearse also spoke about our responsibility to be present where child-related policies are being made, but also the need to engage with our local communities (County Childcare Committees, local childcare networks) in order to move forward. Pearse finished by reminding us that the most effective tool we have to transform our work is meditative/reflective practice.

We finished the day with an open discussion, which brought us to the conclusion that to proceed in this time of change we need courage, perseverance, more perseverance and positivity. We decided that a support to us all would be a Yahoo Discussion Group, in order to have a forum where we could continue to discuss our challenges and be able to stay in contact with each other.

Thank you to all our speakers, to Cork City Childcare Co. for providing the venue, and to Audrey Flynn, for her work bringing all the components of the day together to make it the success it was.

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## Developing Childcare Policies

Barnardos has published *A Practical Guide to Developing Childcare Policies Book and CD 2*. This is a follow-up to the 2008 *Practical Guide* and is intended for use in conjunction with it. It can be purchased by contacting Barnardos on 01 454 9699, by email at [resources@barnardos.ie](mailto:resources@barnardos.ie) or online at [www.barnardos.ie](http://www.barnardos.ie). If you would like to borrow the ISKA copy of either or both of the books, contact the ISKA office.

## Transforming Ireland

Funded by the Irish Government  
under the National Childcare Investment Programme 2006–2010



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## Report from Sligo Seminar

*As part of Pobal's EU-funded project Delivering Lifelong Learning in Disadvantaged Communities, Pobal hosted a Seminar in Sligo on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2009. It was the second in a number of events to raise awareness about lifelong learning in an Irish context. The title was "Early Childhood Care and Education and Family Learning". Veronica Crombie of Brigit's Garden Community Children's Centre, in Tuamgraney, Co Clare, attended the seminar on behalf of ISKA. The following is from her report.*

The emphasis was on the care of young children and its effect on their whole life. The main points I took away from this day were:

- + Brain development is at its fastest up to the age of six, yet government funding for education is at its lowest for this age group.
- + As we look towards the future, the importance of non-cognitive (social and emotional) education will be vital in order for humans to remain healthy, flexible and do their part in society.
- + The people "at the top" creating programmes and policies are ordinary human beings wanting everyone's input and ideas. We can affect change.

When I spoke of "a family setting", creating a "home from home", and the outdoors as a valuable learning environment there were nods of approval from the entire panel (including officials from Pobal, Department of Education, Dublin Institute of Technology). Everyone is thirsty for what works, what works really well for children. They knew Steiner Education and one could see they liked it.

- + The outdoors were emphasised.
- + There was much talk and discussion over qualifications, and appropriate training. The new curriculum organisation Aistear is keen to acknowledge all learning acquired outside of official schools.
- + And the big one for me ... education is not schooling. Learning happens all day every day was emphasised (nothing new to us but good to hear it acknowledged).

This is good on two counts: first, there is recognition that education of children is not happening only in formal settings, and second, adults working with children will have all their experiences taken into account, not only recognised formal qualifications, when being assessed.

The presentations from the seminar are available on the following link:

<http://www.pobal.ie/Funding%20Programmes/Learning/Pages/EventDetail.aspx>

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## Home

### Cork Steiner Kindergarten

The Cork Steiner Kindergarten is now housed in a beautiful purpose-built childcare facility near Blackpool on the north side of the city and is awaiting a government grant to equip and landscape it. We have at present 15 children and are open Monday to Friday from 9.30 till 1.30. We hope to expand our services in the future into a mother and toddlers group, afternoon care and facilitating weekend workshops and conferences. We strive to be an active community-based centre for Early Childhood Education and Parent Support and have dreams of a full Steiner School in Cork.

We welcome enquiries: [corksteiner@gmail.com](mailto:corksteiner@gmail.com), tel. 021 451 8371, or post to 1 Glentrasna Avenue, Glentrasna Drive, The Glen, Cork City

To contact the teacher, Marijke McCartney, ring 087 6658 782.

You can also see us in person each Wednesday from 1.45 till 2.15 at the kindergarten. Please ring beforehand to arrange this.




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## And Abroad

Below is an email I received from a Steiner initiative in San Sebastian in Spain.

Dear Audrey,

I really appreciate all the information and articles posted on your website. I use them during our "meet and mingle" meetings, when a group of parents come together to think about education and the possibility of improving regular education.

My true wish has always been to send my children to a Waldorf school as the most nourishing and enriching form of education available. When my husband and I arrived to San Sebastian I was disappointed not to find any kind of Waldorf education nearby. After I had a baby (my daughter is now one and a half years old) my urge to start a Waldorf school became more urgent. And so I started the Enchanted House in San Sebastian/Donostia to offer to children a warm inviting environment with quality materials wherein they can develop at their own pace. Only few months have passed since I started and I have three mornings a week a Waldorf inspired playgroup for children of different ages.

I hope to find parents who want to get involved to start up a Waldorf school. We are thinking to

start a tiny Waldorf playgroup in September that might substitute the playgroups at the regular schools, to let children have a Waldorf experience and show parents the difference. Here in Spain many children go to school for five mornings and or afternoons from the moment they are two (in Holland where I come from that is not the case). Hopefully this will lead to something bigger. I am happy that the play mornings that I now organise are becoming more and more successful and I hope a Waldorf school will be part of San Sebastian's future. Anyone who has ideas and tips on how to proceed is more than welcome to tell me.

In the meantime, we keep reading your newsletters and articles on your website. Many thanks, Marlijn  
[www.enchantedhouse.org](http://www.enchantedhouse.org)

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## The Snow Drop

*By Hans Christian Andersen (Adapted)*

The snow lay deep, for it was winter time. The winter winds blew cold, but there was one house where all was snug and warm. And in the house lay a little flower – in its bulb it lay, under the earth and the snow.

One day the rain fell and it trickled through the ice and snow down into the ground. And presently a sunbeam, pointed and slender, pierced down through the earth, and tapped on the bulb.

“Come in,” said the flower.

“I can't do that,” said the sunbeam - “I'm not strong enough to lift the latch. I shall be stronger when springtime comes.”

“When will it be spring?” asked the flower of every little sunbeam that rapped on its door. But for a long time it was winter. The ground was still covered with snow, and every night there was ice in the water. The flower grew quite tired of waiting.

“How long it is!” it said. “I feel quite cramped. I must stretch myself and rise up a little. I must lift the latch, and look out, and say ‘good morning’ to the spring.”

So the flower pushed and pushed. The walls were softened by the rain and warmed by the little sunbeams, so the flower shot up from under the snow, with a pale green bud on its stalk and some long narrow leaves on either side. It was biting cold.

“You are a little too early,” said the wind and the weather – but every sunbeam sang, “Welcome,” and the flower raised its head from the snow and unfolded itself – pure and white, and decked with green stripes.

It was weather to freeze it to pieces – such a delicate little flower, but it was stronger than any one knew. It stood in its white dress in the white snow, bowing its head when the snowflakes fell, and raising it again to smile at the sunbeams, and every day it grew sweeter.

*“Oh!” shouted the children, as they ran into the garden, “see the snowdrop! There it stands so pretty, so beautiful – the first, the only one!”*

<http://www.apples4theteacher.com/holidays/spring/short-stories/>



## Transition from Steiner to State Education

In response to frequent enquiries on the topic from parents, ISKA commissioned research in 2009 on children making the transition from Steiner to State education. This is now available on the FAQ page of the website, or by contacting the office with your details, requesting a hard or email copy.

### Lost ...

at the ISKA Conference a number of years ago: Heidi Feucht from Dunshane gave the loan of a labyrinth game to one of the conference participants. She cannot remember who it was, but she is anxious to get it back. If you have it you can contact her about it at Dunshane Camphill Community on 045 483628 or via the office.

### Found ...

at the ISKA Conference 2009: a gold/orange/blue pashmina. Contact the office to organise its return to you.

## ISKA Workshops Update

There will be a workshop on **Parent and Child Groups** facilitated by **Dot Male** in Raheen Wood Steiner National School, Co Clare on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2010

There will be a workshop on **Running Steiner Kindergartens – Administration** facilitated by **Kevin Avison** on Saturday September 25<sup>th</sup> in Cork City. This workshop is highly recommended for all Kindergarten Committee members and teachers.

There is a possibility that **Nancy Mellon**, story teller extraordinaire, will be available for workshops in early June. Watch this space.

More information on the above will be circulated by email. Please send your email address to [info@steinerireland.org](mailto:info@steinerireland.org) to go on the ISKA mailing list.

A reminder that the ISKA workshop programme is a collaboration between ISKA and interested groups/individuals. If you would like a workshop in your kindergarten or area of the country, please contact the ISKA office for the revised 2010 workshop guidelines.

## Advertisement

### PUDDLEDUCKS

## Making Fun of the Weather!

Steiner teachers and parents understand the value of outdoor play for children, but in our damp climate getting outside on a daily basis can be problematic if the children aren't kitted out properly for the weather. But help is at hand with the PuddleDucks range of 100% waterproof clothing for children. The PuddleDucks' Swedish designed clothes are specially suited for children's needs – being soft and lightweight they are comfy to wear, while the durable material is rip resistant and machine washable.



Available in a wide choice of colours and sizes the PuddleDucks range includes all-in-one suits, dungarees, trousers, jackets, mittens and hats, as well as waterproofs for teachers and parents too! The clothes meet the Oko-Tex Environmental Standard 100 and are free from hazardous substances such as PVC, phthalates and Teflon.

PuddleDucks provides fast delivery from their secure website, along with a helpful phone service for queries or orders.

PuddleDucks is pleased to offer parents of children attending Steiner kindergartens a 10% discount, valid on the children's waterproof range. If ordering on-line use the code STEINER10, or if ordering over the phone please advise the discount code. PuddleDucks also offers special rates to kindergartens for bulk purchases.

Tel: 021 437 2917 (Say which Steiner school your child attends to receive the discount.)

Website: [www.puddleducks.ie](http://www.puddleducks.ie)

## Job Advertisement

### ENTHUSIASTIC CLASS 1/2 TEACHER REQUIRED!

Applications are sought for an experienced, energetic and enthusiastic teacher to be involved in a pioneering new Waldorf school initiative in rural Kilkenny in the South of Ireland. The school will be associated with an existing Waldorf Kindergarten. Camphill Community Ballytobin has provided integrated classes in its school for kindergarten "graduates", but the wish has grown to form an independent Steiner school in the area. A suitable location has been found and there is a good deal of enthusiasm for the initiative. In the area are many social and cultural initiatives and activities, including a number of Camphill Communities. Our intention is to begin with a seed-like Class ½ (of about 10 children in 2010), and that this will grow year by year into a small school. We hope that you will be able to teach at least some of the subject lessons – Continental Language, Handwork Irish. There will be additional support from parents and also the teachers' group in Camphill Ballytobin.

If you are interested, please send a letter of application with your curriculum vitae to the address below. If you require any further information please contact Martin Henry on Hmartin33@eircom.netH.

Closing date for applications is 30 April 2010.

Martin Henry, Camphill Community Ballytobin, Callan, Kilkenny, Ireland

## NERA, the National Employment Rights Authority

The National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) was established under the Social Partnership Agreement "Towards 2016". NERA Information Services provide free, unbiased information on employment rights in Ireland to employers, employees and other interested parties.

To contact NERA's Information Services:

Call their lo-call information hotline on 1890 80 80 90, from 9.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. weekdays.

For written queries, email via the website [www.employmentrights.ie](http://www.employmentrights.ie), or write to Information Services, The National Employment Rights Authority, O'Brien Road, Carlow.

NERA Information Services makes presentations and appears at events across the country.

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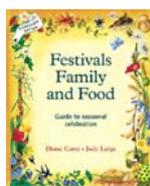
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Website: [www.ansiopabeag.com](http://www.ansiopabeag.com)

Opening hours: Mon-Fri: 9.30 a.m. – 5.30 p.m., Sat: 10.00 a.m. – 5.30 p.m.