

Aspects of the Irish Steiner Kindergarten Advisory Work

The ISKA Development Officer, Ulrike Farnleitner, offers professional, structured advice and support to the leaders and teams in Steiner Waldorf early years centres throughout Ireland, promoting and encouraging the development of high-quality Steiner Waldorf early years centres.

An advisory visit aims:

- + To foster an understanding of the underlying principles within Steiner Waldorf early years education, which rests upon there being a trained Steiner Waldorf teacher working in each setting.
- + To identify ways by which each teacher can support and advise the parent body that surrounds each centre. For example, supporting parent evenings, which address from a Steiner perspective the needs of parents who seek more nurturing ways of being with their children.

What is an advisory visit?

The essence of the advisory work is to mirror and to support, in a confidential way the pedagogical practice of the educator.

It is the inner striving of the teacher that causes her to seek advice, to seek confirmation or to find the right question, also, to seek new perspectives on aspects of the work with children and parents in the community setting.

The adviser's role is a supportive one, a listener, an observer.

Reflective practice will be used as tool for professional development.

During the visit the advisor will remain as "invisible" as possible, though there maybe occasions where the advisory can have an active, supportive role in differing situations.

Plenty of time needs to be given for the exchange at the end of the Kindergarten day.

Each early years centre is expected to host an advisory visit every 3rd year for quality reasons.

Recommendation

ISKA supports the Síolta National Quality Framework. It is therefore recommended, in addition to the advisory visit, that the childcare practitioner engages formally or informally in the Síolta Quality Assurance programme.

The Síolta mentoring is contained within the Development Officer role, therefore each setting also has the support of Ulrike as Síolta mentor.

It is recognised as good practice for all early years centres, engaging with the ECCE scheme, to be familiar with the Síolta Framework and the 12 principles Síolta is based on and how these principles translate into practice.

- + children first
- + parents
- + relationship
- + equality diversity
- + environments
- + welfare
- + role of the adult
- + teamwork
- + pedagogy
- + play

Síolta: <http://www.siolta.ie>

To contact the National Development Officer email ndo.iska@gmail.com.

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Steiner Waldorf and Síolta in Practice

"We do not educate the child for the age of childhood, we educate him for his whole earthly existence."

Rudolf Steiner, *The Roots of Education* 1924

The focus of the Waldorf Steiner pedagogy is to respect the individuality and to foster the dignity of the child. The adults understand themselves as care-takers and teachers for the growing child.

In a trustworthy, light filled and joyful atmosphere a respectful relationship with the child is built up assisting the child to find, through imitation, doing and moving, a freedom in learning and in this way the child develops as a healthy human being.

"The Waldorf curriculum not only matches the key developmental stages of childhood but also stimulates important developmental experiences."

Martyn Rawson and Tobias Richter, *The Educational Task and Content of the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum*,

The aim of Steiner Waldorf education is to educate the whole child, head, heart and hands. The Steiner Waldorf curriculum is broad and balances the needs of children.

Movement, exploring art and participating in practical activities are at the heart of the educational approach.

There is no academic content in the Steiner Waldorf kindergarten experience although there is much cultivation of pre-academic skills.

The understanding of school readiness is stated in the Irish constitution 2000. The child has time until 6 years of age to go to school.

The size of the group and the ratio of adults working are determined by the HSE Regulation 2006.

Through the principles of Steiner/Waldorf pedagogy, the early years teacher creates the environment in a such a way, that the inner development of the teacher (using a method called anthroposophy) beneficially influences the daily curriculum.

These principles, deeply based in the Steiner ethos can be found reflected in the more recently considered Síolta principles.

Role model and imitation During the day the children can witness the adults working on different themes, household tasks like baking, cooking and cleaning, arts and crafts, sewing, felting, repairing toys and using tools. Children join in the activity imitating what they see. (Role of adult)

Rhythm Within the rhythmical repetition created throughout the day, week and year, children receive orientation, security, self-assurance and trust. (Welfare, Children first, Pedagogy)

Sense-development While working with natural materials, e.g. wood, wool, stones, shells, the simple forms of these materials themselves, kindle and engage the imagination of the children in vivid activity. (Environments)

Play During the day the children have the possibility to play most of the time, inside and outside to transform their experiences and to be part of the social interaction. (Diversity, Equality, Relationships)

Outside-time Children experience nature through hands-on experiences, witnessing the weather, seasons and temperatures, they learn to dress themselves appropriately. (Welfare, Environments)

Art Children are supported through a vast variety of artistic activities, rhythmical-musical and movement games, singing, modelling, painting, weaving, sewing ...

Language Children are acquainted with language through repetitive finger-games, stories, puppet shows and fairy tales, all age appropriate and freely told by the adult.

Diversity This is a primary characteristic of the human being. We usefully apply character typology to understand people, such as recognising temperaments, constitutional types, psychological types, cultural characteristics, geographical differences ... the most dominant characteristic is always the individuality. (See Curriculum yellow book)

Development and movement Human development can be seen as the interaction between the spiritual core of the person striving to come ever more fully to expression (within) and the sense impressions coming in through the physical body (from outside).

First the body must become a home for soul and spirit, one with windows and doors to the world. Then it must become the means through which the individual engages in the world.

Festivals Each child's biography is valued through birthday celebrations.

We mark and appreciate the cycle of the year, through the celebration of festivals. We do this by coming close to nature and to the spiritual aspect of that moment in a very practical and participatory way.

Parents The relationship with the parent group is fundamental to our work. This is built and nourished through open communication, parent evenings, information talks, celebrating festivals together, home visits and visits to the kindergarten, in this way a bridge is built between the home and the kindergarten.

Teachers Each teacher has a responsibility for implementing the underlying ethos of the Steiner pedagogy Teachers meet on a weekly basis, outside of the contact time with the children.

The lead teacher, the assistant and volunteers work as a team, organising the setting in such a way as to provide a family environment away from home.

The committee This body comprises parents and interested people who care for the management of the childcare setting as an entity. The board represents the legal rights and duties of the organisation.

When working with children, there are several questions that are vital to be asked and to be considered regularly:

- + How do we make a garden for children?
 - ~ We aim to have *no* stress, anger, telling off, but lots of laughter, humour, working with nature, feeling connected and giving the child the message *You are OK as you are.*
 - ~ We believe in creative discipline and aim to prevent difficult situations by being alert and by knowing our children a bit better every day. Our aim is also to help them become truly "social beings".
 - ~ The surroundings need to be true and beautiful
- "Beauty is truth, truth is beauty, that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."*
John Keats
- It is therefore vital to know the image of the human being that Rudolf Steiner has suggested we base our work on.
- ### The image of the human being
- To educate the human being towards true humanity was Rudolf Steiner's biggest desire.
- The world is like a stage on which we act. We are interconnected with our fellow human beings.
- "Look out in the world and you know yourself, look in yourself and you know the world."*
- Through this vice versa we can understand that we influence our surroundings and conversely we are influenced by what surrounds us.
- But as it is said, "what feed us in the bread is not matter but what created matter".
- As experiences show, there is more to explore than just what our senses tell us. Even a thought is super-sensible and we all know we have plenty of them throughout the day.
- In order to create we have first to have an idea and then we bring it into matter. One can say that this is a rule of all our deeds.
- Looking at the child in the first seven years we can recognise a different approach to life. "The child is a doer" and only through actively engaging with the world, i.e. through touching and moving using all the senses, the child can understand the world.
- "Only through movement the child learns to think."*
- + What is our picture of the child?
 - ~ In this work we are working with the living substance of the developing child.
 - ~ Respect, understanding, professional know-how, love, reverence and care are needed.
 - ~ We need observational skills and the ability to ask ourselves the right questions.
 - ~ Every setting is a unique environment for the children that come and are cared for and educated.
 - + How does the rhythm fit the children and the needs of this particular setting?
 - ~ Children need input and then time to digest.
 - ~ We call our settings Kindergartens – *kinder* means children and *garten* means garden.

Rudolf Steiner indicated that this first stage of life is vital for the whole life. We need to understand the value of childhood and protect it.

As we know, every child goes through a series of predetermined developments yet the child has no influence on these whatsoever.

"The child is a whole sense organ."

R. Steiner, *Education of the Child*

The human being builds up in his soul, his own inner world, this is created in connection with feelings, impressions and thought forms.

Report on Susan Perrow's Therapeutic Storytelling Workshop

May 2012, Raheen Wood School, Clare

I'm glad to say the workshop was well attended, which makes all the preparation worthwhile!

The workshop was enjoyable and well received. Susan's delivery is succinct, organised and encouraging, which means that you really feel you've gained something of value by the end of the day.

Some points for therapeutic story writing

Ask yourself:

- + What is out of balance?
- + What is the resolution hoped for?

Stories need to be very simple for 2- 3 year olds, but will require obstacles & challenges to reflect the more developed capabilities of the 4yr. olds and over.

A song, rhyme or repetitive line strengthens the story and will act as a reminder to the child.

Use metaphors: a metaphor is something that IS (rather than something that 'is like', which is a simile). In this way a child can really 'live into' the story.

Choose metaphors from a child's favourite things; choose metaphors that relate to the behaviour.

Do research, for example, about the animal, to be sure you have the facts right as you will be corrected and the magic of the story will be lost.

Brainstorm ideas under these headings; write down all ideas, as they may develop into

something, if not for this story, then maybe another:

- + Behaviour
 - ~ Chaotic tidy up time.
- + Metaphors
 - ~ Squirrel gathering
 - ~ Tip toe across stepping stones
 - ~ Around the fallen tree
- + Journey
 - ~ Searching for nuts/toys that need to find home so we can use them another day.
- + Resolution
 - ~ Tidy up effectively,
 - ~ All cooperating, good habits, joy.

Study some stories and practise identifying the metaphors, journey and resolution. Also use ideas from these stories to create your story. Therapeutic stories can be told to a group or single child.

Susan presents her framework in her book *Therapeutic Storytelling, 101 Healing Stories for Children*, which is an excellent resource. It is available from Hawthorn Press

Some information from Susan's Tapestry of Discipline workshop will be presented in the Autumn newsletter.

Poem

Fruit in a blossom
 And petals in a seed,
 Reeds in a river bed
 Music in a reed:
 Stars in a firmament,
 Shining in the night,
 Sun in a galaxy,
 And planet in its light;
 Bones in the rosy blood
 Like land in the sea.
 Marrow in a skeleton,
 And in me.

Owen Barefield



The Transformational Power of Stories

Nancy Mellon

One morning I was out early looking for spring with my whole being. Seeing a glittering hunk of ice at the side of the road, I set off to kick it to the stars. But my toes at full tilt found it frozen solidly to the road. I hobbled home in agony to see the damage, which was severe. So I spoke to my big toe and told it, broken or not, it would have to make the best of an intensely painful and disappointing moment – and I went on with my life. Three days later, walking about I assumed my big toe wasn't broken. Two weeks later I wondered if its toenail would fall off: the whole toe seemed to be in a dark study, glowering at me.

After three months I became quite fascinated. I was interning at a psychiatric unit at the time, and I concluded with a studious clinical eye that my big toe seemed to have lost all interest in life. So I decided to hold my whole foot respectfully and to speak to it. "I want you to know you didn't deserve this," I said. "I was out for an early morning walk ..." I told it the whole story of the cold long winter, and of my impatience for spring. I kept telling especially my depressed big toe my story and its story. Lo and behold, its colour brightened. A little pearly movement showed at the root of its nail, and I was celebrating the new moon rising in my new life.

Does speaking with compassion directly to and from the body help it to heal? Along with many others, during the past thirty years I have been exploring how words, images and plot lines encourage or interfere with a healing process. In any walk of life, all our words have vibrations, especially when they are spoken aloud. Images also have vibrations; plot structures in stories hold vibrational patterns. Everything that lives has subtle vibrations and resonances. Every organ of the body emits its own vibrations and tones. A drummer knows that some rhythms reach the heart and some address the breathing; other are more sensual and sexual; others are more thought-provoking. Musicians and storytellers have always tuned in with more or less intuition to these different frequencies in order to communicate with listeners.

How can we speak more often to refresh and stimulate, heal and balance ourselves and others? How can we learn more consciously to

form words and gestures to bring internal processes into play? Stories have always had many functions. If the storyteller wants to fascinate and entertain and has no shamanic intention whatsoever, the listener can nonetheless be helped sometimes toward healing and development.

Some of the greatest of fairy tales were created intentionally to strengthen the heart. There is a whole culture of tales where the main character is not strong in any particular way except in their ability to be loving and responsive to others. These characters, though they may seem simpletons at the beginning of the story, turn into powerful wise rulers by the end, because they rule from the heart, guided by wisdom and love. Of course, not all tales carry this agenda. Sometimes clever intelligence is the most important heroic quality that is being stimulated. Other times it is perseverance and faith. Some fairy tales are not particularly enlightening but serve as a sort of inoculation of the muck and mulch of life.

Since electronic inventions burst into households and communities to change so radically the culture of our daily lives, a storytelling renaissance is occurring throughout the world. I believe we are all invited to join with this storytelling renaissance in order to help redress the various disturbing and very challenging imbalances that are being created by these inventions. The storytelling aspect of all of us speaks fully embodied, with visible gestures wrapped in body warmth, and hopefully with faculties intact, including ingenuity, true rich imagination, and kindness of heart.

Over many years of working with the process of story-making and storytelling, I have learned to trust the intuition and the imaginative pictures that come to me when I focus in the service of another person. I greatly enjoy teaching other people how to trust intuition and imagination that come as we devote ourselves to the greater good. Whether an aspect of our personal body and soul physiognomy or of the various communal bodies we inhabit, our internal organs are gathering centres where information about our lives is stored, processed and transformed. Our cells and souls hold memory, including our traumatic experiences, that can impact our entire being. I have discovered, as described in my book *Body Eloquence*, how remission and complete healing even from

serious disease can result from simply reaching into the dysfunctional story that has lodged in a certain part of the body or psyche.

Whether we have a major or a minor challenge, we can restructure the story we are telling ourselves about it. By expanding and transforming this story, we can hear it in a new way to help ourselves and others to let go, to heal and grow into a greater and wiser light . . .

* * *

Nancy Mellon has specialised in healing through the arts for thirty years. As an author, psychotherapist and mentor, she “seeks to awaken the goodness, truth and beauty of the spoken and written word”. Her books include Body Eloquence, Storytelling with Children, and Storytelling and the Art of Imagination. She lives in California. For more information on Nancy, see her website: www.healingstory.com.

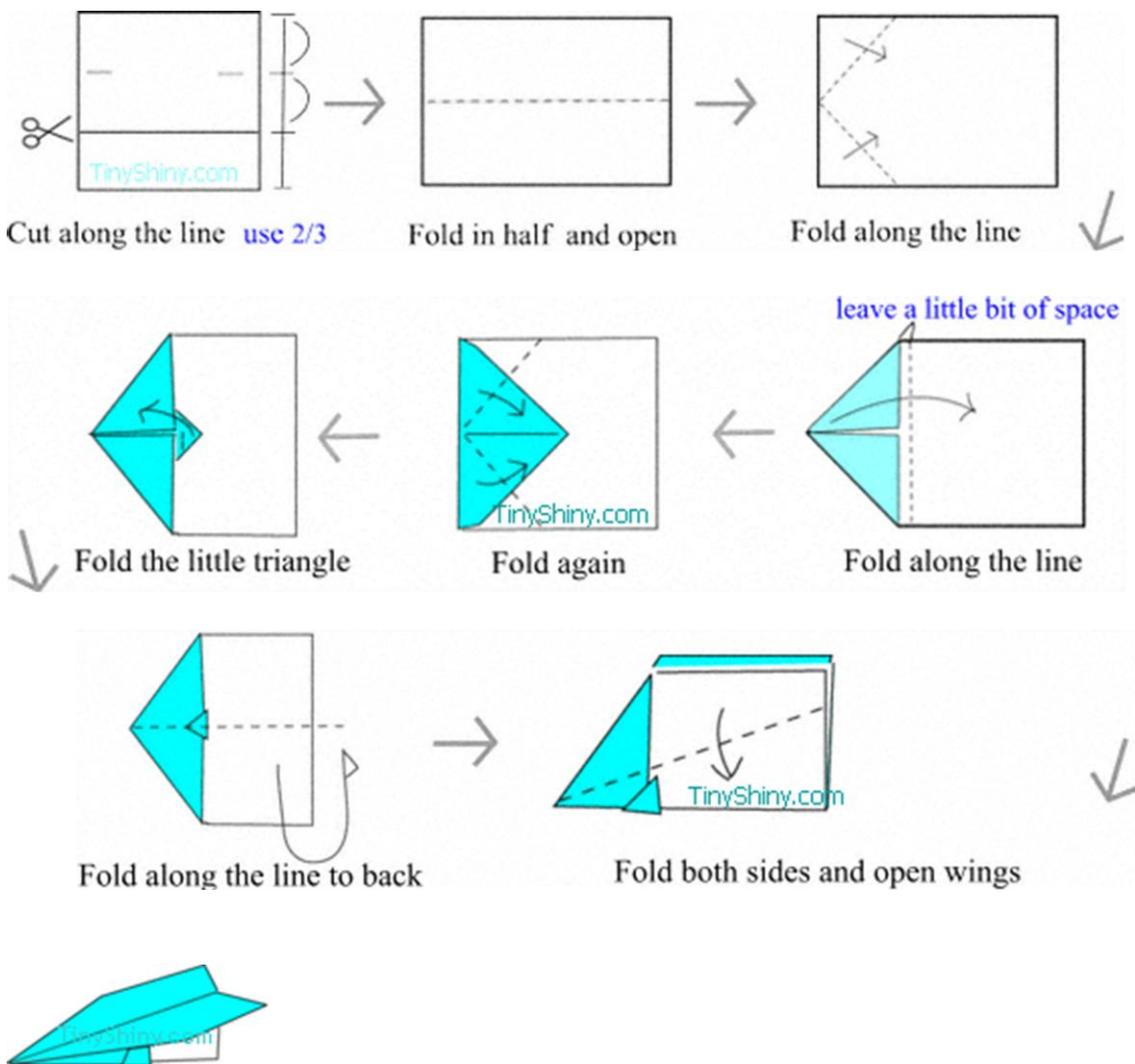


Nancy Mellon will give a five-day course on Storytelling as a Healing Art in West Cork, 18th to 22nd July 2012, at An Sanctoir, Ballydehob, Co Cork. Cost €380.

For further details and to book a place, please contact Ruth Marshall. Tel 061 473866 / 087 6945060. Email: ruth.a.marshall@gmail.com.

Origami Jet Plan

From <http://www.tinyshiny.com/HowToProjects/OrigamiJetPlane.htm>



Dancing Anklets

From: <http://passengersonalittlespaceship.blogspot.com/2012/05/ankle-bell-tutorial.html>

Start with a 44-inch wide scrap fabric.

Fold the fabric over to make a strip about an inch wide. Sew the right sides together. (Alternatively, you could have cut a two inch strip of fabric, folded it then sewn the seam, but sewing prior to cutting speeds things up.

Trim along the seam.

Attach a safety pin to one end of the tube and with the closed end of the safety pin pointing inside the tube, use your fingers to move the pin through so that it is gradually drawn through the inside. Once the safety pin emerges from the other end, pull it gently until the tube is turned completely with the right side of the fabric facing out.

Cut the 44" tube into two 22" pieces for a pair of matching anklets.

Sew three bells at even intervals (about every 7 inches) onto the fabric tube.

Cut a 9-inch piece of elastic to run through the tube. (Measure to loosely fit the person for whom your anklets are intended.)

Lay about an inch of one end of the elastic over the other end and sew them together to form a ring. Then pull the fabric tube over the elastic and tuck one fabric end into the other, or sew together, with it all scrunched up, the unfinished edges are not noticeable.



Finger rhyme (1)

Pea Pods
Bean Pods
Poppy Pods
Seed Pods

Swell until they ripen
Then they open with a pop!

Begin with hands clasped together, fingers interlaced (like a child in prayer) with the fingers laying on the backs of the opposite hand.

As each pod is announced raise up first the pointer fingers together, then the middle, ring and finally pinky.

As they swell the palms slowly pull apart and round as if a ball is held between the two hands.

Pull the hands apart as they "open" and clap back together with the pop!

Finger rhyme (2)

Here is the beehive,
but where are the bees? (a)

Hidden away where nobody sees (b)

Watch and you'll see them
come out of the hive (c)

One, two, three, four, five... (d)

(a) Enclose thumb in fist to make the hive.

(b) Place the other hand over the hive.

(c) Closely watch the hive.

(d) Beginning with the thumb, slowly release each finger out one by one until they're all buzzing and maybe tickling your child.

Research funding

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald, TD announced in April new funding opportunities for research on children's lives. This initiative is being led by the Department of Children & Youth Affairs under the National Children's Research Programme.

Research proposals include school-readiness; sexualisation and commercialisation of children; issues affecting children in contact with juvenile justice services and the impact of the youth café initiative, which is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

For more information see: <http://www.dcyu.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?Docid=1863>

Views and opinions expressed in this newsletter are the views and opinions of the authors of the articles themselves and are included for your interest and information. They are not necessarily the views or opinions of ISKA, its staff or members.

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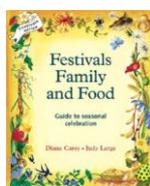
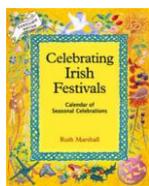
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