

Dear Members & Friends,

Sadly there have been a number of Kindergarten closures during 2011. (in Sligo, Cork & Dublin). In November ISKA sent out a Questionnaire to all kindergartens past and present, in order to gain as full an understanding as possible of the issues facing Steiner-Waldorf Early years settings.

Thank you to those who have already responded to the ISKA Questionnaire.

I still await responses from some settings and will be very glad to receive them. Once I have the information from the questionnaire, ISKA can collate the results and bring the concerns and challenges facing our early years settings to the attention of government and the policy makers via our participation in the NVCC, the National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative, with the hope and intention of making changes in support of our work. If you did not receive a questionnaire, please contact ISKA.

Though the news of closures is disappointing for us all, I am happy to inform you of the rise in Steiner inspired Parent & Child groups and Childminding services. This seems to be a new growth area, possibly in response to the present economic turn.

I'd be very interested in receiving any stories/information from these newly formed settings, and also from other more established groups nationwide, perhaps there are some I have not heard about yet. The obstacles you encountered, and the ideas that worked, the joys experienced can all help ISKA to support others in the same position.

At the very least, please send me your details, name of a contact person and a few lines about your service for the new ISKA website, which will be launched in the spring.

In the mean time, may the light grow steadily, giving strength to our resolutions, Beannacht leat.

Sinead Duignan

National Co-ordinator.



World Kindergarten Teacher's Conference

From: Sunday, April 1, 2012

To: Thursday, April 5, 2012

Venue: The Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland

The World Steiner Waldorf Kindergarten Conference will be held from 1-5 April 2012 at the Goetheanum. For more information, please visit the website www.goetheanum.org.

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Susan Perrow visit in 2012

Date for your Diary; Susan Perrow workshops April 14th & 15th 2012 in Co. Clare

We are delighted to welcome back due to popular demand, Susan Perrow, international storyteller and teacher, author of "Healing Stories for Challenging Behaviour". Susan will be doing 2 one day workshops in April. There is the possibility of a further one day workshop in the Kildare/Dublin area, or Cork, depending on the level of interest, Contact Sinead in the ISKA office if interested in hosting/attending.

Costs to be confirmed, but approx €70 per workshop, including lunch, with an option to attend both workshops for a reduced rate. There will also be as usual a reduced rate for ISKA members. More details will follow in Spring Newsletter.

Clare Workshops;

Therapeutic Storytelling - Healing Challenging Behaviour through the Medium of Story

In this one day workshop, examples, ideas and techniques for writing healing ('medicinal') stories for children are shared and the therapeutic use of metaphor explored. With the support of a storymaking framework, the participants are guided to create their own stories addressing a range of challenging behaviours and challenging situations with children.

The Tapestry of Discipline Exploring Creative Approaches with Young Children

In this one day workshop, ways to weave discipline for young children as a creative fabric are explored. Discipline is respected and addressed as an art-form. Firstly the foundation or 'warp' threads are discussed – threads such as rhythm and consistency; the adult's 'inner' mood; understanding and expectations of different ages and stages; respect and reverence for each child in your care; thinking ahead (nipping potential problems in the bud!); and more.

Secondly the creative 'weft' threads of the discipline fabric are explored and experienced through the playing of games; humour; examples of conscious & creative speech; and the use of songs and rhymes – the magic power of 'the pied-piper'.

For more information on Susan see - www.healingthroughstories.blogspot.com/

Finger Play

A chubby little snowman had a carrot nose.

(show long nose with a closed fist like a trumpet in front of face)

Along a came a bunny, and what do you suppose?

(Hands show the bunny hopping)

That hungry little bunny, looking for his lunch,

(wiggle nose like a bunny)

Ate the snowman's carrot nose,

Nibble, nibble, crunch

(pretend to eat the carrot)

Thanks to Oak meadow fingerplays

<http://themysticalkingdom.blogspot.com/2009/12/winter-verses-and-circle-time.html>



The Snow

This is the way the snow comes down,
Upon a winter day,
But soon the golden sun comes out,
And melts it all away.

— Author Unknown

Lines 1 & 2: flutter fingers down from arms raised position until arms are lowered.

Lines 3 & 4: make large circle with fingers for sun.

ISKA AGM

Dear Friends,

We would like to invite you to ISKA 's Annual General Meeting which will take place on **Saturday 21st of January'12, in Raheenwood Kindergarten at 10.30am-12noon.** If you are interested in volunteering on the ISKA council, please take this opportunity to make contact, we welcome your voice & energy!.

The AGM agenda is as follows:

- ⤴ Minutes of Previous AGM,
- ⤴ Chairperson's report
- ⤴ Treasurer's Report, including presentation of accounts and appointment of Accountant for following year.
- ⤴ National Development Officers Report
- ⤴ National Co-ordinators report
- ⤴ Resignation-Election of Officers
- ⤴ AOB

Officers Information -

The ISKA Council meet 4 times a year at venues around the country, to facilitate the geographic spread of the council members. Membership of the ISKA Council is a voluntary unpaid position. Reimbursement is available for travel costs to these meetings.

Roles

Chairperson- maintains the aims and objectives of the group and the integrity of the meeting process.

Treasurer - oversees the finances

Secretary – Consults with Chair re order of business, circulates information, agendas & minutes of meetings

Current Officers

- ⤴ Chair Person; **Linda Grant**
- ⤴ Treasurer; **Grace Burton**
- ⤴ Secretary; none named at present, Notification role carried by National Co-ordinator and minute taking by the Administration Assistant.

Other Council Members.

Marguerite Devane – Aistear Rep, Kinderarten teacher

Jude Donelan – kg teacher

Dawn Zabala - Fetac Tutor

Council meetings are also attended by the ISKA employees, all part time positions, currently:

Sinead Duignan- National Co-ordinator,
Ulrike Farnleitner– National Development Officer, Siolta Co-ordinator, IASWECE Rep.

Audrey Flynn– Administration Assistant



Jack Frost by Gabriel Setoun

The door was shut, as doors should be,
Before you went to bed last night;
Yet Jack Frost has got in, you see,
And left your window silver white.

He must have waited till you slept;
And not a single word he spoke,
But pencilled o'er the panes and crept
Away again before you woke.

And now you cannot see the hills
Nor fields that stretch beyond the lane;
But there are fairer things than these
His fingers traced on every pane.

Rocks and castles towering high;
Hills and dales, and streams and fields;
And knights in armor riding by,
With nodding plumes and shining shields.

And here are little boats, and there
Big ships with sails spread to the breeze;
And yonder, palm trees waving fair
On islands set in silver seas,

And butterflies with gauzy wings;
And herds of cows and flocks of sheep;
And fruit and flowers and all the things
You see when you are sound asleep.

For, creeping softly underneath
The door when all the lights are out,
Jack Frost takes every breath you
breathe,
And knows the things you think about.

He paints them on the window-pane
In fairy lines with frozen steam;
And when you wake you see again
The lovely things you saw in dream.

More Time and Space for Free Play in Early Childhood Care

The paper from which the following is taken, was presented to the European Early Childhood Education Research Association in Strasbourg, France, on August 29, 2009 by Philipp Reubke, kindergarten teacher at the Rudolf Steiner kindergarten in Colmar.

Each child is individual and unique, having needs, gifts, difficulties and desires that are his own. What can be done so that each child is able to grow and learn according to his personal rhythm? What can be done so that each one feels respected, perceived as he is, and welcomed in his uniqueness and at the same time stimulated to evolve?

A simple method - though not always easy to implement - both effective and risky, which brings enthusiasm to children yet is at times disturbing for adults, is free play.

Play itself is a current topic, even in French pre-school programs, which are known in Europe for their «academic» tendency, compared to the Scandinavian countries where the accent is put on play. Board games, video games, educational games, entertainment- it's not always clear what we mean when we talk about play. Here is how I see the characteristics of free play as I practice it in a Steiner/ Waldorf kindergarten with three- to six-year-old children.

From the beginning, free play demands

- **freedom.** Just as one cannot plan out an artistic creation or an improvisation ahead of time, free play cannot be planned out in detail. I can make certain material available, but cannot say what the children will do with it. Openness, confidence and empathy are indispensable for this type of play.
- **time.** It might take a little longer to get started, and there might be moments of hesitation, boredom, aggression or disturbance emerging from past events appearing early on

in the free space. Some children might experience this as "emptiness". It takes time for the free play atmosphere to unfold. In order for children to take full advantage of free play, there has to be at least *an hour or better yet, an hour and a half*, available for them to fully enter into the process.

- **space.** Ideally, there is enough room for full body movements (jumping, climbing, balancing, throwing and catching, for example) and for generally quieter symbolic games. The teacher needs to be aware of this and to allow for a protected and divided space. The children need to be able to rearrange the area during the play session: they should be free to create their own space with tables, chairs, planks, folding screens and fabric to make ample, large-scale structures such as cabins, vehicles etc. In this way, the game becomes an activity in which the whole body participates, not only the tips of the fingers moving little pieces on a table.
- **a variety of objects.** An extensive range of materials needs to be available: heavy objects that are bigger than life size, and small objects such as figurines, tea sets or sea shells, costumes and to be used to create accessories, modeling clay, string, yarn, wool, pieces of fabric. Toys like this are more suggestive of reality, rather than mere representative copies. The object does not impose itself by fascinating the child, rather, it invites his imagination to start moving.

In free play, everything depends on the child's activity. Not only does he create his play space himself, he chooses the type of play to become involved in, either play based in movement, or more symbolic games in a protected corner of the kindergarten. Each object brings the freedom with it that is necessary for the

child to reflect his mood and his culture onto the object itself (the rag doll can laugh or cry according to the mood of its 'mum'; she can be a little African girl or a superwoman). Each child invests according to his ability, mood and physical condition, each finding his own mode of expression. Great diversity is able to come about, since time and space are open and movable.

A play session like the one described above encourages connections among children from different social backgrounds, and allows the emergence of fundamental competencies described in the pre-school programs (of France), which include:

- **Language:** The possibility for spontaneous, intense small group verbal interaction is ever present. A child who doesn't speak the local language very well learns quickly through concrete examples and soon expresses himself at his own level. Such a child learns to speak quickly through real life situations or by imitating life through play rather than through artificial speaking exercises.
- **Social skills:** Free play offers an intense field of experimentation for a full range of social qualities such as sharing, collaboration, tact, synergistic living or discomfort in social situations, perception and the respect of cultural diversity.
- **Emotional development.** While playing, a child experiences his emotions with intensity and might need to bring them to evolve. A wide variety of emotions, such as courage, spontaneity, joy, disappointment, and boredom can find expression in play. Free play allows children to narrow the gap between intelligence and emotional maturity when necessary. Because it is a time free of rules or adult direction, it offers the child a space full of the possibility to "consider nothingness" (Annie Eschapassee), or "a space full of potential", "an

intermediary ground" (Winnicott). "This can be considered 'sacred space' for the individual as far as one creates in this space the experience of creativity of life". (Winnicott, 143). A child can create the space that satisfies his emotional needs. I have seen an exceptionally bright child create a totally dark space, a child lacking affection create a personal 'nest' and a clumsy child build an obstacle just high enough so that he could dare to jump over it.

- **Cognitive development:** By playing with natural objects or undefined toys, a child takes into consideration their elemental qualities while using his imagination freely ; for example, little sticks can become spaghetti, a large stick a guitar etc. For Christian Rittelmeyer, *...this versatile interpretation of the real environment represents one of modern society's most fundamental competencies...(that is) the capacity of creating several possible interpretations of a real phenomenon.* (Rittelmeyer, 136f).

Before having to become familiar with the completely arbitrary symbols such as those used in writing, the child uses a form of free symbolism based on the inspiring form of an object, with the inspiration coming from that which is evoked from within himself.

Other research suggests that a quantitative decrease of sensory stimulus reinforces the capacity to evoke from within. "The disappearance of normal auditive input can promote the appearance of the auditive cortex hypersensitivity that may increase the strength even more of musical imagination." (Oliver Sacks, 52). Can we not deduce that free play, without sensational toys, stimulates the ability to evoke from within, a

capacity which is fundamental for future learning?

Personal development: Following rules or instructions takes a back seat to the child's personal initiative during free play. The child's development progresses in an atmosphere in which the surroundings invite him to move beyond being a simple spectator, to actively becoming a director or an actor. As Françoise Dolto said, "The enemy of our culture is passivity" (Dolto, 56). Free play promotes the taking of initiative, which is indispensable for cultural and economic life. Many educational researchers have noted the importance of free play in the personal development of children. For example: according to **Jean Piaget** the emotional and intellectual needs of the child are not satisfied if he must constantly adapt to his surroundings. "It is therefore indispensable to a child's emotional and intellectual balance that he have an area of activity available in which the motive not be the adaptation to the real but the assimilation of the real to the 'self', without constraints or sanctions: this is play." (Piaget,44).

Rudolf Steiner follows this reasoning when he states that it is indispensable that the young child act from his own impulses. If a child is forced to do some work, it brings in "a goal that is not part of his own world", and his true nature is not respected. However, if the child does this same sort of work during playtime by imitating an adult, the child can experience growth. According to Steiner, "the child can develop his activity according to his own nature, his own 'life of a man'. This form of play operates from within to without, the work from without to within". (Steiner, 95)

Daniel Marcelli grants that the child "can learn without play" but specifies that "such learning resembles submission and

indoctrination". In his book, *Play and Education*, Giles Brougères objects to the idea that free play can have any educative value. After detailed analysis of the pedagogical thought expressing the idea of self-development of the child through play (Schiller, Fröbel, Winnicott) he writes, "play, whose spontaneity has been put forward by romanticism, is socially built and re-built in the frame of domestication and control of childish activity".

While I understand Brougère's point of view, I find that his objections come from an incomplete understanding of the nature of free play. Controlling and planning a child's activity makes play impossible: it loses many of its previously mentioned qualities. "That it cannot be planned out, is characteristic of this type of educational process". (Rittelmeyer, 137). However, I find that the **presence of an adult and well-established, healthy limits** are indispensable for such play.

An illustration of the above, used to create a framework for free play, includes the following :

- **time:** after an hour and a half, free play degenerates according to my observation.
- **space:** the need to have little nooks as well as a large space.
- **the connection of the adult to the child:** this does not imply direct interference or involvement in a given activity, but an *inner presence* for the child: observing, being present as soon as required or when there is suffering.

"When (a child) feels alone, he cannot play. However, a balance must be respected: presence does not mean interference". (Julien Cohen-Solal, 42)

"It is a non-interventionist attitude, since the children's initiatives are being looked for, but it is not a retreating attitude. This can be defined as a communicative presence based on long-term observation,

(...) a warm, positive regard..." (Sylvie Rayna, 45)

When intervening in a conflict situation, the adult attempts to adopt the language of the game if possible ('*The control tower asks all pilots to control the power of their engines*').

- adult activity: An inactive, observing adult obstructs free play. Concrete activity, simple enough for an adult to pursue all the while being available to the children, is an excellent non-verbal way for the adult to provide a framework for the play. (Almost any domestic activity can be adapted: tidying up, doing dishes, making cakes, sewing, embroidering, rasping and filing, and why not sawing and hammering? Outdoors, hoeing, digging, planting, etc.)
- the cultural framework: In order for a child to play freely without giving way to excitation or destruction, he needs to witness and take part in a healthy quality of life. Any sort of concrete, constructive physical work is stimulating, as are stories, poetry and songs. By the choices, quality and style of presentation of pedagogical enrichment brought to the children, the educator positively influences future play. (Just as too much passively consumed super-hero content prevents this from taking place, making it impossible.)

I believe that free play, well accompanied by an adult, can be practiced in all child care structures, even in state-run early childhood centers. Of course, there are risks, because by definition, we do not control everything. School inspectors say, "More and more, class organization is turned towards the blackboard, just like the desks. Playtime, which is so important for children, tends to diminish. The disappearance of playtime is therefore most preoccupying". (Program, 65). Steiner-Waldorf kindergartens have been taking this idea seriously for 90 years.

Let's not be too serious all the time. Turn the desks around from time to time, away from the blackboards so that children can build cabins and club houses. Let's make education not only the adaptation to what already exists but also the transformation of what is, according to what is living each one's soul. Another person's soul, which is considered different and strange, might be found to be a treasure chest that holds the key for a better tomorrow.

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For more information on Steiner-Waldorf education: www.steiner-waldorf.org (Fédération des Ecoles Steiner en France) www.iaswece.org (International Association for Steiner-Waldorf Early Childhood Education)

"One kind word can warm three winter months." - Japanese Proverb



"MAY the people live their lives as if it were a song,
For living out of light provides the music for the stars
To be dancing circles in the night."

Russian Gypsy Song

Story & Activity

There was a giant big and bold
Whose feet were getting very cold.
He came along to our town
And walked the stairs all up and down
Calling "Is no one hearing me?
My toes are freezing bitterly!
No single shop that I could tell
Has stocking giant-size to sell."

A little gnome both old and wise.
He gave him very good advice.
He brought two pretty bits of stuff.
The giant thought them good enough.
He wrapped his feet, his pain was eased.
And home he walked content and pleased.

Materials: Knotted cloth dolls [this could be a play silk or gauze square the you knot to show head and other body parts] with 2 extra pieces of fabric to wrap the giant's feet. Children can watch you knotting the characters.



<http://sassypackrat.blogspot.com/2010/07/sassys-friday-finds-gnomes.html>



<http://waldorflondon.co.uk/2011/10/project-gnome-part-1-beginners/>

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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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