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ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF STEINER/WALDORF EDUCATION FOR THE CHILD FROM BIRTH TO SEVEN

The future development of each individual child and of humanity as a whole depends on health-giving experiences in the first seven years of life. An atmosphere of loving warmth and guidance that promotes joy, wonder, and reverence supports such healthy development. The most essential aspect of the work with the little child is the inner attitude of the educator, who provides the example for the child's imitation. Therefore the work of the educator requires an ongoing process of research and self-education.

In Steiner Education settings, foundations are laid for later learning and healthy development, including life-long physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth.

This education, based on an understanding of the development of human individuality, offers protection and respect for the dignity of childhood. It includes an understanding of the unfolding development of the child from pre-birth to seven, including the unique significance of the development of walking, speaking and thinking in the first three years of life.

Activities in Steiner early childhood education take into consideration the age-specific developmental needs of young children, from a focus on will-oriented physical activity in the first three years, then on imaginative play in the middle years of early childhood, and later a more cognitive approach to learning after the child enters school. - IASWECE www.iaswece.org

KEY PRINCIPLES OF STEINER EDUCATION

Steiner based programmes may differ according to geography, culture, group size, age range, and individual teaching approach. Granting these differences, our programmes share certain fundamental characteristics:

- Loving interest in and acceptance of each child
- Opportunities for self-initiated play with simple play materials as the essential activity for young children.
- This is the young child's work and makes it possible for them to digest and understand their experiences
- Awareness that young children learn through imitation, through the experience of diverse sensory impressions, and through movement. Their natural inclination is to actively explore their physical and social environment. The surroundings offer limits, structure and protection, as well as the possibility to take risks and meet challenges.
- A focus on real rather than virtual experiences to support the child in forming a healthy relationship to the world.
- Artistic activities such as storytelling, music, drawing and painting, rhythmic games, and modelling that foster the healthy development of imagination and creativity.
- Meaningful practical work such as cooking, baking, gardening, handwork and domestic activity that provide opportunities to develop unfolding human capacities. Here the emphasis is on the processes of life rather than on learning outcomes.
- Predictable rhythms through the day, week and year that provide security and a sense of the interrelationships and wholeness of life. Seasonal and other festivals are celebrated according to the cultural and geographical surroundings.

We recognise that healthy child development unfolds most fully in the context of a community with healthy social relationships among parents, teachers and children.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION TO SUPPORT BRINGING THESE PRACTICES INTO A SETTING

Designing play areas requires a playful approach to design and testing the boundaries of trends; it means to risk being seen as not serious. Designing for play is about expressing ideas and feelings, about communicating playfulness and joy of living. For adults a design can usually be about forms, whereas for a child, design is about activity. Forms are important, but children are environment messers, indulging in moving and shifting the environment and using it often in ways unforeseen by the designer. What must be avoided is creating 'stage settings' for programmable activity for which you write the script – children's play is unscriptable. A designers' explorative approach to materials, form and ideas is a form of play. Like children, the designer says, "what can I do with this?"

The environmental personality changes according to the space or situation in which children find themselves, and knowing this informs the design from the start. We begin with the concept of creating a sacred space where the boundaries, entrances and thresholds are all critical. The overall shape of the space is also important. How does it encourage movement? Circularity is necessary to enable the children to move within the space, encouraging life and vitality. We also need spaces for reflection and settled

contemplation. The emotional security and comfort of the child can sometimes be overlooked. For very young children small spaces are needed to feel comfortable. Environmental psychologists have found that children will usually move towards the boundaries of a large play space or sit in cosy places offering protection.

Any design is an intervention into nature's evolving seasons and play areas should move and change with the seasons and weather. It is important to recognise what nature is doing and work with that energy. The garden or outdoor space is the child's laboratory. The word "garden" originally derived from the Latin "love of work". The children are alive and animated by the elements and by this beautiful natural world.

Play experiences in nature are essential for children, as studies have now concluded. It is not only the physical and mental wellbeing offered, but also a deeper level of the human psyche too – something that connects to the being of nature to the earth.

- Matt Davies, Planet Earth Ltd Chartered Landscape Architects - from "Kindling" magazine, Autumn-Winter 2009



HOW CAN WE BEST FACILITATE MORE OUTDOOR PLAY FOR CHILDREN?

Firstly, we need to set the intention clearly to be outdoors, and we have to want to do it. This includes being dressed for the part! **There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing!** To get the full benefit of being outdoors, both we and the children need to be warm and dry.



The following is a list of essential clothing:

- Waterproof dungaree trousers
- Waterproof jacket
- Wool hat (sun hat in summer)
- Wellies or, ideally, waterproof walking boots
- We recommend pure wool jumpers where possible, and for another layer of warmth, wool/silk mix long-johns and vests are available to order online.
- Always have a change of clothes (if necessary) and a warm pair of slippers for when you return indoors.

Start with a walk to warm everybody up, as children like to explore the minutiae of the environment which involves being in the one spot for a period of time. If you do not have the space for a good walk, you can create some kind of movement or game instead. On warm sunny days, remember sun hats and sun cream, and insect repellent is always handy.

Some suggested websites for clothing:

- www.puddleducks.ie
- www.waterproofworld.co.uk
- www.ansiopabeag.com

EQUIPMENT FOR OUTDOOR PLAY

Some children love to run, jump, skip, climb, play chasing while others will want to build a den, make a house, make a fairy castle or sit and observe the creatures of the landscape under rocks etc, so it is great to have as varied an environment as possible. For an inner city setting, you could do simple things like plant bamboo which grows quickly (even in pots), gives you materials to work with, shelter from the elements and greenery around you. You can plant established fruit trees which will give you height, visible seasonal changes, and food! Fruit bushes blackcurrant, raspberry (choose autumn fruit varieties) so children get to harvest the fruit.

If you are lucky enough to live beside or near a forest or wild outdoor space, no equipment is necessary as nature provides everything you need. If not and you want to expand and develop your outdoor area, below are suggestions of equipment you could use.

Sandpit: (an invaluable addition to any outdoor area, and if you have the space, probably more than one, and as deep as possible)

Water play: An old basin, non – breakable cups, jugs, funnels, sieves. A covered water butt under the down pipe of the gutters.

- Wheelbarrows
- Buckets
- Carts
- Boxes
- Bamboo canes
- Sheets (a tipi, shelter)
- Garden tools (straw brooms, spades, rakes)
- Planks of wood
- Bricks
- Ladders
- Stones
- Rope swing / tyre swing
- Hammer and nails
- A hammock, hung low

If you have a forest/meadow/field to go for a walk, it is always handy to have string, scissors and first aid kit in your pocket or rucksack.

In the early years the use of unformed toys such as sticks etc., and free play allows the child to add as much as possible to their playthings using their own imagination. This use of the child's imagination

For those who have no access to an outdoor area, you can bring nature and the outdoors inside:

- Pot plants in the windows (flowers and herbs provide the extra sensory experience of smell)
- Create a Terrarium (fill a fishbowl or tank with soil and add leaves, stones, insects, snails)
- Have boxes of natural materials, acorns, tree bark, stones, sticks, pinecones, chestnuts to be played with during free play.
- Have a nature table relevant to the changing seasons



FOR THE SEASONS - A STORY

One helpful idea to inspire us to write stories for children is to take our favorite nursery rhyme and make a story in relation to it. I like to start and end by singing or reciting the nursery rhyme - to wrap it up so to speak. The story below is a little out of season but it gives the idea.

Mary had a Little Lamb by Niamh Ruiséal

Once upon a time there was a farmer named Brendan who lived on a hillside beside a beautiful river, just outside the town.

Now Brendan was no ordinary farmer, for he did not sow corn or barley or wheat. He did not have cattle or pigs or hens. No, what Brendan loved was sheep. He had sheep on the hillside, he had sheep in the fields, sheep in the sheds and sometimes he even had sheep in the kitchen!

One sharp spring morning Brendan's daughter Mary came downstairs to see Brendan coming into the kitchen with a small bundle inside his coat. Mary heard a very quiet "ba" and she ran to investigate. There inside Brendan's coat was a tiny new-born lamb.

"Now," said Brendan, "this little one needs our care as her mother has had two other lambs and can't look after them all."

"Run quick to the shed now Mary and get a drawer from the old chest and a sop of hay 'til we make a bed for this little creature."

By the time Mary got back from the shed her father was in the back kitchen putting some milk on to heat for the lamb. When it was warm enough he poured it into an old glass bottle, put a teat on it, tested it wasn't too hot on his wrist. Then he brought it into where Mary had made the bed for the lamb beside the range.

Brendan offered the bottle to the lamb. At first the lamb wasn't too sure what to do. But he soon got the smell of milk and began to suck. Well he drank and he drank and he drank. As the bottle got emptier and emptier his tummy got fuller and fuller. When the bottle was empty the lamb turned around three times in his new bed said "Baaa" as if to say Thank You and fell fast asleep.

When the lamb woke again to be fed, Mary followed her father out to the back kitchen to watch him prepare the feed. Brendan said, "Now Mary it is your turn to feed the lamb."

This time the lamb knew what to do; quickly he started to drink. He drank and he drank and he drank. As the bottle got emptier and emptier his tummy got fuller and fuller. When the bottle was empty the lamb turned around three times in his new bed said "Baaa" as if to say Thank You and fell fast asleep.

By the time the lamb woke again, Mary had the bottle all ready for him. "You'll make a great farmer yet girleen," said her father as Mary fed the lamb. And so it went on: Mary caring for the lamb and the lamb getting stronger every day. Soon it was time for Mary to bring him out to

eat the sweet grass outside the front door. And every day Mary brought him out to the flock of sheep to play with his brothers and sisters. Everywhere Mary went the lamb followed her.

Then one day Mary's Easter holidays were over and it was time for her to return to school. Well, she put on her coat and hat, picked up her school bag and walked out the garden gate on her way to school. She patted the lamb on the head as she passed. He looked up and saw Mary going out the gate.

Unfortunately Mary didn't close the gate properly. The lamb nudged the gate with his head and got it open! He ran down the lane calling loudly after Mary.

She turned around and said, "Oh oh! No, little lamb, you can't come with me today: I am going to school!"

So she brought him back and made sure that the gate was locked and started off for school again.

Well, that didn't stop the lamb. When Mary had left the garden, he jumped up very nimbly on the ditch beside the gate, and jumped down soundlessly onto the grass that grows in the middle of the lane. He followed Mary without a sound.

Mary arrived into school none the wiser! She was delighted to see all her friends again. She sat at her desk and put her books and crayon roll away.

Suddenly, she heard some of the children laughing and calling the teacher saying, "Look, look it's a lamb!"

Oh no, thought Mary, I think I know who that might be! Sure enough, she looked out the window and there was her lamb standing in the school garden.

Well, Mary's teacher told Mary to bring the lamb home again and asked her to ask Brendan if he would bring the lamb tomorrow with a bottle and the children could feed him.

That was just what Brendan did. He, Mary and the lamb arrived early the next morning. He had brought a bottle full of milk and all the children got a chance to feed the lamb. Well, he drank and he drank and he drank. As the bottle got emptier and emptier his tummy got fuller and fuller. But this time he did not fall asleep: he went home with Brendan, and Mary stayed at school.

Now once the lamb knew where Mary was going each day, he seemed content to let her go. He then spent his time in the field with the other sheep but at 2:30 each afternoon the lamb would be waiting patiently for Mary at the garden gate!

FOR THE SEASONS - POEMS AND SONGS



It's often children who notice the first butterfly of spring. Butterflies are symbols of beauty, complexity and fragility. Their metamorphosis from caterpillar, through the chrysalis stage, to adult insect is a wonderful opportunity for us to learn about a complex natural process, and to consider the meaning of beauty and ugliness.

Above all, the butterfly is a compelling illustration of the unbreakable link between a living creature and its habitat. Children quickly understand that the colourful meadows and hedgerows are major fuelling stations for butterflies, and that protecting these spaces is vitally important. These are wonderful lessons to learn in kindergarten.



A SUMMER SONG

Over the fields where the corn flowers grow,
Over the fields where the poppies blow,
Over the stile there's a way we know,
Down to a rustling wood!

Over the fields where the daisies grow,
Over the fields where the willows blow,
Over the bridge there's a way we know-
Down to a rippling brook!



BUTTERFLIES

SHY LITTLE CATERPILLAR

A shy little caterpillar looked at the sky.
He hugged a leaf stem and he gave a big sigh.
The sky and the stem didn't give a reply.
He didn't understand and he didn't know why.

He hid from the birds so quick and so sly.
He hid from the ant family living close by.
"Please, little caterpillar, why are you shy?
Please, little caterpillar, try not to cry."

"I'll try", said the caterpillar, "but I *am* shy.
I wouldn't be shy if I could just fly.
I know what I'm going to do, by and by:
I'll spin a fine bed and then say goodbye."

A little wind sang him a sweet lullaby.
And when he woke up, his wet wings were dry.
The shy little caterpillar whispered, "Goodbye."
He flew to the sky and was no longer shy
Because he'd become a beautiful butterfly!

From "*Spring and Summer Nature Activities for Waldorf Kindergartens*"

FOR THE SEASONS - CRAFTS

Make a Real Flower Sun Catcher Garland

By Ziva Ellis

A walk in the garden on a sunny day inspired this beautiful simple decoration. This easy nature craft using kite paper, glue and real flowers is a fun activity for all age children who love exploring and collecting from nature's bounty. It is a fun way to turn their nature treasures into a keepsake. It can be done in all seasons, but spring and summer are best, when the flowers are most colourful.

This activity needs to be done in two stages: the first stage involves collecting and pressing the flowers and the second (around two weeks later) is when you make the sun catchers. They can be made with fresh, flattened flowers but they will only last for a few weeks before the moisture from the flowers will start to interfere with the paper. They are still pretty – but temporary.

Materials:

White Kite Paper
Flowers & Leaves
PVA glue
String
Flower Press or Heavy Books
(optional)
Scissors
Round Bowl
Paint Brush

First Stage:

First, go on a nature walk, or out to your garden and collect your flowers, petals, grasses or whatever you fancy pressing, this is a nice thing to do with small children, they can each be given a basket and left to collect their own items. Try to keep everything small in size but do not limit to just that and keep an eye out for anything with colour!

You could make this part an entire activity in itself and do a treasure hunt for certain colours, textures, or shapes. Finding special things in nature is fun but remember that a little bit will go a long way for this activity.

Press your leaves/flowers. The less moisture you end up with, the longer they will last in your sun catchers. If you do not have a flower press you can do this by laying them flat very carefully between two pieces of plain paper and then inside a heavy book (like an atlas).

Second Stage - Once Flowers are dry:

1. Draw around your bowl onto the kite paper and cut out the circles.



2. Lay down one circle of kite paper and paint with PVA glue.
3. Arrange the flowers on the kite paper however you wish.
4. Lay the string across near the top.
5. Paint the second circle of kite paper with glue and carefully place on top of the circle with the flowers (*small children will need help with this*). Press down to eliminate bubbles and excess glue.
6. Repeat for however many you want on your garland and leave in the sun on in a warm place to dry.
7. When completely dry hang in your window and enjoy!

FOR THE SEASONS - CRAFTS

Nature Art Mandalas

By Ziva Ellis

Do you wonder how to incorporate natural materials into your curriculum? Are you often left thinking, "How can I use sticks, shells, greenery and stones as a lesson?"

Build a Mandala using nature's loose parts. Mandala making not only offers a therapeutic experience, but it also encourages children to work together cooperatively whilst covering required learning. It is a beautiful, spiritual and simple way to explore nature and learning creatively.



Mandala created by Sophia Ellis

How to make a Mandala

There is no right or wrong way to make a mandala, which is why it is such a wonderful way to engage children in nature. It is so simple that it does not require any tools or materials but relies on what nature provides, and is a beautiful, easy activity that you can do almost anywhere and at any time.

There are so many items one can use to create mandalas, children love to go on adventures to find materials, collect along a walk, or just use what is in your garden. Sticks, rocks/pebbles, shells, sand, flowers, leaves, wood, bark, pine cones, sea glass, moss, berries, feathers, pine needles, acorns, nuts...

The easiest way to start a mandala is with the outer circle. There are three ways to do this:

1. Children can find circles that already exist in nature, whether it be the surface of a rock that looks circular or a tree stump that has a circular surface.
2. Children can collect their items and then create the first circle from one of those natural materials.
3. Clear a patch of ground into a circular shape.

What is a Mandala?

The word mandala is a Sanskrit term that means "circle" and in essence a mandala is a circular structure with a design that radiates out symmetrically from a unifying centre. It is one of nature's most perfect configurations. We find mandala patterns in natural objects from the radiating petals of a flower to tree rings, spiderwebs, the sun, eyes, snowflakes, seashells, seeds, fruits, crystals and more.

While they are beautiful, there is a deeper meaning in the mandala. According to The Mandala Project website, the mandala "represents wholeness, and can be seen as a model for the organizational structure of life itself—a cosmic diagram that reminds us of our relation to the infinite, the world that extends beyond and within our bodies and minds."

In some spiritual traditions, mandalas are employed for focusing attention of practitioners and as a spiritual guidance tool, for establishing a sacred space to aid meditation.

As part of a spiritual practice both Navajo Indians and Tibetan monks created intricate mandalas with coloured sand made of crushed semiprecious stones. They were often highly intricate illustrations of religious significance that were used for meditation and to demonstrate the impermanence of life.

Psychologist Carl Jung used the mandala for his own personal growth. Jung recognized that the urge to make mandalas emerges during moments of intense personal growth in which a profound re-balancing process is underway in the psyche. Carl Jung said that a mandala symbolizes "a safe refuge of inner reconciliation and wholeness."

Interestingly enough, the mandala is usually the first identifiable form that toddlers start drawing as they move from scribbles to more realistic drawing.

Once the initial outline of the circle is in place find the centre, placing something special there, and then they can continue to fill up the space as they desire. Encourage patterning and shape making.

What they learn

Regardless of how old a child is, being in nature as much as possible and creating art from natural raw materials is a way to help establish a healthy and reciprocal relationship between nature and themselves. It can offer an authentic experience of what it is like to be a kind, respectful and loving human being, all of which nature inspires us to be.

This activity is calming and relaxing as well as fun and educational, great for nurturing a child's creativity and problem-solving skills. All they need is a small collection of materials and an imagination. It is appropriate for all ages offering children the perfect balance between structure and free play. By providing children with their own baskets to collect with it encourages their independence and allows them to become directly engaged with the environment without feeling the need to constantly rely on an adult to facilitate. Often the children will work as a team to collect and sort and learn to cooperate and share whilst expressing themselves individually within a unified structure.

Mandala making also provides what the early years curriculum requires as "hands-on experience with materials, and active learning as well as the development of mathematical language whilst sharing ideas and thinking". Thus "supporting the conception of mathematics as an interconnected body of ideas and reasoning processes that students explore collaboratively with their teachers and their peers." Incorporating language (long, short, full, empty, more, over, under, big, little etc) as well as sorting shapes and spatial awareness, construction with 3D objects, patterning and problem solving.

Something we see children dealing with developmentally early on is their attachment to possessions. The mandala is an ephemeral artwork and is not going to be going home with you once you have finished. That to me is a big part of what makes this activity so unique, when they ask what happens to their mandala once left outside, it's a great opportunity for them to see that there is value in the process of creating even if there is nothing tangible to show for it in the end and not everything we value has to be material. Creating ephemeral art also teaches about the impermanence of life. Then they are able to enjoy the process for what it is, this is the true gift of making mandalas in nature, children become completely engaged in the moment.

For more information, see <http://mandalaproject.org>

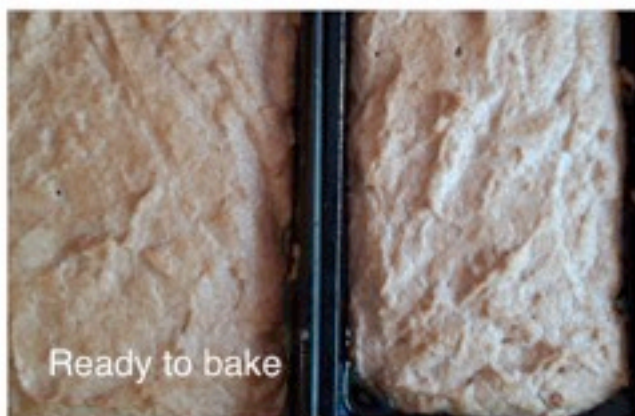


The different seasons present us with a variety of materials and colours to use! These mandalas were

created from natural materials, to mark seasonal changes or special occasions, by Ruth Marshall

MAKING KINDERGARTEN BREAD

by Niamh Ruiséal



You will need:

1 kg of wholemeal Spelt flour
1 rounded dessertspoon of dried yeast,
1 rounded dessertspoon of honey
1 level dessertspoon of salt
A good glug of olive oil (plus some to oil the tins)
700ml lukewarm water.
2lb bread tins x 2

Oven temperature: 190 centigrade for 45 minutes.

First dissolve the honey in the warm water, then add the yeast and set it aside to froth.

Put the flour and salt into a large bowl and mix well. Then add the oil and rub in until it resembles breadcrumbs.

Next add the dissolved honey and yeast (you may not need it all) and mix well with your hand. It should be quite a soft dough.

Put the dough in the well-oiled bread tins and allow to rise in a warm place. 30 minutes or so.

Place in the oven and cook for 45 minutes. Check it and if getting too brown lower the heat. When it is cooked it will sound hollow when you knock on the base.

Variations: Use one third less flour and add porridge oats instead. Add sunflower, pumpkin, or linseeds or whatever takes your fancy! Enjoy

TELLING WAX STORIES IN KINDERGARTEN

By Niamh Ruiséal

Every Thursday in kindergarten we draw our chairs into a circle, and we tell what we have come to call Wax Stories. By this we mean that we compose a story made up from an object made in bee's wax by each child. The adults take it in turns each week to tell the story

In preparation we place bee's wax into warm water to soften it. The softness of the wax depends on the time of the year! In September we make it quite soft to guarantee success. As the year goes on, and they get more proficient, we let the wax a little firmer allowing them to use their will-forces a little more.

The adult makes a story-scape with silks and pieces of wood, stones or whatever they are inspired to use. Of late we have started getting the older children to set the scene. Just make sure that there are enough props to attach or lean their creations on.

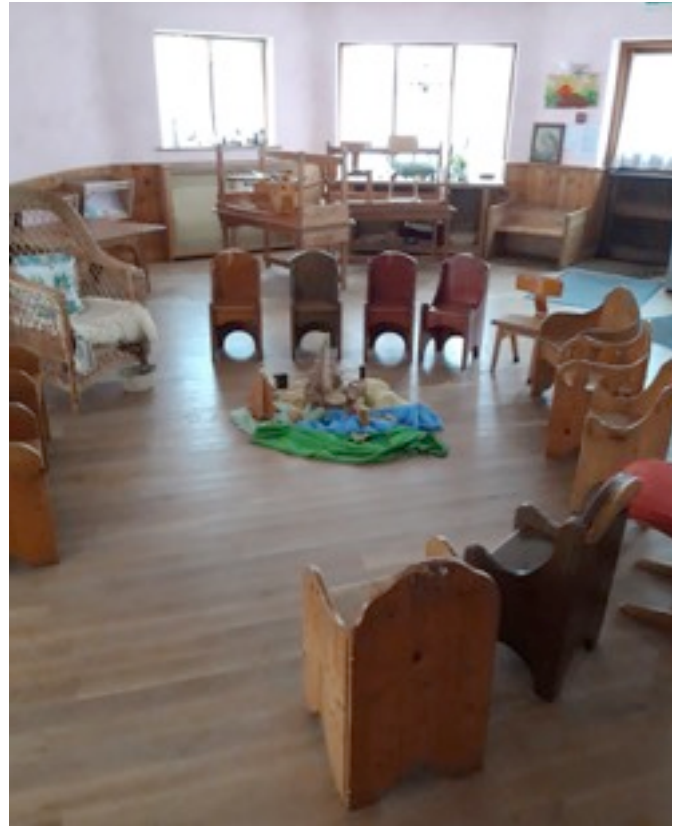
With the scene set, using the warm wax the children form something that becomes part of the story. As we collect the wax creations, we try to anchor the object in our memory. To ensure no-one has forgotten (a great memory exercise!).

Then we just open up to what I call the Story Angel and let the story begin to formulate in the mind.

The important thing is to remember to include every child's creation.

Sometimes we can weave a message into the story: for instance, sharing or not hitting. But some of the most satisfying stories have just arisen without being contrived.

The more relaxed and unself-conscious we are the better the story.



A LETTER TO PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

from Ulrike Farnleitner, April 2020

Dear parents and educators,

We all have landed in unexpected and stressful times which leave us restricted in many ways. Activities that were firmly embedded in our daily rhythm and routine cannot take place anymore. Schools and kindergartens remain closed for the moment.

I am writing this letter to offer some suggestions for how to cope with the challenges this entails. As educators/parents of young children you are probably the person who spends the most with your child now. This might be a new situation for you. And: Your attitude will profoundly influence the mood of your children and your home.

We hope you are healthy and that despite this situation being forced on all of us you can see some positive aspects. What is asked of us is: courage and an attitude of surrender. Both will enable us to accept what is happening and open a way to deal with the present moment constructively. Let's take it day by day, step by step. In this process, we do get help from nature. We can currently witness nature breathing colours into all the beautiful flowers of the earth.

Can we set aside some time every day and every hour to actively practice letting go of worries and stress? Breathe in freedom and breath out everything else! Every hour for a few seconds, every day for half an hour! Let us actively create healthy minds and healthy bodies!

Here are some thoughts that might help with the rhythm of the day:

As adults we are in charge and as soon as we establish a rhythm and routine our children will follow and demand sameness ... pizza every Tuesday, ... spaghetti on Fridays ... fresh apple slices every morning ...

- Structure and plan the day: play time, snacks, cooking and tidying-up, but also clear times for rest, going for a walk and, of course, normal bedtime. Also: time for Mom and Dad to work in their home office (see the little film at the end of the letter)
- Make it clear how tasks around the house will be shared. Let the children help in drawing up the plan. Little drawings can help to clarify all agreements within the family: who will be responsible for watering the plants, who will decide what cake to bake, who will write down the menu for the week ...

- In the evenings check in with your children and state where you as a family have struggled and what has worked really well. Check off the tasks of the day, depending on age of the children. Then set intentions for the next day: "Tomorrow we will make a drawing for granny!"
- Create a clear bedtime routine and reinvent your own inner storyteller! All children love stories. Make them up! Let your imagination come up with stories! What better way to deal with all the anxieties swirling around than giving them to various characters in a story? There could be a giant stomping around or a roaring dragon. Those can be fought by clever and courageous young boys and girls ... there could also be a healing remedy, a herbal potion ... whatever comes to your imagination is good. Allow yourself to be creative and full of imagination!
- Take a daily walk and pay close attention to all the birds and insects. Enjoy the growing fauna and flora.
- Let your children play freely and have fun! Have a good laugh and share stories from your childhood. Invent new games and have an active and happy time. Start singing again!
- Some families re-discover old toys in storage boxes. You can make a game of it and play "shopping" for "new" supplies. Relive memories from the past.
- How about sharing recipes and stories with each other? If you are interested in a group email, please let me know so we can set it up. (I will be mindful of GDPR.)
- Your early years teacher will support you at this time and BLATHU is planning regular Zoom meetings to stay connected. In times where we cannot shake hands, we can still open our hearts to each other.
- Please find below a video of a professor who is also working from home but forgot to lock his office door. Good fun!

Links:

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/staying-sane-while-working-from-home-with-kids/>

For a commercial free childhood experience:
<https://commercialfreechildhood.org/social-distancing/>

Warm greetings, Ulrike Farnleitner
National Development Officer **Bláthù Irish Steiner
Early Childhood Association**
Email: ndo.blathu@gmail.com T: 0871247317

HOW TO STAY HEALTHY IN DEMANDING TIMES?

By Ulrike Farnleitner

We all know that being overloaded by work is challenging and robs one of energy that could be used in working with children in a cheerful and joyful manner. The questions are how to manage these demands carefully and wisely?

We are important role models for the young child. So let us fine tune our instrument as an educator by reflecting and acting. When we talk about reflecting about our day and what has happened throughout, it is very important to remember that one needs “to know oneself”, as Rudolf Steiner endlessly states.

Susan Howard wrote about the “essentials of the Waldorf Kindergarten”. I took these ideas up and hope that some of these questions will help your reflection. You might find it worthwhile to integrate intentions for creative work that will lead to your rejuvenation and health.

Inner Development - a path

How are you engaged in your inner development as an early childhood educator, and as a human being?

What do you do on a daily basis?

Continue with your anthroposophical path if you are engaged with one, but if you would like to begin, here are some ideas.

Your first challenge is to get up 5 minutes earlier every day, next *acquire a sense of gratitude* for everything in your life... Be curious what the day might bring! Write your experiences in a daily diary. Do this for 3 weeks and then assess your progress. What has changed?

Cultivating a relationship to the children in your imagination. This might mean to imagine the group of children you are working with once a day. You might do this in the evening. You will bless them, imagine a rainbow-like colour around them for protection. Henning Köhler mentioned in his book “Working with Anxious, nervous and depressed children”, to pose a question while you are relating to the children’s angel. Our challenge is to bring a clearly thought out problem that concerns one deeply for the children’s sake rather than of our own. (p7) And with that we really form a clear image of the child.

With this work we foster an environment of spiritual striving. All these efforts will flow back to me as a gift of strength. Any steps towards a deepened study of child and human development, creates understanding and respect of human destiny and karma.

The best way to not burden children by unresolved issues in one’s personal life is this amazing image that in the morning when we change into kindergarten gear, we consciously pass on our personal burdens onto the mantel hook. After that we are free to be the best adult ever for this day.

Everybody who works with this concept will confirm the health-bringing joy in such an attitude of working with the young.

Our appearance and even our clothing express our worthiness of embodying beauty. Betty Beck so beautifully explains how being dressed aesthetically for the children enhanced in her the joy of beauty, goodness, and truth. It had a wonderful effect on all visitors big and small over many, many years of her working in the kindergarten. The kindergarten children benefitted by the aesthetics of the environment.

How do we express our joy and love towards children? How do we integrate the working with families and the environment? The world? In this realm we are completely individually creative, be it with our skills of creating art in any form, organising social occasions, festivals. It is an important experience for parents to plan, to prepare and to become integrated into the community.

Sometimes we need tools to implement ideas and to change patterns after we had reflected on them. One amazing tool is called **S.T.O.P.**, Timothy Gallwey mentioned this in “*The Inner Game of Stress - outsmart your life’s challenges and fulfil your potential*”. He says so simply about any problem: just stop consciously, step back between you and the situation. Think – what is really the truth what is happening? What is causing stress? Organize your thinking. What could the plan of action be? Proceed-move forward, with understanding, clarity of thought and interest. A must successful tool, indeed.

I wish you all wonderful walks in Nature, either doing so silently, or while telling stories.

CREATING A HERB GARDEN

Extract from "Spring and Summer Nature Activities for Waldorf Kindergartens" by Irmgard Kutsch and Brigitte Walden. Floris Books ISBN 978-178-250-581-5

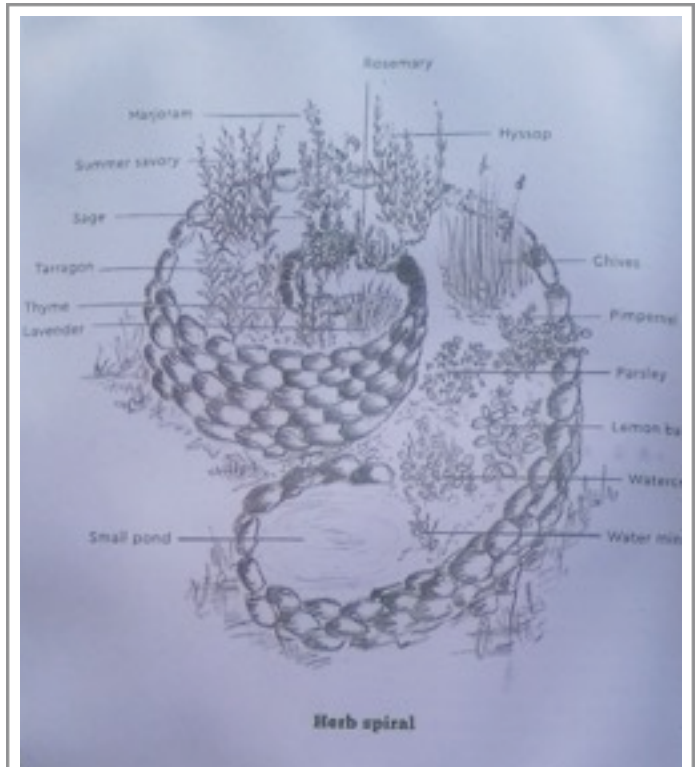
Herbs can be used in many ways. Often, they are both healing and seasoning plants, whose essential oils and other components offer distinct fragrances and flavours. Fragrant herbs can have positive effects on feelings and are useful in healthcare. In the garden, they are good for attracting insects and enhance the health of the soil.

Many kitchen herbs come from the Mediterranean and grow best in full sun. Bearing in mind, a south-facing bed is a good place to position a herb garden. In addition, stones used to build walls around the bed will absorb and retain extra heat.

Preparations for planting the bed should be made in the autumn when the ground is porous and rich in humus. You should not need to regularly add fertiliser to the soil, which can affect the taste of the herbs. However, you can mix heavy earth with sand to make it more porous; or mix stones into the soil for plants that flourish on dry stone walls. Some herbs love calcium, and calcium-rich stones can also be mixed in where needed. When planning your herb garden, try to position large or bushy plants at the back of the bed so they don't get in the way of the smaller plants. You should plant annual and biennial herbs in the spring.

A HERB SPIRAL

Although some herbs like sunshine and a dry position, others need shade, damp ground or even shallow water. A herb spiral can provide appropriate living conditions for a variety of smaller plants. First, build the surrounding dry-stone wall in a sunny spot. Fill the inside with calcium-rich stones. Put a thin layer of topsoil in the upper part of the spiral, for herbs like thyme, which enjoy warmth. Fill the lower section with garden soil and compost; herbs that need some shade and more nourishment, such as parsley, can be planted in this area. At the foot of the spiral, make a small pond for water-loving plants such as watercress and water mint.



THE SEASONAL TABLE - BRINGING NATURE INSIDE

Designate a special table, shelf or corner of the room as a seasonal table or festival table. This is a special place for displaying seasonal crafts and natural objects.

You can spread a coloured cloth to match the mood of the season. For example, in spring you might use a white, yellow or light green cloth; in summer, lilac, pink, light blue or pale yellow; in autumn you might choose a red, gold, rust or wine coloured cloth, while royal blue or violet might suit the winter.

As well as cloths, you will need a vase or bowl to hold flowers, branches or bare twigs, as appropriate. No great expense is necessary - a few wild flowers arranged with love in a jam jar may be all that is needed to carry the mood of the season.

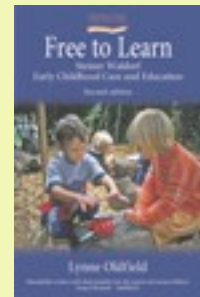
From Celebrating Irish Festivals, Ruth Marshall, Hawthorn Press, 2003.



RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- **Free To Learn – Introducing Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education.**

Author: Lynne Oldfield. Publisher: Hawthorn Press. ISBN 1 903458-006-4.



- **Work and Play In Early Childhood**

Author: Freya Jaffke. Publisher: Floris Books ISBN 0-86315-227-9.

- **Bringing the Steiner Waldorf Approach to your Early Years Practice** (Part of a Series of Comparative Approaches to Early Childhood)

Author: Janni Nicol. Publisher: David Fulton. ISBN 978-1-84312-433-7.

- **KINDLING – Journal for Steiner Early Childhood Education and Care.**

Email: earlyyearsnews@aol.com.

- **Festivals, Family and Food.**

Authors: D Carey & J Large. Publisher: Hawthorn Press



- **Celebrating Irish Festivals - Calendar of seasonal celebrations**

Author: Ruth Marshall. Publisher: Hawthorn Press

- **All Year Round**

Authors: A Druitt, C Fynes-Clinton, & M Rowling. Publisher: Hawthorn Press.

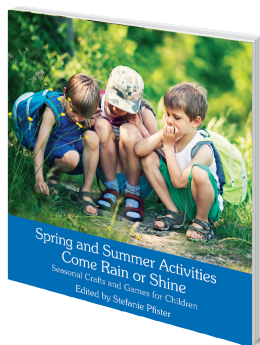
- **Storytelling with Children.**

Author: N Mellon. Publisher: Hawthorn Press.



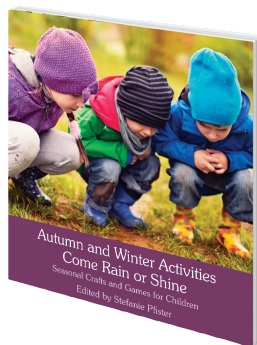
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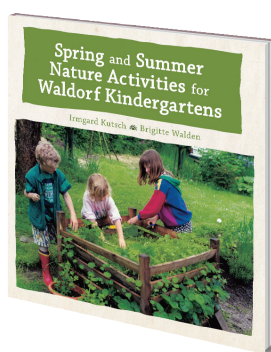
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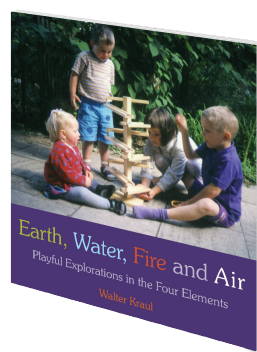
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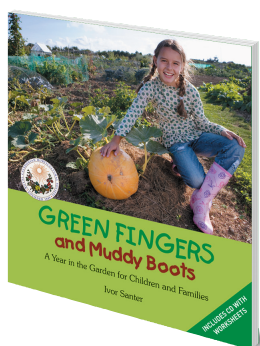
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