

Norwich Steiner School

Framework of Kindergarten Education

Reviewed May 2014

Framework of Kindergarten Education – May 2014

Introduction

In the Steiner Early Years approach, we provide time and space for the natural, unforced development of key skills as a basis for literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional competence; and a warm and secure learning environment is created where the qualities of childhood are nurtured.

Children enter the kindergarten between the ages of approximately 3 ¼- 6 ½ years old. The mixed age kindergarten group contains up to 16 children per day creating a large family structure where older children can become aware of the needs of the younger children, and the younger children can imitate the older children. Older children who are familiar with the rhythm of the kindergarten are encouraged to help the younger children and to ease their integration into the group. The number of sessions a child attends varies according to age. The morning session lasts for 4 hours. There is also afternoon kindergarten provision where a packed lunch is eaten, followed by a rest and then a further period of play.

In the kindergarten, parents of the younger children are given verbal updates of progress and development, in individual teacher/parent meetings as well as at more general termly parent evenings. Throughout their stay in kindergarten, a profile form is maintained tracking progress in all key areas and providing a written record of development that is updated regularly. The children are assessed for readiness to enter class one during the year that they turn 6, usually entering class one in the September following the 6th birthday, if this falls before the end of June. There is a formal admissions procedure as entry is not automatic. A transition report is always provided for parents and their new class teacher.

Cycles of development

Steiner's educational philosophy recognises three broad seven-year cycles of development: birth to 7, 7 to 14, and 14 to 21. Each stage of Steiner (Waldorf) education is designed to work with the developing interests and emerging developmental needs of the child. Educational activities and learning opportunities thus reflect the developmental stages of the child, and the learning environment is purposefully and carefully structured to foster both personal and social learning. During the early years, children learn through example, or imitation, rather than via formal instruction. In general, the curriculum is aimed to adapt itself to the child, and not the other way round. Children are given plenty of time to develop and unfold the many faculties and competencies they will need to thrive in later life. Formative assessment, rather than testing, is practised throughout.

Chronological development

The Steiner curriculum is designed to be responsive to the various phases of the child's development. The era of human history being taught at any one time will correspond in many ways with the stage of

development of the child herself. For example, early years leaders present children with fairy stories to match their “dream-like”, unawakened state of consciousness; class four (around 9 years old) studies the Vikings and Norse mythology to suit their “war-like” feelings; class five (around 10 years old) learns about the Greeks just at the time when their intellect is awakening and their sense of fair play is coming to the fore - and so on. The total curriculum has been likened to an ascending spiral: subjects are revisited several times, but each new exposure affords greater depth and new insights appropriate to the developmental stage of the child.

Kindergarten life in practice

Our kindergarten provides a warm, home-like atmosphere and an opportunity for the children to learn through imitation, free play, rhythm and repetition. During creative play children are allowed to learn through investigation, exploration and discovery, nourishing creativity and the imagination, and thereby cultivating each child’s capacity for inventiveness and adaptability. The toys in the kindergarten are simple and intentionally unsophisticated, and are made exclusively from natural materials. The simpler the toy, the greater the creative space for the imagination to be exercised and to develop in a natural way.

It follows from this approach that we strongly believe in giving children the free space to develop their creativity, fostering a life-long love of learning, which in turn helps to lay the foundation for a healthy adult life. In our kindergarten we aim to create an environment that encourages co-operation, sociability and reverence and respect for life and nature.

Play and imitation

Young children are excellent players, and they display an extraordinary talent for imitation. It is the task of the Steiner early childhood teacher to respect and work with this powerful age-old learning process and, as far as possible, not to obstruct it, nor unduly nor unnecessarily to intrude into the play of the children whilst they are in the teacher’s charge.

Free creative play strengthens the imagination, and repeated research studies have shown that children who are encouraged to enjoy creative play tend to show more empathy towards others and to display less aggression. They are more likely to have the capacity to see things from the perspective of the other, and demonstrate fewer signs of anxiety, distress or fatigue. In Steiner early childhood education, children are encouraged to learn through investigation, exploration and discovery, enabling them to become inventive and adaptable.

Another duty of the early childhood teacher is to provide the presence of a “working adult” – someone whom the children can freely imitate. A combination of practical, domestic and artistic activities are undertaken in the company of the children, designed to encourage skills such as concentration, perseverance and independent activity. Children are fascinated by adult activity, and it is certainly a great responsibility to be worthy of a young child’s imitation.

Another application of learning-by-imitation is in the rich variety of (often seasonal) songs and verses offered, sometimes including verses in French, German or other languages. These are learnt quite naturally and seamlessly, and constitute an invaluable foundation for later creative living and learning.

Story-telling

The environment created in Steiner early childhood education promotes the development of competent talking and listening, enhancing the child’s ability to use words with confidence. Children are encouraged to speak freely, and learn to listen to others. There is an overriding concentration on

the oral tradition, and many wonderful stories are related. A well-told story creates an appreciation for the human voice and the beauty and rhythms of language. This assists in the development of a strong and rich imagination, and helps to extend the vocabulary and develop a good memory. Traditional fairy tales and nature stories are told and retold, to cultivate a love of language and familiarity with the spoken word - an excellent prelude to, and foundation for, more formal literacy learning in class one and beyond.

Rhythm and repetition

Steiner education recognises rhythm as an educational principle of key importance, and a strong framework of rhythm, routine and repetition is employed, particularly in the early years. Rhythms provide reassurance and security for children, and in the home these would be provided by, for example, regular bedtimes, shared meals and restful moments and enjoyable walks. Beyond these daily routines are the rhythms of the week, the seasons and the year. The seasonal rhythms are closely connected to the celebration of festivals throughout the year. Working with rhythms in this way helps children to understand the past, present and future: it is a healthy way to start to find their place in the world.

Repetition plays a key role in establishing continuity, and it assists in the development of memory. Daily, weekly and yearly events become recurring experiences, and are often eagerly awaited and anticipated. Stories, commonly with archetypal themes, are told many times to give the children a chance to familiarise themselves with the content and deepen their understanding of it.

Festivals and celebration

Festivals are celebrated with the children so as to nourish body, soul and spirit. Although the Steiner curriculum is non-denominational, many Christian festivals are observed, and the children love the activities and preparations involved, such as finding seasonal materials, baking, making lanterns or other simple craftwork activities. Festivals from other cultures are also marked and celebrated in many Steiner schools. Rooms and classrooms are always specially decorated, and songs and poems are collected and shared. In early childhood education the teacher or leader tells appropriate stories - for example, at Whitsun they will not speak of the event as described in the Bible, but instead tell stories of transformation such as "The Whitsun Daisy" or of the birth of a butterfly. When the festival is over and the celebration comes to an end, the preparation for the next one can soon begin.

THE MAIN FESTIVALS IN SUMMARY

Michaelmas is the first festival of the school year and falls on or around the **29th September** at the beginning of autumn. It celebrates courage and strength of will, which are described for the (school) children through the legends of St Michael, Conqueror of the Dragon. In our kindergarten this festival is celebrated with a harvest feast prepared by the teacher and children.

The whole school together, on or around the 11th November, celebrate **Martinmas** and make and carry their lanterns in a procession, celebrating with songs their bringing of light into the darkness of winter. This is celebrated in the school grounds which will have been beautifully adorned with lit lanterns to show us the way.

The Advent Garden. Every year all the children of the school come together on the first Advent Sunday to walk around the evergreen spiral to light their candles. It is a festival of quiet reverence, of darkness slowly turning to light. The kindergarten children experience **CHRISTMAS** through ring time themes, nativity stories, the nature table with the nativity scene, the special foods that we bake, and the gifts which are made. We aim to create a mood of reverence around this festival.

Candlemas is celebrated in February by all the children in the school. Usually a candle is placed in the earth to celebrate the return of the light and life in nature.

Easter is the festival celebrating new birth and the force of life, which we experience all around us in nature at this time of the year. The Easter hare brings eggs and hides them for the children in the kindergarten.

May Day is celebrated by all the children in the school with maypole dancing and a picnic for all the families.

Whitsun marks the descent of the Holy Spirit to the earth, where the spirit of community resides and mutual understanding is fostered. It is traditionally celebrated by the speaking of a verse or a passage from a book in many languages. Kindergarten celebrate this festival with a special meal.

St John's Midsummer Festival on the **24th June** is a festival celebrated by the whole community with a bonfire, singing, games and a picnic.

The Kindergarten Daily Rhythm

Approx times

9-9.15	Arrival time
9.15	Ring time
9.35	Daily activity and free play, followed by tidy time
11.15	Snack time
11.45	Outdoor play
12.45	Story time
1.00	Home time / transfer to afternoon kindergarten
1.00-3.30	Afternoon kindergarten

Ring time

Once children have arrived and the register has been taken we gather in a circle for ring time. At this time the emphasis is on teacher-led activities such as singing seasonal songs and saying verses together with appropriate gestures. We also practice finger rhymes at this time, as well as the traditional nursery rhymes. At the end we often play a ring game together. The ring-time activities are chosen to reflect the time of year and the current mood that we find in nature. As repetition plays a key role in establishing continuity, and assists in the development of memory, ring-time themes are repeated over many weeks.

Daily activity and free play

The daily activity is always led by the teacher, and often involves the preparation of the snack whereas the free playtime which follows is very much child initiated, with minimal adult involvement. It is during this time that the child uses his/her own creative imagination to – for example - make a building site out of wooden planks, a shop, a train, a spaceship or a den with wooden clothes racks and pieces of muslin. Our weekly activities are as follows:

Monday:	Modelling/Woodwork
Tuesday:	Baking
Wednesday:	Watercolour painting
Thursday:	Soup-making (Autumn/Spring) / Gardening (Summer)
Friday:	Crayoning

Sun child projects

The older children have ongoing projects, such as weaving and sewing, which they will continue throughout the week or for however long is necessary to complete them. During festival times a particular craft or baking activity may be added in. During the Summer term the six-year-olds participate in an additional afternoon transition group once a week as a preparation for beginning Class 1 in September.

Tidy time

After free play everyone is expected to help put everything back in its proper place. It is important for children to have order around themselves, not least so that they can find what they want to play with the next day. This is a time of co-operation as we sort, fold, put away toys and set the tables ready for snack time.

Snack time

After tidy time and when the children have washed their hands, we gather at the table for our shared snack. This is vegetarian and usually organic. We have a particular snack for each day of the week, usually with a daily grain, and following the seasons in our menu planning as we prefer to use local seasonal produce. Therefore we have two weekly menus, one for the Autumn and Spring terms and

the other for the Summer term. Snacks include soup, apple crumble, bread rolls, savoury millet and couscous. Fresh fruit is provided also. We always say a simple grace together and give thanks for our meal. The older children have the task of setting and clearing the table, and they take turns with the washing up. When a birthday is celebrated, parents usually provide a home made cake or cupcakes for the children to enjoy.

Outdoor play

Outdoor play follows snack time, where the children are free, conditions permitting, to run, jump, climb, dig, skip rope, play games and make constructions or work in the vegetable/flower garden. The outdoor activities are varied and are left up to the child's own initiative. During the warmer months, we usually have a garden day once a week, where we start the morning outside, returning inside for snack and story when the sun is at its' height. The children are always dressed appropriately according to the weather conditions. Warm waterproofed clothing, hats, gloves and wellingtons/snowboots for the wetter, colder months; sunhats, suncream and cool clothes covering their shoulders and backs in the warmer months. We go outside, regardless of the weather, every day.

Story time

After outdoor play we cover the sandpit and collect all our tools to return inside for story time. The children remove their outdoor wear, put their slippers on and then return to the kindergarten where they sit in a circle and story time begins with a song. The teacher tells a traditional fairy tale or nature story, thus enabling the children to create *their own* pictures out of their imaginations. The stories are repeated over a number of weeks, which assists in the development of a strong and rich imagination, and helps to increase the vocabulary and develop a good memory. We often find that story themes are delightfully re-created during free play. Sometimes the story can be made into a puppet show for the children to watch. These stories are seasonal, link in to the ring times and the festivals and are repeated each year at the same time. Birthdays are also celebrated at this time, with the birthday child being given a crown, and special chair to sit on, and given an age appropriate gift, made by the teacher, at the end of the session. The morning ends with a good-bye song and the children then either get ready to go home with their parents/carers at 1pm or go to afternoon kindergarten for their lunch.

Afternoon kindergarten

The afternoon session provides continuity of care, in a family- like environment, which supports the ethos of the kindergarten, until school ends at 3.30. The rhythm of the afternoon continues the breathing in and out rhythm of kindergarten, and allows the children to rest as well as to play. The children are welcomed into the afternoon room, where they eat lunch with their friends. Lunch is a sociable time, with the table set with seasonal flowers and a candle. The kindergarten blessing is sung before starting the meal. The children chat and catch up on news- often talking about their morning, or things they have been doing at home, or planning what they are going to play later on.

After lunch it is time to rest, relax or look quietly at books and then there is opportunity for outside play. This is an important part of the afternoon and we aim to spend as much time outside as possible. The children play with hoops, build dens, play in our all-weather sandpit, or play role-playing games. There are often gardening jobs to be done, like weeding, watering or raking leaves.

Then we go indoors and finish the afternoon with a story before it is time to get ready to go home.