Steiner Education Australia

AUSTRALIAN STEINER CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK 2011

Educational Foundations
Attachment 3(b):

STEINER APPROACH TO CHILD DEVELOPMENT
KINDERGARTEN / FOUNDATION
POSITION PAPER

Kindergarten / Foundation
Position Paper

Contents

Overview

In Steiner Education, Kindergarten is seen from the perspective of the three stages of childhood as the final year of the first stage as represented below.

	Kindergarten Birth to 6 years	**Primary/ Middle School** 7-14 years	**Mid-Upper High School** 14-21 Years
Quality with which to pervade the learning. Child assumes world is imbued with…	**Goodness**	**Beauty**	**Truth**
Area of Human Endeavour which integrates learning	Presence and Connection	Artistic expression of experience	Discerning, scientific approach to knowledge lifted to ideals
Role of Teacher	One who is deeply connected to life with reverence	World Knowledge expressed through Arts	Ethical Researcher/Scientist
Teacher Works through……	**Intuition** and connection in their presence and in their deeds.	**Inspiration** in their transformation of learning into artistic experience	**Imagination** in their transformation of concepts into living thoughts, pictures and deeds
Children make things their own most optimally through…	**Self-directed Creative Play**	**Inner Pictures** -Arts of drawing, writing, speaking, movement, music, painting , creating.	Thought which rises from the conceptual to the **truthful image** and then ideals which inspire action
Teacher works through/with the student's faculty of	**Imitation** of all that is good.	**Openness to Authority** (one who knows about the world)	**Individual Judgement** which seeks the ethical expert in the field as guide

Stage 1 contains within the seven years a developmental process as outlined in the Child Development Paper and reproduced below.

Physiological growth in Seven Year Stages – Stage 1 Birth to Seven Years[1]
Further sub-stages can also be discerned at intervals of approximately two and a third years. At about two and a third years of age children experience their first awakened consciousness of self which is marked by their ability to refer to themselves as "I". The realisation by children of their separateness from the world around them indicates that a sufficient degree of objectivity has been attained for the thinking capacity to become more active. By the end of this stage (by the age of seven) children are able to associate perception and cognition and have developed the first form of memory (Lievegoed, 2005). However the development of thinking comes to expression initially in the feeling life of children in the form of imaginative consciousness; [i] in the next two and a third years (from 2⅓ to 4⅔) children begin to use their creative imaginations [ii]. From 4⅔ to 7 years of age (the following two and a third years) children awaken to their first conscious experience of the will: they are able to set and achieve goals for the first time.

Steiner Education sees the young child up to the age of 6 or 7 years as characterized by a gesture of trust and openness toward the world. This includes the capacity of the child to absorb sense impressions right into their being without the reflective or analytic skills of the older student or adult. This can be seen as a potent form of engagement and embodied learning. In Steiner Education a focus on bringing to consciousness the child's perceptions and played-out wisdom is left until later years. This is considered to safeguard the very deep body-based learning in which they are engaged.

[1] Child Development Paper *Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework* Educational Foundations 2011 SEA

The Senses

Through the sense of life that the child experiences in self-initiated play with aesthetic materials and outdoor creative activity in the elements of nature, they develop what will mature into the soul quality of contentment and well-being which is a necessary state for the ability to think and reflect. Through strengthening their physical sense of balance in play they not only develop neurological readiness in the proprioceptive system[2] for literacy and numeracy but also experience the counterpart of an inner balance at a soul level. Steadying the wooden tower and balancing the branch on top of the upright log require an inner calmness, focus, and a weighing up. Climbing, running, twirling; in this movement a healthy sense of freedom and of moving towards one's goal is experienced.[3]

The real world for the young child between 5 and 6 is one of vegetables growing in gardens and brisk breezes, rain and tall trees, cutting up vegetables and baking morning teas and impromptu plays and games.

While it is true that the children are protected from technological noise and computers at this age they are not protected from energetic, lively play and robust physical activities of building, gardening or crafts and exploring the world of bush or garden enthusiastically

Imitation

The curriculum for a Steiner Kindergarten is based on the understanding that the child learns through imitation. The openness of the young child, their reverence and their ability to absorb every nuance of what they experience, allow deep learning to occur. Through imitation they learn authentic home and garden skills and develop artistic and musical capacities. A growing consciousness of the world emerges through the teacher's stories and Kindergarten work. They also experience and take in deeply as part of their education the gesture, attitude and atmosphere created by the teacher. The teachers strive to be worthy of imitation in all that they are and all that they do.

Imitation can take several forms. A young child might imitate someone's actions directly. If a teacher is carding and spinning wool, for example, a child might also want to card and spin. Children might also imitate in their play the actions that they have encountered. For instance, a group of children might join together to form a moving company. They will pack up the toys in the kindergarten into a moving van that they have made of some chairs and boards and drive it to another land. Children also imitate our inner attitude. Kindergarten teachers therefore try to pervade everything they do with care. This will be reflected in the way they place an object on the seasonal table, or the way they put the toys away at clean-up time and make sure all the babies are tucked in and don't have any cold toes sticking out. If parents and teachers approach common life tasks such as cooking or cleaning with reverence and care, children will develop a deep respect for work and for material things. If, however, such tasks are done quickly and sloppily, this will be reflected in children's difficulties in finding meaning in life.[4]

Child-Initiated Creative Play

All that the child has imitated becomes their own through self-initiated creative play. They do not reflect or conceptualise but take in the gesture and impulse and through their will express this in play. This immersion in life and ability to play bring embodied experience and learning at this age.
There are two forces in the child at work. The child brings the capacity to imitate and also their own inner impulses to engage with the world in a unique, creative and potent way. This connecting together of what is experienced or revealed to the child about the world on the one hand and on the other the awakening and strengthening of what are essential individual impulses and gifts characterises a healthy education.

Young children love to play. Through play, they enter the activities of the adults around them. The best kind of activities for kindergarten children are therefore those that allow them to engage, on a child's level, in the work of adults. .... . children are offered the possibility of participating in the traditional activities that might take place in a home: cooking and baking, cleaning and washing, sewing and ironing,

[2] For a review of the importance of movement, music and balance to neurological development and later literacy see the Educational Foundations Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework Attachment: Primary Position Paper.
[3] Schoorel Edmund *The First Seven Years; The Physiology of Childhood*
[4] Robert Trostoli *Rhythms of Learning*, Anthroposophic Press, 1998

gardening and building. Because these activities are done rhythmically, they create a feeling of well-being and a sense of security in the child. Because they are real, they help a child become grounded in the realities of life. Because they serve a purpose and are filled with meaning, they help the child enter more fully into life at a later age.

The materials and toys in a Waldorf kindergarten stimulate the children to use their powers of imagination and fantasy. As these powers are developed, children become able to transform natural materials into any kind of toy. They can use pieces of wood that have been left in their natural shapes as tools, musical instruments, telephones, vehicles, tickets to a performance, food for a feast, or the gold and jewels of a buried treasure hidden by pirates.

If one observes children playing with toys that have a great deal of detail, one can see that there is a different quality to the play. .... If, for instance, children are given a toy yellow taxicab, they are likely to limit their play to activities involving a taxi. If, however, they are given a plain wooden car.. .. The possibilities are endless, limited only by the children's imagination.[5]

Research[6] suggests that those who score highest in socio-dramatic play (which involves make believe, transformation of objects and verbal expression) also show greatest gains in later cognitive and creative capacity, intellectual competence, socio-emotional skills. Observers have recognised twelve types of play[7] which develop movement, creative, language, artistic and imaginative skills and expression. Creative play may correlate with later psychological adjustment.[8]

It is the free nature of self-directed play that fosters creativity. It has been suggested that structured play such as board games may foster higher motivation, persistence, sophistication of oral language and creativity as self-directed play.[9]

Rhythms

For young children to be able to connect to the participatory consciousness that allows immersion in the life and gesture of the world and also allows them to be engaged in self-initiated imaginative play they need to be held in a secure rhythm and warm aesthetic environment without overstimulation. Rhythm brings reassurance and continuity as well as trust in the unfolding of life. A sense that here there is time to do things beautifully is cultivated in the Steiner Kindergarten.

Children's healthy habits are supported by repetition of authentic tasks and their memory is strengthened by recurring meaningful events such as festivals. Memory is considered to move through three phases in line with the three divisions of this stage ; place memory (where events happen and the surroundings), rhythmic memory (verses, songs, movement) and picture memory (stories, descriptions creating an image in the mind. [10]

A daily rhythm would usually include:

Circle Time : music, speech and movement
Indoor Self-directed Creative Play
Home Activities: Cooking, Morning Tea, Baking, Tidying
Artistic Work: Painting, Beeswax Modelling or Crafts
Outdoor Play in Nature,
Lunch
Story
Bushwalk /Games.

The curriculum is interwoven in these activities in a natural way.

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[5] *Rhythms of Learning* Robert Trostoli, Anthroposophic Press, 1998
[6] Smilanski, Sara in Almon, Joan *The Vital Role of Play in Early Childhood* 2000
[7] Breipohl, Renate in Self-Directed Play Waldorf Associartion of North America 2010
[8] Highscope Educational Research Foundation Michigan; Stuart Brown; National Insitiute for Play
[9] Anthony Pelligreni *The Role of Recess in Childrens Development and Education*
[10] Schoore,l Edmund *The First Seven Years*: *The Physiology of Childhood*

Authentic Home Activities: cooking, crafts, gardening, bringing order and beauty, caring for the hurt or ill, washing and sculpting are all part of Kindergarten work. The imitation of care, purpose, dedication and gratitude in these processes is as important as the work that is done.

Learning in a Steiner Kindergarten

Kindergarten Curriculum: English

In a Steiner Kindergarten language is developed in children through **stories of the literary heritage** of childhood told for several days, nourishing the memory forces. The traditional and classical stories as well as teacher created and modern ones are carefully memorised and told with focus on a well-modulated voice. The richness of the language helps extend vocabulary and the beauty and rhythm of the language develops the aesthetic sense. A rich repertoire of songs, poems and verses are experienced in the daily morning circle.

As well, daily **self-directed play** time requires rich oral communication between children in cooperative play scenarios. The language is specialised and ever changing as each day brings new imitated life experiences and children are highly motivated to communicate to engage their friends and fulfil their imaginatively planned play. .
Morning Circle is a daily time of imitated songs, poems, movement, action rhymes and finger plays. The repertoire has a seasonal mood and is carried by a cohesive theme with appropriate gestures, and music.

The ability to find one's voice in later life is built upon experiences of potent language which is meaningful and connected to the world and humanity. Expressive qualities develop when beautiful speech is heard and imitated. Later subtle complexities of thought are facilitated by the rich and finely formed language structures of the teacher.

KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM: HISTORY

Children come slowly into the experience of time in an authentic way through the unfoldment of daily, weekly and seasonal rhythms in rhythmic circle work, stories, crafts and seasonal celebrations. Their observation and involvement in traditional handcrafts brings experience of past ways of life. Their understanding of community grows out of the close connection between the Kindergarten and home when parents and grandparents participate in activities and festivals.

When children are allowed to awaken to time as a real experience of the earthly and cosmic cycles then it gains meaning in the context of human unfoldment. The experience of past traditional ways of life through crafts and stories also builds living pictures which can grow throughout the curriculum.

Kindergarten Curriculum : Science

In Kindergarten children are provided with opportunities to experience and interact with the natural and humanly created world through self-directed play, outdoor exploration, nature festivals and authentic home and garden activities as well as stories, action rhymes and games.
Science and its strands are not taught as a subject but the Kindergarten experience provides a rich and appropriate exploration of the world through the carefully created environment of garden, bush, animals and elements of water, earth, sand, warmth and air. The rhythms of the world and the cosmos are experienced through rhythms and festivals and the self-directed play of the children allows them to imagine, create, and build diverse structures. In cooking, composting and craft work they mix and transform substances.

Each aspect of the world is brought through exploration and observation through the senses. Through self-directed play and communication the children investigate, describe informally, cooperate, build and create rich and evolving scenarios in the world.

The ACARA Curriculum – ACARA strands of Science Understanding, Science as Human Endeavour and Science Inquiry Skills can be identified in the Steiner Curriculum in a fully integrated way in the elaborations. These are found in the Stage-wide Topics of Festivals, Celebrations and Rhythms of Time; Handcrafts of the Traditional World and Outdoor Play, Bushwalk and Home and Garden Activities. Below they are identified in strands which equate to Biological Sciences, Chemical Sciences, Earth and Space Sciences and Physical Sciences.

Kindergarten Curriculum : Mathematics

Mathematics in the Steiner Kindergarten is not a separate subject but an integrated experience in a play-based curriculum. Teachers are aware of the numerical and geometric qualities of the world and engage children in authentic Home and Garden activities and in Stories and Circle Time which bring these qualities to the children in an authentic and meaningful way.
Movement and number rhymes and games in morning circle, number-based stories and imitated work in cooking, drawing, beeswax modelling and craft all allow development of mathematical experience and skills. In self-directed play these experiences are integrated and creatively expressed by the child.

Number:
Rhythmic work of number rhymes and games, number related stories which are heard and played out, and finger games and action rhymes are one area of number development. Conversation between children creatively weaves in numbers- *How many children are here today? I have 5 rice crackers.* Play also affords rich and ever changing opportunities for counting eg how many children will fit into the cubby; shell paths are sorted into pairs of increasing size laid out with one to one correspondence. Home and garden activities use counting in eg the number of cupfuls in cooking or the number of watering cans to share to take to the vegetable garden.

Measurement/Geometry:
Spatial awareness is developed initially through one's own movement in space. Measurement happens informally as children play- *Will the log fit in the house? There are 5 steps to the door.* Weekly baking brings weighing and measuring of spoonfuls or cupfuls and in gardening the bucketfuls of soil and arrangement of flower and vegetable beds in neat rows or circle forms bring real life geometry and capacity. Beeswax modelling allows experience of 3 dimensional forms which metamorphose from one to another. Crafts of lantern-making, sewing and finger-knitting baskets all involve forms. Ordering of rhythms of time occurs in the unfolding cycles of day and night, days of the week, and in the seasons which are the focus of stories and songs, craft and festivals.

Statistics and Probability:
Statistics is the gathering of data about the world and its presentation in a meaningful way. Children first go through a stage of immersion and then slowly awaken to conscious perceptions which are named and ordered. There must be a balance between these two elements. Play, involvement in daily tasks and teachers work all allow natural unfoldment of ordered perception and presentation of information.

Music, speech, story and movement based number experience develop embodied knowledge. Future work with algebra will depend on being able to elaborate, imagine and balance two sides of the equation. The sense of balance in forms made in creative play and in movement is a necessary step towards that skill.

Appendix A

Connection to the Early Years Learning Framework Australia

Steiner Schooling deeply connects to and considers the transition from Early Childhood as the child moves toward the world of formal schooling. The Steiner Kindergarten Curriculum is designed on the understanding that:

- A bridge is built that gives security, trust and a harmonious and gentle transition to a school learning environment.
- The principles, practices and outcomes of Early Years Learning, are optimally enriched for the 5-6 year old child or first year of formal school attendance and can find an extension which is both age -appropriate and valuable.
- This bridge is optimal in its alignment with child development and learning research for this age which suggests that early literacy work (age 5-6) is best oral language centred and play-based until the proprioceptive system (6 ½ -7 years) is developed. In addition left brain development and myelination (7-8 years) as well as the development of the corpus callosum are needed for full literacy and numeracy skills[11].
- Research suggests that this extended transition is not detrimental to long term cognitive or literacy skills. The Steiner Kindergarten approach is in alignment with recent recommendations of the **Cambridge Review**[12] which notes that five is too young to leave behind active play-based learning and embark on formal subject-based curriculum. It recommends extending the Early Years Framework in England for one year. It notes that in 14 of the 15 countries that scored higher than England in a major study of reading and literacy in 2006, children did not enter school until they were six or seven. On average only 16 per cent of European Union five year olds are in school.

EXTENDED EARLY YEARS LEARNING in the Kindergarten/Foundation Year

In Steiner Schools educational practice recognises that children of 5-6 years benefit particularly from extended opportunities to continue to develop the outcomes of the EYLF:

Outcome 1 – **Children have a strong sense of identity**

- regularly initiate cooperative and sharing behaviours and **persist in a sustained way** with creative challenges over time and with others.
- Explore **increasingly rich and diverse** roles and identities and **transformations of identities** in creative play
- work in groups with **increased sensitivity and harmony**
- develop **deeper reflective moments** harmonising their own actions in relation to others

Outcome 2- **Children are connected with and contribute to their world**

- **form and reform creative communities within their child-initiated imaginative play** and contribute to their class community through helping prepare meals and tidy the space.
- visualise, plan in cooperation and negotiate in the implementation of rich and **extended play based scenarios**.
- undertake **larger and longer journeys** out into the wider school community from their safe and secure base with confidence and trust.
- Participate in an **increasingly diverse range** of cultures, festivals and traditions.
- Practice compassion and kindness **sensitively imitated from their surroundings.**
- Explore their environment actively and with care, participating in rich relationships between the natural environment and other living things

Outcome 3 **Children have a strong sense of well-being.**

[11] Goddard-Blythe, S *The Well Balanced Child* Hawthron Press 2004

[12] Cambridge Review

- Show an **increased capacity** to adjust their behaviours in light of the feelings and needs of others and experience and demonstrate trust and confidence in **diverse situations**
- Experience joy, humour and laughter in a range of classroom situations from story to drama and play.
- Remain calm and resilient in the face of challenges and frustrations and actively interact using their **growing independence**.
- Engage in **increasingly rich and diverse sensory experiences** in exploring the wider world.
- Integrate **gross and fine motor skills, spatial awareness, sense of balance** and creative expression in play, dance, creative movement and drama.
- Use **authentic equipment and tools with increasing responsibilitysafety** for Kindergarten cooking, cleaning, gardening and building.
- Connect with familiar characters and situations in stories in which **resolution of challenges occurs.**

Outcome 4 – **Children are confident and involved learners**

- Dispositions- maintain a sense of wonder, creative playfulness, enthusiasm, commitment and curiosity while their ability to focus on the exploration of the world **becomes more detailed and inquiry or goal oriented.**
- Skills – explore, experiment, predict and balance diverse situations in their self-directed play.
- **Transfer knowledge** gained from one experience or situation to another.
- Connection – **explore more diverse ideas** using the senses, imagination, creativity and play on their own and in rich shared relationships.

Outcome 5 – **Children are effective communicators**

- Use language in **rich and diverse ways** in interactions to communicate ideas, feelings, imaginations and understandings including mathematical concepts such as attributes of objects.
- Engage in singing, verse, rhymes, storytelling and dramatic play using rich sound and language patterns and use the creative arts to express ideas or experiences.
- Experience **increased trust and security** in rhythms or patterns over time.
- Express in their play, explorations of order, sequence and balance of sets of objects of the natural and aesthetic world and **use more creative real or imaginary technologies in play** to solve problems and enrich creative possibilities.

The Australian National Steiner Curriculum recognises that the following developmental considerations of the child from 5- 6 support the extension of the Early Years Framework.

- The ability to hold a sustained inner picture on which to plan play becomes increasingly possible. Not just fantasy in the moment but an extended scenario with sustained concentration in which all components are created out of an inner picture. Eg the bus trip- the bus is built, a ticket book made, bus driver hired and passengers seated.
- Increasing cooperation in this more complex play and oral communication is possible as children are recruited to help and then come with ideas- ‘the bus has a compartment for suitcases’, ‘the bus will stop at the beach.’
- More complex crafts, creative skills and technical explorations are possible eg designing a pulley to get the stones up to the top of the mountain in a basket, putting all the shells in ascending size in spirals around the lake, digging tunnels and making locks for water to travel along in the sandpit.
- Developmental steps in language and the ability to think in pictures allow self-directed dramatised stories and puppetry to be created in the act of telling them as a precursor to the later writing of stories.

1.

[i] Imaginative consciousness: The young child's consciousness differs from the adult's – it is more like an adult's day-dreaming consciousness - Steiner education calls this "imaginative consciousness". Imagination is understood to be a capacity that can be developed through phenomenological (Goethean-style) observation and arts training. In adults Imagination is understood to develop artistic inspiration and spiritual insights; in children imagination refers to a capacity to be creative in play and learning and to form inner mental images (these do not have to be visual). See the note below.

[ii] Creative imaginations: The imaginative flow of a young child's consciousness runs along with the creative stream of life. "Participative consciousness" (which is characteristic of the earlier stage of the baby and toddler) is the type of consciousness associated with deep sleep – it is the most unconscious mode of awareness. We know this level of awareness from tasks that once learnt we are able to perform automatically. Athletes and sports people call "participative consciousness" being in 'the zone'. It is not possible to be analytical when one is performing a learnt physical skill and yet we can experience that we are in a stream of knowing consciousness. "Imaginative consciousness" is one level more conscious – whereas participative consciousness relates to the sphere of the will – imaginative consciousness relates to the feelings. This is the awareness of the artist and poet who know how to switch off their critical thinking while they draw on the creative stream of consciousness. This too is the level of awareness of the young child – they are able to slip into a creative flow of awareness that informs their play.