

# BLÁTHÚ Newsletter



An update for members and friends

Winter/Spring 2021

## THE PRAYER OF SAINT BRIDE OF IONA

Christ, King of the Elements, hear me!  
Earth, bear me.  
Water, quicken me.  
Air, lift me.

Christ, King of the Elements, hear me!  
I will bear the burden of the earth with thee.  
I will lift my heart to the air to thee.  
I will cleanse my desire for love of thee.  
I will offer my life renewed to thee.

Christ, King of the Elements, hear me!  
Water, fire air and earth,  
Weave within my heart this day  
A cradle for thy birth

~ Ann Ellerton,  
from *In the Light of the Child* by Michael Hedley Burton

## Welcome to this first BLÁTHÚ Newsletter in 2021

### New year, new ideas, new stories to tell!

We experienced a very special constellation during the winter solstice 2020. Jupiter and Saturn are normally the most distant of the visible planets, but they met.

In overcoming cosmic distancing they gave us a magnificent role-model.

Can we allow ourselves to see the signs of a new beginning?

## CONTENTS

Editorial	1
How Do Children Grow up Today?	3
For the Seasons - Story	5
For the Seasons - Folklore & Symbolism	7
For the Seasons - Crafts	8
For the Seasons - Verses	10
For the Seasons - Nature	11
From our Readers...	12
Homeschooling from the Heart	12
I Too Can Be an Illustrator!	13
Learning Materials - a Teacher's View	14
Parents and Technology in Education	16
Rhythmic Massage	17

Are we open to realising what is necessary for the good and healthy development of mankind?

Presently Covid 19 is isolating mankind but does it have to? What opportunities are we being given in this time? Can we access consciously our inner creative stream of positivity and resilience?



Warming ourselves with the inner qualities of our heart forces and imagination can be nourishing. As can trusting ourselves to find guidance from the spiritual world. We are social beings and without real connections and encounters our life seems dull and unhealthy. We feel the need for contemplation, connection, exchange, interaction and joy.

Friendship has deepened in this time and the wish to see fully all the friendly faces.

The two planets had met.

Instead of isolation we need bonding and care, no matter what age we are. Let us cultivate new ways to explore the world and seek together the adventure of joy and living, with nature and culture. Warming each other through heart connections, enthusiasm and interest is the driving force for the going forward urge of mankind.

*By Ulrike Farnleitner*

*In my Head I feel  
Warm fount of Love  
In my heart I feel  
Raying Light of Thought.  
Now the warm fount of Love  
Joins with the light of Thought,  
So to make strong my Hands  
For the good work of Human  
Beings.  
I feel me*

*- Rudolf Steiner*



*"Hope is not the certainty that things will turn out well,  
but the belief that they make sense,  
no matter how they turn out."*

*- Václav Havel*

# HOW DO CHILDREN GROW UP TODAY?

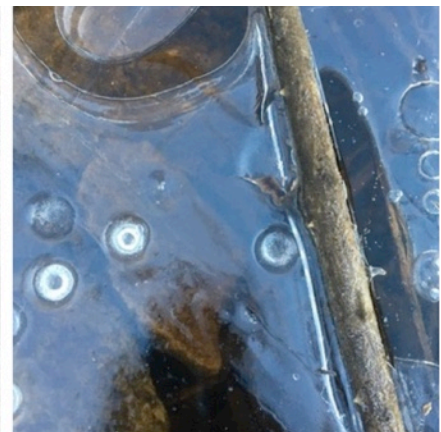
## Thoughts for parents...

by Ulrike Farnleitner

How do children develop their value systems and sense of self-esteem, and what example do we show them as adults? We all know very well about the recent world health situation. There has never been so much talk about numbers and diseases, about the danger of infection and about fear of the future as there is now.

- What would we like our children to experience?
- What values do children need in this current situation?
- How can we accompany and support them so that they can develop their resilience and stay strong?

Almost everyone speaks of illness. Let us focus instead on how to strengthen our immune systems. As we know it is not only a matter of keeping the body healthy; it's about strengthening the human soul: thinking, feeling and doing. When it comes to looking after our children, the most important thing to safeguard is their future, a future of which adults are co-designers.



I would like to invite you as parents of young children to **“play with your child”**. There is no better gift you can give them than to participate in their world of fantasy. Why not grab some blankets and pillows, materials, scarves, clothes pegs, cushions and cardboard boxes and build a den together. Your child will know what it is... it could be a castle, a secret robber's den, a bird's nest or a time machine... whatever it is just run with it ... watch your child's imagination take flight.....and just enjoy BEING a part of the game.

Play helps children to form connections with others, to process what is happening around them and to express their fears and desires. In play there are no goals to be achieved, no rules to be observed, and no expectations to meet. There is just freedom, fun and companionship. By making the time to spend even half an hour every day playing wholeheartedly with our child you are

giving them a clear sign that you care about their world, their feelings and their lives.

It can be tempting in today's busy world to let television and computer games entertain our children but at what cost? Technology may seem like a friend when we are overworked and exhausted from running around to meet the ever-increasing demands that are constantly being placed on us as parents and providers for our children but is it really? If we want our children to develop their creativity and self-expression we need to help them to be active rather than passive in their imaginative worlds. Technology need not be our enemy but if we are to benefit from what it has to offer us rather than become dependent upon it, we need to set limits. How much time do you want your child to spend on these devices? What else will you do with them and when?



Daily walks can be a wonderful way of spending time together because, in addition to providing much needed exercise, they also offer opportunities for numerous outdoor activities: collecting and foraging, learning and singing songs, playing “I spy” and other observation games and telling stories. Try to really **be in the moment** when you are walking with your child, to turn off the thoughts that are continually churning through our heads, the “to do” lists and the never-ending recriminations. Change the way that you walk, quicken and slow your pace, skip and enjoy the different movements with your child. Stop every now and again and let your child explore and listen to the sounds around them. Look for hidden “wonders” in the natural world. and either photograph these or draw them so that you can look back on them later together. It is amazing how the discovery of a bird made of fallen leaves on the ground, a heart-shaped stone or water droplets

preserved under ice can lighten the heart. Jump in puddles with your child, climb up on rocks or low stone walls and see how much more exciting the world is when you explore with a child’s eye and let your senses take over

In the evening try to make tidying up a happy, healthy ritual filled with warm conversation and light-hearted banter. Share a story before bed or read a book and talk together about the things that happened during the day. Peaceful sleep requires a calm ending to the day. In the morning the child will be well rested and ready for new adventure indoors and outdoors.

This book **Growing Up Healthy in a World of Digital Media** by Michaela Glöckler and Richard Brinton is full of useful advice for parents on how to mindfully use technology with your children.



“Education is not the filling of a pail,  
but the lighting of a fire.”

- W B Yeats

# FOR THE SEASONS - STORY

## BRIGIT'S CLOAK

*An Ancient Irish Story, retold by Bryce Milligan and Illustrated by Helen Cann*

A wild and windy night it was, fifteen centuries ago, that a very special child was born in Ireland. The baby's father was Duffy, a warrior prince and the lord of the Faughart Hill. But the child's mother was not a princess at all. Far from it. Little Brigid — for that was the baby's name — was born in a cold hut outside the walls of Duffy's hill fort, a slave child among slave women.

The wind groaned and swirled that night, and likely it seemed to tear the thatch from the roof. But when the baby gave her first cry, the wind shushed to a whisper. Then all over the people came out and looked to the sky, swept clean and cloudless.

"Listen," they said to each other in wonder. "The stars are singing." And it's singing they were, not a song, like you or I might sing, but a gathering of sweet crystal notes like birdsong and brook laughter in the spring. The forest all around was so dense and dark that it was hard to tell where the trees ended and the sky began. Then someone said, "Look, a star has fallen into the forest!"

But it wasn't a star at all. It was a tiny lantern that twinkled as it swung back and forth from the top of a tall staff. A very old man appeared at the edge of the forest, and it was he who carried that star-lantern. He had holly leaves in his long white hair, and he wore long flowing robes. The people backed away as he came up the hill. They knew what he was. He was a Druid — one of the powerful wizards who lived alone in the oak grove in the centre of the great forest.

He came directly to the door of the hut where the newborn child lay cradled in her mother's arms. Now the women in the hut were all Christians, but Druids were not. Druids worshipped the moon and the tree spirits, and they talked to the fairy folk who lived beneath the hill. And everyone knew that Druids could tell the future.

"God be with you," said the young mother politely.

"It's with me your God has been," he replied in a voice wise and fierce and full of truth, "I was told in a dream to bring this gift to the child born on the night of the singing stars.

The old Druid held out a beautiful blue cloak. Now in those days blue was a rare colour for any sort of cloth, and the women were surprised. Blue was a royal colour. The old Druid wrapped the baby in the cloak and then held her up high in the air and said, "This cloak will be a sign your God's favour. I am one of the fathers of old Ireland. I greet little Brigid, who will be a mother to the new Ireland that is to come.

Now these were strange words indeed, and not soon forgotten, but no one knew what they meant. And the Druid didn't explain either. He simply placed Brigid carefully in her mother's arms, made a magic sign of blessing with his staff, and strode away into the dark.

Well and ill, ten years went by. Brigid was in charge of a small flock of Prince Duffy's sheep. One bitterly cold December evening, Brigid was





bringing her flock home, as she did every night. The little shepherdess pulled her old blue cloak close about her shoulders. The Druid's gift was now little more than a worn and tattered cloth, yet it was her most treasured possession. Brigid wore it every day and often wondered about the meaning of the Druid's words — for her mother and many other had repeated them to her over and over.

The first stars were beginning to twinkle. Brigid loved this time of day so close to Christmas, for she would pretend that the brightest star in the east was the Christmas star. She liked to imagine that she was one of those shepherds so long ago, making her way to a stable in Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus.

In her own stable, Brigid shut up the sheep for the night, and patted each of the cows as she called them by name. When all were settled in their stalls and fresh hay had been spread, Brigid knelt down as she always did to say a prayer of thanks. There were no wolves today, and all her animals were safe.

When Brigid stood to go in for supper, she rubbed her eyes in disbelief. She was no longer in her own familiar stable. She was in a stable, true enough, but outside there were no forest sounds, and the air was dry, warm, and dusty. Up the hill from the stable, she saw a village of curious flat-roofed houses and narrow streets. But there was Duffy! Or was it? A man dressed in oddly coloured robes came striding down the hill.

"What is taking you so long daughter?" He demanded. "We have many visitors, and they want their suppers." Brigid followed him up the hill and into a small stone building. Duffy, it seemed, was an innkeeper in this strange place, and he soon had Brigid ladling out bowls of stew, cutting thick slices of hard bread, filling the refilling cups of wine. She worked hard, long into the night.

At last, Brigid had a chance to rest. She sat down on a bench by the door, wondering where in the world this place might be, and why she was there.

Just then, there was a soft knocking at the door. "There's no more room!" Duffy shouted from another room. "Tell them to go away." "Please," a man's voice outside said, "I must find a place for my wife to rest."

The voice was so kind and tired. Maybe, she thought, she could talk Duffy into finding just one more bed. Wearily, Brigid rose and opened the door. Outside, behind the man, a young woman sat on a very small donkey.

"Thank you," said the man. "My name is Joseph, and this is my wife, Mary."

Brigid felt as one does when a candle is lit in a very dark room. She now knew exactly where she was and what she had to do. "Come quickly," she said, leading them away from the inn and down the hill.



In the stable, she helped Joseph lay a bed of soft hay on the floor. They covered the hay with Joseph's cloak. Even though it did not seem cold to Brigid, Mary was shivering. Brigid took off her old cloak and put it around Mary's shoulders. "You will need some water," she said when they were settled, and she hurried back to the inn.

When she returned with a heavy clay jar of water, Brigid could hear from inside the stable the soft sounds of a newborn baby. Joseph gave the child to Brigid to hold, as he made Mary more comfortable. Lovingly she held the child, then carefully laid him in the cow's hay manger.

"Blessed are you among all women," she said to Mary, "and blessed is your holy child." Joseph and Mary smiled at her, and a comforting golden light seemed to grow around them. From the skies above came the sweetest music Brigid had ever heard, yet it sounded familiar. It was the music of the brooks and bird song, of bells and harps, of oceans and lakes. For that one moment, the earth itself sang out in joy.

Brigid's awe was broken by the soft voice of Mary. "Thank you, child of the West," she said, then she handed Brigid's cloak to Joseph, who placed it around Brigid's shoulders.

"Your generosity will be remembered always," he added.

Then there was the sound of steps and voices outside. "Where is that child?" A voice said. "Brigid!" Called another. "Look! What is that light in the stable there?"

Brigid looked up as the door was thrust open. But there were no shepherds or wise kings at the door. Instead, it was her own mother and some of the other slave women from Faughart Hill. Snow swirled in the open door with a gust of cold night air. The holy family was gone, and Brigid felt the ache in her knees from kneeling too long. But the ache in her heart was much worse — she longed for the holy scene that had vanished so quickly. Instead here she was in her very own stable, surrounded by her own sheep and cows.

“What had taken you so long!” Demanded her mother. “It’s late and cold and we were worried.” Then she stopped her scolding with a gasp. “What is this?” She said, pointing to her daughter’s cloak.

All the women gathered around to examine the cloak, though none would touch it.

Brigid pulled the old blue cloth from her shoulders only to find it changed. It was a deep rich blue again, blue like the eastern sky at twilight, and on it were dozens of tiny glowing stars.

“I was in Bethlehem...,” she began.



This story and its illustrations are taken from a book written by Bryce Milligan and beautifully Illustrated by Helen Cann. Only a few of the pictures are reproduced here, but they are, as you can see, very lovely indeed.

The book, “Brigit’s Cloak”, is available to buy here: <http://www.books.ie/catalogsearch/result/?q=St.+Brigits+Cloak>

## FOR THE SEASONS - FOLK TRADITIONS & SYMBOLS

By Ruth Marshall, storyteller & heritage specialist



Photo: Ruth Marshall

On the eve of Brigit’s day, it is traditional to gather rushes to make a Brigit’s cross. There are many types of Brigit’s cross, and the 4-legged rush cross that most people nowadays would recognise, was not actually the most common style of Brigit’s cross made in old Ireland. We know this one so well because, when RTE started broadcasting television, they used an image of this Brigit’s cross and displayed it on the otherwise blank screen when they had no programmes to transmit. Brigit’s cross was a kind of placeholder.

The cross is meant to sit with its 4 arms diagonally. The diamond at the centre is an ancient symbol found in cultures all over the world, both contemporary and ancient, and represents the sun. The arms depict the gateways to our 4 seasons, and the pre-Christian festivals of the indigenous tradition: Samhain, Imbolc, Bealtaine and Lughnasadh. The whole representing the “wheel” of the year. This is why this symbol is also known as a “sun-wheel.”

Brigit’s cloak, the Brat Bridhe, is another potent symbol. Women in Ireland and the Western Isles of Scotland, traditionally would have their own little piece of Brigit’s cloak. This could be just a small scrap of fabric, a ribbon, or a large shawl. This would be placed outside on the eve of Brigit’s day, and brought back inside early morning next day. Brigit was believed to travel all around Ireland on Brigit’s Eve, and to bless everything left out for her. The Brat would be dried, folded away carefully, and brought out on occasions when it was needed, e.g. to aid a woman in childbirth, or to wrap around a sick child. The Brat embodies the qualities of generosity, protection and healing warmth displayed in many stories of Brigit -both the goddess and the saint.

Brigit was generally seen as a down-to-earth support for the hearth and home, and sometimes butter, milk or seed potatoes were left out on the doorstep, for her to bless with abundance and protection for the year ahead.



# FOR THE SEASONS - CRAFTS

by Ziva Elliis

Imbolc is traditionally the great festival and honouring of Brigid (Brighid, Bride, Brigit), so loved as a pagan Goddess that her worship was woven into the Christian church as St Brigid. There are many traditions and customs associated with Lá Fhéile Bríde (St. Brigid's Day) on February 1 and many of these involve invocations for good health and fertility. Brigid is a Goddess of healing, poetry and smithcraft. She is a Goddess of fire, of the Sun and of the hearth, of good fortune and the awakening nature. She brings fertility to the land and its people and is closely connected to midwives and new-born babies.

## The Brideóg

A very old tradition involved the making of a Brigid doll or Brideóg ("little Brigid" or "young Brigid"). This is placed in 'Bride's Bed' next to the hearth or a candle to bring fertility and good fortune, welcoming the potential of the year to come and the energy of Brigid, Goddess of hearth and home, into the home.

Originally made from straw, rushes or corn husk and adorned with wool, ribbons, herbs, dried flowers and trinkets like shells or a special stone/crystal, even a prayer or wish for the future on a tiny piece of paper.

I have used yarn, white for purity, green for the fresh burst of life and red to revitalise and stimulate the 'fire' energy she calls forth.

### Materials:

- White yarn
- Red yarn
- Green yarn
- Silver thread for decoration
- Needle and thread

1. Tie about 20 strands of white yarn together on one end

2. Bend all the strands upwards

3. Take another 12 strands of white yarn and tie them together in the middle, plait each end and tie the ends.

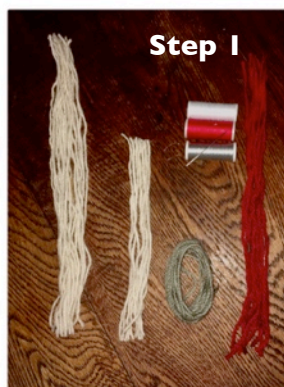
4. Place the plaits between the strands of the body. Slide it upwards. Those plaits are going to be the arms.

5. Secure the body strands together again underneath the arms. Wrap a belt with the green yarn.

6. Cut 18 lengths of red yarn and sew onto the top of the head for hair

7. Decorate the doll with dried herbs or flowers and ribbons.

8. Place her in a basket next to a white candle or on the hearth on Brigid's Eve (31st January)





# FOR THE SEASONS - CRAFTS

by Ruth Marshall

## Working with the weather:

Don't they say there is no such thing as bad weather, only wearing the wrong clothes?

The weather can help us to make something beautiful, especially when it is icy and frosty.

### Here is what to do:

Lay a few pretty leaves or little bits of moss in a bowl

Fill the bowl with water to about 2/3 of the way up (water expands when it freezes)

Leave the bowl of water outside on a very cold and frosty evening

Take a look at it next morning, and you may have a lovely surprise!

The water will freeze, and the leaves will be held within it, as if it is a sheet of glass.

Of course, it will not last forever - but it will be so lovely while it lasts.

### You can also do the same thing without adding any leaves to the water:

This time you will get a big plate of clear icy glass to look through - like the lens of an enormous magnifying glass.

Does the world look different when you look through this lens?

Or is it a crystal ball. Will you see the future if you look into it?



## The Snowball

I made myself a snowball,  
as perfect as could be.  
I thought I'd keep it as a pet,  
and let it sleep with me.

I made it some pyjamas,  
and a pillow for its head.  
Then last night, it ran away.  
But first, it wet the bed.

- Shel Silverstein

# FOR THE SEASONS - NATURE & VERSES

In the Western Isles of Scotland the dandelion was known as “the little notched of Bride” (*Bearnan Bride* in Scots Gaelic) and was revered for its healing properties. The dandelions will be showing themselves soon, and you can eat the leaves as fresh salad. Bees love dandelion flowers, and they are one of the best sources of food for them in early spring.

Snowdrops were said to spring up wherever Brigit stepped upon the ground - a sign that spring is on its way, and the cold weather will not last forever. They are often seen as a sign of hope.



## Saint Brigid

The dandelion lights its spark  
Lest Brigid find the wayside dark.  
And Brother Wind comes rollicking  
For joy that she has brought the spring.  
Young lambs and little furry folk  
Seek shelter underneath her cloak.

- Winifred Mabel Letts (1882 - 1972)



‘Where are the snowdrops?’  
said the Sun,  
‘Dead,’ said the Frost  
‘Buried and lost.’

‘Nonsense,’ said the Sun  
‘They did not die,  
‘Asleep they lie.

‘I will wake them,’ said the Sun  
‘Into the light,  
‘Clad all in white.’



I know a little pussy,  
Her coat is silver grey,  
She lives down in the meadow  
Not very far away.  
Although she is a pussy,  
She’ll never be a cat,  
For she’s a pussy-willow,  
Now what do you think of that!



# FOR THE SEASONS - NATURE

## Primrose – *Primula Vulgaris*

*(Primus in Latin means first)*

The first wild primroses, these harbingers of spring, started this year blooming right now in the middle of January. This is extremely early but does happen in a mild winter. Soon we will find vigorous bundles of yellow flowers adorning our gardens, streams, woodland and along hedges. In spring they thrive well in wet, well drained earth, preferably on slopes.

*This article by Doris Potter was first published in the Well-Spring newsletter.*



If plants can be described as social, the primrose is certainly very social. What we perceive, as a well-established plant, actually consists of several plants growing in a unity as if it were one.

During the dryness of summer the plants are dying back, and in autumn new leaves start appearing again. The leaves will establish a rosette close to the ground. And in spring they appear like little nests out of which new leaves and flower buds appear. The leaves are curled up towards its centre vein and seem to urge straight up towards the sky and the cosmic forces. In their midst also appear the soft lighter green velvety flower buds.

The flowering plant brings forth an abundance of flowers on single delicate stalks with the tendency to form a half globe. Usually several such unities appear in close neighbourhoods, often covering large areas.

Special about primrose leaves are their relative strength compared to the soft and delicate looking flower and stem. The veins of the leaves are very pronounced and in between they are a little bulging. The strong leaves are lance like and yet give themselves over to other forces that come more from the periphery, that lets it appear curly.

The flowers, as mentioned already, have an opposite gesture. The delicate light yellow flowers are held by thin stalks. The five petals are heart-shaped, sometimes grown together into a chalice and sometimes separate. The centre of the petals is slightly darker coloured. And the reproductive organs deeply imbedded and protected in the centre of the flower.

The roots and the flowers contain a fragrant oil. Stem and flowers are covered with tiny little hairs, thus feeling soft and velvet like to the touch. These hairs are like little sense organs raying out drawing warmth and light towards itself.

If we summarise, and draw conclusions from these observations. We can know that the plant has very

strong etheric forces, forces that want to become round form a unity. Thus it will support medicinally, when such help is needed. When we look at the leaves we can know that the circulatory system is particularly vigorous. Is it surprising that herbal medicines use the leaves for wound healing?

The primrose has the signature the forces of Venus, which can particularly be seen in the five, heart-shaped petals. We also observe that the plant stands in a particular balanced way between the earthly forces and the cosmic forces, between strength and delicacy, creating abundance. These qualities can also balance our nervous system and thus strengthen us when our souls are out of kilter.

Traditionally an infusion of primrose roots is used for insomnia, for nervous headaches, spasmodic conditions, but also as a gentle sedative (especially suitable for children). Leaves and roots can be used as an expectorant that can help breaking down mucous and will calm spasms in the lungs. (Perhaps, not to forget for those who may contract corona virus). It can be infused in a sugar or honey syrup and made into a cough mixture or drunk in tea.

Whenever herbal remedies are taken one must be particularly careful in conjunction with other medicines, as for example in primrose together with Warfarin or Aspirin as the plant contains naturally a certain amount of these substances, that are artificially available in these medicines.

It is safe to eat all parts of the plant in moderation, particularly a few leaves and flowers in your salad, or some flowers in your herbal mix, might add taste and well being.

For a nice skin and wound ointment you could pound some leaves with pestle and mortar cover with warm olive oil, add a little bees wax and cool in very clean pots.

## Homeschooling from the Heart – A Parent’s Diary

By Lyndsay Myers

“Home is where the heart is” – that’s what they say. But for many families keeping the heart beating when life around you is falling apart can be a BIG challenge. Especially when all of the resources that you have been depending upon to nourish and shelter your children are suddenly withdrawn and both your and their familiar routines are forced to change. As a mother of two young children I have to admit that my mind and body almost went into meltdown in the first few weeks of the Covid 19 school closures. Not because I have never had my children at home – some of the most amazing months of my life were the ones when I had parental leave and I was able to really BE with my children, to listen to their stories, to play in their imaginations and to see the world through their wondrous eyes. Not because I am incapable of recreating the daily rhythms that provide children with the comfort that they need to express themselves and their talents and on which kindergartens and schools around the world are built. But because the mother who knew and desperately needed to be the primary educator of her children in this time of immense turmoil was also a full time lecturer in Italian and Children’s Studies at NUI Galway.

For the first few days my heart was quite literally torn apart – should I work? Should I be with the kids? Whichever I one I picked I felt guilty. “Set them up with some activities and then go into your study, shut the door and tell them that you are working. They’ll have to get used to the idea that mummy works”, some well-meaning friends told me. Understandable advice but not very realistic when you have an incredibly, impulsive and imaginative 8 year old who when she decides it’s time to build a time machine from old cardboard boxes and string simply has to do it NOW and isn’t going to wait till you’ve finished work but is instead, however nicely you say that you will be free later, going to take out ALL of the craft materials, all of the sharp implements in the kitchen drawers, spread them out ALL over the floor and keep coming in and out every ten minutes to ask you if you will make a hole in a piece of cardboard or tie a knot in a piece of string. And what is worse you are actually so dead

PROUD of her time machine that you can’t actually concentrate on the lecture you are trying to write anyway..... and you end up having your coffee sitting in a laundry basket filled with cushions inside a cardboard box on its way to last week and you get so excited about the fact that you are travelling back in time to last Tuesday that you totally forget about the staff meeting you were supposed to be attending after your coffee break. Sound familiar?

I KNEW what my children needed – I just didn’t have enough time in the day to give it to them..... but then I realised something very important and that is that when it comes to spending time with your children quality is often more important than quantity. The reason my daughter wanted to pester me 24/7 was because she needed my attention to unleash her creativity and because she didn’t know WHEN I would be free and when I wouldn’t. So instead of setting them up with an activity in the morning and starting work at 9 as I would have when they were they going to school I decided to use the time when we would ordinarily have been commuting to start the day with a family walk. We would get some fresh air, sing a song (or even learn one from my phone while walking) and then we would come back, and have a nourishing snack. Then around 10 I would set up their activity and go and work.

It did not take me long to realise that I had cracked it! Happy from having got out of the house, explored the natural world, walked, run and skipped down the leafy boreens near our house for an hour I found that the kids, amazingly, had no problem occupying themselves for hours without me after we got home. They would teach themselves magic tricks from you tube, build Lego constructions from their imaginations, do drawing tutorials or just listen to audiobooks till they could practically imitate Stephen Fry’s British accent. No interruptions..... no pieces of string to knot.....and at the end of the day what a wonderful joy it was to see their creations.

The moment when I knew that I had really discovered something magical was when I came downstairs from my office one day to make the



lunch and my daughter showed me the first ever watercolour painting that she had done entirely on her own.

What all of this shows is that when we give our children unscheduled time AFTER we have given them our full attention for a significant chunk of

time they naturally develop creative and entrepreneurial skills, they conquer their own boredom because their minds have somehow been activated!

## “I TOO can be an illustrator!”

The marvellous story of *Mootsy and the AWFULLY big bite!*

By Lindsay Myers

Children are naturally creative. But how often are their creative efforts truly encouraged and enabled to flourish in a non-competitive environment? No matter what type of childcare we find for our children the opportunities for them to grow their skills and to build their confidence, to find out who they are and what they stand for can easily be missed in the busyness of life. If we take the time to stop for a minute, however, to look and to listen to the unique talents we can enrich not only their lives but our own too. For when it comes to learning children really do have as much to teach us, as we have to teach them.

Learning by doing is at the heart of Steiner education, and the children’s picture book that Lindsay Myers and her 8-year-old daughter Tara Canniffe created to inject some creativity, joy, and excitement into twelve long months of social distancing and school closures is a testament to the magic of collaborative learning. Written by Lindsay Myers and illustrated entirely by her daughter, Tara, the book is a true fusion of talents, a work which the author knows could never have happened without the input of both parties: “when I decided to try my hand at writing a picture book I wasn’t sure who was going to illustrate it but as soon as I saw the pictures that Tara was drawing I realised immediately that the warmth and humour she was adding to the characters was just what the story needed”.

Tara, who has been drawing as long as she can remember spent almost all of the 2020 lockdown drawing and colouring her creations with pens and pencils, and by the end of the year the pair had created not only a funny and heart-warming picture book but an even stronger mother/daughter bond.



Eager to share their discovery with others the pair approached a local designer and set about publishing their book, and as of this month *Mootsy and the AWFULLY big bite!* is available to purchase online at [www.mootsyandme.com](http://www.mootsyandme.com) for just 11 euro including postage.

Set on the fateful day when Aoife’s pet gerbil bit her finger by mistake, *Mootsy and the AWFULLY big bite!* offers an empathic insight into the value of two-way communication, and in recognition of the book’s dual perspective the makers have decided to donate all of the profits to the Galway SPCA.

Readers with children stuck at home because of school closures will be excited to hear that the accompanying website contains not only a 30-minute video on the dynamic duo’s picturebook-making journey but a 15-minute drawing tutorial for children by Tara on how to draw Aoife and Mootsy.

# Learning Materials - A Kindergarten Teacher's Observation

by Carol Brogan

Two “magic” words indicate how children enter into a relationship with their environment. These words are imitation and example [...]

Physical environment must, however, be understood in the widest sense imaginable. It includes not just what happens around children in the material sense, but everything that occurs in their environment - everything that can be perceived by their senses, that can work on the inner powers of children from the surrounding physical space. *This includes all moral or immoral actions, all wise or foolish actions that children see.\**

Steiner, R. (1996) *The Education of the Child and Early Lectures on Education*. Anthroposophic Press, Barrington, MA \*my own italics



Over my past 7 years working as a teacher in a Waldorf/Steiner influenced sessional preschool it has become obvious that one of the strongest tools in the educational toolkit has been the teacher's understanding of the importance of the child's imitation of the teacher's voice, gesture and movement.

Starting from September with a “hello” and morning handshake, through to building towards Ring Time greetings with song and movement, the cues from our movement and voice can range from tweaking the mood of the room to exciting interest in a group table top activity to signalling the time for a story or getting ready to go home. We work hard to forge these links between voice, gesture, movement and the child's own interest, learning and trust in the adult.

More important than “teaching” a child how to do something, providing working examples worthy of imitation and watching out for natural scaffolding opportunities is what makes Waldorf Steiner education, in my opinion, one of the most developmentally appropriate, patient and respectful (of the child's age, stage of development and temperament) pedagogies.

Although in recent years there have been welcome improvements in how inspections of early years settings are carried out, with the introduction of a Department of Education curriculum inspection hiring an inspection team drawn from a pool of applicants with a hands on background in early years education, it can still be a challenge to communicate just how important learning through imitation is and exactly how it



works in the Steiner Kindergarten. It is not something that is immediately apparent in the Waldorf setting and can seem intangible. This is particularly challenging in an education arena where box ticking, record keeping and note making can sometimes take precedence over meaningful, quality teacher-child interaction, all in the quest of performing well during an inspection to prove.... meaningful, quality teacher-child interaction. I bet that sounds familiar!

With these pressures constantly on our minds it can be easy to deviate from what we know works about our curriculum to get lost and muddled down a path of pictures, posters and flashcards in order to satisfy the numerous outside agencies that we are held accountable to: TUSLA, HSE, Dept Of education, Occupational Therapists and Education Psychologists to name but a few.

There is no room to explain from the beginning or give a biology lesson here, but we all know from our myriad respective early years education courses and degrees that children are not capable of more abstract academic learning (in our case literacy and numeracy flashcards, making the connections between pictorial instructions on a poster and a concrete learning or self-care task, etc.) until roughly the age of 7. We know from other European countries who actually take on board what experts in the field say that children in Germany, Sweden and Finland, for example, don't take their children out of the Kindergarten to sit down to the three Rs until at least 6 or 7 years of age. Ireland and the UK have still not broken away from the 19th century initiative of marching 4 year olds into primary school education in order to save them from having their limbs mangled in textile mills.

Thankfully children in this part of the world 3 and 4 year olds don't work in textile mills or coal mines anymore but why haven't we moved on from biologically impossible learning expectations of this age group? Why the pressure on early years educators to prove to parents, managers, providers and outside agencies through developmental checklists, posters and charts that we are doing our jobs and the children are

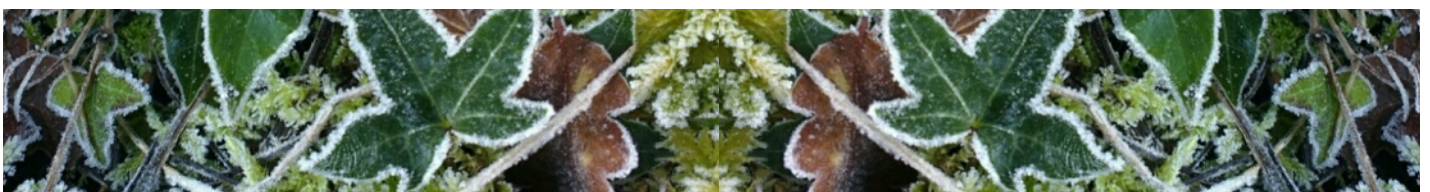
progressing, all the while taking us out of the actual work with the children?

Using "fun" disease control intervention literature and "interactive learning material" from the HSE (Rufus the Handwashing Monster anybody? [www.safefood.net](http://www.safefood.net)) interrupts the education methodology of the Waldorf Steiner Kindergarten and disregards the careful relationship built up between Kindergarten Teacher and child which facilitates learning through imitation of the adults in the room. I find this also the case with 'cartoon' visual schedules offered by OTs (of course these are ok if they are something that the child is already familiar with from home), star charts, flashcards and some in school speech therapy exercises. Apart from being confusing and taking the child's attention and actions out of the concrete task at hand these learning materials can also serve to *other* the child with additional needs drawing negative attention from other children.

Children are not fools. They do not need the middle man of monsters or cartoons to understand what needs to be done in their day when they have healthy deeds and speech to observe and model.

There should be no need for interrupting the flow of the session by constantly checking a visual schedule throughout the session if the rhythm of the day is firmly established from the first day and transitions are gently cued by the teacher's own gentle voice through song. Dictation with flashcards are meaningless against a group of children who can sign their schedule through Lamh.

For this age group there can be no substitute for the learning that takes place through the imitation of actions that are worthy of imitation. We must trust in the Will of the child, that they will come to us when they are interested and ready and it must be the job of outside agencies whose livings are earned off the backs of the constant monitoring of early years professionals to catch up with where we are.



## Parents review on using technology to educate

by Ruta Ivanauskaite Little

Changing times, uncertain times, fearful times, new times. How do I find my way to go forward and how I as a parent support my children through these changing days, weeks, months? I always believed that there is time for my children to grow up, exploring the natural world around them, engaging in meaningful daily activities, learning new skills without using the internet or having screen time. There is so much that is offered to us, garden forests, mountains, rivers, they are all our new undiscovered worlds in themselves. And not only for a young person. I find myself just as excited and inspired as my children who become “explorers” as they enter or climb or even dive into these rich worlds.

All my children had the privilege to attend the Kilkenny Steiner School where a child is viewed as an individual and where education supports their growing needs.

With the series of lock- downs we encountered, I found myself becoming my children’s teacher or a guide as I followed the curriculum offered by the school. Once it became apparent that we will need to use the internet for research, we did so in a very focused manner. Just exactly what we did not know or had no books on the subject, we engaged the technology to find out. Once inspired, we wrote stories, poems, painted and drew, thus connecting deeply with the new subject and taking it within our head and souls. We absorbed it and this I believe is a true learning that will remain with us as we journey through uncharted situation in the world. To stay master of technology while creativity feeds us and sustains us.

*Ruta is a parent of 5 great explorers*

### Soulscape Training

Exploring Anthroposophy as a Foundation for Life.

#### STILL SOME PLACES AVAILABLE!

Just to let you know that there are still a few places remaining on this course. So, if this aligns with your intentions for 2021 to be a year of discovery, creativity and transformation, do get in touch!

*Do you want to find new ways to get in touch with your creativity; to enhance your understanding of what it means to be human; to have a meaningful and holistic understanding of the world we live in?*

This course has been running successfully for a number of years, and aims to provide a foundational, yet immersive introduction, to many aspects of Anthroposophy, on which Waldorf/Steiner education, Biodynamic Agriculture, Anthroposophical Medicine and Eurythmy are based. It can be a foundation year for anyone planning further anthroposophical studies, and is ideal for teachers, parents, assistants or administrators in a Steiner/ Waldorf setting who are interested in deepening their understanding.

The course, comprising 9 monthly weekend sessions, aims to educate, nourish and inspire, while cultivating real inner growth, and giving participants tools to enhance their engagement in life and work. Our intention is to educate the whole person through head, heart and hands in a collaborative learning process. Whilst we hope to be able to meet in person, we are prepared for the possibility that some of our sessions may need to take place online.

*“A nourishing, life changing journey! The Orientation in Anthroposophy was an important step in my teacher training.”*

Would you like to know more? Contact us by: Email at [thesteinertraining@gmail.com](mailto:thesteinertraining@gmail.com) Facebook/Soulscape Training Instagram/ Soulscape Training; Website/ [www.Soulscape.eu](http://www.Soulscape.eu)



# Rhythmical Massage Therapy

by Doris Potter



Rhythmical Massage Therapy derives out of Anthroposophic Medicine and the understanding of the living human being within his spiritual organism, a science newly initiated by Rudolf Steiner. Rhythmical Massage Therapy was developed in close collaboration between Dr Ita Wegman and Dr Margareta Hauschka and their followers.

Dr Rudolf Steiner indicated that many cases of proper massage might be able to replace the knife of the surgeon.<sup>1</sup> At present we are still far from being able to claim with certainty such success. However in following and furthering the given indications from the inspirers of Rhythmical Massage Therapy, we can confidently say, that the physical and spiritual needs of a person, can be profoundly met and restore health and wellbeing.

Important underlying aspects in Rhythmical Massage are:

- the caring for warmth as our higher Ego can then more deeply connect to us and influence the “self-healing” processes; so people undergoing this process will experience being warmly wrapped.
- -addressing and balancing the polarities in our 3- fold organisation, the nerve-sense organisation, the rhythmic lung-heart-circulation, metabolic- limb system. As an example, this may mean working on your feet when you have a headache.
- Very central to Rhythmical Massage Therapy are secreting and nourishing aspects and especially the breathing

aspect. In every in-breath we incarnate our astral-ego organisation and with every outbreath we exarnate it. These are rhythmical processes that happen through our whole body right into the smallest parts of muscles and tissues. By applying subtle, very differentiated movements better balance can be achieved and release discomfort and pain, that are manifestations of the astral body not being able to release.

- Special Massage oils will support the healing process. Also special rhythmical applications for the organs may be included. To every massage session belongs an integral part of a rest as this enhances the treatment. Clients often experience this time as hugely consolidating.

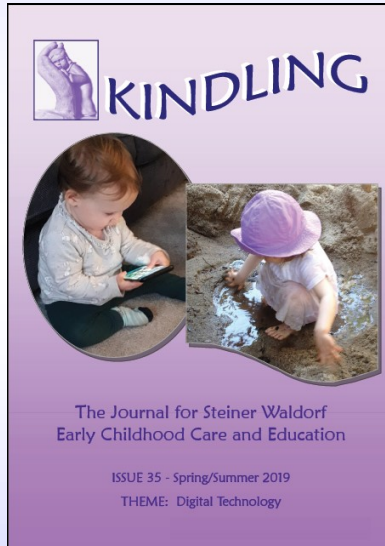
In Rhythmical Massage therapy a number of different symptoms of an emotional or a physical nature can be addressed in adults, children, or babies. Working in conjunction with an Anthroposophical doctor, Rhythmical Massage Therapy may be an integral part of a therapeutic programme.

I offer Rhythmical Massage Therapy twice a month in the therapy room at the Christian Community in Tuamgraney. (Co Clare) or at my home in Carne (Co Wexford), other arrangements possible. For further information or appointments contact Doris Potter at Tel: 087 7575304

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## KINDLING Journal for Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Care and Education

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