

Reflections on the conference by participants

— Adrienne Doucette, Wendy Weinrich & Anke Scheinfeld

It was an honor and a privilege to attend the International Early Childhood Conference this past spring. I “bunked” on the floor of a classroom in the high school science and math wing of the Rudolf Steiner School with a room full of colleagues from around the world. This arrangement allowed many opportunities to meet and share stories with my fellow colleagues while riding the shuttle bus daily to and from the conference and during morning chats over coffee in the cafeteria. Surprisingly, this turned out to be one of the highlights of my experience!

Other highlights were the opening and closing events of the conference. Susan Howard, Philipp Reubke, and Stephanie Alon stood at the podium in the colorful main hall of the Goetheanum and conducted the international roll call of participants. This exciting and joyful experience reminded me of the opening ceremony at the Olympics, with smiling, cheering and waving. The country flags were missing, though there were plenty of scarves.

The final evening was presentation of artistic offerings from many countries. As well as beauty and artistry, much humor and laughter were shared. A raffle of traditionally-dressed, hand-made dolls from around the world was held, and the dolls bestowed upon lucky winners who would carry them to new homes across the globe. The evening ended with everyone processing around the outside of

the Goetheanum with lit tea candles in hand while quietly reflecting on our 100-year Waldorf history and envisioning the next hundred years to come. Beautiful song began wafting through the crowd of over a thousand people.

The conference content of collaborative keynote presentations, workshops and discussion groups were inspiring and nourishing. One theme focused on working respectfully and collaboratively with parents. How can we work toward a mutual understanding between teachers and parents on the child’s behalf?

A second theme emphasized was the urgent need to protect free play for children. The recent passing of Joan Almon, devoted advocate for the young child’s right to play, calls forth the question of how we can carry this torch and protect play in early childhood. I ask myself: how much time do I give to uninterrupted, free play, how much time outdoors or in nature? Where can I simplify and provide more open-ended and raw materials for play?

This conference served as a reminder that we are never alone. Though we came from different corners of the world with varied settings and unique challenges, the conference allowed us to experience how much we share, united in our love and care for the children of the world. Human beings want to do good deeds and bring goodness into the world. May it be so! ♦

~ Adrienne Doucette



My first view of the Goetheanum was after 24 hours of travel. We accepted a ride from our airbnb host, and as we arrived at the west door he said, “The Temple!” And there it was on top of the hill in the middle of Dornach where he had grown up. It was always there for him, but this was my first glimpse of the building that I had only heard about and seen in photographs. Those pictures did not convey the power of the architecture, nor the size of the building. We found our way to registration, but were too late for the first lecture of the conference. We were not too late for dinner! After dinner we walked around the outside of the building just as the full moon was rising. What a sight to behold.

I did a lot of beholding in the next five days as I wandered around the quaint neighborhoods and gardens, with a twenty-minute hike up the hill each morning. I did a lot of beholding as I listened to the lectures and then processed them in the discussion groups, which I found very meaningful and helpful. I felt both instantly at home and also in a very foreign land, where many, many other languages were being spoken. So many countries were represented, so many early childhood teachers who shared many of the same values and views on the needs of young children. I met a teacher from New York City, just 100 miles from where I live. I met another from Prague, one from Nairobi, and Russia, and Israel, and so many others.

The pace was manageable as the days flowed one into the other. I found myself connecting with old friends and meeting new friends, all the time aware of the theme of “Social Responsibility: Finding Ways into a Human Future.” We are doing this by building communities worldwide.

When the last night’s talent show moved me to tears I knew that I had come home. I had found my tribe and celebrated with my sisters and brothers as we, all 1100 of us, walked around the Goetheanum carrying candles to commemorate the one-hundredth birthday of Waldorf Education.

I feel so grateful to have had this experience and to be able to carry it to my community in my little school here in upstate New York. My work with my colleagues, with my staff, and with my parent body has been greatly enriched. My destiny has become clearer than ever. ♦

*The wishes of the soul are springing,
The deeds of the will are thriving,
The fruits of life are maturing.
I feel my destiny,
My destiny finds me.
I feel my star,
My star finds me.
I feel my goals in life,
My goals in life are finding me.*

My soul and the great world are one.

*Life grows more radiant about me,
Life grows more arduous for me,
Life grows more abundant within me.*

— Rudolf Steiner, *Verses and Meditations*

~ Wendy Weinrich



Everything was new, yet intimately familiar. Meeting so many others from all over the world who also have a deep interest in the work with young children and in the questions and struggles of our time was reassuring. In the “Sozialwerkstatt” (social laboratory) of this conference, language no longer appeared to be a hindrance, as nonverbal communication and a way of “knowing” the other took over. And there was always someone present to translate what could not be said without words. Taking part in a workshop where five different languages were spoken at the same time opened a new dimension. Differences in opinions and cultural backgrounds clearly revealed themselves as forces for creative encounters and possibilities for evolution.

The inner work found its reflection in the outer environment. Even the natural forces aligned themselves with the progression of the conference. A cool and misty weather gave gradually way to a clear blue sky and the warming sun. Nature awakened and unfolded, as did the creative impulses in lectures, workshops, conversations and celebrations. Each day was filled with innumerable meaningful meetings facilitated by the space itself. ♦

~ Anke Schienfeld

Adrienne Doucette is a long-time early childhood educator currently teaching preschool and parent/child classes in Bellingham, WA at the Whatcom Hills Waldorf School. She is a member of the WECAN Board. Adrienne is interested in and inspired to work toward building healthy, respectful relationships with children, their parents, and with colleagues.

Wendy Weinrich is founder and director of Mountaintop Waldorf School in Saugerties, NY where she teaches a mixed-age kindergarten (3-6 years) and a weekly Parent/Child class. Using her Waldorf therapeutic EC training and elements of Dance/Movement Therapy, she offers healthy movement opportunities for the children. She is continually striving to expand ways to support young children and their parents.

Anke Schienfeld is a lead kindergarten teacher at the Rudolf Steiner School in New York City. She has particular interest in deeply penetrating to the essences of Waldorf education and representing these in the classroom. Working warmly and honorably with parents is also a priority.