

Goetheanum Glimpses

World Teachers' Conference -
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I was looking forward with great excitement to the Ninth World Teachers' Conference in Dornach this year, as I had been lucky enough to attend the previous conference four years ago and had been yearning to return once again. The conference is enlivening, full of energy and enthusiasm, with educators from all over the world attending and contributing to discussions, sharing ideas and experience of their countries' issues. Every day we walked up the hill in the crisp spring air, to the wonderfully imposing structure of the Goetheanum and each morning it felt like a momentous occasion. It seemed the Aussie/NZ contingent this year may have been over 50, making an impact on the almost 1,000 attendees.

The whole programme was excellent: keynotes, workshops, artistic programmes and student contributions. Hearing the bell resound to gently remind people to enter the beautiful conference hall is another unique experience. It was difficult to decide on what aspects of the conference I would like to share but will give a picture of highlights from two keynote presentations, and the morning workshop I attended over several days with Ben Cherry and Claus-Peter Röh.

Rosie Simpson gave an inspiring talk '*Creating a culture of wonder, reverence and devotion: The class teacher's perspective*' (reprinted in this edition). She spoke of the importance of teachers carrying a picture of the child incarnating into their physical body and gave a wonderful imagination of the story of The Three Little Pigs as the house/hearth/fire being a picture of a child's inner life.

What does this mean for teachers? The teacher must continue to work strongly on their own inner life so that they can consciously experience compassion for every child. To cultivate the inner imaginative life in a child is the prime task of a

class teacher. This leads to the experience of truth in the high school as the gift of imagination leads to the gift of thinking. Rosie ended her lively and enthusiastic talk with the emphasis on devotion, "*making small moments of devotion in all we do allows the spirit to enter our work*".

Florian Osswald (co-leader of the Pedagogical Section) also spoke of devotion to another, not out of weakness but out of strength. What you give devotion to becomes richer and richer. Florian called the teacher both a *time artist* and a *servant* and began with a story of a Class 10 camp trekking through the mountains with their donkeys. Those that could not build a relationship with their donkey struggled, and at the end of the camp one student asked, "*Who served whom?*" Teachers have the wonderful task to be servants, but this must come out of strength, not weakness.

To be a time artist, Florian spoke about the ability to anticipate the future out of the moment, to be open and try to sense what wants to come. This is an important gesture, to anticipate and develop these forces in us. We also need to develop healthy time rhythms, neither too fast nor slow, but a nourishing ebb and flow.

We are all sense beings; and children especially so. They sense immediately if the teacher has the right balance of rhythm and also the right balance of expectations. It is not just the teacher's formative impulse at work, but also the student's; therefore we need to develop a rhythm between form and formlessness, encouraging students to do things out of themselves. How do we know if the balance is right? If the child's inner and outer life is in harmonious relationship with each other, you will see this in the child's eyes

The morning workshop I chose was Ben Cherry and Claus-Peter Röh's workshop,

“Worldwide perspectives of Waldorf education”. I wanted to hear what issues were alive in schools in other countries and find out the differences and similarities to the Australian context. Not surprisingly, most countries were working with the same questions.

On the first day there were introductions and brief country presentations. Key issues and questions raised on the first day and discussed over the week were:

- Increasing government requirements and educational reform, and the impact new regulations were having on pedagogy, especially in the earlier years with demand for early age starting and technology
- The shifting of school administration away from the College of Teachers
- Class teacher period – in several countries governments have moved Class 7 into the high school years
- How do we work together internationally to support each other?
- How is the curriculum being localised – e.g. is Norse mythology relevant to Asian cultures, where is Ancient China in the study of the epochs?
- What is essential to the *place* and the *culture* in each country’s curriculum?
- How are we meeting the transition needs between the seven-year periods?
- What influences do I authentically bring as a teacher?
- Did Steiner forbid soccer and other ‘myths’?
- The lack of high school teacher education worldwide

On the second day we deepened the discussion and it was obvious that a key theme emerging was the question of the strong northern hemisphere culture throughout the curriculum indications. How do we incorporate cultural diversity for a global education movement? There was discussion of the need for the teacher to really internalise his or her’s own culture and bring content in an individual and authentic way.

We heard from some of the Indian schools; Hyderabad is predominantly an Islamic city but the schools there celebrate a variety of religions and festivals. For schools that do not have classes beyond class 7 there are concerns, as students going on to other high school are pressured to sit exams that may determine their job for the rest of their life!

We heard from schools worldwide, about the lack of resources, the challenges of parent and teacher education, challenges for teachers. It was humbling sitting in this global circle, realising how lucky we are in Australia and really how little we have to grumble about.

Regarding the long awaited answer about soccer, Claus-Peter Röh (co-leader of the Pedagogical Section), stated that the Pedagogical Section had looked into this question, *“Did Steiner forbid soccer?”* They have not been able to find any such statement, only that Steiner said *“there should be no one-sidedness; not **only** soccer, but a variety of movements is necessary”*.

At times, of course, we had more questions than answers, but there was a sense that challenges had been shared and maybe the load had been lightened; that we could turn to each other for support; that we were all part of this amazing education movement that truly has something special to offer to the world. Some of the concluding thoughts of this wonderful worldwide discussion group were:

- Breathing is an incarnating process, not only of the child, but the class, school and the community
- We must at all times strive for finding the essential
- We must develop healthy relationships with love
- In our teaching we must develop loving relationships to the children, parents, our colleagues, to the world and the spiritual hierarchies. This comes out of seeing the spiritual being in the other. ◆