

International Early Childhood Conference 2012

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*I died from the mineral
And plant became,
I died from the plant
And took on sentient frame,
I died from the beast
And put on human dress;
When – by my dying –
Did I ever grow less?*

J. Rumi (1207 – 1273)

For seven years this conference was anticipated and the practical preparation took three years, so perhaps it was no wonder that well before the conference opened there were no more places available. 1,100 early childhood teachers from 52 different countries around the world gathered to study the process of the individuality of a child entering the body.

It would be hard to find a more difficult task, in this ever more complicated world!

The Early Childhood Conference was organised by the International Association of Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE) of which New Zealand is now a member. At the opening of the conference, the IASWECE Council members arrived on stage with one or more dolls from each country. Each doll had a name and each had come to Dornach to find adoptive parents in one of the countries of the conference participants. During the course of the conference each was welcomed by their new mother or father.

Our “child” went to Australia, following a current trend for many New Zealanders! All this was done as a raffle and raised €3,200 for training projects worldwide supported by IASWECE.

Steiner Waldorf early childhood education is growing especially in Asia and many countries need financial support to begin teacher education programmes. China now has over 250 Steiner

kindergartens and early childhood education programmes in five cities with over 100 students on each course. Malaysia, Korea, Fiji, Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia are among other countries which have all started teacher education programmes recently and have asked IASWECE for support. In turn, IASWECE has asked New Zealand what it could do to help. Consequently, Marjorie Theyer, Diana Bacchus, Kate Bryant, Edith van de Meer and I have all been doing what we can to help with teacher education in Asia.

In South Africa there are many projects to help the desperate plight of the children there. In Eastern Europe, much support is still needed. South America is also experiencing rapid growth in Steiner early childhood education.

New Zealand is considered ‘experienced’ and we have been able to implement many new courses such as the degree programme in Steiner EC education at AUT University, the In-Service courses at Taruna College and now the Steiner Schools Certificate which is fully accredited and gives entry to all universities in New Zealand. There was a lot of interest expressed at the International Association meeting before the conference and at the conference itself in the work we are doing.

The speakers at the Early Childhood Conference included Louise de Forest, a kindergarten teacher from the US; two medical doctors - Michaela Glöckler and Edmond Schoorel - Claus-Peter Röh from the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum and Dr Renate Long-Breipohl from Australia.

They all spoke about different aspects of the process of how the ‘I’ incarnates into the body and how we as early childhood teachers can understand and support this process. The lectures were translated simultaneously into eight different languages.

There were over 80 morning and afternoon workshops including a meeting of 60 early childhood teacher educators looking at the different ways they meet and include the diverse cultural environments they work in.

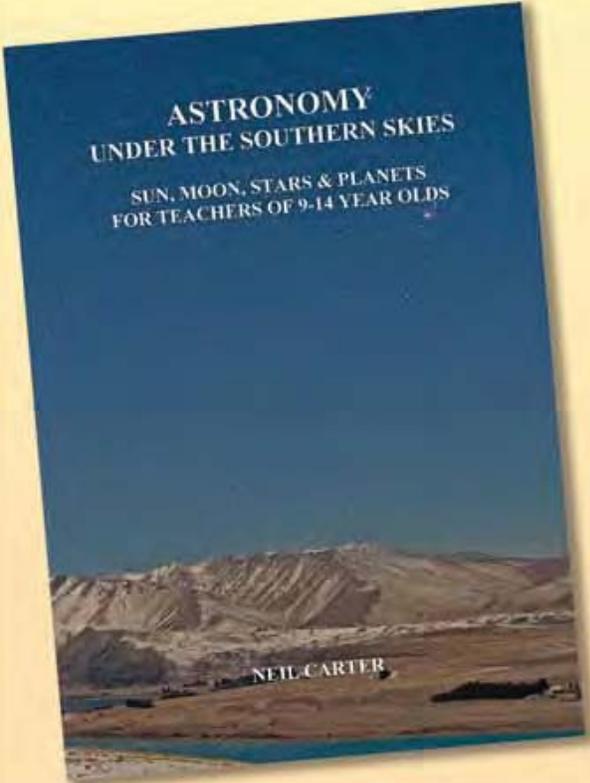
There was a wonderful 'pedagogical market place' where participants could share aspects of their work such as the projects in South Africa, thoughts around the organisation and administration of a Steiner kindergarten, or a debate around the need for criteria for the use and protection of the name 'Steiner/Waldorf.' We had two wonderful eurythmy performances in the evening by the Dornach stage group and by an exuberant Brazilian youth group. Instead of an evening of reports from the different countries, countries were invited to sing and dance in their traditional ways which was probably more illuminating than a report could ever be.

We also had a musical performance by a group of adults who have special needs and who enjoyed performing as much as we enjoyed watching, in fact it was hard to get them to stop!

I think the most lasting impression for me was being in the Goetheanum building itself. It is such a statement of anthroposophy, with form and colour bearing an inner relationship to the whole and the whole flowing organically into its single elements of metamorphosis. It was a re-inspiration of the work we are doing born out of these concepts.

There were five early childhood teachers attending the conference from New Zealand. The next conference will be held at the Goetheanum in seven years time, in 2019.

I highly recommend that we start saving now for this experience of a lifetime. ♦



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