

International Conference Reports

A Journey to Dornach: Desire and Determination

— Kyle Dunlap

I had wanted to go to the World Early Childhood Conference in Dornach since I first heard about it when I was still in training at Sunbridge in 2009. Dr. Michaela Glöckler, Renate Long-Breipohl, Helle Heckmann, and Edmond Schoorel, not to mention amazing teachers from North America, were all going to be there and I wanted to hear what they had to say. It seemed incredible to think it could ever happen, that I could actually get on a plane during the school year and go to the Goetheanum. There were many obstacles to my going—finances, the fact that I was a first year faculty member at a new school, my six-year-old son and our two dogs that would need care during my absence. Yet at last everything came together and I was able to go.

As the date of my departure approached, my colleagues would ask me if I was ready? packed? excited? I wasn't any of those things. I was, like all of us at that time of year, busy with my class and preparing to leave them and my assistant for four days. I was not prepared to go. Everything I had received from Dornach was in German, and I couldn't read it. I decided I would just have to figure out what to do when I arrived in Zurich.

Louise deForest gave the opening keynote speech for the conference. She said: "Each day is like the first day of creation. Everything is new, anything is possible. And...you don't have to know where you are to find yourself there." I certainly felt that all of that was true, both in the kindergarten and in finding one's way to the Goetheanum.

While I was on the plane, I met a little girl, who had just turned six along with her twin brother. Her family was returning to Basel after a year in New York City. This little girl was interested in me because I was knitting, making new ropes for the classroom. It was easy knitting and I could be conversational while I was working. This little girl's mother said to me, "Oh, she would love for me to do something like that. She would like it if I would knit or sewed or something." The children watched an in-flight movie and then

restlessly fell asleep. I couldn't sleep on the flight, so I made the girl a little rope. When she woke up I handed the rope to her rolled up like a snail. It was as if I had handed her gold. The children in my kindergarten class like these ropes, of course, but they take them for granted a little bit. This little girl cuddled this rope, smelled it, loved it, put it around her doll as a sash and then in her own hair. It really struck me that she loved to see a grownup doing something that could be used right away. I realized I take this a little bit for granted too as I am always making something in the course of daily living.

It was early in the morning when the plane landed in Zurich. By the time I found the train to Basel I was really tired, but still I couldn't sleep on the train. I arrived in Basel, went the wrong way, then found the right way to the trams. I thought I had read something about a tram #10 to Dornach, so I got on. It was Palm Sunday, and no one was there to take my ticket, or to hear my question, in badly spoken French, if this was the right way to the Goetheanum. I was so tired that I decided just go to wherever this tram was going.

The tram started to move. I had been thinking about getting off and asking if I were in the right place when a young woman sat down and said to me in English, "You are on the right one to go to Dornach." She continued, "You are going to the Goetheanum." It was a statement. She was a eurythmy student coming back from Sunday services in Basel and I must have looked like a kindergarten teacher. We had a very interesting and pleasant conversation.

The eurythmy student showed me the way, I dropped my bag where I was staying, and we walked on toward the Goetheanum. She left me before the Goetheanum came into view, so I could have the experience alone. I was feeling like I should be having some kind of profound experience walking up to the Goetheanum, the place I was so determined to get to, but what I kept thinking was, "This is hard work—Rudolf Steiner was not kidding when he designed this building to be way up here!" You really have to want

to get there. And then the doors are really heavy to open. Even after being awake for thirty-six hours, a plane ride, a train ride, a tram ride, a walk, a walk up a very big hill, there is no button to push the very heavy doors open for you. One still has to have the will forces to open those heavy doors.

The Goetheanum has many lovely apple trees on one side and a tiered lawn. I sat there late one afternoon and sketched an apple tree, and then I sketched the left side of the Goetheanum as you face it. The Goethanum is really difficult to draw. It is like drawing a plant and a building all at once. There is a straight line and now it is a curve and how they truly meet is really difficult to understand. I got totally lost while attempting it, the parts are confounding. But then if you take a step back and look at the whole, it is amazing. What a sight! The Great Hall of the Goetheanum is a wonder. I think if I had only gotten to sit in the hall and stare at the ceiling for four days I would have been totally satisfied. The color is otherworldly. It has such a depth and presence that you can almost hear it. When the curtains reveal the windows penetrated by the sun's light, you are bathed in saturated, colored light.

~ *It is so mysterious, this journey of the I, both our own journey and the children's.*

This amazing place fed my propensity to enjoy thinking and sitting still rather than moving, but Helle Heckmann's workshop on the foundational senses was at the bottom of the hill and Dr. Glöckler's workshop was at the top. I went back down once more to the bottom of the hill for Renate Long-Breipohl's amazing presentation of her research on play. Her insightful observations on "What is the motivation of the child during self-directed play?" are careful and her thoughts are inspiring. At the top of the hill an amazing panel of women spoke on *Waldorf education in the first three years: what is the essential?* Jane Swain suggested that "self-awareness of the movement body, is essential "as these factors profoundly affect the child's tools to overcome hindrances. Striving—this is what we must model for the children."

On a tour of the Great Hall the guide told us that in the original Goetheanum, it was said that as one walked down the center aisle past the colored windows, by the time you got to the front and stood in front of the Representative of Mankind your destiny would be revealed to you. How cool would that be, I

thought! I really loved this idea. Walk down the center aisle and *Voila!* Destiny revealed—great! No walking up and down hills and getting lost. I liked this idea of a straight shot to one's destiny.

Well, that particular aisle does not exist anymore. A new building has been built and there is a new way the mystery is unfolding every day, a new creation in us, in the children, and how we meet in our early childhood classrooms. The question is, what are we creating there? Why do we do it? Do we do it with love, with joy for health and healing, or do we do it because that is just what we do and how we have done it for a long time? Do we show respect and admiration for our colleagues? Do we forge friendships because we like how we feel when we are around someone or out of a common duty we feel toward the world?

What does it mean to hone our capacities for observing the journey of the I in little children? What could it mean that how they initiate movement when they are infants reveals how they might be in grade school? Do we ask these questions to find the answers or to keep seeking the better question to ask?

It is uncomfortable to ask without the promise of an answer. I strongly dislike the idea of not having my questions answered, just as strongly as I dislike walking up a big hill when I am already exhausted. But, I really wanted to go. So, on we go and we find joy and excitement despite our daily exhaustion. This is what the children want from us. The children really want to go and see us work and be accompanied by us with out the promise of a known destination. It is uncomfortable. Louise deForest closed the first keynote lecture of the conference by saying: "You can be comfortable or seek the truth. You can not have both." It is uncomfortable because it is so mysterious, this journey of the I, both our own journey and the children's.

So many of us had the desire and determination to go to Dornach in April 2012. Many more have had to hold the impulse, desire and determination to go another time. It is this desire in each of us to something good and useful. It is the striving towards seeing the children for who they want to become and not who we want them to be. This is a little rope that these incarnating children can grab onto as they begin to feel their I, as they begin to feel their destiny.

I am so grateful it was my time to go. I am grateful for the immense effort on the part of WECAN, IASWECE, the Goetheanum, and all the individual presenters who made the conference possible. It was truly a nourishing experience that will continue to live within me forever. ♦