
Around the World

A Summary of the Fall IASWECE Meeting in Ti'von, Israel

— Louise deForest

Twice a year the IASWECE Council (International Association for Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education) makes an effort to have our meetings in a member country, giving the IASWECE representatives an opportunity to have a first-hand experience with the teachers and schools of that country. This October, our meeting was held in Ti'von, Israel. Given that our themes for the last several years have been the question of diversity and overcoming fear, Israel, with its ongoing conflicts, was the perfect country in which to deepen our understanding of both.

Anthroposophists have been living in Israel since before the state was created in 1948, but they were not active in practical deeds until 1967. Following the Arab-Israel War, in 1967, the first curative home for adults opened, located in a state home but guided by the vision of a German anthroposophist. This small beginning awakened anthroposophic activity in Israel. In 1969, two more homes, both for handicapped children, were opened, one in the south of the country and one in the north. In the 1970's growth became steadier; young people left Israel, gathered experiences in other countries and returned to Israel with new impulses, such as founding a kibbutz in 1982 based on anthroposophical impulses and vision.

The first Waldorf school was started in Tel A'viv, followed by the Ti'von Waldorf School a few years later. Today, in a country of eight million people, there are twenty Waldorf schools going from first to eighth grade; six high schools, five of which have double grades and long waiting lists; and many, many early childhood programs. It is estimated that close to 5,000 children are being educated in Waldorf primary and secondary classes, and over 3,000 children are being served in Waldorf early childhood classes.

Waldorf schools are not subsidized by the government in Israel but the government does provide land and buildings to independent schools for their use. This is of great support to most schools. For the

free-standing early childhood programs, however, it is often difficult to obtain these land/building grants.

Before our Council meeting, the Israeli Early Childhood Association organized a conference in the Ti'von Waldorf School, and many Council members were available to offer workshops or talks. Over two hundred Israeli teachers attended this one-day conference with the theme *I and You: the Space Between*, giving all of us an opportunity to meet one another and to share our work with young children. While in the past the kindergarten teachers would regularly meet, this was the first time in several years that they were able to host and attend an early childhood conference, which made this conference all the richer and more appreciated.

During our Council meeting, several important decisions and actions were taken up. IASWECE has been in the process of moving our legal seat from Sweden to Switzerland over the last year, and now our Swedish office will officially be closed in the new year. Once we finish our application for non-profit status in Switzerland, the process will be completed and the seat of IASWECE will once again be closer to our area of activity. We also provided teacher training support for 25 countries for the coming year, as well as for several of our mandated working groups so that they can continue to meet and work between Council meetings.

We began planning for several joyful events: 2016 marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Helmut von Kügelgen, the founder of the Kindergarten Association many years ago. 2019 marks the 100th anniversary of the first Waldorf School. While no concrete plans were made, IASWECE representatives carry the question of how each country can mark these occasions individually and how these important anniversaries bring us closer together as a world-wide movement.

The next IASWECE Council meeting will be held in Krakow, Poland, in April, 2016. ♦