

The heart of the festival - the inner attitude of the adult

by Philipp Reubke

As parents of young children, as kindergarten teachers and child care providers, we experience life in all its freshness, intensity and turbulence. Rudolf Steiner offered the advice that if we look back in the evening after each day to review what was essential and what was not, this can be a source of strength for the following day.

At the end of a year as well, we often look back with the question, what was really most important? Of all the events that took place, which are important for the future and will develop further? At the end of this year 2012, which many view as the end of an era and a threshold to something entirely new, this question arises again: what is truly essential?

It is therefore perhaps no surprise that various groups within the Waldorf movement have been especially concerned this past year with the question of what aspects of Waldorf education are truly essential. The IASWECE-Council is no exception. At our meetings this year in Dornach and Odessa, we discussed how we can speak about and stand for Waldorf education in such a way that it is evident that this education is for all children of the world, and that it can strengthen the development and creative potential slumbering in every child in every region and culture.



Preparing for a festival in a Waldorf Kindergarten in Russia

It is well known that the preparation and celebration of festivals in the Waldorf play a major role in Waldorf early childhood education. To what extent are the specific festivals we celebrate, and the way in which we celebrate them, truly essential? What is „religious education“ in the first seven years? From our conversations in the council and through our study of various lectures by Rudolf Steiner that were presented in our meetings, it is clear that the most essential aspect of Waldorf early childhood education can be summarized in one work: the educator.



Birthday celebration in the Mbgeti Kindergarten in Kenya

The young child develops and learns through that which the adults in the surroundings are doing. The concrete work that takes place there has an effect on the small child. And through the way in which the adult sweeps the floor, fastens a zipper or sets the table, the child feels intuitively what kind of human being this is, how he or she thinks, and what kinds of feelings are living within. This is the education of the child:

„In the end, it is a matter of how we ourselves are in the surroundings of the child in the first two and a half years of life.“ (Rudolf Steiner, Soul Economy and Waldorf Education,)



Cleaning with water and soap in the Florianopolis Waldorf Kindergarten in Brazil

In the question of religious education, it is no different. In fact, Rudolf Steiner expresses this in a radical way:

„No matter how often parents may talk about their own religious attitude, no matter what beautiful words they may speak, it has no meaning for the child at all. The words simply pass the child by. For anything directed at the child’s reason, even if formulated in terms intended to appeal to the child’s feelings, will fail to have any impact, at least until the change of teeth.

The only way of avoiding such heedlessness is for the adults around the child, through their actions and general behaviour, to give the child the possibility to imitate and absorb a genuine religious element right into the finest articulation of the vascular system.“

(Rudolf Steiner, The Child’s Changing Consciousness)



Sweeping the doorway in Chengdu Waldorf Kindergarten, China

As parents and educators at this time, we can thus best prepare for the festivals by concerning ourselves with the questions, who am I? How can I nurture and cultivate my thoughts and feelings in such a way that they can receive a spark from the spiritual world? And if we can do something with the children - take a walk along the beach on a mild summer evening on an island in Brazil, or under the dark pine trees in Finland, or in a city building on Fifth Avenue in New York, or a flower bedecked hut in Mumbai, - wherever we are or whatever we are doing - cleaning, decorating the house, dancing, lighting oil lamps or candles, or digging in the snow - the little child, actively participating or watching, will feel joy and will be strengthened through the spark we have received in our soul.



Freeplay in a Waldorf Kindergarten in Helsinki, Finland

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