

Collaboration with the International Forum for Steiner/Waldorf Education (“Hague Circle”)

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The International Forum is the council of the international Waldorf education movement. Twice a year, active Waldorf teachers from all over the world meet for a multi-day conference in one of the participating countries or at the Goetheanum in Dornach. These conferences provide opportunities for mutual understanding and exchange on key educational issues with national or global significance. The members of the International Forum bring their experiences to the meetings, and discuss - on the basis of differentiated perceptions - the key criteria of Waldorf education and their application in different geographic, cultural, economic and political regions of the world. In order to become a member of the International Forum, one must be invited by its Preparation Group to participate in the work of the Forum. The Preparation Group makes its decision in consultation with the respective country association.

Whereas the Council of IASWECE concerns itself in a similar way with pedagogical issues in relation to the first seven years, the International Forum is concerned with the entire Waldorf movement, from birth to completion of school, and concentrates more on themes that have to do with the education of school age children. This is evident in the fact that only two of the 41 members of the International Forum are kindergarten teachers. They are both also members of the IASWECE Council, so that there has been a healthy cooperation for many years, which has recently intensified.

Our collaboration has been particularly important in three main areas in recent years:

- **Plans for the celebration of the 100th birthday of Waldorf Education:** In 2019, it will be 100 years since the founding of the first Waldorf School. This occasion can serve on the one hand as the reason for an intensified and festive presentation of Waldorf Education to the public, and on the other hand for a deepened work on the foundations and perspectives of the anthroposophical study of the human being in institutions and organizations that feel connected to the impulses of Rudolf Steiner. All events, conferences, celebrations and performances in 2019 will be planned and carried out on a local or regional basis; however, the idea is that everyone involved will be aware of one another's activities and that there will be a special website in order to achieve this. If anyone is interested in taking initiative in this, please contact info@iaswece.org.
- **The book *Towards the Deepening of Waldorf Education*,** containing the meditations for teachers, was re-edited and expanded in the past year with new contributions by International Forum members. It is already available in German, and translations into English, Czech, Finnish, Norwegian and French are in process. In the past, this book was distributed in a very protected way. The idea now is that it should be available to all interested teachers, early childhood educators and students in Waldorf education. Country associations will distribute this book. If you are unable to locate a copy or if you want to organize a translation into your language, (funds are available) please contact Dorothee Prange at dorothee.prange@goetheanum.ch

- **The process for authorization to use the names „Waldorf“ and „Steiner“** has not yet been fully regulated for countries where there is no national Waldorf association. The German Association of Waldorf Schools, which carries the legal trademark for these names in many countries, has led negotiations with the International Forum and with IASWECE. and all have agreed on a process that will be announced soon. Waldorf kindergartens in countries where there is no Waldorf country association can already contact IASWECE at info@iaswece.org to state their wish for official permission. All other kindergartens should approach their country association.

Study

At the most recent meeting of the International Forum in November 2015 in Orange County (California, USA) it was once again obvious how important, interesting and stimulating the collaboration among the various education professions can be, when it comes to studying the anthroposophical view of the human being and developmental psychology.



Meeting of the International Forum in Orange County

The focus was on the spiritual background of the education in the upper classes. Douglas Gerwin (USA) presented some thoughts around the burning question of violence in our society. Upper class teachers are often confronted by the fact that their students are moving from one polarity to the other – from violence to lethargy – both of which are obstacles to learning and further development. If we consider the whole biography, a certain form of violent or intense bodily activity could be seen as appropriate in early childhood and a certain form of lethargy or contemplation could be seen as appropriate in old age. What could give adolescents and young adults the faculty of meaningful action and powerful thinking are free play and lively stimulation of the lower senses in early childhood, working with strong images in the primary school, and continuing working with images and enthusiasm in the upper school.

He gave a very interesting quote of Rudolf Steiner saying that violence is not a consequence of pressure that leads to an explosion; instead, it is the consequence of an emptiness which leads to an implosion which then makes the human being violent because he wants to overcome this inner emptiness through something which makes him feel strong again. Working with images is very important in this context:

“... Children have forces in their body which will tear them apart if they are not brought out in pictorial form. And what is the consequence? These forces are not lost; they spread, they gain in existence, they enter into the thoughts, the feelings, the will impulses. And what does that make people? Rebels, revolutionaries, dissatisfied people (...) When the world is in revolt today, it is the heavens which are in revolt; in other words, the heavens which are held back from the souls of people and which then come to appearance not in their own form but in its opposite, which come to appearance in conflict and bloodshed instead of imagination.”

(GA 199) lecture on September 11, 1920, quoted in an article by Michael Birnthal in: <http://www.erziehungskunst.de/en/article/violence-abuse/the-heavens-rumble/>

Michael Zech insisted that it would be very important for further development for upper school teachers to create a learning environment that allows that the meaning of the images to arise in the young people themselves rather than being given by the teachers. In primary school, for children from 7 to 14, Steiner insisted that judgments regarding truth, beauty and goodness should be given by the teacher and that the children should follow the teacher with their feelings.

In kindergarten it is strengthening for children to imitate the truth the beauty and the goodness of the adults' gesture. In the upper classes it is very important that the teacher leaves the students entirely free regarding the meaning or the value of gestures, pictures and concepts. The significance must awake in the soul of each pupil; this is the simulation of the growth of the I, which will then become able to be tolerant and open to the world in adulthood. Providing perfect explanations and fixed judgements would be like giving only sugar in Early Childhood and never allowing children to experience free play: this would weaken the inner strength of the child, make self-initiated activity impossible and would have the result that in the future, the adult, when confronted with new and unexpected conditions, would react with fear and violence. Nationalism, closed borders and violence are signs that Waldorf education is still not strong enough.

More information about the International Forum: <http://www.haager-kreis.org/en/current/>

Philipp Reubke is a member of the IASWECE coordination group.



The Waldorf School of Orange County