

IASWECE COUNTRY REPORT: DORNACH APRIL 12 – 16 2022

Dear members,

Earlier this year IASWECE sent out an expression of interest to all the country members to gauge how realistic it would be for the whole council to meet in person once again. The responses were varied but it seemed that the numbers that were in favour of travelling to Dornach could make an in-person meeting a possibility. Zoom attendance later became an option as well. Finally, two thirds of the members were able to travel. This included welcoming new council members who are Birgit Krohmer and Sigrid Jackstadt from Germany and Cathy Seiwert from France, and guests Tanja Eeg from Denmark and Inneke van Esbroeck from Belgium.

One of the regular agenda items, that is very important for the deepening of IASWECE's council work, is the opportunity on the first day of the meeting to participate in a prepared study. Presently changes and uncertainties are being expressed more than ever across the world. At the heart of the crisis, our work brings us to the focus of the young child and the adults around the child. Diversity has been the theme for study over the last three years.

Diversity: Cultivating the Middle Space in our social and collegial settings

Philipp Reubke from the Pedagogical Section introduced this theme for discussion. He described how these last two years of the pandemic with its fears and restrictions, and now the war in Ukraine with its traumatic violence and hatred, has had a polarizing effect on our society, with our diametrically opposed opinions in turn giving rise to further fear, anger, and hatred. We would all like a sense of normality to return – how can we cultivate the 'middle space' to heal this antagonistic situation? This question was also addressed in our 2019 conference by asking: how can the social needs of the times be met?

As Philipp reminded us, it takes a huge effort to understand one another. Inwardly we must do big (soul) work to move beyond positions of sympathy or antipathy and arrive at a place of understanding and acceptance of the other. Philipp pointed out that this inner work of acceptance is addressed in *How to Know Higher Worlds* – how listening to others with reverence rather than clinging obstinately to our own opinions is what leads us on the path of knowledge.

Rudolf Steiner explained how in the spiritual world we are all living within one another – in earthly words we understand this when we think of unity through love and compassion. This way of being is a gift from heaven, which the child brings to earth through the innate ability for imitation – a way of almost being the other. This is later expressed in role play, further developing an understanding of the other. The gift of curiosity is the first step to interest in the other, giving rise to the ability to meet others – an important step in self-development.

We then took these thoughts into small discussion groups. We considered what the deep division that we are experiencing in our society is asking us to do, both outwardly in our social structures and inwardly in our self-development. And most importantly, we discussed how we can guide the children to cultivate the 'middle space', particularly through the sense of touch and sense of life.

Philipp's reference: *How to know higher worlds? (Chapter 5, 2nd and 3rd conditions) R. Steiner GA 10*

Diversity: Japan and Denmark

Finding the middle space in diversity was beautifully illustrated by presentations from Japan and Denmark. A very thorough power point presentation demonstrated Japan's cultural and religious diversities and how they manage to implement the Waldorf Essentials for Early Childhood. There are over five main religious streams, and each family quite comfortably connects to different aspects of these religions. In Steiner kindergartens the Nativity is celebrated just before Japanese New year, both festivals sharing the essence of heralding the light and of giving thanks for life and growth. These two festivals bring a meeting of eastern and western cultures. Denmark gave a lively picture of the diverse settings in which the kindergartens exist – from forest to city, where some have the garden on the roof. Young children have lots of exposure to digital devices. Many children display difficulties; on the one hand ADHD, on the other, withdrawal and anxiety.

Through sharing presentations from different countries, we experience that the children, parents, and communities we serve are asking us to be conscious in everything we do, and to be role models where warmth, equilibrium, and enthusiasm for the future is always present. We are called to offer young children a healing and safe space, a possibility of becoming themselves while enfolded in a sense of belonging.

Changes in the Coordinating Group

The council received the news that Clara Aerts would be stepping down from her coordinating position. The initial shock soon transformed to gratitude for her dedication and for the enormous work that she has done for IASWECE over the years. Clara's Waldorf journey started 33 years ago. Since the pioneering days of IASWECE she has built bridges to other organisations, both within the Waldorf movement and without. Clara expressed pleasure at having been able to experience the changes and the development in this association; she believes IASWECE is in a very good place to grow into the future.

With the various changes in the coordinating group, the council took the opportunity to reflect on its current activities and to begin building up imaginations as to what is needed going forward. We considered whether, out of the past two years and the current situation, we are perceiving different and perhaps additional needs that should be addressed. Finally, we considered what would need to be addressed in the short term and what was required as a longer-term vision.

War in Ukraine (Report in April 2022)

Svitlana Eks joined the council meeting via zoom from Odesa in southwestern Ukraine. She described the bombing and destruction, relating that over 170 children have been killed and that some 7 million refugees have taken shelter in Western Ukraine, while upwards of 4 million are scattered throughout Europe. Svitlana spoke with gratitude of the many Waldorf families and colleagues in Europe who have opened their homes and schools to Waldorf refugees. She thanked *Freunde der Erziehungskunst* and all those who are contributing financial support to host families, and to colleagues who have lost their income with the closing of schools. She emphasised the need for educators to maintain equanimity, and the special work of outreach programmes to support them in guiding children who are experiencing trauma.

Financial Year 2021: Please refer to the full Annual Report 2021 on IASWECE's website.

Working with Other Organisations

Representatives from IASWECE met with ECSWE (European Council for Steiner/Waldorf Education) and have formed a group to work on political policies in the EU. One of the topics is Digital Media – IASWECE is a partner in the HERMMES (Holistic Education, Resilience and Media Maturity in Educational Settings) project which has just been approved as an Erasmus+ project and will thus receive EU funding. ELIANT (Alliance for Initiatives of Applied Anthroposophy) together with ECSWE has also formed a focus group to work on the topic of Digital Media.

IASWECE Board & CG have begun a series of meetings with country member associations. All council members are encouraged to arrange such meetings.

A spontaneous contribution on behalf of Australia

Early in the planning weeks for the Vital Years conference, and prior to me going to Dornach, the world was becoming aware of the situation in the Ukraine. As we are so far away from Europe, I was wondering how we could use this travel opportunity at such short notice, to make a contribution. Through a conversation with the Vital Years planning group, some of the members enthusiastically connected with a colleague, who had experienced a shop loss due to the flooding in Lismore. Our thanks go to Melissa Adams who open heartedly sent some of her beautiful handcrafted items. Julie McVeigh offered to send a Mother Earth puppet as did Lana Risi. It was a wonderful feeling to be carrying these contributions with me across the oceans into the hands of Council Members, to contribute to the start of our Ukraine fundraising. We were able to contribute Euro 208 into IASWECE's restricted donations account for the Ukraine on behalf of Australia. *The Nativity puppets have gone to South Africa; Julie's Mother Earth has gone to Sweden; Lana's indigenous Mother Earth has gone to the USA ; the three Star babies have gone to Poland; the small indigenous puppets have gone to Israel and Hungary and the unicorn has gone to Germany.*



Project Support

Projects supported by IASWECE have bravely endured the challenges of the pandemic and becoming active again. New applications for support have come from Iran (Iranian students are training in the Waldorf kindergarten in Yerevan, Armenia), from the Shalita refugee camp in Lebanon (the Waldorf kindergarten Bait-al I Sham opened there in 2015 and an official training course is now desirable), and from two areas in Beirut ,for the establishment of Waldorf early childhood training courses.

Teacher Training Working Group

Members of the IASWECE teacher training network have been taking part in conversations with the online ITEP (International Teacher Education Project) and are meeting as a group to explore the themes presented by ITEP and to examine the essentials of early childhood training.

The IASWECE teacher training working group is now preparing for an in-person teacher training conference in Vilnius, Lithuania, 9 – 12 October 2022, following the IASWECE council meeting. **Information is now available for trainers who wish to attend the meeting in Vilnius.**