

## 100 Years of Steiner Waldorf Kindergarten and Early Childhood Kindness, Strength and Love - Seeds for a healthy unfolding

Philipp Reubke



The little child comes into the world delicate and tender and in need of help, into today's world, where we are so proud of our strength, intelligence and independence. The child, on the other hand, is 100% dependent and can neither reflect on the past nor plan for the future; its physical existence is permanently threatened.

However, the little child is very good at something that many adults are not so good at: the child is unconditionally devoted to its environment and loves us so much that it identifies intensely with us. So much so that it gradually adopts our way of controlling the body, communicating and reflecting.

But this process takes a few years, and we don't always find it easy to have someone around us who is so weak, simple-minded and dependent. With our love of strength, intelligence and independence, we are less and less willing to have children ourselves or to look after children. The birth rate is falling in many countries, and early childhood educators are desperately needed everywhere, as are teachers.

When the child smiles gently at us, are we ready to shed our rough shell? Our tendency is to want to be the strongest in countless conflicts and to treat our environment roughly.

When the child screams and rages, are we prepared to remain benevolent, tolerant, patient, and upright, even if we don't always understand the child?

If the child urgently needs us - physically, emotionally or spiritually - are we prepared to live, work and be in its presence in such a way that the child gradually feels comfortable in its body and explores its surroundings in a healthy and strong way?

A small child needs our kindness, our inner strength and our love. The more we cultivate these qualities, the better the child will do. Living and working with a small child can be an enormous challenge. But it can also be an enormous opportunity to turn to these qualities, which do not easily thrive in today's living conditions.



***100 years of Steiner Waldorf Kindergartens and Early Childhood Education***  
**Kindness, Strength and Love - Seeds for a healthy unfolding**

The Council of IASWECE and the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum are preparing an international conference to mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the first Waldorf kindergarten by Elisabeth von Grunelius. It will take place from

**April 8 to 12, 2026 at the Goetheanum (Dornach/Switzerland).**

Everyone who lives and works with young children from birth to seven is cordially invited. Please make a note of the date! Suggestions for joint preparation for the conference will follow.





Just as flowers, vegetables and trees need certain conditions to develop well, so do children. Just as it makes little sense to artificially force plants to produce flowers and fruit that are not inherent in their nature, it makes just as little sense to teach young children something through educational programs. After all, they want to learn and try out so much on their own initiative, and they manage to do so if the adults have created the right conditions. "Kindergarten" - this name for pre-school facilities, first introduced by Friedrich Froebel in 1840, is a good expression for the special nature of the child in the first six to seven years of life. The gardener waters, enriches and loosens the soil; the early childhood educator creates a play space, structures play time, and sets an example through their work, their language, their inner attitude. Each creates a favourable environment for free development and activity.

Self-education is also like working in the garden and kindergarten. Little or nothing can be achieved through coercion and rules. Everything depends on me wanting certain qualities and abilities so strongly that I actually develop them. Here too, certain conditions are helpful, others are a hindrance – haven't we all experienced this?

Harmful:

Stress, illness, fanaticism, conflict situations, complaining about others, exaggerated self-centeredness, as well as obliviousness, pride and greed....

Helpful:

Paying attention to our own health, not hardening oneself in conflicts, wanting to change ourselves rather than others, taking our own thoughts and feelings as seriously as our external actions, not imposing our own points of view on others, not forgetting our own points of view and intentions, being true to ourselves and taking an interest in the world at the same time, being grateful and loving.

Are these helpful conditions for self-education not precisely the qualities of an ideal kindergarten teacher, mother, father, or nursery teacher? Aren't these also the qualities that we want to promote through Waldorf and Rudolf Steiner education in the first years of life?

At least that is what IASWECE Council members and the conference planning group thought. We therefore suggest that in preparation for the conference "100 years of Waldorf kindergarten and early 100 Years of Steiner Waldorf Kindergarten and Early Childhood, P. Reubke

childhood," we read a chapter from the book "How to Know Higher Worlds", in which these qualities are described<sup>1</sup>. At the conference we then want to work on these questions in more detail:

- How do I specifically promote these qualities in myself?
- How do we help each other in our institutions, among colleagues?
- What can we do in our daily educational practice so that the personalities we have around us as children can later develop these qualities?

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*Philipp Reubke, is a former Waldorf kindergarten teacher in France and is a member of the IASWECE board and council. Since October 2020, he has been a member of the leadership of the Pedagogical Section, from 2022 together with Constanza Kaliks.*

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Steiner – “Knowledge of Higher Worlds and its Attainment (GA 10), Chapter: chapter conditions of esoteric training  
[https://rsarchive.org/Books/GA010/English/RSPC1947/GA010\\_c04.html](https://rsarchive.org/Books/GA010/English/RSPC1947/GA010_c04.html)