

A Mentoring Visit to Flame Tree Waldorf Kindergarten in Fiji

Edith van der Meer



The welcome to the kindergarten was warm and inviting. Present were Shirlyn Singh, the director and lead teacher, Nani, Sai, Lora and Elizabeth, who are the main teachers and the relievers, Suman, Fazai, Malisha and Shazia. The kindergarten runs a kindergarten group of around 20 children, a "Lalai" class for 3-4 year olds with 13 children, a "Chiria" class in the afternoon for children over 5 and a playgroup for mothers/nannies and children in the mornings, which is very well attended.

The first couple of days we worked on building trust so we were able to open up to each other in earnest. This was very tentative at first and I later came to understand the cultural significance of this. We spent our time together exploring the two, three and four-fold way of looking at the human being, sharing morning circles, exploring what it means to create an 'etheric womb' for the children, how to care for the environment, the importance of storytelling, play as an expression of awakening consciousness, and working through the book 'Crisis points-working through personal problems' by Julian Sleigh¹ to work on trust building and developing personal relationships.

Life in Fiji does not seem to have the speed we experience in the Western world, but other aspects are just as troublesome for young children (technology, screens, push-down of academics, risk avoidance, over scheduling esp. for city children, overwhelm in sense experiences). It was very interesting for us all to learn about the various differences in culture to do with this topic.

¹ Sleigh, Julian. Crisis Points- Working Through Personal Problems. Floris Books, 1998.



We also made wool pictures. This is such an amazing activity: a sense of wonder for this medium and the calming effect this has on everyone is not to be under estimated. Most of all we enjoyed the fruits of our work and they could hardly imagine that such lovely work had come through their hands. We also did other needle felting activities.

Our final day was spent in a national park where we discussed teacher resilience and caring for our own body, soul and spirit in this outside nature environment. This was a great way to finish formally our time together. We followed this by a hike through this park in search of a swimming hole and a shared meal in a restaurant.

My overall impression of my time with the teachers of 'Flame Tree' Waldorf kindergarten in Suva, Fiji was a very positive one. Here are striving people at work, for whom anthroposophy and Waldorf education are relatively new. They have not had formal training and have gathered together all their knowledge from seminars, conferences in New Zealand and Australia and mentor input over the last 5 years. The next step would be to send one of the teachers to complete a training course.

The collegial working between the teachers was great. These people have fun together as well as work hard to see to the needs of the young children in their care.

I feel humbled and blessed that I have been in the position of visiting and working with these teachers for a week. It has certainly enriched my life and views of the needs in Fiji and to work with colleagues so earnestly for over a week has opened my eyes to yet another culture and its specific needs.



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Originally from the Netherlands, Edith van der Meer has been living in New Zealand since 1976. She taught handwork at Taikura Rudolf Steiner School in Hastings for 14 years. She then retrained and became a nursery teacher and later a kindergarten teacher at the same school. She is currently involved in kindergarten support (in New Zealand, Fiji and Indonesia), and offers parent and craft courses.

