

## Conference in Hannover - „Learning from the Child“

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**Waldorf kindergartens are sprouting like mushrooms. Recently the Association of Waldorf Kindergartens in Germany celebrated the 100th birthday of its founder, Helmut von Kügelgen, with a conference on the needs of children.**

To celebrate the 100th birthday of its founder, Helmut von Kügelgen, the Association of Waldorf Kindergartens hosted a conference in Hannover on November 19th with the theme, „Right to Childhood! The responsibility is ours!“ As an educator and editor – von Kügelgen was a Waldorf teacher in Stuttgart and the editor of the journal *Erziehungskunst* after 1948 – Helmut von Kügelgen’s impulses for the Waldorf kindergarten movement continue to guide its direction today.



Approximately 600 guests and participants filled the Eilenriede Hall in the Hannover Congress Center. Journalist and television moderator Markus Brock moderated the event. At the morning’s opening ceremony, the Kügelgen family was represented by three of the daughters – Elisabeth von Kügelgen, Angelika Fried and Michaela Glöckler – as well as a grandson Martin McKeen. The congratulatory words of the opening ceremony were framed with piano music and poetry by Helmut von Kügelgen.



The founding of the Association of Waldorf Kindergartens in 1969 was a response to a period of political and social unrest. Its central intention was and continues to be the protection of the young child, respect for its dignity and the development of its individuality.



“It is not a matter of methodological systems, pre-determined programs and compulsory goals – it is a matter of awakening life and preparing the birth of the individuality into a healthy physical body and into a healthy soul” said Michael Wetenkamp, board member of the Association, quoting its founder Helmut von Kügelgen. Against early intellectualization, early school entrance and media consumption, the movement created a protected space for the “capacity to develop one’s own capacities” which the child brings into the world, said Michaela Glöckler.

The time in kindergarten, according Wolfgang Sassmannshausen, should not be understood as a preparation for school. Working with the life forces is central to kindergarten education: the question about what the child needs can only be answered through constant, honest, independent striving. This concern of Helmut von Kügelgen should be made strong again today.

Worldwide there are 200 Waldorf kindergartens. In Asian countries like China and South Korea, there is currently a boom in Waldorf education. Individual freedom and societal pressures for conformity: growing numbers of parents want to protect their children from strict demands and rigid expectations. How is this possible without isolating oneself from society?

The afternoon lectures widened the horizon in various directions. Johannes Stüttgen, in his lecture, „The child who wants to be born,“ described personal biography as an artistic process that follows an inner necessity rather than a predetermined goal, and freedom as a condition of potential which constantly needs to be grasped anew. Michaela Glöckler took the motto of her father, Helmut von Kügelgen - “one who remains in a process of becoming” –as the starting point of her lecture on the conditions for a healthy childhood, from her many years of experience as a pediatrician and leader of the Medical Section at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland.

Manfred Spitzer rounded off the lectures with a contribution in the evening on „Digital Kindergärten? Why digital media are especially harmful in early childhood,“ in response to the „digital pact“ planned by German Education Minister Johanna Wanka; a lengthy podium discussion concluded the evening.

Immediately following the conference, the Association of Waldorf Kindergartens in Germany wrote a Memorandum for the Protection of the Young Child, which accompanies this newsletter in various languages.

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