

“A little here, a little there fills the tin” Waldorf Education in East Africa

Silviah Njagi

The first Waldorf School and Kindergarten began in 1989 in Nairobi Kenya. Since then the Waldorf movement has grown in size and popularity. There are 3 full Waldorf Schools and many Waldorf inspired schools also known as ‘initiatives’ in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Each of these schools and initiatives has one or more kindergartens attached to them.



The early childhood centers have mainly three subgroups; the toddler groups which are from 18 months to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 years, the playgroups 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 years to 4 years and kindergartens 4 years to 7 years. There are several streams of each age group in most of the early childhood education centers. In some of the early childhood education centers, there is a reception group twice a week for an hour. This is where the children who are going to be class one ready that year, are gathered together for specific movements, simple wood crafts and simple speech exercises. Parent and guardian involvement is key in all the Waldorf early childhood education centers and to a certain extent in the initiatives. All this is enabled by the continuous training and mentoring of teachers.



The East African In-House Teacher Training Program

The Waldorf Teacher Training in East Africa is a modular course that takes place during the school holidays. It carries on for three and a half years culminating in a Diploma in Waldorf Early Childhood Education. The Freunde der Erziehungskunst, IHF, the GLS bank and Partners, Evidenz, Sanduko a Ndege among other funders have been of utmost support in sponsoring student teachers into the training. Most of the teachers that attend the training have a state recognized qualification. Mentoring is therefore a very important aspect in the training process.

The mentors are mainly sourced from the international community. Resources are necessary in getting the mentors to the different parts of East Africa where the teachers are stationed. IASWECE plays a key role in ensuring that this process continues as smoothly as possible.

Reflecting back and planning ahead

The teacher training has mainly been run by very dedicated people who have for about 18 years consistently developed and implemented the teacher training curriculum. Ann Sharfman and Peter van Alphen from South Africa actively continue to mentor the East African teachers in the next phase of development. Currently a transition phase has begun, where the East African experienced Waldorf teachers will gradually take on the responsibility of the teacher training. This needs resources and teacher training fees have had to be adjusted upwards to accommodate all the running costs involved. This has been well received and the training center is also gradually attracting a few self-sponsored teachers and parents who aim to enrich their parenting and teaching methods through Steiner's philosophy. The Advanced Course caters for teachers who have successfully completed the foundation course in further developing and researching their teaching. We hope that the experienced Waldorf teachers can create a community of local mentors and support each other in the work with young children.



Closing words

East Africa continues to be diverse in its vast variety of cultures and traditions. Festivals resonate well with the East African community building motto of Harambee. Though resources continue to be a constant growing pain, we trust that through the Spirit of Harambee as the Swahili saying goes, "Haba na haba hujaza kibaba" (A little here, a little there fills the tin); as we build the communities around Waldorf Education and the Waldorf Early Childhood Education Centers we hope to keep better resolving this challenge for all peoples. We celebrate Waldorf Education as it resonates within the community aspects of East Africa. We are grateful for all the support and love we have received in the past. May we continue to be forever renewed through this amazing way of education even as we aim to grow beyond what currently exists!

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