

World Early Childhood Conference 2026 A Retrospective View

Jill Tina Taplin



What a privilege to be part of this conference, joining one thousand other participants from across the world, all passionate about the Waldorf approach to early childhood education. As an 'elder' now involved in teacher education and mentoring, it was wonderful to see so many young colleagues present, giving a youthful buzz to the whole event. This really gives me hope that our movement will thrive and evolve into the future. How fortunate we were to have such a beautiful venue to hold and care for us over the days of the conference. The welcome was warm, the sun shone (until the last day) and we felt so happy to be there.



I loved how the audience's youthful enthusiasm was audible in their response to the speakers. They did not just clap; they whooped, whistled, and stamped their feet. Rightly so, because the speakers were masterful in the way that they wove together in their allotted 45-minute presentations the conference theme that was based around the seven conditions for spiritual development. Choosing these seven simple rules for living as a unifying theme was a wonderful inspiration. The seven conditions are not complicated, and they are relevant whatever the practicalities of your life are. For example, I was involved in a workshop on healthy nutrition, and we could discuss precisely how each was relevant to that topic. As an illustration, I will include here my notes on Philipp Reubke's introduction to the seven conditions.

For each of the first four conditions, he sketched a threefold picture with possibilities of balance at the centre:

Do I focus on what gives pleasure?	Do I focus on healthy development?	Do I focus on what builds resilience?
Antipathy	Transforming antipathy and sympathy to bring relationship	Sympathy
The power of our thoughts	Bring these together as a support for healthy development: acknowledging both the visible and the invisible.	The power of our feelings
Do I overwhelm others with my intentions?	Can I balance my intentions and the intentions of the world?	Do I just meet the immediate question coming from the world?

For the fifth condition, we can see that children are active because they love to do what they do. Can we bring together activity and love as we do the right thing with joy?

For the sixth condition, remember that we are not an island and we have all have much to be grateful for. All our challenges are possibilities for development. Can I balance seeing what I have to give to the world and true humility?

For the seventh condition, our work is like gardening, always for the future, for what will become. This sums up the conditions from five to seven.

Silvia Jensen shared an allegorical painting of 'Chastity' or pureness. The child is a pure soul, receiving flowers from heaven, and we can bring this pureness into our early childhood groups through the quality of our gestures, not perfect but always trying to improve. Angels, archangels and archai will give us strength in our thinking, courage in our speaking, wisdom in our impulses. In this way, we can trust in the eternal spring of intuition and always bring flowers to the children, matching their pureness. Adam Blanning spoke about how to protect our physical and spiritual health, reflecting on the first condition. Perhaps we need to do less but do it more deeply! By continually creating love and freedom, a middle space emerges for our physical and spiritual health, one that prepares us for encounters with others.



Anita Isla referred to the flight instructions, to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others. This is the basis of collaboration. When we create our own safe space, we can be present to meet what comes towards us each day and embrace change when it is needed. In this way, we can stay flexible and creative, capacities we need to create a new world with gratitude for the children who want to come to us. Peter Selg spoke of the School of Spiritual Science, initiated by Rudolf Steiner in 1913 as the foundation stone of the first Goetheanum was laid. This is a School for changing the life conditions on earth, it is for the children of the future. He told us that the power of imitation is a gift of the cosmos!

Kathy MacFarlane's contribution followed and centred on the fourth condition, the need to find a balance between the demands of the world and the development of our inner life. Every challenge is an opportunity. For example, we can meet the breathlessness of modern life with our interest in outdoor spaces, real work, and authentic reverence. This is how we can be worthy of taking up the task handed to us by cosmic beings. Li Zhang and Clara Aerts shared a presentation exploring the conditions of steadfastness and gratitude as themes that balance one another. Steadfastness has the concentration of the sun radiating out warmth, power, and strength to the periphery, whatever is happening in the world. We can find that power in our hearts when we love our actions. We also need to listen to the world as our hearts are kept alive by gratitude.

There was a One Hundred Year Celebration that included contributions from Paula Levy, Philipp Gelitz, and Michaela Glöckler. These speakers reminded us of our part in the worldwide movement with a history to maintain and a future to create, which connects us with all those working for healthy childhood experiences. Philipp made the strong point that we must look at Waldorf education through the lens of today's challenges, rather than trying to view today's challenges through the lens of Waldorf education. What do children need today, and how can Waldorf education and care provide it? We do not have to defend Waldorf education, as our task is to work for children.

On the last day of the conference, the leaders of the Sections of the School of Spiritual Science were invited to contribute thoughts on how the research of their sections linked with early childhood work.



This gathering of Section Leaders, all speaking about the importance of early childhood education and care, created on the Goetheanum stage a most powerful picture. It reminded me that we are working together for the good in the light of the spirit, and the early childhood group is a place of potential were the new can unfold.

Constanza Kaliks made the final contribution to the conference, speaking of the humbling task of welcoming star beings who are becoming earth beings and finding their star on earth. We are inspired by Rudolf Steiner's picture of the evolving human being. The seven conditions help us take on this task as a daily experience. Teachers work with the soul, using living, breathing knowledge of the heart, which comes from the starry realms to earth in order to heal. We carry the gesture of Mary, enabling, embracing, and sustaining life. A Brazilian teacher and activist said that dreams and ideas are the most concrete substance we have to build the world. Our work is with the dreams and ideas of children.

Around these keynote presentations, there was a well-balanced rhythm of discussion groups and workshops. There was singing, dancing, and nourishing cultural evening events, including a festival of puppet plays. Everyone I spoke to was filled with gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this wonderful conference and full of inspiration to take back to their work. I have a new friend thanks to the leaf I collected from the IASWECE tree. I left the conference with the knowledge that, whatever our circumstances, we are all moving with courage and imagination into a future where these two virtues will be essential.

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