

RESEARCH AND CONFERENCES

Children at Risk Perceiving and Meeting the Needs of Today's Children
By Dr. Michaela Glockler

The following article is a detailed summary of talks given by Dr. Michaela Glöckler at the Eastcoast Kindergarten Conference on February 15-16, 2002 at Sunbridge College in Spring Valley, New York. We thank Kate Gage, who took and transcribed these notes, and Jennifer Kleinbach for editing them for publication. These notes have not been reviewed by the speaker.

Friday, February 15, 2002

We live in a new millennium and we are faced with children who bring with them new gifts and challenges. There are many new books out concerning these children, books which help adults to look at children with full attention, to take seriously the idea that children are adults in the early stages of development. They help us to love these children and to have respect for the dignity of the human being at every age. These books open the eyes of parents and professionals to see what each child is bringing into incarnation.

Indigo Children helps us to understand that children are coming from the spiritual world cloaked in their auric destinies. *Children Of The Stars* helps us to look at the effect that pathologically-oriented diagnostics (looking at what is wrong, what is unbalanced) may have on a child. Many parents come in and say what is wrong, what is out of order, how their child doesn't fit in. What does it mean for a child to be diagnosed as having minimal brain dysfunction, ADD, or lack of control? These say what is missing, and the child then lives with the feeling: "I'm not in order. I'm not a good human being. I'm not like father and mother. They are okay, but I'm not okay." If all the adults think that a child is not okay, it's difficult for the child to feel otherwise. *Difficult Children Don't Exist*, which explores this dynamic, made a lot of professionals angry.

These books can help to stop certain harmful attitudes toward children, and that is good. But they also create new theories, which we then put upon the child, as when, after reading, we decide: "Oh, I must admire this child's expanded spirituality." In this way, we create educational attitudes, which are not helpful for the children. So, these books are helpful as eye openers, but not in providing strategies for dealing with children!

On the one hand, these authors contribute the valuable sense that all children are carrying something precious out of the invisible, incarnation means to make visible what was invisible. This is art. Every child is an artist, trying to bring its own nature into visibility, to explore, to see something new-not to confirm what-he already knows. Looked at in this way, if children encounter our expectations and our prejudgments, then they have difficulties revealing their true selves in the world. The common addition that is so problematic is the idea that these children are so wise and wonderful that we should never educate them.

In every child there is good will. Difficult children or adults are only struggling to come into the body. How can we help each other? As teachers or parents we have our faculties raised to the level of the children who have trained us. They show us the path. No doctor is an experienced doctor without meeting lots and lots of patients. We come to see that our biological age and life experience and autonomy are a bit further along than the child-is, but not our inner being. If we are able to see this, then we can raise children who are much wiser than we are. Then we are inspired.

So we have a new paradigm. The past century held an old, pathogenetic understanding of medicine: that the doctor has to correct defects (metabolic, emotional, etc), and that the educator has to correct failures. The new paradigm has a wonderful name: the salutogenetic concept, or resilience. What makes children resilient, resistant to attacks of violence and abuse in a problematic milieu?

In France there is a new book: *Stronger Than Hate*. This is the autobiography of a boy who, when he was five years old, was brought to the hospital, beaten almost to death. His nose was smashed in fifteen places.

Only through being taken to the hospital was he taken away from his abusive home and sent to orphanages. Later, when he had married and had children, this man was encouraged to write his life story. He describes his youth before the age of five. When he was three years old, his mother, in Paris, dropped him in a crowded street and went away forever, hoping he would be adopted. The police, however, brought the boy back home. The father, an aggressive alcoholic, could not cope, and brought the boy to his sister, who had a normal family life. She told the boy: "Now you belong to us." He had never heard this before. The boy, at age three, could not speak or walk properly. But, in the three months that he lived with his aunt, he experienced

how it is among human beings. He was given a standard. 'What is life, relationship, me. Every morning there was rhythm, ritual, play, sisters and brothers-a normal family life in which religion, respect, and quality of relationship played a role. After three months the boy was brought back to the father, who had remarried. He lived with his father for two years and was the child who was beaten whenever anything went wrong. He escaped whenever he could-to the doghouse. But, of course, he had to eat and sleep, and would return home. In the end he was beaten and smashed down the steps and was brought to the hospital. This was his chance.

This story can give us real encouragement! To experience Rudolf Steiner's first motif, "the world is good" - even if only for three months! - can waken the good center of the personality for the whole of life, even when many more bad experiences come through than good ones.

This shows how realistic Rudolf Steiner was when he said it is important that the educators of the youngest children not be too young themselves. Young teachers should teach in the grades; older teachers should teach small children, since this age needs a higher level of morality. If we are around very young children, we have the duty to be better than we are.

Modern economic theory and research looks for new trends for the big money of tomorrow. It charts the economic booms of the past and the present: The zenith of the current information-technology boom has already passed. Market researchers say that, in general we can make big money for ten to fifteen years, but then we need a new technology, for example, biotechnology. But even in the new generations of biotechnology, it can't boom as big as it did boom -we have to look for new business, new products, to be the big moneymakers. Before industrial technology it was petrochemistry (plastics) and the auto industry (1950 to 1980). Before this it was electrochemistry. Before that it was steel, and train traffic. Before that it was the cotton industry, and steam engines. In the 1800's we had the industrial revolution, and this started the global economy.

We still wear cotton, cotton still makes money. We still use trains, drive cars, and use petrochemicals. These still go on, but something totally new has to appear for the big money. This is prepared. The new boom will be psycho-social health.

The World Health Organization has published studies saying that if present trends continue, within the next century every second person will be addicted to drugs. If every second person is unhealthy, that creates a tremendous market. Economists point out that if we let things go this way it will undermine and destroy the global economy, for if too many people are ill, then too many people can't work or can only work poorly. Even now, illness costs us millions of dollars. For the first time there is an interest, a synergy between government and economics: How can we create better health in mankind?

The government can't pay for complete insurance coverage-Sweden's system, for example, has collapsed. A change is needed. Those who make money want to continue to make money. So, big money from the economic realm is being given to health research not only into what is wrong, but also into what is good, what is salutogenetic. This means, "where health comes from," in contrast to the term pathogenetic, "where suffering comes from".

Why have I got a cough when the twenty people around me do not have it? How can I avoid stress? What can I do to better cope with noise and stress? In this world, we need people who have the energy to adapt to difficult life situations and to transform the system. We need people who are not defeated by their life circumstances, but who can transform them.

Rudolf Steiner said that learning is painful. He did not want just a nice school. Without resistance and problems we will never develop. Our best faculties and inspirations are born out of problems. Difficult children are my inspiration.

In Germany a book by Kurt Schule has been published which looks at the question: How can a school make children healthy and ready to learn? There is not one word about Waldorf education in this book even though it is published in Germany, the heart of Waldorf education-but what he speaks about is pure Waldorf education. He lays out all the Waldorf education guidelines: Children need what is whole, they need stability. Throw out computers and videos. Waldorf checklists are in this book, without naming Waldorf education. He brings forth the most essential pedagogical guidelines, and asks: How can I encourage on a soul and physical level the parts of my personality that keep me healthy? He lists the following qualities: A cheerful attitude (Rudolf Steiner also speaks of the "cheerful smiles of the educator."), confidence and self-trust, self-esteem, and security in one's relationships. One way to develop is to be exposed to those who have them. We can also gain these faculties by working to make the events of our lives understandable, meaningful, and manageable. According to Aaron Antonovsky, it is healthy to have a worldview which is meaningful for us, and gives us a sense of coherence. If we have a whole picture, with all the details in order, this allows us to work through all the aspects of any given life-which maybe positive, negative, or neutral. Of course, it is most difficult to make sense of the bad things that happen.

If we live, knowing that whatever comes—even if it is something very bad or painful—wants to help us toward something good, we can develop forgiveness, endurance, patience. There is nothing that comes that I cannot use to develop faculties that I don't have.

The way I understand the whole landscape gives live events meaning. Then things become manageable. In Waldorf schools this process is helped by the recitation of the morning verse: "I look into the world, in which the sun is shining..." Through this we work out a world-view that never becomes sectarian or fixed, but is always growing.

Nothing is more problematic for children than having adults around them who don't know why they are there, who don't start the day happy, who are glad when the day is over and they can relax. This is not for children! Children need to meet adults who haven't lost the child within, adults who can't resist a little smile when the children are naughty! No order will be terrible if this little smile is there.

Our program for this weekend asks certain questions: What are the needs of young children today? What gifts and capacities are they bringing as they incarnate in this new millennium? What is it that is a bit different from before? What kind of eyes do I need to see the changes? How do I personally deal with these questions? What are the needs and gifts of the children in my kindergarten? What are they asking of me? Why are they dealing with me and not someone else?

Young children, who long to experience that the world is good, are increasingly exposed to evil. How can we provide them with a protective sheath and help them to meet, confront, and transform evil in these challenging times?

Saturday, February 16, 2002

Dr. Glöckler began by giving her interpretation of the American flag. Fifty stars: The occult meaning of 50 is Whitsun, which is 50 days after Easter. This is a time when everyone understands everyone. Seven red stripes: This refers to the rhythm of development. The 'American' cultural epoch will be the seventh one, the last one. (We are now in the fifth post-atlantean epoch.) Red and blue: These colors are the pillars of the two blood streams. White: This is the color of the apocalypse. We all wear white clothes at the end.

If we meet our children every morning in the spiritual aspect of our flag and rededicate ourselves to this spirit every time we see it—then we can unite in trust for the future of mankind. How can we provide our children with a strong moral, spiritual ground of security, a protective sheath? The flag is a symbol that the people want to live together in one spirit. This can be a symbol of protection.

But now, in the fifth epoch, we have to struggle with evil. All high spiritual realities can be abused, misused. People speak about their holiest symbols, but their actions are the opposite. Some are making war, some peace. This is the normal situation of the fifth epoch. Rudolf Steiner says this is the situation in which we will develop consciousness, individually and as a society.

Now, in the era of the consciousness soul, children soon experience their "I am," but then comes the question: Who loves me? Who accepts me? How can I acknowledge myself if I have never felt acknowledged? Does my mother know what she's talking about when she addresses me by name? I am a being that doesn't know where it comes from, where it goes, why it is here. This constitutional insecurity is part of our epoch.

In the fourth cultural epoch, that of Aristotle, things were simpler. There was an ethic for the young, and an ethic for the old. Aristotle's two pillars are heredity (where I came from, How I am born) and education (where I am). The human being is the result of how he is born and how he is brought up. This was still accepted at the end of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, people began to rethink this. Freud discovered the power of the individual to deal with his milieu and his constitution. Then came Rudolf Steiner. Paul Klee discovered the power of the creative individual. From the 1970's onward, we have had literature speaking about a third factor which stimulates the way our character is formed, even having the strongest influence: relationship.

In the beginning of the 1990's, Robert Plomin and Judy Dunn wrote *Why Siblings Are So Different*. Their research showed that the strongest power is that of relationship. For example, a mother has five children. She says she treats them all equally. If the children are asked how she treats them, every child says something different. You would think it was five different mothers!

This is the consciousness soul. Every individual experiences things differently. This is a matter of karma. One child is glad he escaped notice. One is the beloved. One feels over-controlled. One child has a heart condition and is babied. (What effect does this have, of constantly being 'special' or 'not right'?)

The second part of the "I am" leads us into a huge abyss. Through his mystery dramas, Rudolf Steiner was the first to openly speak about this abyss, the threshold to the spiritual world.

For every human being, the "I am" is incarnated. I am here, and I am happy to be here. By all the laws of reincarnation and karma this is a reality we cannot change. But the other part is not organized by nature or the hierarchies. It is each individual's own business. Through the possibility of freedom, we create ourselves anew out of nothing, out of total insecurity, out of the abyss. This is not a nice experience, but it is a precondition to the dignity of man.

The dignity of the incarnated person can be violated, be wounded, but the dignity of the "I am" is in another place. Its spiritual existence can never be touched.

In his autobiography, Jacques Lusseyran describes trust, protection, and warmth that his parents gave him in early childhood. He speaks of the feeling of living without questions where everything comes from, and of feeling accepted as one is, of being confirmed in one's existence. He experienced that this gave him a magic weapon, an armor which protected him throughout his life. When he was twenty-one,

Lusseyran was deported with colleagues from the French resistance to Buchenwald. They were taken in cattle cars without windows, standing shoulder to shoulder. One day the train stopped, and he asked a friend: "Can you see where we are?" Through a crack, they could see Weimar, where Goethe had lived. This was synonymous with spiritual protection for him. His heart opened, and he said: "Well, nothing bad can happen if we are here."

We have to create our own identity by consciousness, and we do this by following a path of initiation. We can, for example, follow a path of knowledge into initiation, as is outlined in Rudolf Steiner's *Knowledge Of Higher Worlds*.

There is also the path of creativity, of self-experience. All famous artists know this, the secret of rebirthing themselves. When I start an artistic training, I have to re-learn and newly cultivate my ability to speak. I develop a new speech, or way to paint, sing, or act. This path is less through conscious thought and more through a conscious experience of one's self. It is the "I" that is active in creating one's own identity. It is the "I" that is established by creative activity.

Then there is the path that wakes up our eternal spiritual being by working through life experience. This is what Lusseyran went through in the concentration camp as a young man of twenty-one. Imagine, being blind in a concentration camp. How could he protect himself? In moral disorder, he was totally blind. But he re-found moral seeing when he re-found himself, in total trust, open and oriented toward the central ideals of truth, love, freedom, autonomy. How can I live with my relationships so that love can develop more between us? How can I act so that my autonomy, and that of others, can grow? In this way we can develop auric sight. The first step of Lusseyran's initiation was through life.

In the camp, Lusseyran met a blacksmith, an initiate who opened Lusseyran's inner eyes again. He said: "This Buchenwald, this horrible place, is not an invention of the Nazis. They only make visible a possibility within each of us. Why do you not enjoy every moment you are allowed to live, here in the camp? Discover joy in this existence. Do you remember your life before Buchenwald? How many hours were you not in agreement with yourself, and not experiencing the joys of life? You lived in Buchenwald before you came here. You had Little Buchenwald at home. There you also hated and disagreed. Those were the same experiences; they were a little diluted, but they had the same quality." From then on, Lusseyran was able to experience every moment from the eternal point of view. One day, the blacksmith came to Jacques and said: "I have to say goodbye. They will take me off the earth." This was their last meeting.

How can I confirm the meaningfulness of this initiation for myself? This is part of twentieth century destiny, that mankind is guided through the abyss. Our task is to develop the spiritual consciousness that each one of us needs. We each must establish our true identity. So we choose one of these paths: knowledge, self-experience or creativity, life events. But of course, we need all of these paths. If we do this, our eternal being will speak louder and louder in us. Only then can we give our children the experience of deep trust in the order of evolution, guided by the inner authority of our "I am."

Before September 11th we had the same problems going on in the world, but without someone saying "stop!" On September 11th something became conscious, something we had been leaving to the authorities and did not take upon ourselves.

We need as much apocalypse as will make us willing to change. Yet although all this happened, people go on doing what they always did.

At home, the children start to suffer; they have more and more problems. Okay, in this case there are constitutional problems-let the physician take care of it. Okay, this one has a bad home life; it is all their fault-I don't have to change.

But we know that life's most precious thing is a human relationship that is trusting. We get more from a loving relationship than from a holiday. There is no problem in the world that we can't transform through the power of relationship.

We have the children three or four hours a day, and we can help them to develop their humanity. How can I help this pure and wonderful spiritual being who wants to incarnate into this body, this heredity, this milieu? Through the power of relationship.

This year the theme for the Anthroposophical Society was the work of the angels in the astral body. Rudolf Steiner says there are three ideals that inspire our astral body, but that they are not conscious. The angels offer us the possibility to make these ideals conscious:

1. We come, through thinking, to a real spiritual experience.

2. On a feeling level, we experience this dignity of another human being. The "I am" is god. As the basis of good relationship, we long to find this god in ourselves and in others.

3. We want to act in life to experience the ideal of brotherhood through doing.

We feel these three ideals within us, and they are present in the general culture, spoken of in current books on psychology, management, economics, etc. We also find huge counter forces against these ideals within ourselves. These forces are the origin of evil. The best relationship is based on true understanding of the individual, and our relationship to the world is best when we find the deeper meaning of things. Then our relationships have substance. But if we cut off thinking, the other spheres will not work.

People can be misguided from early childhood on by meeting technology, by meeting intelligence in matter. In working with computers, one needs enormous sensitivity to find exactly the right place to "click." One can pour one's intelligence into this technology, and create new Ahrimanic beings in the sub-substance. This is ok if this is not all that is happening. But what do we do when we addict our children, in whom these ideals live? They don't realize that technology is not spirit, and they can be imprisoned by technology. If we involve ourselves too deeply in the world of technology, we can accustom ourselves to an attitude that life (and our children!) should be perfect-like our computers. But this is not so! It is important for us to see that the same activity that goes toward developing spiritual activity also goes toward developing technology. It is the same self-creating intelligence, the same "I am."

There is no quality, or emotion, you can't re-create with a drug or a medicine. Peace, sadness, libido activation, wakefulness, sleepiness, love-you can have everything with designer drugs! We have new generations of drugs to stimulate sexuality, that say we have the right to have good orgasms, and the insurance companies have to pay for this! This is an interesting question. If someone cannot develop the faculty to sleep, or to love his partner-if these faculties are not there, you can buy them! This is our attitude, our normal life.

The angelic ideal is that we develop these faculties ourselves, that we learn to master our emotions, to inspire our feelings. Instead, we let doctors and the government pay. When it gets too expensive, the government will stop paying. Rudolf Steiner spoke of abused and misguided sexuality becoming more and more visible at the end of the twentieth century, if people do not use their freedom of self-development and identity.

Small children have a strong longing to be taken seriously, to meet the spirit strongly, to find god in everyone, to discover brotherhood in all that life offers. But, there is also the longing to leave everything to the doctors, to the experts. We don't want to do it ourselves. 'What are possible strategies to learn these faculties?

And, of course, we easily let relationships sink to the physical level. We don't work hard for true communication; it is too easy to have a nice conversation without saying anything. We misuse ourselves and the other when we don't really look at the other and find meaning there. Sexual abuse is only the follow-up to this lack of will in us.

Since the 1980's, worldwide, children have been less and less interested primarily in the intellectual field and have been increasingly oriented toward developing their will forces. We have so much hyperactivity and lack of concentration because there is a great longing to develop will forces in all spheres of life and soul. How can we organize ourselves to meet the longing for will-education? How can we organize our own soul to meet this, so that strengthening of the real "I am" can be the result? Without this we can never overcome the evil in the world.

Group discussion with Dr. Glóckler Saturday, February 15, 2002

Meister Eckhart, a Christian mystic who lived in the middle ages, said: "If I were a king not knowing that I am a king, I would not be a king." This is the key. If I am an "I am" without really knowing, sensing, and understanding what that means, I would not be an "I am." Children need to incarnate and find their naturally ordered "I am" but they need models.

In the Bible, there are two stories of creation. The first is the seven-day creation. On that sixth day, when God created both animals and human beings, at the end, he said: "This is very good." Of the five preceding days it is said: "He saw that it was good," but on the sixth day, "He saw and it was very good." God had created animals, man and woman. Then, on the seventh day came a wonderful rest.

With the second creation, it starts anew. It starts with the man. First God creates the man, and only later Eve. And God says: You shall give all things their names (wake them up), and he puts Adam and Eve in the garden where the devil is waiting to tempt Eve. This creation is not finished; it runs over into human history. The problem we have is created by God in the second creation-including the possibility of temptation and suffering.

Then, in the New Testament, in the story of the Baptism, we read something new. When Jesus Christ goes into the Jordan, and the true Christ is born, God's voice says: "This is my son, in whom I am well pleased." This is very good. The second creation is finished. It is finished with the good God-the essence of spiritual mankind-coming from the human being.

Since this time we have had the possibility of finding ourselves in the abyss-but not as a given, natural thing. We are left completely free to take the step into the groundless fear of our inner self-experience. I myself have to make a commitment to myself-who do I want to become? I want to become a good, true human being. Then, immediately, good ideas start. If this is a serious commitment (and this is what the importance of Golgotha is), if we really want to do this, we can.

He is there, as a true human being, but he can only unite with us out of our own inmost freedom. Not to answer God's expectation, or so God will love us. Not so we will have a good image, or be nicer. The abyss experience gets deeper and deeper. I do it because I want it, not because God, or people, expect it. This free decision is the end of the second creation.

Christ's coming is a free deed of mind and love. The more I love, the more I give space for the other's autonomy, the other's freedom.

This is the background of Waldorf education. There is a meditation by Rudolf Steiner that tells us that education is to be taken up in the name of Christ, in pure intent, with good will. The children themselves help us on this path. Through their difficulties and joys, they remind us of where they come from, and that there is something to do. In education, we need to decide between what is animal and what is human. Animal warmth is nature's gift; we are protected by warmth. Physical contact is one side of warmth. Sometimes we have too much warmth. Real spirit love, however, lets a child breathe between nature and spirit, allows the child to take a risk, to experience his self.

Every education is self-education. As educators, we only form the right conditions in which the child can find and experience what he or she needs. I can teach nothing. I can only create conditions in which people can teach themselves. This is Waldorf education.

But now problems start. We have both the devil and God in us. We long to remain as an animal in paradise, without being responsible for what we are doing, and we long to be with our angel, and become a true individual. If we delegate our responsibility to God, or to the devil, we become addicted, we lose ourselves. It is the biggest danger of our times that people are not ready for this freedom.

Addiction-to drugs, or even to the crowd of advisors-is the result of our hesitation to be our own advisors. Addiction is the result of not using our spiritual powers.

We want to delegate responsibility for our well-being to all sorts of authorities. We delegate, and become more and more aggressive with these authorities because then they are the guilty ones. Aggression replaces the use of our own spiritual power. All wars and troubles have their origin in a lack of self-responsibility in the emotional sphere.

Misguided warmth is extremely close to sexual abuse-it is a slippery pathway. If we only live out our physical will force in embracing the other-we want to love, to protect, even to penetrate-this is the result. To allow the self-creation of an individual being is to love without touching the body, to love with autonomy, even if the children-the adolescents-are intermittently suffering from loneliness. We need to be able to cope with this and find the balance. When does the child need to be physically embraced and when is it important to say strong words to the child I am with you"-so the child can take this in on the soul level?

How can I handle children in a group individually? Children are never, ever, group beings, but in the early years they feel symbiotic with the surroundings. It is important to give them a chance to feel protected in a home, in a group. This is a process in which the child must wake himself up. How can I help this?

Little rituals of personality stimulation-calling the name, looking into the eyes, taking the hands-is a very delicate matter. Where does the personality end? How strongly should I touch the child? Through this the spiritual connection is made.

If a child hasn't felt respected or acknowledged as an individual before coming to school, then, in class, when the child gets into difficulty, we take care to immediately see that he gets what he needs. This takes care of the individualization process in the group.

Children are extremely self-oriented, but still totally integrated into the whole of their surroundings. By nature, they are social beings, but they are looking to find themselves. By the time they get to high school, they are suffering by themselves, and looking for relationship. We always have to give the children what they are missing, and protect and support what they are trying to develop.

Nature organizes us. In the beginning we have a social orientation. By the time of the third seven-year period, we have an established disposition to become a being. The mystery of the will is that we have to do everything ourselves, and to enjoy this possibility. The more we live this path, the more we take responsibility for our lives-with all the angels and devils. This is the second creation. Because I want to develop myself, I should not complain that this is so! If we don't want to develop, we shouldn't be teachers!

Be busy, enjoy every individual encounter. Every day gives us the chance to take another step. The path of the will is given in the anthroposophical school of spiritual science. We are initiated by Rudolf Steiner into three problems of the will.

Our will has to struggle with doubts. The intellect knows everything and is the source of security; but because we are will-oriented, we question and doubt everything. We accept only the thoughts we have understood.

In our emotional life, we feel we have good and evil, and we have to battle with hate, fear, etc. This is a will problem. If we were conditioned, we could just behave. But we want to find our own ways to deal with the good and bad forces within us, to transform our aggression potential to compassion-but not because we should. There are no shoulds.

There is huge power in fear. Children with lots of fear need to sense-first through their physical senses, later through loving words, and later still through their own individual spirit-striving. In fear we need to find the call to awaken the individual will. It does not help to say: "You should not fear. Look how well so-and-so does." This is discouraging, blaming. First let us understand that there is fear, and that fear has its mission. Explore how, and when, we can trust. Then the child feels taken seriously.

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