

The New Generation of Children

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This article arose from a lecture given at the Vital Years Conference in Sydney in July 2003. The conference dealt with the qualities of the young child and how educators can meet them and nurture them. This lecture marked the end of the conference with a look at issues of the debate on the modern child.

There has been a new phenomenon of change in children recently documented in several books. These books include *The Indigo Children* by Jan Tober and Lee Carroll, *Millennial Child* by Eugene Schwartz, *Star Children* by Georg Kuehlewind, *War Michel aus Loenneberga aufmerksamkeitsgestoert?* (Did Michel of Loenneberga have ADHD?) by Henning Koehler, and Siegfried Woitinas's book *Who are the Indigo Children? All of these publications deal with the question of whether there is an observable evolutionary change in this new generation of children, or are we observing the result of damage caused by growing up under the conditions of our time?*

Indigo Children received so much attention because it documented children speaking about themselves and their experiences of being different. Some of these children showed a consciousness advanced beyond their age. Since that book was published, we have many more examples of children with an obviously different consciousness. Below is a quote from a book written by a Brazilian 8-year-old child whom one might say is mad. However, if one is familiar with the work of Rudolf Steiner, then what the child says does not appear at all strange.

"I come from the core of the Sun to fulfill my task. . . The children who are born now come from a more progressive school than that of Mars, for example from the Sun. These new beings will help that the earth does not experience a too radical transformation. . . I do not come to earth all by myself, I come together with a group of souls. There are many other soul groups. Together we are in the other world, before we come to earth. Then I go to earth together with this group of souls through various spheres, but first I have

to go to the Sun. This Sun gives me strength in order to prepare for my path to earth. . . The newborn is afraid to be locked into the reality of the body. He misses the essential unity of the place where he comes from, and therefore he connects quickly to the people who care for him. He gives to them the role of the highest beings. If parents believe in material things only, then they draw the child more and more into the physical. While they teach him to speak, they limit his thoughts. When children grow older, they gradually lose the connection to their origin."

His father once told him a legend about the angel of forgetfulness who kisses the children before birth so they forget about their spiritual existence. The child said, "Yes, this is true. But I took great care, and, when the angel came, I moved my head sideways and the angel touched me only a little. Therefore, I can remember. It is sad if one forgets everything. Now there are many children who bring with them the memory of God. The most difficult part is not the remembering, but putting it into words." (Woitinas, p. 28)

The consciousness of this child is extraordinarily different from the consciousness of most people today. However, there is general agreement in all the books mentioned that the main characteristic of these children is a change towards a more extended consciousness. It appears to be developed far beyond their age and beyond the consciousness of the average person today.

Whether the children are Star Children, Indigo Children, or children with ADHD, there are certain similarities in the characteristics observed. Below is a compilation of the attributes found in the publications: Their gaze is deep, serious, often wise at birth already. Later on this gaze can turn into a look of utter defiance. They say "I" early, often as early as 18 months, and display an early consciousness of self; they know about their spiritual origin and about their task, and often appear to others as overly self-confident or even arrogant. They seem to look through

people and comment on their hidden thoughts and feelings. They are interested in evil at an early age and react to lies or false pretence.

They accept some people immediately, others not at all. They often choose as friends only children of a similar kind. They want to discuss things and be involved in decision making and want to be respected with their opinion.¹ They respond positively to truthfulness in relationships. Some have a great social awareness and we may be surprised at their unexpected, deep remarks. They reject rituals, especially those that are empty and meaningless. (This may include long established, wonderful practices of Waldorf early childhood education, such as the use of gently colored veils, soft toys—even if made by the mother, festival ceremonies, candle lighting, and morning circle. This antipathy can't be understood as a reaction to bad experiences for it seems to come from nowhere.) They express great determination at an early age and are not easily distracted from what they want. They are only attentive to what interests them. They reject guidance and authority and refuse the logical, orderly, planned approach to action. They reject toys and invent their own. They show an abundance of energy and often have difficulty controlling their movement and actions. They appear to be fearless or unaware of danger². They appear to resist currently used methods of education and punishment. They appear to participate in the suffering from general stresses in society, as do all children today, such as the hectic life style, the coldness, the general mood of fear and anxiety, and the competition. They seem to show unusual developmental profiles, for in some areas they are advanced beyond their age, while in other areas, such as in their lower senses, they are substantially behind.

Looking at the qualities described here, one can see the relationship to the realm of consciousness and will. Every kindergarten teacher or childcare-giver will know children who show some of these characteristics. The characteristics relating to an advanced spirituality may not be seen that often. It has been suggested that children who seem spiritually advanced often have spiritually interested parents so that the inclination of the parents reappears in the child. Others maintain that most of the items on the list of characteristics

are the result of the children's suffering from the effects of modern life.

While symptoms of ADHD are observed in those children, they do not seem to be linked by necessity. Koehler and others question the classical triad of lack of attentiveness, restlessness, and lack of impulse control with regard to the establishment of a diagnosis of behavioral and psychological disorder. It all seems to depend on the yardstick used. As many of the symptoms of the ADHD child in the realm of will and senses are normal for the 1- or 2-year-old child, questions such as the following arise:

1. **Attention:** What is attention; how short is a "short attention span" allowed to be? Is attention less intense because it is short? Is attention that moves around something that has to be changed? And if so, can one change it? At what age should one intervene, given that it is usual for young children to be like that?

2. **Restlessness:** Who draws the line between a child being unable to hold himself still or keep himself from intruding into another's space and the diagnosis of behavioral disturbance? Is it the mother or the care-giver who cannot cope anymore and seeks for treatment or prescription of medication?

3. **Lack of control of movement:** Again, this is a "normal" occurrence in very early development, arising out of the absence of a consciousness.

Much depends on the viewpoint and the judgment of the observer! More and more doctors and psychologists question whether the diagnosis of ADD or ADHD expresses a reality or is a label. There is a great deal of discussion on this controversial issue worldwide. It is estimated that 30–40% of children are diagnosed as suffering from ADD or ADHD on the basis of showing a certain number of symptoms from medical checklists. Koehler and others suggest that, rather than concluding that half of the children today are seriously disturbed, it may be the case that we do not have the right way of looking at these children and dealing with them. In consequence, we are lacking the understanding of what is happening. If so many children are classified as disturbed within our current system of education and our current

interpretation of developmental patterns, our concepts and criteria may be wrong. Koehler suggests that we are witnessing a “shift of paradigm,” the heralding of a major evolutionary change, which asks for a shift in developmental-educational theory and practice. The assumption that this might be the case is supported by recent research on changes in developmental patterns in children. Again, one can ask if these phenomena are really new, or were they here for a long time and we lacked the eyes to see them?

Here are some of the recent findings: Many newborn babies do not sleep anymore for as long periods as it used to be. Many neonates are alert and awake for extended periods right after birth. The newborn communicates and imitates immediately, babies make eye contact, they imitate from day one.³ Children’s developmental patterns are more diverse than it used to be. Remo Largo⁴ conducted a longitudinal study of children and their development over more than 10 years. The result was that individual developmental patterns vary by up to two years in an increasing number of children. Largo refuses to call these children developmentally delayed, but rather uses the notion of “developmental originality.” More children than previously assumed show a polarity of being very advanced in some areas of development, but behind in relation to current benchmarks in other areas. Many children say “I” to themselves in the second year of life instead of in the third year. In the educational theory there is a change in the understanding of intelligence. It is not justified anymore to link it exclusively to the cognitive realm as intelligence is seen to be at work in the social, artistic and will element as well.⁵

Changes in the brain structure are identified and new faculties are observed in children side by side with the loss of others. These phenomena are much discussed in recent psychological educational publications.⁶ Healy and Huether state that the formation of the fine structure of the brain depends to a large degree on the use and the choices an individual makes in regards to the brain. Neurological research as such does not ascertain what causes the problem. One cannot infer any more that only a reduced synaptic activity in the brain causes a reduced ability to

think. It rather seems to be the other way as well: reduced activity of thinking causes the synaptic conditions of the brain to change.

Even though our culture values the cognitive faculties related to the left brain hemisphere highly, there are more and more children in whom the right brain hemisphere and the imaginative faculties are more predominant. This can either lead to an inclination towards visual learning and a dependency on visual stimulation, or it can develop into an amazingly independent imaginative/creative faculty of the individual. There is an increase of “difficult” children without obvious environmental causes or obvious educational shortfalls. There are many parents who have supported their child and educated him with love and dedication, yet the child remains “difficult” and has been so since birth or an early age.

Georg Kuehlewind suggests that we are witnessing the arrival of children that herald the future and are, at present, meeting an environment and general consciousness that is very much oriented on the past. This causes friction, clashes and suffering. Similarly, Koehler speaks of these children not as damaged but rather as “strange” in relation to the expectations and educational measures they are exposed to. He has observed and studied such “unusual” children in his practice over many years. He maintains that it makes a huge difference for the improvement of the condition of such children, if one changes one’s attitude and perspective and starts to look at them as children who are competent in their world but not fitting into the current world.

In anthroposophical terms, this would be called a further step in the evolution of the consciousness soul. Eugene Schwartz⁷ has pointed to three characteristic steps of transformation of the human soul in the twentieth century. The first one is characterized as new thinking, the second as new feeling, the third as a new impulse in the region of the will.

In the years after the first world war and all through the 1920s there appeared in Middle Europe the so called “youth movement,” characterized by a rejection of the life style and values of the society of that time by the younger generation. Steiner very much welcomed the ideas of these young people. He addressed the youth movement

in a series of lectures and pointed to ways that their legitimate concern and ideals could be reconciled with the best part of what comes from the past. He was certain that, if these young people did not find something in the thoughts of the older generation that could meet the longing of their souls, then this unfulfilled longing would become destructive.⁸ Eugene Schwartz interprets the intention of the youth movement as a longing for the spirit in the realm of thinking. In the 1960s, a second youth movement appeared—student protests, the peace movement and flower power—along with alternative lifestyles and different ways of raising and educating children.

Schwartz interprets this movement as centered in longing for deeper transformative processes in the realm of feeling. For our time he suggests that the phenomenon of the new generation of children could be interpreted as a third wave of longing for the spirit, this time appearing in the very young. He particularly relates this to the way in which children who are diagnosed with ADHD express themselves in the area of will.

One could perceive a progression of this third wave in the increased appearance of Indigo Children since the late 1980s. This would mean that we are witnessing a moving forward of the human being in the realm of will and that there are children who will lead us into the future. They are children who already know what they have to do and who cannot be easily deterred in their ways by pedagogical intervention. They are also children who are overwhelmed by the strength of such will forces rising up within them. At the same time, they are longing to be met with spiritual understanding.

In his lectures to the younger generation, Steiner urged young people to work together with people from the older generation who are still young in consciousness and thought. Similarly, the children today need parents and educators who are young and flexible in thought, otherwise their ever-stronger will forces and the challenge of having a spiritually advanced consciousness of self will lead them to desperate and destructive action.

If we as educators are not to lose these children, we have to build a strong, supporting relationship with them based on the continuing effort of gaining a spiritual understanding of these

children. What legitimates one to say that the children today are leading the way towards the future, towards a higher consciousness through the transformation of the will in an unprecedented way? Has it not always been children that are able to bring something new from the spiritual realm into our world? Is not the following generation always ahead of the previous one?

Steiner (GA 203) indicated that human beings born after 1930 would have a different consciousness than those born before that time. He speaks about the effects of the end of the Dark Ages and the new possibility of human souls partaking in spiritual initiation during the time between death and rebirth. He mentions that those human beings would have the following characteristics:

1. A strong imaginative ability, which, if not cared for, would become socially destructive.
2. A loosening of the etheric body and, with it, the ability to a more extended consciousness and a higher sensibility.
3. An ability to feel and connect with the environment more intensely. This, however, may express itself only as a feeling of disquiet or discomfort in relation to their surroundings.

About the children, Steiner says the following:

When the human being today descends from pre-earthly existence into the physical body, he experiences something similar to the instructions in the Old Mysteries. This is a fact. One cannot think about the human being who is born now in the same way as was the case in old times, when one spoke about it like this: The human being descends and it is his calling to be initiated through mystery wisdom into what it is to be truly human. Things are different today. What I said, was valid for human beings who had lived through fewer earthly lives than is the case with human beings today, who have already absorbed a lot in previous lives. This enables them to undergo a certain instruction by spiritual beings in pre-earthly existence. This one has to assume if one meets children today. It is not the task anymore to somehow pour into the child what in old times needed to be instilled. Today we have the task to say: The child *is already instructed* (italics by RLB), and now he puts his

physical body around his knowing soul and this sheath has to be penetrated in order to call forth what was pre-earthly instruction by the Gods. Thus we have to think today pedagogically. . . If we think in the direction of anthroposophically-oriented Spiritual Science, it becomes clear that all education does nothing else than removing hindrances which hide what the child brings with him. Therefore in Waldorf education it is immensely important that the teacher really looks at the child as somebody who presents a riddle to him, which the teacher has to solve. . . The emphasis is not on what the teacher has intended to bring to the child, he never should proceed in a dogmatic manner. He has to regard the child as his teacher and he has to observe the child. The child will disclose through his behavior how the sheaths should be penetrated so that the instructions of the gods may stream forth from the child himself. . .⁹

The task in respect to the modern child is to acknowledge that, through education the *child is instructed* by the gods and that *we are willing to learn* through the child's behavior. We learn how the bodily sheaths of the child can become permeable for what the child wants to bring and how hindrances can be removed in each individual case. One could perceive, for example, that the strong wish of many children today is to do everything by themselves. Because they can't as yet, one witnesses all of the frustration that this causes. In thinking of the child as being instructed in the spiritual world, it is not so strange that the child cannot discriminate between their knowing much in the spiritual world and not knowing as much here on earth. They will overestimate themselves in relation to learning in life on earth, because they remember the spiritual wisdom of which they were part.¹⁰ And if the adult cannot acknowledge the spiritual wisdom of the child, then there is a hindrance for the spiritually-conscious child to enter into a relationship of imitation and example with this adult.

Does it really make a difference for the educational and therapeutic process whether one speaks of removing hindrances that are blocking the spiritual intentions of the child, or speaks of diagnosing deficiencies or developmental delays?

The difference is this: the answer of how to remove hindrances which block the way of the individuality would come from searching for a spiritual understanding of this individuality through observation and meditation. The assessment of specific functions and delays can play a part within this understanding of the child, but is not the foundation of educational intervention. The observational findings have to be related back to the fundamental insight that the child is instructed by the gods and may disclose herself to the educator if he is able to meet her in her essential being. Here lies the key to what the educator is destined to do for this child. In order to find out, one has to enter into a relationship which is spiritually open towards the child, human and loving. Carried by a deep interest and tolerance towards the difficult aspects of these children, one is able to tune into the meaning of the unusual in respect to their pathway, their education and healing.

One will find a good example of this attitude in the descriptions of the therapeutic relationships which Koehler gave in his books, specifically the one mentioned above.¹¹ One may criticize Koehler because he has abandoned traditional ways of therapy and is highly skeptical regarding their outcomes. But his work is based on an exceptional interest in these unusual children and the ability to build relationships with them that open new possibilities. Relationships, including those to the parents, are at the core of education and therapy; all other therapeutic applications or educational programs are put in place as support.

Is there a new generation of children with a spiritually more evolved consciousness and a new strength of will? Without aiming to present a final answer, it seems to me that there are many relevant observations and experiences that support this assumption. However, I am inclined to say that what appears as obvious and outstanding may only be the peak of a state of being which all children born today experience to a stronger or lesser degree. I do think that it is of importance for the day-to-day educational work to include all children in considerations of change in educational practice resulting from the phenomena described above.

It has been observed in *Indigo Children* that

these children respond better to Waldorf education than to any other education, and the recommendation of Waldorf pedagogy has caused interest in Waldorf schools in some parents of these children. Why is it that Waldorf education has the potential to meet what children today are needing and looking for? I consciously say “potential,” because I am well aware of the fact that the practice often falls short of what could be. I would like to point to the “pedagogical law,” given by Rudolf Steiner as the foundation of relationships between the teacher and the child.¹² In this law he describes how the different members of the human being are working in this relationship on each other.

The physical body of the child is influenced by the etheric body of the teacher.

The etheric body of the child is influenced by the astral body of the teacher.

The astral body of the child by the I of the teacher.

The I of the child by Spirit Self, which we today only have in seed form.

To my knowledge, Steiner has not taken this further, but would it not be possible to continue: the child’s Spirit Self is influenced by Life Spirit, which again is present in the human being only in seed form. We do have children today who seem to have progressed into the development of Spirit Self beyond what was possible in previous generations. This demands of us as educators that we are able to make available to these children some of the qualities of Life Spirit. To me this seems possible in the realm of early childhood through consciously striving for an etheric quality in education and through inwardly connecting our work with the realms of the four ethers.

Waldorf education today would then especially serve the unfolding of qualities of the etheric realm for the sake of the children today who come with the knowledge of their “Star.” What are the qualities related to the etheric realm?

1. The warmth as present in seed form in the heart sphere and the unfolding of love for the child.
2. The light as present in seed form in the interest and conscious striving to know the child’s being.
3. The forming and dissolving activity (chemi-

cal ether) as present in seed form in educational practice, which does not get stuck in rules and old habits but is able to flow.

4. The life creating activity, the universal life ether, as present in seed form in educational practice based on pedagogical imagination and creative approaches to education resulting from there.

How can we develop the etheric quality in Waldorf early childhood education in concrete terms? I suggest the following:

Early childhood educational practice is based on the principle of movement and flow, with the life enhancing qualities of breathing and nurturing. Space is created for the young child to play and explore freely. Forms will change according to individual needs and developmental stages.

Routines are handled flexibly, taking into consideration the nature of the individual child or the specifics of a group of children.

Education is based on forming authentic relationships with the child. The teacher strives to meet the child in a genuine way. She observes and respects the child’s response and leaves the child free in the realm of creative activity. In that sense, a relationship based on working with imitation and example has a true etheric quality in that the child is able to choose freely what he is taking up or leaving aside. Thus working with example and imitation can become the ideal basis for a human relationship which creates closeness without denying the differences in the role of the adult and the child.

Joy is an essential quality of this relationship. In its objective form, freed from self-feeling, it carries the etheric quality of levity and light. Children are beings of light. They need the light-filled environment, physically and spiritually.

The quality of education depends on self-development and the schooling of perception of the educator. The “learning to see” belongs to the foundation of meaningful interaction and intervention. The question of how to act in a certain situation or deal with a certain child will not be approached by using a set of rules. Preparing programs and plans serves the teacher through bringing consciousness to her actions, yet they need to remain flexible in regards to their application. This is also the foundation for acquiring a

medically trained perception based on the knowledge of the working together of the four members of the human being in the child. Steiner stated that it will be increasingly necessary for teachers to understand the conditions of health in each individual child.

The ability to manage children is directly dependent on the growing inner and outer awareness of the teacher. Maintaining discipline does not rely on the application of methods or policies. Where rules are necessary, they should be open and flexible enough to allow a situational use.

Educational intervention in respect to developmental difference is based on the criterion of flow or stagnation of the progress of the individual child. Interference is refrained from if the child by itself makes progress, be it ever so slowly. Developmental plans would be used to become conscious of and monitor individual developmental patterns and progress. Underlying such a plan would be the picture of the whole child.

Education supports the child's mastery of her will and the development of self-trust in her abilities. The realm of self-initiated and self-directed movement is respected and nurtured as the foundation of the experience of freedom and self-confidence.

These points are an attempt to take hold of the fundamentals of Waldorf early childhood education in the light of the generation of children today. The seven aspects listed here should invite more work to shape our ideals and visions for the education of the young child. At this stage they are offered as signposts on the road of removing hindrances in the child of today. If educators pursue this road, it will be revealed more and more that today's children are truly instructed by the gods.

Endnotes:

¹ This leads Kuehlewind to suggest that Waldorf teachers should communicate more verbally with these children and should involve these children in decision making. This created a number of very critical responses from German Waldorf educators.

² M. Dornes, *The Competent Baby*, 2001; also research summary in: Laura Berk, *Child Development*, Boston 1997 (4th edition).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Remo Largo, *Kinderjahre (Childhood Years)* Stuttgart/Zurich, 1999.

⁵ Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind*. New York, 1983; D. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*. London, 1995.

⁶ Jane Healy, *Endangered Minds*. New York 1991; G. Huether, *Bedienungsanleitung fuer ein menschliches Gehirn*. (Instructions for Using a Human Brain.) Goettingen, 2001.

⁷ *The Millennial Child*. 2000.

⁸ Rudolf Steiner, *The Younger Generation*. 1922, Lecture 11.

⁹ Rudolf Steiner, *Man's Responsibility for World Evolution through his Spiritual Connection with the Planet Earth and with the Stars Above*. Lecture 6, January 22, 1921. Available in English as typewritten manuscript in London. The quotation is my translation from the German text.

¹⁰ Siegfried Woitinas, *Who are the Indigo Children?*, 2002.

¹¹ Ibid. Not only in his recent publication, but also in *Anxious, Nervous and Depressed Children*.

¹² Rudolf Steiner, *Curative Education*, Lecture 2, June 26, 1924. Within the constraints of this essay, the depth of this law cannot be further explored.

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