

# *Research Collaboration Conference*

Andrea Gambardella

The conference was formulated and led by Susan Weber and Jane Swain of Sophia's Hearth. Sophia's Hearth was founded in 1998 to provide programs for parents and their young children with a mission to create a continuum of support for the family from expectancy through the years of forming a family. They are also committed to initiating research on the care and development of the very young child. Working out of anthroposophical disciplines that inform the work and care of children is their primary inspiration. Blending with this work is a recognition of the valuable contributions made by Hungarian pediatrician Emmi Pikler and Magda Gerber's work with parents and children age two and under being done at the Resources for Infant Educators or RIE (Los Angeles, California).

On a very cold weekend in early January, eleven people gathered to support each other through the process of formulating working themes and questions for research. Conversation in large and small groups and personal journal work were used to explore the topic. Playing games, doing movement exercises and having tea contributed to a breathing process that allowed the variety of ideas and diversity of experiences to settle and focus into some common thoughts. Among us were kindergarten teachers, home care teachers, parent-child class teachers, adult educators, a public school specialist and a movement therapist. One member came from Texas, and the remaining ten are in the Northeast.

Our focus was exploring where the meeting points are in Rudolf Steiner's and Emmi Pikler's work; what do they contribute together to the work with the young child and supporting family life? Can we demonstrate that Pikler's work addresses the three-fold human being?

We used two articles for our common study as inspiration for our discussion: A lecture by Rudolf Steiner, "The Work of the Ego in Childhood, a contribution towards the understanding of Christ," given in Zurich, 25 February 1911; and an article

by Georg Kuhlewend, "The Importance of Play in the First Three Years." Steiner's lecture was a tremendous gift for helping us to clarify aspects of this phase in the human biography and what our research could point to. In his lecture, Rudolf Steiner describes how in the first three years of life on earth spiritual formative forces are active in a way, and only during that time of life, that nourishes the whole course of a human life; "The fresher, the more flexible these forces remained, the less time-worn they have become in advanced age, the more easily we can bring about transformation in ourselves through these spiritual forces (p. 88)...the forces at work during the age of earliest childhood shed their sunlike radiance over the whole of life (p. 92)... we can become aware that the Ego working in early childhood is related to another entity, that the first Ego is like a sheath and that after about three years its connection with all the members of the rest of man's nature changes entirely." (p. 92) Rudolf Steiner points to this knowledge as a power that grows within humanity, indicating to the progression through incarnations that might bring humanity to attain increasingly higher levels of consciousness until the Earth reaches its goal: the Earth-soul rising into the spiritual world.

If our task as parents and care providers of very young children is to provide an environment that fosters this working of spiritual forces, then the primary element in that environment is the relationship of adult to child. Our discussions circled around the "I" and "Thou" in the relationship of adult to young child. Individual themes for our research developed around observations of parent to child, about helping women prepare and be fortified for mothering, the role and relationship of care provider to child, the role of movement and the role of language development in light of these spiritual formative activities. We noted that in the last century humanity has moved out of a Gabrielic time into a time led by Michael. The Michaelic gesture for the

**family, the child, the individual is different. How do we carry the Gabrielic gesture so indicative of Waldorf early childhood work into this new time, and meet both child and parents in a Michaelic way?**

**As a group, we are looking to report to each other in the spring, summer and fall of 2004 with intention to meet again in January 2005 and share in our personal research from the year. The warmth and enthusiasm generated in this coming together is evidence of the growing love for this work.**

**We are very grateful to the community of Sophia's Hearth for hosting the conference, to Susan Howard for writing our funding grant, and the Norton Foundation for its support of the initiation of this research group. Also helpful to our work are the "Research Guidelines" developed by the AWSNA WHSRP planning group. Anyone interested in this work may contact Susan Weber at Sophia's Hearth, (603) 357-3755, [www.sophiashearth.org](http://www.sophiashearth.org).**

***Andrea Gambardella is the Program Director of the Full-time Early Childhood Teacher Education at Sunbridge College. These notes were recorded at the conference hosted by Sophia's Hearth Children's Center Keene, New Hampshire, January 16–18, 2004.***