
FOCUS: Speech & Language

Developing Speech: What needs to come into the space between us?

Speech and the Human Encounter, Keynote Lecture III – February, 2018

— Dr. Lakshmi Prasanna and Michael Kokinos

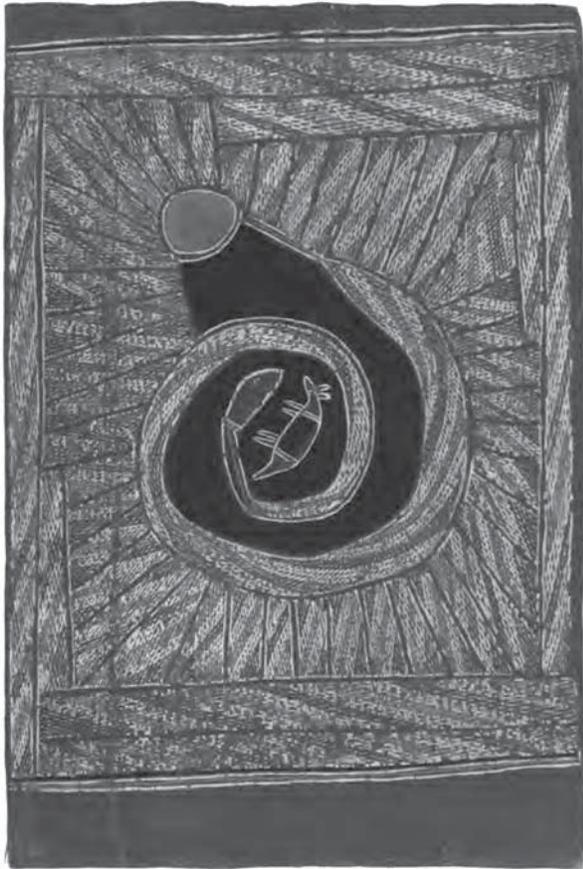


Early childhood circle

Introduction

Dr. Lakshmi Prasanna and Michael Kokinos, keynote speakers at the February 2018 WECAN East Coast Conference, created a sensitive, profound picture of what is happening with the development of speech in the young child. This speech milestone, which comes after uprightness and walking are achieved and before the first signs of thinking are displayed, is typically described in physical and mechanical terms in clinical textbooks, which catalog the stages of speech development. But the picture that Prasanna and Kokinos shared goes deeper, placing the birth of speech in its rightful context as a bridge to creating relationship with other human beings. This bridge entails both speaking and listening, and requires both hearing words through the ears and also “listening to the sounds of the soul” of the other. When we are truly “speaking,” we are listening to the questions and responses that are living within the other.

The first two keynotes were published in issue 75 of Gateways in Fall, 2018. We encourage readers to revisit them.



Images depicting Australian aboriginal mythology. Aboriginal art always presents situations in their full context. The cross-hatching in the pictures indicate the unseen etheric world that surrounds all objects, people, plants, and events. All things are connected in relationship to one another. No single thing can be thought of as isolated; all things and events are interconnected.

In the first keynote, “Speech Development: Giving Birth to Speech,” Dr. Lakshmi described that we have known one another in the spiritual world and have agreed, even vowed, to meet again in physical life. Once we are born on earth, as preparation to encounter each other, we begin to awaken to the experience of ourselves through movement and then through speaking, which opens the doorway to thinking. Awakening to oneself first is a prerequisite to becoming aware of the other.

Dr. Lakshmi continued: “Every moment in our lives, we experience ourselves—where our feet are, where we are in space. We claim our space. The moment this happens, we have a longing to share, a longing to meet someone on earth whom we have known before in the spiritual world ... I wake up and look around for my friends. Every time in our lives when we wake up in our physicality, we are looking for an encounter which brings a memory from a previous encounter.”

We come back to earth to meet both the birth mother and also the earth mother. The child listens to the birth mother and listens to the earth mother through “standing upon the earth and listening to her with his feet.” But when standing and walking occur, a distance is created between both the physical and earth mothers. The distance—the space in between—is experienced as a separation that the child longs to fill up with speech. From here on out, the child searches for spirit-filled words through which she can express to the world what lives inside her.

Michael Kokinos continued by expanding on the spirit of language in “The Human Encounter and Integration of the Lower Senses.” He described the Australian aboriginal peoples as having true congruence between what is spoken, what is inwardly pictured by the speaker, and what is artistically created [through a puppet or beeswax modeling, for instance]. Congruence means that all of these elements match and create an experience that is bigger

than the sum of the individual parts. Unlike our modern selves, these people have no “inner chatter” that intrudes upon the encounter through speech. All events, all creatures, all people are interwoven into a context of wholeness. Aboriginal peoples will never draw an object or animal alone; they will always draw it in the context of its surroundings and interactions with others. These people in their lives and in their speaking reflect that all things are interconnected. This interconnectedness between the inner picture and the spoken word is essential for true communication. The authenticity of how these elements match and the warm intention with which the word is spoken will determine the quality of the encounter and relationship.

After describing a profound experience with a nonverbal child through a rhythmic hand-gesture game, he stressed that intellectual knowledge of therapeutic techniques is not enough. The work of the therapist, healer, and teacher all depend upon relationship with the other. It is the longing for connection, and the true warmth of interest with which it is met, that “invites the birth of true, human speech.”

Speech arises out of a deep longing to create connection with the friends around us whom we have already known in the spiritual world. Part III of this presentation begins with that understanding and goes on to explore what is required of us to fulfill it.

For the third keynote, Dr. Lakshmi began and Michael Kokinos added concluding remarks. The two earlier lectures described the development of speech—and blockages to its healthy unfolding—for the child. This concluding lecture addresses the qualities, intention, and consciousness the adult speaking partner needs to develop in her speech in order to make connection “in the space between.”

Approaching the Space Between: The qualities, intention, and consciousness needed in the adult speaking partner

Dr. Lakshmi:

We sit here together at this conference and the truth is that we all agreed to join together at this meeting a long time ago. We each individually take responsibility for ourselves and for our sisters and brothers whom we have come to meet from pre-birth. It is both selfish and selfless that we recognize one another, for we have things to do with each

other, ways to help each other fulfill our pre-birth intentions. What needs to happen between you and me and what needs to come into the space between us? We need to come into words and practicality in our encountering. Encountering requires that the words we speak, the images that stand behind the words, how we listen, and how we think about the encounter itself must all match and reinforce each other; they must be congruent. To this we bring the wholeness of ourselves in body, soul, and spirit. We have to bring all of this to mind.

A little child in the kindergarten already knows that there is someone there whom she has recently known. The children’s ink is still wet. Their memories are still very fresh. The child is here and is ready to meet others. The more she gets into her body, the more she wakes up and also wakes up to others. Even though the child has prepared for this meeting, there is no compulsion to make connection. Maybe the child has come prepared to meet someone but experiences that “she stinks.” So the child does not engage. There is always free choice.

Who we are in each incarnation has influences from the past. The head of the child does not belong to this incarnation. The head carries everything the child has experienced in the previous lifetime. The embryonic head is large and makes up one-half of the size of the child. Very close to the head lies the heart, and there is an intimate meeting between the two. The memory of this intimacy is very fresh for the child. Then the head unfolds. By the time the child is one year old, the head and heart are not so close together. For us adults, the distance is even further. We make observations through our head, but our business in relating with the child is to use the “non-head” part of ourselves. To create relationship in freedom, we have to choose our words carefully to bring harmony with the inner experience. There is a whole plateful of words to choose from. We can pick sounds and words from the plate, but we want to allow time and have patience to choose the right ones. This is very important. Working through the head is one avenue of encounter. The head analyzes and separates.

In the metabolic/limb system, where we are unconscious, we all belong to each other. It is hard to understand what the other person means only through the head. If someone knows you through this rhythmic system, he will give you what you need

when you need it—not according to some timetable, like the meals served on airplanes that come whether you are hungry or not. Things that come out of this “non-head” are more supportive for us.

We make observations of the children with our head and think of remedies and helpful activities. This is head work. Then in the evening we have to tell the head to be quiet. Impressions can now come of things that could not be written down. In the human digestive system, we have continuation of embryonic creative forces that build the body. Here in the evening, in the night, arise imaginations from the non-head forces. These imaginations meet us in the morning and give us new insight and substance to work with. The goal of this creative process is to transform facts into images. It is this metamorphosed fact-to-image that we are striving for in our work and to carry out into the world.

We hold what we have brought from the night carefully. There is the world outside, but we create our own inner life with our own words. Our whole organism is working so these two streams of outer and inner world meet. We each have our own story going on inside ourselves. We meet in the night with the child and review our agreements of why we have come together and what we are going to do together.

We can listen to each other in many different ways. Using language is a very specific human capacity. We select the words to use with a lot of inner and outer preparation. When we go to a new land, we are often met with a new language and new songs. Native peoples listen to the land and sing out what they hear. Each child is a new land with a new language and filled with songs that we want learn through our ways of listening.

When we speak, listening is also happening both within oneself and within the other person. We hear with our ears and also with our bones. Sound causes our bones to

vibrate, so we are hearing through bone conduction also. Whenever someone speaks, the larynx of the listener is also moving sympathetically. When we hear, we are also “speaking” along with the speaker. There is constant movement both within and between one another.

As we help children to build up their own language, we have to let the children have free play with what they say. Every child is interested in picking up vocabulary. There has to be freedom on the non-head to burp, “toot,” say “bad words.” Of course, we are here to educate children in time and space to learn what is appropriate. But we do not say that what is coming out of your body is wrong. Children up to seven years are still open sense beings and are sensing how we react to what they bring out. I listen with my whole body and speak with the whole body. The child listens to and senses our whole organism, not just the words. Even though external ears may be working, the child is listening with her whole being. As the child first listens to the earth’s vibrations through her feet, so with our “feet” we listen to the child. Language tells who we are as we use it to express ourselves. Little babies who do not have language express themselves through movement. The child is relating constantly. The baby kicks her feet in a particular way and the mother says, “She’s tired,” and knows that this is true. The mother can read her child’s movement language.



Parent and child during handwork activity with beeswax fish

Each child has chosen a language and has a plate of words from which to choose. Once speaking starts, the child is eager to choose many words from the plate and asks questions. But we do not need to answer all the questions. This is actually a disservice to the child. Only after seven years are children ready to recall a memory. Memory expands through many loops, each one reaching back or out further and further. But this is meant to occur over time and we do not want to accelerate it. If we have five-year-olds who cannot recall a story, we are happy. We are not training children at this age to memorize.

Rudolf Steiner said that beauty belongs to language. There was a time when language was still beautiful. Then came the need to be correct and grammatical. This moved speaking from the non-head [where speech sat on the top of rhythmic breathing] to the head. In our time, speech is very pragmatic. Children are asking for boundaries [in their speech and behavior] to prove that we really love them. When they are ready to speak hexameter, then they are ready for grammar and correctness. We need to allow space in which a child is free to create in language as well as in free play. We are constantly in the process of listening and speaking. We want to listen to the soul of the other also through what is not said. We listen to the unspoken and bring a picture out of it. The whole world is here to educate the child. The role of the teacher is actually quite small. The

child must be free to explore and be guided by our wisdom but not censured in her speech.

For us to do our work, we need to have a healthy relationship between our metabolic and our head forces. When the head is tired, metabolic forces keep things going; they do not tire. Our ego and astral separate from our physical and etheric bodies during sleep. We need this rest from ourselves. When we eat and digest well, we sleep well. When we sleep well, the head is sleeping. Then every morning we wake up with more wisdom and more love.

How do we know if we are really experiencing the child? We have to ask whether what we are seeing is actually the child or whether I am seeing what I expect to see of this child—which may be my expectation and not the child himself. We must practice Goethean observation, nicely described by the Nature Institute as “ways of thinking and perception that integrate self-reflective and critical thought, imagination, and careful, detailed observation of the phenomena,” where we strive to look with objectivity and to see the wholeness of the child. We are training our instruments to become perceptive beings. The human being is never perfect but is always becoming. What we see right now of a child is a momentary expression of what is striving and longing to become.

Michael Kokinos:

There are many themes weaving together with the thoughts of these keynotes. Lakshmi and I work with children with autism who do not speak. There are things we want the children to be able to do. And we want to allow them their freedom. This takes us to the mystery of encounter. We need to be open and receptive to this mystery. If we have an encounter at the spiritual level, two beings meet. We can meet as we are now doing in this conference with everyone together. We can also meet in an individual encounter, I-to-I, where there is an intimate, intuitive connection. If we can bring our attention to hold the space of this intimate contact, we can achieve the connection through touch, through a song,

The joy of a knot doll. “Congruence” means that all the elements of what is thought, spoken, and intended fit together, and each part reinforces the wholeness of all the elements.



through a crisis. We can do this, not through the Pedagogical Law, but through warmth. (As Steiner described the Pedagogical Law in *Education for Special Needs*: if the need of the child is to develop the physical body in the first seven years, the teacher works to strengthen her own etheric body. If the grade-school child is to be supported in developing a healthy, strong etheric body, the teacher works to strengthen and purify her astral body, and so on.) Through the intuitive relationship that has been established between child and caring adult, the warmth ether travels down the adult's limbs into the held "space between" and descends to the physical body of the other. This can open up the possibility to speak for the first time. Nothing else exists except my focus in the sensory world [through touch, hearing a song, and so forth] to create something. This is our business to bring the spiritual into the physical. We can bring this through congruent action, through good speech. [Editor's note: Congruent action, which was introduced in the first lectures, means that all the elements of what is thought, spoken, and intended fit together, and each part reinforces the wholeness of all the elements. For example, when the adult is speaking of a "fish" and holding a bee's wax fish in her hand, all of her thought and imagination is also living in "fish-ness," in the archetypal image of the qualities and character of fish.]

In the eurythmy performance last night, we saw colors and heard words and music. These elements were all congruent. The speech, music, colors, and movement all worked together to affirm the truthful archetype standing behind the images in the story. We want to be conscious of the archetype that each character in our stories, each activity in the kindergarten, present to the children in our kindergartens. Our goal is to be congruent in our thoughts, movements, and speech as well. We have to begin thinking of the archetype standing behind each image as a spiritual being. We want to make ourselves open to bringing this over to the children. The images must be living in us.

The indigenous peoples we have spoken about sing of the space between and what happens there in the wholeness of etheric space in which all things are interconnected. The archetype of this connectedness is the circle. Can we hold the highest in our consciousness when we are moving in circle time as we move joyously in this encounter? ♦

All images courtesy Michael Kokinos.

Resources:

- Michael Kokinos, "The Human Encounter and Integration of the Lower Senses," *Gateways* Issue 75 (WECAN 2018) at 10.
- Dr. Lakshmi Prasanna, "Speech Development: Giving Birth to Speech," *ibid.* at 6.
- The Nature Institute, www.natureinstitute.org
- Rudolf Steiner, *Education for Special Needs: The Curative Education Course* (Forest Row: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2015)

Lakshmi Prasanna, MBSS, DCH, is a pediatrician. She was one of the pioneer parents and founding members of the Abhaya Waldorf School in Hyderabad. Lakshmi has worked for many years all over the world as a school physician and was the founding president of the Anthroposophic Medical Society in India. She runs a teacher training (www.iralearn.com) as well as a small curative education center in India. Lakshmi has developed courses for all schools, parents, and teachers to understand and help children with autism. Visit her at www.doclakshmi.com.

Michael Kokinos B(PT), Masters (Health) Michael is an anthroposophic physiotherapist certified at the Goetheanum. He has researched the use of rhythm and movement and the health benefits of the Waldorf curriculum at the masters level. He helps teachers improve their rhythmic competence for morning circle with TaKeTiNa voice and rhythm workshops. As a healer he uses a combination of craniosacral therapy and sensory integration work with children. He is the director of Blue Sky Therapies in Australia (www.blueskytherapies.com.au).