

## *The I and the Body: World Conference 2012*

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The 2012 World Kindergarten Conference theme “The I and the Body” is especially interesting for working in the kindergarten and with groups of very small children. The IASWECE conference planning group has been active with the following questions:

From the spiritual world, from pre-birth existence, the “I” comes in, bringing its destiny, and forms the vessel of the body in the first years of life. Spiritual beings are also active in this process, accompanying the development of walking, speaking and thinking.

Only in the third year of life does a preliminary *I-consciousness* appear, but the *I-activity* is there from the very beginning. It is visible through the physical body, above all through movement. Already in achieving uprightiness, the guidance of the I is visible through the overcoming of gravity—the penetration of the I is visible down into the feet of the child. One can observe, for example, how the child walks: strong and secure, or insecure and on tiptoes.

This is all connected to the peripheral activity of the I. In our times, this is hindered through accelerated development. In the little child we see shortened maturation processes and early *I-consciousness*. By learning to read and write too early, the development of the inner bodily form (“gestalt”) is premature and the imitation phase is shortened. This can lead to later disturbances.

Through imitative activity the I anchors itself in the physical body. The drive to imitation is something the child brings with him—it is an activity of the I.

Sense impressions, when they are not virtual but are experiences in reality, give bodily experience and bodily form (“gestalt”). The I is connected to every perception and is only able to experience itself through sensory content. It needs the physical body in order to come into appearance. The body does not create the soul life; it is the necessary mirror for soul-spiritual activity that takes place outside.

Sense impressions are often difficult to digest today; the bodily vessel becomes damaged and therapeutic support is needed. Hindrances must be removed so that the individuality can penetrate the body and complete

its formation in a healthy way. In the first seven years this has to do primarily with the formation of the physical body.

Thus the task of the kindergarten becomes clear. Children need the feeling that they can play in a protected way, experience the world through their own activity, and discover, experiment, and have social experiences rather than conceptual training, information and explanations.

The task of parents and educators has become more difficult. Little children today are much more awake, self-conscious and often extremely sensitive. Their will is not stimulated enough and is not guided through rhythms and meaningful activity; instead, the head is expected to understand, remember and achieve. Expectations of children have changed. Harmonious movement, dexterity, and the training of capacities often remain undeveloped.

Naturally we must ask whether this situation is just a problem or incapacity, a new development, or perhaps both?

We must also ask whether the thoughts and feelings of the adult are not the most important educational tools to reach the peripheral I and make it possible for the child to open its soul and form relationships.

When the adult engages in work with her whole body, this is a great support for imitation. Large movements such as sweeping the floor, hanging up the laundry, and so on, allow a better consciousness of the periphery, a feeling experience of space, whereas work with small things creates a consciousness of the point. The aesthetic element in the work should not arise from the head, but should flow from the will.

Educators must exert themselves, discover sources of strength for themselves, in order to be able to radiate the inner peace and equanimity that form a necessary sheath for the group and create a common experience of the present with the children. In order to be able to work at all with today’s children, one’s own inner spiritual path of development is essential and a well-grounded training is the foundation.