

Connecting with Today's Children: Body, Soul and Spirit

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St Peter's School, Cambridge, New Zealand

Almost twenty one years ago, during a golden autumn in Stuttgart, I had the privilege (with several other New Zealanders and about 600 others from all over the world) of attending the first Kolisko Conference. Dr Michaela Gloeckler, the leader of the Medical Section, had brought together, for the first time, anthroposophical practitioners from both the Medical and the Educational professions. It was the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Dr Eugene Kolisko (1893-1939) – the first School doctor at the Stuttgart Waldorf School. Such was the depth of this first meeting, that I know I have never been able to absorb and put into practice the many gems that were shared all that time ago.

I believe it was also symbolic that during that Conference, the Berlin wall came down – and a whole continent began to re-unite after years of separation.

Approximately every four years since 1989, Kolisko Conferences have been held in different countries: England, USA, Finland, Australia and in 2006 Kolisko was held in nine countries – Michaela travelling to each one – Hyderabad in India, Taiwan, South Africa, Philippines, Ukraine, Australia, Mexico, Sweden and finally France. Early this year, Michaela was the leader of the Hawai'i Kolisko, but could not attend the Kolisko in the Ukraine or New Zealand, due to her husband's ill health.

The participants at our Conference were appreciative of those doctors and nurses who stepped in at such short notice to fulfil the demanding tasks of the Conference: Doctors Ruth Baker, David Ritchie and Michael Sargent; nurses - Jocelyn Freeman, Mary Willow and many others contributed to step into Michaela's role. We, the participants, were humbled by realising just how



Dr Ruth Baker

much Michaela had given over so many years in sacrifices, and, on the other hand, admiring of the strengths and depth of experience and knowledge of the speakers who volunteered at such short notice and inspired us with their sharing and insights.

Due to the planned 2010 Sydney Kolisko and International Post Medical training (another impulse of Michaela's - to train qualified doctors in Anthroposophic Medicine), being transferred to our Kolisko premises, we were able to include over 100 Australians and some participants from the USA. Doctors, nurses, therapists, teachers and parents: in all we numbered over 500.

Our Conference opened with the verse Dr Steiner had given to doctors:

*Once, in olden times
There lived in the souls of the Initiates
Powerfully the thought
That by nature,
Every person was ill
And education was seen as a healing process
Which brought to the child, as it matured,
Health for becoming a true Human being.*



Florian Osswald (Switzerland)

Many colleagues over the years have said to me how they found “that verse” ‘difficult’ to appreciate, especially the part about the human being ill.

For myself, I felt I could begin to appreciate it much more as it was performed in eurythmy and spoken powerfully. Dr Simon Bednarek, in his warm introduction, reminded me that our spirit or ego can not be ‘sick’ but it is the soul that, in its task here on earth, seeks resolutions, new paths, ones that cannot be resolved in the spiritual world, but only be achieved here on earth. It is in the soul realm that healing is sought.

Simon gave the background to how this particular Kolisko Conference had been formed, by asking the Waldorf teachers in New Zealand what their questions were - and out of their answers came the themes: empathy, encounter, communication, connecting with children and the extremes of not being able to connect due to Autism, ADD and anxiety.

Simon encouraged us to examine moments (or longer periods) in our own lives where we may have experienced feelings similar to autism, ADD or anxiety. He shared his own moments with us - which levelled the playing field - helped us relax and be warmed into the theme. We were then treated to four days of enriching, empowering and

encouraging experiences to deepen our work and life in connecting WITH ourselves, our family, friends, colleagues and children.

The first afternoon included the welcome from Simon Bednarek and an address by Dr John Angus, the New Zealand Children’s Commissioner, who heads the work of the Task Force for Action on Violence within Families. Sue Simpson, David Ritchie, Florian Osswald (soon to be the new co-leader of the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum) and Hartmut Borries all delivered in-depth insights into our current social and spiritual situation with regard to ‘connecting’. We were also treated to a short play written by Thornton Wilder that depicted a soul’s decision to incarnate again to earth .



Mary Green (Weleda)

The evening gift from a group of eurythmists connected with the Titirangi School, including their entire class seven, was a warmly received welcome to our Conference.

Each day followed a rhythm of an artistic



Impression of a socially isolated child

experience engendered by short written expressions as though from children who experienced Asperger's, ADD and finally, on the last day, anxiety. Robyn Ritchie enacted and read out the imagined speech of an anxious (over sensitive) child who had just returned from a 'nightmarish' class camp. The mood in the hall was one of huge empathy and respect. And in the artistic group that I was part of, there was such concentration and reverence as we placed pastel colours or lines upon the paper. The resulting discussions with the group of 20 showed how much this exercise had increased our desire to connect and find the right actions to help such children.

After morning tea, we entered more into the thinking realm with excellent lectures from the three doctors mentioned above. The afternoons were well related, with numerous workshops connected loosely or tightly with the

Conference themes.

Many talented colleagues volunteered to share their work with us during the late afternoon panels, and evenings were left free or we were warmly invited to join with the International Post Medical training Conference to hear speakers from the Christian Community share their experiences with working with gender issues.

We ended on the Wednesday afternoon with a panel taken from several different realms: doctors, nurses, social workers, therapists, and teachers.

With warm acknowledgement to the organising committee to make this Conference happen and the financial support of the Weleda Trust, the Federation of Waldorf/Rudolf Steiner Schools in New Zealand and the Pedagogical Section

The committee sent a letter of appreciation and warmest wishes on behalf of everyone to Michaela. ♦



Mike Caris (participant) and Kathy Macfarlane (organiser and speaker)

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