

International Birth-to-Three Colloquium

— Claudia Freytag

On November 22–24, 2012, the Pedagogical Section in collaboration with IASWECE invited experts in working with very young children to meet in Dornach. Thirty Waldorf teachers and caregivers from Europe, Canada and the U.S. came to the Goetheanum to exchange their experiences and research results with their colleagues.

At the opening Florian Oswald, co-leader of the Pedagogical Section, warmly welcomed the participants. He explained that it is very important for the Pedagogical Section to shelter childhood from the very beginning. It is their special concern to focus on the whole arc of childhood, from birth to age twenty-one.

Our working time was divided into five sessions. In each session colleagues gave presentations, leading to conversation and a shared deepening of the theme afterwards. The goal of the colloquium was to perceive the special personal approach of each presenter and to stimulate a lively exchange.

A central theme connecting all the contributions was the question of how we can help the child to find his or her own special way in life. The first approach was “The attitude of the educator” (presented by Martin Derrez and Bernadette Lange). The adult has to learn to work inwardly, to be in harmony with himself and the whole cosmos. He should develop a culture of self-education. This enables him to encounter the child without personal bias. The study of the twelve senses can also help the adult in his self-education, to find the right inner attitude. That is the basis for becoming an educator whom children like to imitate.

The next contributions widened our point of view. As we know, within the first seven years the child is developing his etheric body. But what is “The etheric” (Claudia Grah-Wittich)? How do the etheric forces of the small child develop between expansion and contraction, between being-within-oneself and being-with-others? In another presentation we saw that the gestures of development during pregnancy can also be found in the gestures of development after

birth (Angelika Knabe). Rhythm and a healthy environment support this process—illustrated by examples of best practices (Brigitte Huisinga and Dorothy Marlen).

Children today often suffer from a lack of movement, especially walking, running and playing outside. This influences their ability to talk, and causes problems with eating and sleeping. (Helle Heckmann). We can observe different phases of children’s play that embody archetypal gestures. Can we research the question of the forces of the zodiac during pregnancy and after birth and their connection to the phases of play (Marie-Louise Compani)?

The final contribution showed us how we can observe the Christ forces at work as the child learns to orient the body in space and walk (Jane Swain).

At the end of the colloquium questions and concerns were collected. Ten of these were taken up by participants. They will continue their research, coordinate the questions and concerns, and can be contacted by colleagues.

- Angelika Knabe: *The etheric*
- Karen Whyler-Lheurex: *Bonding*
- Nicole Schreyeck: *Professional bonding*
- Marie-Louise Compani: *Play*
- Bernadette Lange: *Care for the lower senses*
- Philipp Reubke: *Metamorphosis of role models and imitation within the first seven years*
- Martin Deretz: *Inner attitude of the educator*
- Dorothy Marlen: *Birth-to-three Training*
- Gabi Deretz: *The art of talking and advising parents*
- Clara Aerts: *Stillness, the space in between*

To contact these individuals, please contact the Pedagogical Section.

The participants felt very grateful for and enriched by this colloquium as they left Dornach. The next possibilities for meeting and exchange are the Whitsun Conference in Hannover, Germany (May 17–21, 2013) and the Birth to Three Conference in Dornach, Switzerland (June 20–23, 2013). ♦