
Supporting the Sense of Life in the Kindergarten

~ Ruth Ker

Ruth Ker, kindergarten teacher from Sunrise Waldorf School in Duncan, British Columbia, spoke about supporting the sense of life for children in the kindergarten domain. Before speaking about how teachers can support the life sense for the children—and for ourselves—she further described what this sense actually is.

Henning Köhler, in his book *Working with Anxious, Nervous, and Depressed Children*, asks us not to confuse the sense of life with vitality. Vitality is an energetic state. The sense of life informs us that something is occurring in our body which hopefully is an experience of wellbeing within ourselves.

Karl König gives us this picture: The sense of touch informs the child of her “envelope.” This experience can build trust in others and even in higher powers later on. He says that the sense of touch ultimately connects us to heaven. Through the sense of life, the child is informed of what is inside that envelope. The sense of life tells us that we are okay in our body, that it’s a safe place to be. This sense helps us to feel at home on earth. Through the senses of touch and life we are helped to feel at home in heaven and earth.

When the sense of life develops, children experience just a dim sensing of what bubbles up and radiates into the soul as gifts from the etheric, astral, and physical bodies. One of the things that this sense of life gives us as adults is a sense of our own biography. What we put together in regular rhythm and routines support our lives and give us experiences of our lives as a biographical continuum. Regular rhythms also nourish the life sense of the young child.

Healthy rhythms require times of activity and times of rest. Among those things that support healthy development of the life sense is rest. At birth the senses are very new and raw, and they need to be trained and sharpened so children can learn about the world. But this is hard work. In order to refresh their senses, children need rest. Sleep and the cessation of activity are important to the development of the senses. Henning Köhler says that one of the indicators of a disturbed life sense is a state of rest-less-ness.

The life sense loves the feeling of being on the edge of sleepiness. If you want to get to know the life

sense, this sleepy state is where you must go. Yet in our world we make many excuses for not taking a rest, taking a break, or sleeping. Parents are in a rush. We ourselves rush to school to en-soul the room and then stop running around with our preparations just before the children arrive. No matter how justified our hurriedness is, our sense organs need rest.

The life sense is also supported by having the magic of life confirmed. Children yearn for something greater than the everyday life—something magical. If we listen to the way they answer their own questions, they will tell us what the answers are that they are hoping for.

One little boy’s father had supplied him with a lot of factual answers to his questions, and he was sharing these with his kindergarten classmates one day. Another child from an anthroposophical family was in tears listening to him. She exclaimed, “It is not true! Father Sun is not like that!” The boy was saying, “It’s just a ball of gases.” Finally, another child piped up, “How does he get his gases?” The knowledgeable boy replied, “Well, you know those pipes that come out from cars. He just reaches down and grabs the gases.”

This child had found a way to maintain a healthy imagination about this “scientific fact” that could otherwise have been very disappointing. Generally the inner pictures that flood into the healthy child are quite strong, and we, as adults, have to work very hard to defeat the living pictures of the child—but unfortunately we can succeed. It is so much better if children can be left free to make pictures of their own. It is important to allow them to have magic in their lives, to explore nature and to come to their own understandings. They may know something we don’t. It is this experience of miracle and magic in the childhood years that gives the possibility for us later on as adults to live in awe and wonder, and this nourishes us.

Rudolf Steiner talks about the forces underlying everything that we see. Our sense organs are the doors and windows into our soul. They are spiritual gifts and would not exist if we did not have the support of the spirit beings working into them. It is a good thing if, as teachers, we can discover where our respect and regard is for the earth and its elemental world—sunshine, air, wind, water, and minerals.

All these build the children's bodies up—and ours as well. Rudolf Steiner speaks of the importance of cosmic nutrition uniting with earthly nutrition. It is the union of these two forces which give us the opportunity to grow, refresh and rejuvenate.

In conclusion, let us suppose that the earth is a microcosm, and cosmic space is the macrocosm. The earth wanders through this space, collecting impressions from the sun, moon, and stars, and brings them back to the earth, creatively manifesting them. We see this with the star-shapes that we find in the apple and the primrose, and almost every fruit, berry, and flower.

Suppose now that the earth is a macrocosm, and

the child and teacher are the microcosm. The child and teacher are wandering through the space of the earth collecting things. As we gather and collect, we are present together in the moment and we experience awe and wonder together. Real spirit substance comes to us from stopping to wonder and admire. Out of this wonder the children can create the rich inner pictures that support their life sense. When the life sense is healthy, they can feel secure and optimistic about what lies before them on their life path. The teacher is also gifted in these moments with fresh forces and an understanding of how to meet the child's capacity for inner picturing. Inspiration and rejuvenation happen in these moments together. ♦
