
FOCUS: Celebrations of Life

Nurturing the Sense of Life with the Very Young Child

— Susan Weber

The WECAN East Coast February conferences for the years 2014-2016 have been dedicated to the theme of nurturing the sense of life and wellbeing. What follows are highlights from presentations in 2014 by Susan Weber, Ruth Ker, and Patricia Rubano, and in 2015 by Dr. Adam Blanning. The 2016 conference will feature Barbara Baldwin, a therapeutic educator from Australia. When this series has concluded, it is our hope to collect and publish more complete versions of all the presentations in a single volume. The following leading thoughts and images are offered as stepping stones on the path to understanding the sense of life.

Susan Weber, director of Sophia's Hearth Family Center in Keene, NH, opened her presentation by stating that there are three elixirs of life that will support the young child as she enters into life on the earth. As educators, we have the capacity to be guardians of these elixirs and use them to support children in developing their capacities so they can fulfill their destiny.

The first elixir is what Rudolf Steiner calls the life forces—the forces that metamorphose into thinking with the change of teeth. We feel this connection when we experience that our thoughts become muddled at times when our own life forces are not strong. We then have to seek rejuvenation. The life forces are the forces we protect for the growing and developing child.

The second elixir is the life processes, which are always active but also unfold through a process of development in the child. Rudolf Steiner mentioned these briefly in two lecture cycles without much elaboration. Karl König took up the subject in his research and described the life processes as not having fixed organs, but as being something that wafts and weaves throughout the organism.

Susan listed the seven life processes and briefly characterized each one. These are breathing, warming, nourishing, sorting/excretion, maintaining, growing, and reproducing. She then described how the caregiver of the very young child helps support these processes. If we think of the life processes, perhaps the adult is breathing an atmo-

sphere around the child so the child feels the world is safe and secure for him or her to move in. Through warmth, the adult makes sure the child is warmed in body and in soul; this gives the child security. Nourishing comes from the child's own reaching for something, from touching, from free movement and self-initiated activity. Through all this activity comes sorting. The child practices and practices, discarding what doesn't work for his own body and claiming what does. Maintaining is integrating what the child has already done. Only ten percent of movement is new movement. Out of that maintaining comes the process of growth; the child grows in capacities. One could say, there is something reproduced as the child masters these new capacities. They rise up and then the child is giving back. The child offers his own being back to the universe.

The third elixir is the life sense itself, the sense of wellbeing that reflects back how the life processes are working. We support this experience by radiating to the children: "I'm joyful to be with you. I'm interested in who you are, what your path is, who you are trying to become."

Then Susan mentioned that there is also a fourth elixir, which is a wellspring that never runs dry. It is the water of life, the Christ Forces. If we can find in ourselves a relationship to those forces, we can work with something that will radiate joy and possibility out into the world and into the children. ♦