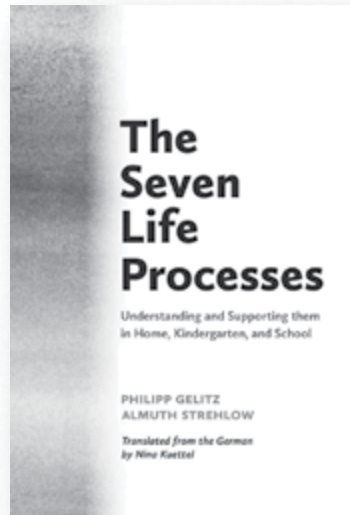


***The Seven Life Processes:  
Understanding and  
Supporting them in Home,  
Kindergarten, and School***  
by Phillip Gelitz and Almuth Strehlow  
WECAN 2016 | 180 pages | \$22  
Book Review by Nancy Blanning

I must honestly confess that I did not expect WECAN's new publication, *The Seven Life Processes*, to be gripping reading. Truthfully, I sat down with a dutiful intention to inform myself because, of course, all early childhood educators want to better understand the perpetually elusive "etheric." But I could never have guessed how much new information and, better yet, insight this book had waiting for me. What an enormous and exciting surprise was waiting in these pages.

Some background about Rudolf Steiner's description of how the human being interfaces with



and processes experiences of the world will be helpful start. Steiner pointed out different “numberings” to describe the multiple aspects of human experience and activity in earthly life. There is the **three**-fold Thinking, Feeling, and Willing, connected to the nerve-sense, rhythmic, and metabolic-limb systems respectively. Then there is the **four**-fold insight that the human being has physical, etheric, and astral bodies, crowned with our individual I-being. A **twelve**-foldness

describes our avenues into sensory life through Steiner's twelve senses. And in the case of this book we are dealing with a **seven**-foldness of Steiner's “life processes”: *breathing, warming, nourishing, secreting or sorting, maintaining, growing, and reproducing or creating*. These seven affect all of the others in subtle

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ways and above all are essential to supporting and strengthening the etheric forces of the human being.

This can all be dizzying to think about! Yet this book has helped to distill the picture into an accessible and practical framework of how the life processes weave and dance with and amongst all these other human aspects.

Thinking of a very young child's drawing has been helpful. One of the child's first drawing motives are swirls and spirals in a circular motif. We might imagine these curving, enclosing forms as the four-fold sheathes that surround the incarnating soul so life becomes possible in a physical body. Then into the drawing comes a dot or cross within the circling forms—the awakening of an upright human being who will do, feel, and ultimately think.

As the child matures and steps out into the world, he or she will be surrounded by experiences that come in through the portals of the twelve senses. Humanity has been pictured from ancient times as the upright human being encircled by the signs of the zodiac, each of which is associated with one of the senses. It might be seen an enclosing circle from which the child reaches with the senses into the world and through which the world streams in toward him. The zodiac and the number twelve are associated with qualities of space. Gaining spatial orientation through the twelve senses and a reliable body-geography makes possible an experience of grounded rest and stillness. If there were only rest, however, human life would be static; and that is not its nature.

Human life unfolds through time in constant, dynamic activity and development. And the seven life processes carry us into time and show their selfless service. These we might imagine as seven dancers (eurythmists, of course) who weave within the twelve. These dancers perform both simultaneously and sequentially, depending upon what the life needs are at the moment. Each will step forward for an individual performance at the right time and then step back into the harmonious rhythms the others have maintained so another can show its virtuosity. The tempo may ebb and flow, but each is always dancing.

The first half of *The Seven Life Processes* begins with literal, scientifically-based explanations of how each life process functions on a physiological level.

This gives a helpful understanding of the basic, physical processes from a factual perspective. Then the insights revealed further on in the book become all the more impressive as the subtle transformations that the life processes make possible are described.

From Rudolf Steiner's explanation of the twelve senses, we know that the health and strength of the first four senses lay the foundation for what can happen later in physical, cognitive, social, even moral, and spiritual development. It is the same with the seven life processes. How each process is cared for and nourished on a physical level during the early years of life lays the groundwork for the capacities and sensitive use of our thoughts, feelings, and deeds—"our soul faculties"—that are so needed and sought for in our times. Examples of the soul faculties the book considers include: attention, concentration, interest, enthusiasm, inner connection, selection and sorting, organization, differentiation, questioning, memory, practice and improving, and idea expansion. This list reminds us of so many faculties we see disabled in ourselves and in the children who come into our care. The positive reassurance is that each of these healthy faculties can be achieved "if the seven life processes are able to be anchored in the body during early childhood" (p. 107). Quoting further:

*Each of the life processes stands in a living relationship with these unfolding soul capacities. Physical breathing has special influence on lung activity, blood circulation, and heart function. The soul faculties associated with breathing have to do with perception and attention. At the same time, the way a person breathes has an influence on physical digestion and, regarding soul faculties, is associated with being able to make an inner connection with something.*

*Similarly, for example, physical secretions mainly have to do with sorting or elimination and soul-wise with differentiation, organization, and questioning. At the same time, secretions also have a strong influence on body warmth, through perspiration; the soul correlates are the faculties of perception, interest, memory and so on (ibid.).*

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To summarize, healthy breathing facilitates clear perception and focused attention. Healthy digestion influences the ability to make inner connections. The sorting process of digestion—what to keep and what to eliminate—is connected to the ability to make clear differentiations, to organize, and to question objectively.

After pointing out these associations, the most practical and encouraging part of the book begins. The authors, Philipp Gelitz and Almuth Strehlow, tell what educators, parents, and other caregivers can do to support the healthy life and functioning of the life processes in practical and concrete ways. The section on “Salutogenic Teaching” is a treasure chest of suggestions. If weaknesses are seen in a particular area, they indicate which of the “dancers” we can invite forward into our classrooms and homes.

Looking at development through the lens of the seven life processes can offer us a whole new way to look at our classrooms. How is the breathing in terms of rhythm? Where is the warmth of soul and enthusiasm? What nourishment is being offered to the children’s senses and feelings as well as at the snack table? Are we, as teachers, able to sort the essential from that which is not? Is there a “hum” of predictability and stability that sustains and maintains each morning? What activities invite the children and teachers to growth? Where does our creativity, our freshness for the new come from?

*The Seven Life Processes* is factual, practical, and insightful. The book reveals on many levels, from the obvious to the subtle, ways the life processes support our continuing human development. Reading this is an exploration well worth the time. ♦