
The Human Encounter and Integration of the Lower Senses

Speech and the Human Encounter, Keynote Lecture II, February 2018

— Michael Kokinos

Lakshmi's keynote lecture offered several important images. The first one is that the human being is always developing, always becoming. The second image shared was of the first breath and the first intake of breast milk as making a connection, a communication, between the inner world and the outer world. The third image was of little tiny feet landing on the earth in uprightness after the long journey from the spiritual world and of the feet listening to the earth's story. The final image Lakshmi brought is of the spirit of language, which lives in the sacred place in Australia. It is full of crocodiles, but it is also the "dreaming place" for what is known as "mermaids' spirit." This mermaid dreaming place is ceremonial ground for the aboriginal people.

Telling some stories about work with aboriginal children will tell something about the spirit of language. The baby represents a polarity. He is completely vulnerable and open to the world. Yet he is also active and moving with muscle power. We will want to carry these images. In the northernmost part of Australia, indigenous people live as a very old culture. They constitute only 1.5 percent of the population. Before British and Dutch colonists came two or three hundred years ago, there were three hundred different language groups, probably more. Most of the old people who taught in the school on the ceremonial grounds knew five or ten different languages, their own mother tongue and the tongues of their neighbors. With this incredible linguistic capacity, no pen or paper was used. All was taught by rhythm, imagery, and movement (tapping sticks). There lives here a historical harmony, sort of a spiritual unity, in the diversity of the languages. Much of this is gone now and we find only remnants. We are lucky enough to work in an environment where this spirit of history and this linguistic history is still living.

In our work with aboriginal teachers, we explored puppetry, storytelling, felting, and beeswax modeling. Out of some cloths the teachers and mothers made knotted dolls and brought them to life. One could see

the joy as they told stories and engaged the children beautifully. These aboriginal ladies just knew what to do and created masterpieces in their own chaotic style. The children were completely mesmerized, sitting still and quiet.

They also did hand-gesture games. The children loved these, some joining in, some just chewing on a pen.

One of the teachers sculpted a fish and told about it. The teacher looked intently at the fish while she spoke the word "fish." What is the inner life and consciousness of this mother when she says "fish"? What is she thinking? Is her speech and inner life congruent or is her mind wandering off to details of what she needs to do next? It is scary to realize how much chatter is going on in our thinking. What is wonderful about working with these aboriginal people is that they have no inner chatter. These teachers and mothers are fully present in their actions and thinking. There is congruence between what is spoken, what is created artistically, and speech. The child takes this in and becomes almost paralyzed in engagement with the image and speech. We have to become awake to these moments with the children. We are witnessing neurology. This is how connections in the brain are made. It is not linear and materialistic. It is done through the soul. Through ceremony, through movement and song the children are carried along. They receive a wonderful education through speech, song, movement, and rhythm.

Aboriginal art and ceremonial decoration make use of diagonal marks and cross-hatching and designs of dots, varying from tribe to tribe. These designs represent what we know of as the universal etheric. Here is a picture of a snake. It represents the universal etheric, the formative forces behind everything. For an indigenous person, this snake is not drawn in isolation as a concept, not even as a separate sensory concept. There is an egg, a snake, and a small animal that will be the snake's lunch. But the whole is nestled in cross-hatching, within creative forces. Outside of the figures are the etheric, creative, universal forces,

and the body contains the same forces inside. This is clearly seen and beautifully expressed.

We have here a picture of objects that live within their wholeness. It is probably safe to say, however, that our culture has lost this wholeness. We would just draw the separate snake. But an aboriginal person will never draw a separate snake. It just doesn't happen. It is always contextual. Rudolf Steiner said that we should always see events contextually whether it is in space or in time. This picture shows time contextually in the egg, the snake, and its lunch. Time and space are expanded beyond just a simple concept.

In aboriginal culture there is also the "song man" or "song woman." One "song man" friend would create a rhythm with clap sticks over which he would speak words. He could sing for hours, for days, actually. When he finished a song and was asked for a short title, he would answer with a narrative of what the whole song had included. He could not express it briefly. His song and the words did not represent objects but the spaces in between, where connection and interrelationship live. This is a type of universal consciousness we have lost by gaining objective consciousness. This relates to young children. We need to remember that they come from the spiritual world, where everything is interconnected. They enter this world where things are separate for the first time. This is such a wonderful concept to keep in the back of our minds, pictured by the snake not being represented out of context.

Another painting shows a picture of a man, a spiritual being, who is gathering our language from a tree. In reading Rudolf Steiner's *Creative Speech*, I realized that this aboriginal picture depicts the spirit of language. This spiritual being is collecting language for the human being from the tree, a living object, not an inanimate rock. The living tree brings the gift of the spirit of language. One can see the cross-hatches and the dots that form a contextual, etheric landscape tying everything together.

In Lakshmi's school in India are children with autism who do not speak. They make sounds but cannot speak words. How can these children be helped to speak? In *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, Rudolf Steiner states that the fourth condition for esoteric training is to acquire the conviction that the real being of man does not lie in his exterior but in his interior. Working with speech takes us to this inner condition.

In a simplistic picture, we can look at the child in terms of what he does in movement, speech, and behavior. This we see as "output." These external things are observable and are commented upon and diagnosed by parents, teachers, doctors, and therapists.

But there must also be consideration of what experiences come through the environment, which we can call "input." How are sleep, nutrition, and sensory and social experiences coming toward the child? What was going on in the house, in the car, with friends? What is going on with the adults in his life, in their inner lives? Are thoughts, speech, and meaning congruent? What is the inner content of the parents' cerebral life and soul life? All of these have impact. The child is processing in his inner life all these experiences and trying to integrate them. What comes out of the child is usually unconscious, not something intentionally guided by him. Children just move, speak, and behave.

If we want to address the "output," we have to observe the "input" and make changes there. To paraphrase Albert Einstein, we cannot solve a problem in the immediate moment; we have to go "upstream" to find the source of the problem. As parents and teachers, we see "output." Can we take ourselves back to a place where we can wonder where lies the source of strain producing what we see in the moment?

We have heard of the steps the child goes through to come to self-perception. At about twelve months, the child stands, then starts to walk. This separates her from other people and awakens a longing to reconnect. This is a deep, spiritual, primal urge and longing to touch into the place whence she came. Speech emerges from this longing. We need to realize how much happens in the nonverbal space between oneself and the other person. After many years, some young people with autism have begun to speak, some verbally, some through typing or using a computer. They have asked teachers to facilitate computer use for them to communicate about their inner life. After many years of Waldorf curriculum, they have begun to "speak" nonverbally. When asked about odd behaviors, these boys communicate that they cannot sense their own bodies. "I don't feel my physicality. I don't feel my physical body. I do not have a sense of my own 'I am.'" They lack a sense of physical body landscape. Most of us have a safe, secure experience of our physical body even when all kinds of other transactions are going on socially. But

the boys describe that they do not sense themselves through proprioception.

Another boy says, “I am floating in space. I do not orient to my own three-dimensional physicality. I scream and stamp and make noise because it makes me feel better in my body. I cannot stand the sounds and lights and noise—these are too painful.” This is a description of sensory disintegration. These children have not crossed over from physical sensing to perceiving themselves as a wholeness. These examples are extreme, but we meet more and more children in our classrooms who are not oriented into their physical bodies. Then we see behavior problems. What do we do? If a child cannot sense his feet, how can he feel the story of the earth? How can he speak when he does not perceive himself?

Recalling from yesterday, we are reminded of four steps in development—

- Inner perception
- Motor development—head control, crawling, standing, walking
- Separation from others through mobility
- Longing to reconnect

This work with autistic-spectrum children is research with children who did not make that first step. Development is always sequential and built up, layer upon layer. We can begin to understand this as Rudolf Steiner gives us a picture of the lower senses. These lower senses are a wonderful structure for considering children. He tells us very clearly that the sense of self-movement or proprioception is directly related to the sense of word, also called the sense of language, the ability to sense language. But we should be warned to remember our snake in its context because this is not a linear relationship. It is always complex and interrelated. We cannot just move with children who do not speak, and expect them to speak. It is interesting to observe that speaking came to the students with autism later like a waterfall after the Norse Myths block. The Norse Myths are very physical and are about encounter. The speech and the imagery are powerful. It is all about the structure and beauty and temples and experiencing hexameter. Stamping and clapping, the noises made in rhythm in this curriculum helped to integrate the lower senses.

I work within the kindergarten to integrate the lower senses. Working in a group in the kindergarten classroom is the best practice. There is no better place.

Looking at speech itself, where has evolution placed speech in terms of human physiology? Speech is a motor and muscle activity that is placed on top of our breathing. Rudolf Steiner said that speech has a formative influence upon the physical body. How others speak and how the child hears language also affects physical development and influences the way the child goes into the world and collects words. The child collects words through listening. Then the question is, “What do I hear? Are people speaking in a way that is connected to the spirit of language? Are people speaking in a way that is congruent? Does what Mama says make sense with what I sense in her inner life? Or is this incongruent for me?” What happens in the invisible “space in-between” takes us to the place where speech either comes or is inhibited in children. This is the space where speech is birthed. Space. Think about what care we take in consciousness about the earth. Are we that careful about speech?

The aboriginal people sit in the ceremonial circle by a waterfall, surrounded by the colors of nature, tapping rhythm with sticks and speaking and singing. What are they doing? They are imitating our physiology. They are imitating the speech sitting on top of rhythm, the rhythm of the breath. The breath mediates the inner world and the outer world. Speech is grafted on top of this function which connects the individual soul life and the outer world. Rudolf Steiner never stops talking about this. In the *Foundation Stone Meditation* he is talking about the human soul in mediation with oneself and the world—the world of the earth, the elementals, the world of the spiritual beings, the world of social relations. To mediate and integrate all these is our task on earth, what we do.

Speech is in the center of this task.

There is a wisdom in bringing hand-gesture games to our kindergarten classes. These games are full of playful, rhythmic, musical education. We know this but must stand strongly for our practices. Mainstream views may think that we are “all play, but what do the children learn?” We need to inform ourselves so we can speak strongly and proudly about what we do. This education is the best practice;

it is a physiological, health-promoting education. We should carry this conviction away with us from this conference.

A miraculous story of a little Indian girl and a hand-gesture game proclaims this truth. We worked extensively with this nonverbal girl, who had many challenges. When she and Lakshmi first met, it was as though they had been waiting for this encounter forever. We worked with her with movement and nutrition, but the child seemed most interested in us as people, in the relationship and encounter with us.

Then came the magical moment. Lakshmi wanted to bring the magic of hand-gesture games. We live in a world of ideas in which we can become trapped. Rudolf Steiner points out that human gestures, especially with our hands, convey deep feeling towards song and to the word, not to ideas. With hand-gesture games, we can save ourselves and our children from this trap of living in ideas. Be cautioned in hearing this story again that there is always an interconnection of events, not linear causes and results. But this is what happened between us and this child.

I had recently learned Wilma Ellersiek's hand-gesture game, Snailyman, and did it as a touching game on the little girl's hand. When the game finished, the child ran to everyone in the clinic and grasped each one's hand and said, "Man!" She repeated this word over and over and could not be stopped. She would walk up to people, often strangers, and point to the back of her hand and say "Man." This was her first word. What happened in our encounter?

In both teaching and therapeutic work, we work with life forces and the rhythmic system. Whenever we work with these, we help the child consciously access her own life forces. And we start with the radiating warmth of the life forces, which enable the child to enter a meaningful karmic relationship. Children do search and look for that meaningful karmic relationship. It is not enough as a therapist, healer, or educator to intellectually know exactly what this child needs and give it. There must be relationship. It is this longing for connection that invites the birth of true human speech. And this birthing of speech is the freeing of the spirit. If the spirit is freed, it can choose which space into which it wants to enter, the space into which one wants to

bring personal, inner content. In this space lives one's truth of inner life. "Where do I share it? How do I share it? With whom? How much do I share? Do I want to share the whole of it, a little bit of it?" And here is where human speech belongs. This little girl with the Snailyman game demonstrates to us how she recognized this space where speech lives.

Speech belongs to the warmed space between the two participants, into which comes the experience of who "I am."

What happened with Snailyman? In the beginning the child watched the person doing it. Then she began to look at her hand. Snailyman is a beautiful expression of the archetype of the inner world opening up. The words don't mean anything; they are mostly nonsense sounds. This means nothing but also everything. It is fun and it is deep. When I did Snailyman, I began to build up the picture of the *Foundation Stone Meditation*. What lies behind it is the human soul; what lies behind it is the picture of the snake; what lies behind it is the song man singing with his clap sticks; and what lies behind that is the spirit of language, mediating from the spiritual world through speech into this little girl and me. We can find this mediation through speech, perhaps a song, a rhythmic verse, hand-gesture games, or through puppetry. We have many tools for opening up pathways to the encounter the child has come to earth to find. ♦

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