

The I Coming into Relationship with the Physical Body

~ Philipp Reubke

Imagine how we each came to our kindergarten trainings and our individual kindergarten settings. How much did we initiate ourselves, and how much was the result of events we could not plan or anticipate? After four years of teaching, I had planned to resign my post and go to teach in Italy. But that did not work out. We approach something out of our own intentions, but what actually happens can be something quite different. When we reflect back we can often see that where we have ended up is more of what we truly wanted than what we asked for. We have an intention in mind and then the world answers with its will forces.

So we picture being in our kindergarten. We want to continue to learn. How can we do this together with the children and our colleagues? How can our colleagues help us continue our evolution? Colleagues can point out that we talk too much, we sing wrong. We are somehow also attached to our difficulties. My difficulty was in keeping the kindergarten tidy and ordered. My class families came to clean the classroom and a mother pointed out that the radiator was dusty. But the child said, "Philipp likes dust."

How can we talk about such things with colleagues with confidence, trust, and love? We do not want to be stuck in seeing only the difficulties. But we want to see how we can help each other to go further. We need to feel the invisible side of our colleagues, what it is one wants to become. Within ourselves we have a cold and antipathetic side and another side of strong sympathy and warmth. We want to feel the possibilities of the colleague and where he truly wants to go. We need to have a good mixture of these two sides—that is real love.

Our relationship to the child is the same story. The miracle of incarnation is the theme of our meeting. There we can see what we are now, and what we are striving to be. What is incarnation? The individuality comes out of the world of the invisible with a very strong intention of becoming and comes into a situation with a special place, family, language, and culture, and with a body that gives him gifts and

difficulties. He comes out of a world where there are infinite possibilities to one with limitations. Now he is in a place where he can experience loneliness, laziness, and being confined in one particular place. How can we help the child to feel at home in this situation without forgetting his spiritual homeland, without cutting off the possibility of change, of metamorphosis?

If we return to our own experiences, we can say someone is really incarnated when he is in some activity where he has adapted well to the physical environment. A skilled football player or a mountain climber has the instinct to do the right thing in the right moment automatically. When we can do the next thing without having to think about it, this is when we are well incarnated.

Rudolf Steiner says that when we change our automatic behaviors, we change our life forces and return more to the realm of becoming, of metamorphosis. We can feel it right away. In the kindergarten we can change our habits—could we have a different way of welcoming the children? We want nothing drastic, but small changes in little ways, such as a tiny change on the seasonal table every day, or the toys rotated and changed in position. These kinds of efforts give us more life forces.

But the main question is how to help children feel at home in their bodies and also preserve the connection they have to their spiritual homeland. In connection with this I can bring some stories of children from my own kindergarten. At the beginning of winter I could see different qualities of incarnation in the children when they went out to the woods. Some children would slide on the ice, fall, and get up and go on. Others would break the ice with stones and make a soup out of the mixture. Others liked to carry pieces of ice with reverence like a treasure.

One particular child sliding on the ice is thin, pale, with dark hair and dark eyes. He has very sharp perception and misses nothing in the kindergarten. If something is not fair between children, he interferes and

punishes the offender. He likes talking and always has questions. He watches others building and loudly gives directions. He looks for the possibility to fight with others, likes the sensation of being hit, and likes noise. When children discuss what they like, that's what he says: "noise." At circle he makes everything a caricature. He does not like to hear the same story twice and has no imaginative play. He paints with yellow or clear colors, no dark colors. Sometime he starts with yellow and then hides everything with blue or gray.

A four-year-old girl is blond and big-headed with blue eyes and a round body. Her mother took her out of public preschool, saying the child was gifted and was bored. She likes to come to kindergarten. She loves baking bread and stays at the table a long time. She never runs or climbs. She likes to cover a table with a cloth and write on a paper: "Private, do not enter." She sits on a ledge in the garden and looks out over everything, thinking about how to get down. She is another child who is very awake in her head.

Another boy has been in kindergarten for three years—big-headed, round, with red cheeks. He lies down and watches others. He likes to eat and always senses when food is available. He has difficulty speaking with poor pronunciation. His drawings are dense colors with no forms. Stories pass over his head. But he is kind and would not hurt anyone. At a lantern festival the class passed a meadow with cows. He looked at the cows for a long time and said that the cows must be happy that the children had come with the lanterns. His head is not yet awake.

Every child has an individual and unique relationship to his body; there are as many different relationships as there are people on earth. If we take the children described above as examples, what can we do to help these children incarnate, but not too much?

In the fourth lecture of the Curative Education Course (*Education for Special Needs*), Rudolf Steiner speaks about incarnation. The human being incarnates differently into the head, chest, and limbs. For the moment, we will look at the polarity of the head and the metabolic/limb system. The head is a lovely sphere with very hard bones on the outside. The organ inside the bones, the brain, has the possibility to be conscious of our I. But the I who is there lives in reflected pictures of experience and is somehow cut off from reality. These pictures are not the real thing but only images. Is there a relationship of these pictures with reality? In the head, the physical body is on the outside and the I inside.

In the limbs it is the opposite, with the bones in-

side. The I lives on the outside, on the periphery of each limb. Here the I is completely unconscious. As we reflected earlier on how we came to be Waldorf educators, we found that sometimes unexpected events happen that push us in the right directions, of which our I was unaware. In the limbs the I speaks from the periphery in a very unconscious way. There is a spiritual connection here. In the head the I is conscious but we have only images. In the limbs it is unconscious, but we have a connection with reality. If we try to draw this, we can make a vertical lemniscate where the two change position.

But how is it with a little child who does not have the same consciousness as the adult? In lecture eleven of *Study of Man (The Foundations of Human Experience)* we are given a picture. The little child has a big head, which is the most physically developed and mature part of the body, the most complete and perfect at birth. Then we have the limbs and chest, which are not as perfect or developed. The head is the part of the body which is most physical. The I is connected to the head; the head spirit has had wide experiences from previous incarnations but is asleep to this memory. The little child's head is perfect but asleep. But the limbs are awake. The spirit living in the limbs is living and active. The limbs are linked to the spiritual world and can be much more active than in adult life. Because the child is still asleep in the head, the spiritual beings can be more active. We adults educate what the child is doing. Being asleep means that the I is in the surroundings, is around us. When we are asleep, our I is in the periphery. Because his I is in the periphery, a little child can imitate.

This helps us understand why it is so important to leave the child in a dreamy type of consciousness, in the mood of the fifth. It is so important that we educate the will. *The will wakes up the sleeping I in the head.* We adults want to wake up the child with questions and choices. It is important to not do this too fast. If we work with the will and act toward the child with our actions, our willing, then we act in collaboration with higher spiritual beings who are active in the limbs. Together we touch, nurture, and awaken the one who is a prisoner in the bones and who will afterwards as an adult no longer have connection to the spiritual world. We have a chance to touch the child through the limbs as a way to awaken the head.

We adults cannot do it like this any more, though we can strive to re-establish this connection with the spiritual world through meditative practice. When we educate the child through the will, we do not interrupt

the connection with the spiritual world too soon, as happens when we appeal to the child's head forces.

Looking back at the children already described, children whose consciousness is already too awake and who will not imitate any longer, we may ask: How can we bring them into their will, into rhythmical activity, so the awakened head can fall asleep for a while?

And what can we do for children strongly incarnated in the limbs but still sleepy in the head? Yes, the body is strong, but what if the head does not awake and the individuality stays hovering above the body?

Following are some guiding images and specific suggestions for interacting with these polarities:

- The goal is that the child will be able to take initiative to create in play out of her own imagination. If the child cannot do this, as a transition we ask the child to do something and she does it. Give the child a task from the outside to stimulate activity on the inside. Take out the compost, sweep the floor, card the wool, etc. [*Editor's note: We would not do this with children awake in the head who lack imitative capacity or strong limbs. With them there would be endless discussion.*]
- Older children and those exposed to technology often resist doing what we ask. To them bring big tools—saws, hammers, drills, big pliers—and work that engages the limbs in big movements.
- For children who talk rather than act, the teacher can offer an idea through his or her own will activity. For example, some of my boys would stack tables and sit up high and talk. I quietly rearranged the tables without explanation to make a challenging tunnel that widened and then narrowed. This drew the children into play and activity.
- A sensitive, self-critical child with unrealistically high expectations of self needs a different approach. In such a case, I gave more one-on-one quiet encouragement and warmth of interest to a girl to quietly help her build self-confidence.
- An autistic boy would never play and always observed from the periphery. The key for him was music. I played singing games with him individually during free play time.
- Older five- and six-year-old girls gifted in drawing, dancing, and fine motor activities can also be too self-aware. This awakens the door to competition—who has the nicest clothes?—and social conflicts. For this problem, I told the parents that the class would be playing and working outside in the mud and weather, so the girls should wear pants to

school. This redirected attention to activity rather than appearance and helped with social issues.

- Many children are anxious and have difficulty with transitions. The key is to take time with each transition and not rush. Have confidence that the transition will go smoothly and move into it by deliberately showing through your own actions what is coming.
- For children too awake in the head, water activities are good: painting, washing painting jars, washing sheep's wool, laundry, washing dishes. These lead back to sleepiness. Practical work with strong rhythmic quality is also helpful. Building houses and shelters that give a gesture of protection lead in the right way too.
- For children who are still too asleep, work with the fingers and fine motor tasks encourage awakening. Beeswax modeling helps. The hand gesture games by Wilma Ellersiek are wonderful. Jumping rope is also good.
- The sleepy child is also helped by deliberately being given small frustrations. It provokes awakening if something he is looking for is not in the usual place and he has to look for it.

All of these children need time. We are working with a time process. If we want awake children to have a chance to slow down and sleep a little bit in the head, we cannot be in a rush. In the rhythm of the morning, we can choose what to emphasize and not include every activity. For example, for one or two weeks we can focus on a puppet play and story and not circle time. This will afford more time for play. Create a rhythm for two or three weeks and then change. Now the circle games become the focus. Think more in longer periods of time, in blocks. I also arranged my work in the classroom in blocks. In the fall everything was cooking—chopping vegetables and cooking soups. Then leading up to a lantern festival, the building of lanterns over time took precedence. Making dolls is another activity block. During this time the regular dolls in the class are “away on holiday.”

It is also important to like what we are doing. Our engagement and joy communicate to the children. Enthusiasm and joy form the placenta in which the children can grow. Michaela Glöckler has said that our profession is to bring joy in life. We should choose activities we like and also have rhythm in our lives so that there is joy. Our own engagement in life is critical.

How to Know Higher Worlds is a fundamental book for early childhood teachers about self-development. If

we read it with the eyes of an early childhood teacher, we will see that Rudolf Steiner is talking about an inner child within ourselves. His recommendations to us are like what we would recommend for the children in our class.

He speaks first about inner calm. We should think about our day and look at what we experienced from a distance—without emotions. We review images inside our soul but from a distance. This is the same exercise we have to employ with the children. We proceed with a distance and do not get emotionally engaged in what the children are living in. Rudolf Steiner recommends this for our daily review.

In our life we have experiences of joy and pain which can be very hard in our emotions and upon our senses. But if we only follow sense impressions and emotions, our inner child is overwhelmed by the intensity of the impressions. There is no space in which to grow. We have to create moments of inner calm for ourselves when this inner child can grow. We tell the same thing to our parents—the children should not be overwhelmed with too-strong sensory impressions. We are not trying to be overprotective but to allow inner creativity to grow for both the child and ourselves.

If someone speaks about us for good or ill when on a path of development, we are freer to know that

what the other says has nothing to do with one's value as a human being. Let these experiences flow off our back like rain off a duck. The children will test us and find things that make us angry, even wound us. But we have to let them not touch us. This objectivity gives us authority to go ahead with a child. As we incarnate ourselves in this way, the children live in imitation and will imitate our inner state. Our inner work helps the children to incarnate too.

There are people who think that anthroposophists want to retreat into themselves like monks. But it is not like this. We have to strengthen the inner child, which is one's I. To do this we have to go in the world and have pleasure and sense impressions because this tells us about the world. If we have no pleasure, we shut the door and the world will not speak to us. In closing ourselves off, we harden the I and stay in our shell, never to come out. If we stay in pleasure, we also harden the I and shut the doors to the inner self. We want to stay in the life processes, taking some distance away from our sensory experiences. We reflect back and watch what has happened with some distance. There is breathing from one to the other.

We can close by coming back to where we began with ourselves as kindergarten teachers. What is our goal for ourselves, for our children? Our head has a tendency to have fixed, rigid pictures of the children. With the feeling part of our being, we need to practice imagining the steps to help a child or another adult make the next developmental step. But how do we develop faculties to do this? We have to be very active with our will, really do things. We need to dig holes and make toys, and not only be on the computer when at home. In this area we are inwardly connected to the children. We can also be very active in the will with our meditative practices. We have to shut down the inner I in the head with exercises of inner calm. Observing others with sincere interest is the companion path. It is important to be truly interested in the children and in our colleagues.

Our goal is that our head thinking may welcome and receive the enlightened impulses of the higher I who is living unconscious in our will. This is what we strive toward for the children and also for ourselves. ◆

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Dolls in Dornach. Photo courtesy of Janni Nichol.