

A Survey Of Birth
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Three years ago I was lucky to enjoy a sabbatical from kindergarten teaching at Pine Hill and actually found myself with enough time to pursue some personal anthroposophical research. I had long been occupied with children 4 1/2 to 6 + years old and was beginning to turn with interest to new questions about the child's development from birth to the age of three. As Advent time and the Holy Nights approached I was filled with particular concern about birth itself. There are mothers everywhere, I thought, that are trying to make conscientious, informed decisions about birth and birth-related issues like birth control, abortion, invitro-fertilization, adoption, and birth methods. There is also a natural scientific community keenly interested in the topic of genetic manipulation before birth. I wondered what I could find from an anthroposophical point of view that would help me to understand the threshold of birth better and the incarnation journey from the realms of spirit into earthly existence. What was this experience like for the child? For the mother? How are the astral body, etheric body, physical body formed? By whom? What was the development of consciousness like? How are body, soul. And spirit united?

I happily discovered a fellow "birth" researcher along the way in Marjorie Thatcher from Vancouver, B.C. Her work resulted in an early childhood course for senior high school students at the Waldorf school. Where would my study lead? By the end of those precious few months of effort I knew more than at the beginning of my journey, enough to offer a short workshop for Antioch New England during Holy Night time the following year. But I also learned firsthand the nature of very large anthroposophical questions; they take a life time of study and I had only just begun!

Nonetheless, when I returned to the classroom I wondered how my efforts could be put to use with the children and families of the kindergarten. It was hard to find time for research once I had re-entered that very fulltime occupation of kindergarten teaching and in fact, I wasn't able to do much my first year back. But just before school began last year I happened to read Torin Finser's little book *Research* (I highly recommend it!) and was inspired to at least do a survey of the class of 1996-97. I had been studying about ideal development but what were the actual birth experiences of my class of 19 children?

We had already asked each family for a brief written biography of their child's development (which included birth history information) as part of the kindergarten application process. For me, it was really more a matter of filling in any gaps of missing information by speaking with the appropriate parents and then compiling a list. But though I began with the birth question in assembling a profile, I discovered other significant developmental events for the children so I included them in my results as well. Here is what I discovered child by child, noteworthy events in their early physical development, including birth:

1. Cervical procedure for mother at 5 months to preserve pregnancy. Significant premature dental decay for child.
2. Intense one hour birth. Rare, life-threatening viral illness for child at 5 years which she survived.
3. Home birth. Surgery for child at 3 months to correct lack of a proper opening between scrotum sacs and abdominal cavity.
4. C-section delivery after long and complicated pregnancy.

5. Natural labor and birth. Child broke leg at 7 months, delayed crawling and walking. At two years, swallowed a nickel and rushed to hospital when breathing stopped.
6. Birth involved a vacuum extraction after 39 hour labor.
7. Normal birth and development.
8. Induced labor, 15 days late. (Day care begins at 3 months.)
9. C-section after 36 hour labor.
10. Normal birth. Breastfeeding difficulties.
11. Posterior position, C-section delivery. Lactose intolerance, delayed language development.
12. Normal birth and development
13. Emergency C-section.
14. Home birth and normal development.
15. Induced labor.
16. Rupturing membranes was necessary for birth to proceed.
17. Pregnancy difficult, child sensorily over-sensitive since birth.
18. Umbilical cord wrapped around the neck, child aspirated and developed an infection of the lung. Not breathing at birth, 7 days in intensive care.
19. Rupturing membranes was necessary for birth to proceed. Significant premature dental decay for child.

It was eye-opening for me to consider the above picture. I realized that this was only one group of children and therefore it was impossible to draw any large conclusions. In fact, I was left with more questions than before I started. But it was very helpful to me as a kindergarten teacher to have developed even this simple but concrete physical development composite of my group. From a new perspective I was able to consider the concept “obstacles to incarnation” and it made me wonder about all the other children who are entering Waldorf early childhood settings at the turn of the century.

P.S. For those who are interested in further reading about the process of birth from a spiritual point of view, there are two books that I highly recommend: *The Path to Birth* by Stanley Drake, and *Eternal Childhood* by Karl König. Both are available through the Anthroposophic Press.