

A Right to Childhood

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These two lectures were given at the International Waldorf Kindergarten Conference. The summary is written by Renate Breipohi with Dr. Glöckler's approval. These first appeared in Star Weavings, the Newsletter of the Australian Kindergarten Association.

Lecture 1

Dr. Michaela Glöckler started by looking at the changes that are happening in our time: there is a growing participatory consciousness, a new emphasis on development, and a new awareness of hindrances.

It has been our task to develop relationships with each other and in this process, we find a relationship to the mighty being of Word, for through words we live in relation to each other.

Now, at the beginning of a new millennium, another step is needed - the step to the deed. The intention expressed in this Conference - to form an Alliance for the Right of Childhood - is such a step. It will be hard work to preserve the foundation of human development.

Dr. Glöckler then traced the battle for protection of the right of individual development in history. The first declaration of Human Rights appeared in 1689. From then onwards, up to the second half of this century, there was a battle to establish these human rights in all countries. We know of the American Human Rights Declaration of 1776, the French Revolution of 1789, and then the Human Rights Declaration of the United Nations in 1948. It took another 8 years until this declaration was signed by Germany and still this Declaration is not acknowledged everywhere on earth. More recent than the Human Rights Declaration is the agreement of the United Nations about the Rights of Children.

It seems that the Right to Childhood may be a major theme for the next millennium. Dr. Glöckler pointed to major themes of human development from 3000 BC to 3000 AD.

What do we find in the third millennium BC? Pyramids in the south, megaliths in the west, ceramics in the east, and stone axes in the north. Human beings turned towards the earth with their will. They worked and struggled with the mineral world. City cultures arose beside the hunting and farming cultures.

In the second millennium BC, we find what is called the Bronze Age: jewelry and more refined tools. A sense for the artistic is developed and with it, the realm of feeling.

In the first millennium BC, we find weapons made from iron; wars became different. As the blacksmith forged the iron, so also the life of thought was forged at this time. After 600 BC we find the beginnings of Greek philosophy together with Buddha, Lao-Tse and Zarathustra. Greek thought was taken to the East by Alexander the Great.

Within the entire process of evolution these 3000 years can be seen as a special preparation for the mystery of Golgotha and its ongoing effects in the next 3000 years, in which new possibilities arose for an individualized experience of the human soul capacities of thinking, feeling, and willing.

Up to 1000 BC personal thinking was spread in Europe through church councils, the monks and the refined Arab culture entering the Middle and West Europe.

The next thousand years saw human beings work on the individualizing of feeling in an ever more differentiated way. Rights are a matter of feeling. The consciousness of rights and with it, democracy, developed over centuries. In the 16th century Comenius proclaimed the right of education. It took until 1917 to establish this right in nearly all countries.

We still are in this process and we realize that at the turn into the next millennium the most beautiful thoughts and feelings will be in vain if they do not enter into the will of each individual. It will not be possible to rule human beings from outside. People won't behave as politicians want. We are out of the age of imitation and authority. Only through the individual's thinking, feeling, and willing will it be possible to achieve further evolution. Even without knowing about the Christ, one can recognize through the study of history how at this time the guidance from outside has been replaced by a guidance from inside. Christ has incarnated in one body and established the strength to use this body for the unfolding of individuality. The third millennium will be devoted to the individualization of will, in order to come to free, individual, ethical deeds and to find the courage for these.

This is the basis for founding a culture, which comprises the right to childhood. One can only talk about the right to childhood if one has a clear understanding as to what is important in relation to childhood. Through Anthroposophy we learn about development. We need a science of the supersensible to understand development. Then the great themes of child development -goodness, beauty and truth - will be recognized as included in "right".

Dr. Glöckler finished by speaking about an initiative in a small northern German town. Through enthusiasm and a strong determination of will, a beautiful Steiner kindergarten has been fully established within a few years by the parent community. She called this a "weather indicator" for the next millennium, a lightening up of new ways of working in which parents will take things in hand and we will learn to trust their initiative.

Lecture 2

Out of all social aspects the sphere of rights is least understood and people are not very conscious of it. Rights are connected to breathing, heartbeat and feeling. It is the Christ sphere of compassion and love for all that is living. We are hurt when we are treated unjustly, children especially.

If we look on the one side at the spiritual life and on the other side at the economic life, we find both are endangered fields. There is the danger of grandiose idealism on the one side and power on the other. Lucifer and Ahriman press towards the middle from both sides and want to absorb the rights sphere into their own.

The third millennium will need a strong life of rights, with protection of the right to be human and also of the right to childhood. The protection of childhood is at the forefront of the battle for a new social order.

If we join with others in this battle, we can only pursue what lives in the commonly shared understanding of rights. If we work, for example, in the medical movement, we can find a common denominator in the preparation of a protected space. We can look for allies among the professionals, doctors and nurses, but also among health insurance companies and unions. What groups are there which are already working for the protection of children?

We have beautiful kindergartens, but they are empty in the afternoons and early evenings. How could this space be used for the benefit of children who are not enrolled in the kindergarten? How are the under-threes cared for? It is no longer possible to say mothers should stay at home. The consciousness

soul does not work with such “either/or” principles but with the “as well”. The either/or belongs to the intellectual soul and to the past. Nothing is there today which does not have two sides.

But if we go out into the public field there is always the danger of watering down the essence, of losing or denying one's identity and of becoming alternative. We can only dare to take this step together with a step inwards and with increased work on one's own spiritual foundation. Therefore it has been the aim of this conference to go back to the sources. These sources are outlined in the following part of the lecture.

The work of the individual is to develop one's thinking, feeling and willing.

Strength can grow only in one's own heart, independent of outer authority. The individual has to stand on her own without the security of a social network and has to ask the questions: “Why do I live?” “What do I want to do?” One may become aware of the great Christian ideal of a person capable of living truth, love and freedom.

What did the spiritual world give to the human being? Light-filled thinking. In its purity live the angels. Colorful feelings like strings that are plucked and create a mood that connects us with the world. The archangels hear the music in the vibrations of feeling, and if these vibrations are good they are able to help. Strength of will. It means that one's action should not disturb others, should leave space for the fellow human being. Such tolerance is blessed by the time spirit.

If these inner sources can flow, then we are prepared for kindergarten work. For what do we do in providing the possibility of play? We work with the archai so that these may grow into free will. When we nurture the artistic expressions in gesture, speech, drama and puppetry, then we help prepare an ennobled life of feeling so that children may become future co-workers of the archangels. When fairy tales are told, the great ideals of humanity light up, and in these the children meet their guardian angel. For what is this angel? Our life ideals, the thoughts that guide us.

There is a meditation shared by Steiner kindergarten teachers worldwide: Steiner's Christmas Imagination. It should be read and worked with at least once a year in every kindergarten. What is it? The jubilant spheres of heaven with the souls of the unborn and the angels behind them with hope for what these human beings will do. And in the foreground, the Mother of humanity (Menshenmutter) wrapped in a large cloak and creating a protective space. And in her arms is the Christ Child with the deeply stern look. The Sistine Madonna by Raphael, as described here, is a world culture imagination of the supersensible worked, descending down into the sense world.

How does this beautiful imagination fit into our modern life? We experience resistance and difficulties. Dr. Glöckler used a picture to share the secret behind this contradiction. One can marry the princess only if one is ready to fight the dragon. We always want to marry the princess without battle. This is not possible. It is the destiny of the consciousness soul to be dragon and princess in one. For example, self awareness, self feeling, and self realization become ever stronger ideals of our time. But individualization and emancipation can lead to a demanding attitude: Who greets me? Who not? I want to be recognized for what I can do; I want social acceptance. There is a competition about who does what and who does it best. This all sounds fairly normal but the problem in it needs to be recognized. This is the first step in Consciousness Soul development.

Today there is a certain egotism showing in self-consciousness, self feeling and self motivation. They are seen as healthy. There are many therapists working on creating those abilities when they are missing in human beings. Steiner speaks of them as an innate threefold anti-social drive, as egotism. We need to develop a threefold social impulse which is also in us, but asleep. If a strong individuality is able to awaken the social impulse within, then there is the “marriage” which will make life truly “good”. We will

have the deep wish that everybody can develop freely (free spiritual life), that everybody gets self recognition in the rights sphere (no special privileges), and that economy (which is in itself unjust) may be protected from the bad aspects of individualism by a firmly established sphere of rights. We need to develop a social instinct for recognizing the worth of one's fellow human being. If one practices the Rückschau (a backward review of the day in images) every night, asking "How did otherwise experience me?", we can become more social.

We also need to develop social imagination: faculties of creating what is missing. For example, if in the kindergarten there is no full time position available, instead of getting jealous one can create a new field of work and use space that may be available in the afternoon for a new initiative. This is healthy egoism which stands against Ahriman and radiates outward. But this can't be achieved without schooling our individuality and our social faculties.

Children like it when we educate ourselves as strictly as when we educate them. Then parents will bring their children because they trust us. This trust is the basis for taking parents more and more seriously despite the fact that they are not perfect educators.

In occult development one works out of the positive, one has no time for criticism and complaints. If children are not kept warm at home, one may look at them as practicing their "sense for the cold", and then in kindergarten with the cardigan they practice their "sense of warmth"! Let us become researchers in finding positive solutions and abstain from singing the song about the bad world.