

CHILD STUDY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

It will indeed come to be for us a necessity
 That we observe the children day by day
 And also exercise in ourselves day by day
 Control of our own thought and feelings.
 Every child has a subtle perception
 Of whether the person looking after him (her)
 Or teaching him (her) is inwardly equipped in their soul
 The child's well being depends to a great extent
 On what is growing and developing in the inner soul
 Of the person in charge.
 Develop your keenness of observation;
 Nurture the powers of your inner Being;
 Develop vitality of thinking;
 Depth of feeling, strength of willing.

By Herbert Hahn

This verse is an amazing one to contemplate when beginning to look into the world of child study. It is so very interesting that Herbert Hahn would emphasize that the child's well being depends upon the inner striving of the teacher. It is true that when we try to understand and contemplate the child, we are immediately faced ultimately with the question; can we find the mood of soul that is needed so that genuine perceptions can be born in us and give us the possibility to accompany the child on their journey, or, as Henning Kohler so eloquently states when talking about the child, "the guest looking for the way." What is it do we need to overcome in ourselves, as educators of these young children, to come closer to the child? How can we begin to develop the selfless love that is needed to recognize the original intentions of the child? Original intentions have to do with the essence of the will in each individual child and the resolve to incarnate and integrate the heavenly into the earthly with the help of higher powers. The original intentions which we all carry shine above us as a star guiding us on our way. The three Kings followed the most radiant star to find the Christmas child and bring their sacramental offerings. Rudolf Steiner says in a lecture, On The Three Magi, "To be led by a star means nothing else than to see the soul itself as a star." How can we train ourselves to be led towards recognition of the child's star? What gifts will we have to offer?

Some of the first questions that the teacher may ask upon meeting a child is, "Who are you? What do you bring? How can I be of service to you?" This is the initial moment when a different type of hearing is required. A non-judgmental objectivity is required, and an offering of attention with reverence needs to open in the heart of the teacher. All naming, psychologizing, and jumping to conclusions must be laid aside in the mind and soul of the teacher so that the inspiration waiting to be heard can be recognized. An awakening capacity

of pure listening is planted in the heart as a seed in the educator when there is utter attention that has the possibility to lead us towards the sacred door that has been opened into the destiny of the other. The hearing is as if one is trying to listen to what the angel of the child could be revealing to us at this initial, profound moment.

After this gesture of listening has taken place, then a picturing of the child can be developed. Often the children who come to us have obstacles on their life path that interferes with having a life of healthy integration and balance. Observing a child and sharing these studies in a group process with those who also hold concern and interest can weave together a picture. When working with others we can create meditative conversations that may lead to a healing response. A complete physical description of the child is a helpful place to begin. Often, when observing a child in this way there are details that are noticed that serve in understanding the child. Rudolf Steiner states, "Through intensive study of the physical configuration of the body, characteristics of soul are revealed." Can we observe in such a way that after we watch the child move, we can imitate the movement so that we can feel what it is like in our own body and begin to sense and experience what it feels like to be that child? Looking from the outside and observing the child, and then bringing what is seen into experience, may guide us to insightful understanding and lead towards therapeutic steps. Paying special attention to the behaviors that occur at particular times, their play, transitions, speech and social relationships all reveal various aspects that help to gain a wider perspective.

If the teacher is able to have a conversation with the parents, there is also more information that can add to a more comprehensive view of the child. It is always interesting to know as much as possible about the sleeping and waking life of the child. These two thresholds hold many mysteries and give hints about the constitution of the child. Is the child restless and a light sleeper, or does she sleep so soundly that she is hard to waken? Is she chirping like a little bird and happy in the morning ready for breakfast upon waking, or edgy, nervous and unable to eat until later? The kind of sleep a child has or does not have, deeply affects how their day is lived out. Nutrition is also a key factor in the behavior and energy of the child and can be of significant importance. Another area of observation that is important to pay close attention to are the senses. The realm of the senses is too comprehensive to explore in this brief article but is well worth the effort to gain a basic understanding in consideration of the child.

After this kind of study and observation in one session of child study, it is advisable to continue with a second session in a few days or a week at the most. The picture can then be taken into our sleep life and be woven into a deeper transformed understanding. "Sleep is the little brother of death," it is said, and if we can bring our thoughts of the child into sleep with us into the spiritual world, asking for inspiration from the child's angel on behalf of the child, we again are striving towards another kind of hearing. To create a 'hallowed' space in ourselves, a kind of inner manger, where the birth of the child's being can find its way to us is a kind of reversal form that takes place in the inner life of the teacher. The teacher can then let the information that has been gathered about the child go, to stop thinking about it and open towards the echo that lives out of this world of sleep. As described in the first step there

is a gesture from the teacher of an attentive listening upon meeting the child with an awareness that the angel of the child may reveal a picture as a seed planted in the heart of the teacher. Impressions and inspirations that arise out of sleep, then, may be a flowering of this seed that can be received as a kind of heart offering laid out for the child.

The second session can begin with sharing impressions and imaginations of the child that came out of this work in sleep life. Then the biography and developmental milestones of the child can be studied. The reason the biographical information is not shared before this time is that it sometimes tends to color the picture of the child so strongly in our minds that it may affect the open mindedness needed during the descriptive study and the sleep work. It may cause us to jump to conclusions too soon before receiving and penetrating our observations. Assessments or screenings of any kind have been done can be presented along with the child's drawings. Then as many threads that have been gathered are woven together into a tapestry that may have the possibility of leading the teacher to what Henning Kohler calls 'inner accompaniment'. Suggestions and ideas are discussed but it is realized that there are no definite solutions, and it remains a continual process as the teacher stands by the child in a revived and renewed approach. Sometimes, there are no suggestions or ideas, but that is not the determining factor to success in a child study of this kind. Perhaps success lies in the inner effort of those involved in the study to stretch their own being to make room to really try to know the child: out of this a new understanding can arise.

Through our own endeavor to change ourselves to meet the child, we begin to see the child differently, which allows for the possibility for the child to change. Karl Koenig, who devoted his life in working with the handicapped, wisely said, "To recognize the child's individual nature at once means to release the necessary curative and educational treatment."

- Laurie Clarke