



**Gifts for Children and Educators –
Reflections on the Study Activity of the IASWECE Council in Belgium**
By Philipp Reubke, Thann (France)

In October, the IASWECE council met in Mechelen, Belgium – 32 individuals from 28 countries, most of whom are Waldorf early childhood educators or involved in Waldorf early childhood teacher education. Each year in our fall meeting, the council makes decisions about the financial and pedagogical support of projects (see the list of projects

IASWECE will support in 2014), support which we hope will benefit as many children as possible in as many countries as possible around the world. After the meeting, each of us then took home a present – the thoughts and feelings that were stimulated through our study work together.

Stefanie Allon from Israel and Kai Iruma from Japan introduced our study of Lecture 6 in *The Child's Changing Consciousness (Pedagogical Praxis)* and I would like to share with you a few thoughts from this study.

Many know the situation in the kindergarten or at home where we would so like to have the children be nice, to appreciate the beautifully laid table, to participate with reverence in the gestures of the adults, to listen attentively and to be grateful for everything they receive from the teacher or parents. Instead, we are often confronted with nervousness and aggressive behavior among the children, which in turn makes the adults nervous and aggressive. We then admonish the children to please be grateful, respectful, and nice.

This lecture by Rudolf Steiner offers suggestions for working with this problem. Stefanie showed us how the lecture is built up in the form of a sonata. The first section right away places the adult in the center; whether the child is “nice” or has learned to behave in a moral or culturally acceptable way, depends on the adult. In the second theme, gratitude, love and duty are mentioned – the three virtues that the child develops, one after the other, in the first three seven-year periods of life. This leads us back to the first section – how do I as an adult bring it about that the child can develop these qualities?

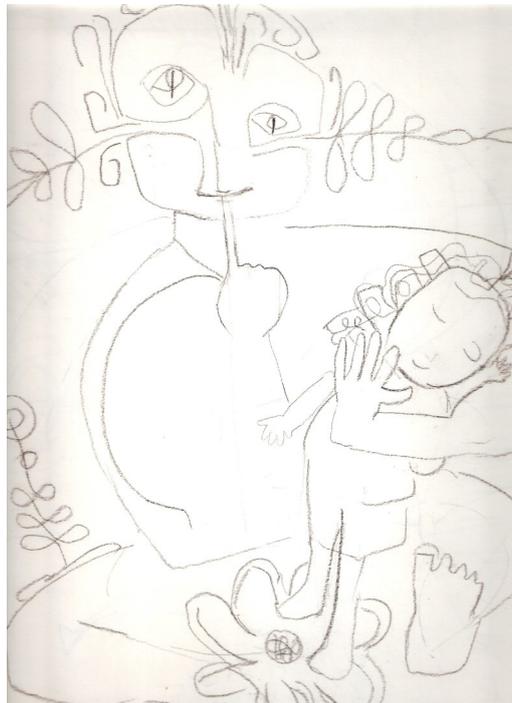
Here we worked with the question of what it is that is most important in the first seven years of life – we cannot teach gratitude to the child

through admonitions or what we say, but through what we do – through “meaningful gesture”. To teach gratitude, “we must act in such a way that we are worthy of gratitude.”

Who among us has not noticed how difficult this is; despite our best intentions we find ourselves filled with criticism or lack of love. This is exactly the reason why Rudolf Steiner stressed how important it is that gratitude be cultivated in the early years of life.

Gratitude must be deeply anchored in the

physical body; it must “even change the chemical composition of the blood and other fluids” so that in later life we are not limited to mere intentions or lack of love.



This is a particularly valuable gift that we can give children and one to which we are called as Waldorf educators: through our gestures, through undertaking our activities in as loving and meaningful a way as possible, we can help the child develop

the bodily constitution for gratitude, from which a moral attitude and reverence can later develop.

We often revert to old habits, admonishing children, explaining things to them, as if we were cursed to remain in abstraction, unable to work in and through our physical body. However everything depends of how we do things, and how we feel in our thoughts and in our actions.



*Drawing of a
five-year old
girl*

Waldorf education for the young child is something universally human. It does not profess to teach content through words; instead, it invites us to work on ourselves, to bring beauty and meaning into our gestures, warmth into our feelings and light into our thinking. “All education is basically the self-education of the human being.”

The council is particularly concerned with this universality, the all-human aspect of Waldorf education. In our study discussions in Mechelen we attempted to understand how, near the end of the lecture, in the “cadenza,” we encounter the statement that the educator must take the Pauline words to heart, “not I, but the Christ in me.”

This does not have to do with a kind of sectarian Christianity; instead, it is a summary of what was developed earlier. If we embark on a path of self-education, we notice how difficult this is and how much we need to change and transform and even

extinguish in ourselves. We discover all the disturbing, ungrateful voices from the kindergarten in our own selves. He who is self-satisfied will not develop further.

All of this is not possible without great effort, energy and engagement. To extinguish oneself at the same time as exerting the greatest personal effort – this is what is demanded of the educator, the self-educator.

This is an attitude that the Zen Buddhist also attempts to cultivate, an attitude, of which Rudolf Steiner spoke in an all-human way when he said that it is the Christ who makes it possible for human beings to practice.

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