
A New Vision for Early Childhood Care and Parent Support

by Dorothy Marlen

At the end of January 2015 I received a long awaited phone call announcing that the course I had been working on for 18 months, and had thought about for much, much longer, had finally completed the process of becoming a nationally accredited course – a Level 3 Early Years Educator (EYE) Diploma. The Holistic Baby and Child Care course was now officially ‘birthed’. It is twenty odd years since I started my journey supporting parents and very young children. It is two years since the vision for this course was first discussed with colleagues and then Crossfields Institute and Emerson College – the two organisations which have made this new part-time course possible. It is a good time to reflect on my personal journey, the vision and its cultural context, and what the wishes and hopes are for this pioneering course.

I came to Anthroposophy as a new mother with one-year-old son. A flier on the counter of a local shop announced a talk on “The importance of rhythm in childhood” led by a Dutch anthroposophical couple who were visiting Lancaster where I lived. I signed up to a study group before the talk had even started – not knowing at all that this particular evening was changing my life. I went on to help start a local Steiner initiative with some other parents, training as a kindergarten teacher and running a childminding/kindergarten venture with another kindergarten teacher for six children, from my dining room. Later the project moved to a local community centre, and a few years later a Steiner school was born and still exists. By then my husband, son and I had moved to York so that my son could attend the Steiner School there. Those years showered me with a new understanding of childhood and riches that could be brought to family life in the form of rhythm, festivals, free play, slowing down, respecting the natural phases of childhood and much more. It showed me what was and what was not appropriate to bring to children at different ages and phases of childhood. Rudolf Steiner’s profound insights brought everything I held dear into a ‘wholeness’ for me.

From those early days my heart has always been with supporting parents and those who care for the very young child. For over 20 years I have run parent and child groups and workshops and courses for parents and those who wished to train as Steiner Parent and Child

Group leaders. I wrote *The Parent and Child Group Handbook* with Hawthorn Press.¹ My deep interest in the first three years eventually took me to Budapest, Hungary, where I trained at the Pikler Institute. That experience, like the first evening at the Steiner talk, had a profound effect on me and catapulted me into starting Parent and Baby groups integrating the Pikler approach, organising a Pikler training in the UK for Steiner Early Years practitioners and co-founding a Pikler UK Association. It became evident that the Pikler approach – with its emphasis on and long experience of how to create co-operative partnership with young children, particularly through times of bodily care, and its thorough understanding of the natural motor development of the child and the necessity for free self-initiated movement without interference from adults – opened up a way forward for more informed Birth to Three professionalism in the Steiner movement and beyond

Deep down I am an idealist, with “paradigm shift” written in gold across my heart! My early personal journey as a mother helped me to understand the importance and the power of parent initiative and that we can create what we want for our children. Also that there are ways that honour our own and our children’s spiritual origins and offer a naturally holistic and health giving way to parent and care for children. My experience of supporting parents and carers of very young children is that we live in very, very challenging times – not only are we not learning the skills of parenting anymore, because family life is breaking down and the old rules do not hold, but there is in addition the onslaught of technology, overload of faulty advice and consumer pressure, and government driven early learning milestones. The vision for the course slowly emerged through my listening as Chair of the Steiner Birth to Three working group and as Birth to Three representative on the Steiner Waldorf Early Years Steering group, and as a result of many discussions with parent and child group leaders, childminders and carers of young children and parents. The creation of the Holistic Baby and Child Care course is the response to the need for a recognised and valued training for those who feel their vocation is to care for the youngest of our children and support family life. And to bring

something new to the table... an alternative qualification for early childhood professionals not only in the Steiner movement but also available for those in mainstream.

One of the five core course tutors, Dr Richard House, a nationally recognized educationalist and campaigner for early childhood, recently spoke to this issue of cultural context. He remarked “a key importance of the course lies in its challenge to the prevailing paradigm of early education and care in Britain, which is commonly mechanistic, procedural, inappropriately accelerating of early development and, crucially, lacking any spiritual foundation. Practitioners, parents and academics alike know in their hearts that something is fundamentally awry with the current approach – and this pioneering course is leading the way in showing that there is a better way, which explicitly re-founds the perennial principles and wisdom of respectful, unhurried care and development – wisdom that is increasingly being lost in the hyperactive and politicised “modernising” of early childhood experience.”

The Holistic Baby and Child Care course integrates Steiner early childhood studies with the Pikler approach whilst fulfilling the requirements of the UK government’s Early Years Foundation Stage² and the Level 3 Early Years Educator training criteria for early childhood professionals. Level 3 is equivalent to A level standard [the upper school state qualification normally taken by 17/18 year olds] and prepares learners to become Early Years Educators (EYE)³, enabling them to work with children from birth to 5 years and gain knowledge of children aged 5 to 7 years. It is a level of qualification which sets a new standard for early childhood professionalism.

This means that the Holistic Baby and Child Care course is a professional qualification that will be recognised in mainstream “birth to five” child care settings. Furthermore, the Holistic Baby and Child Care course has a unique emphasis on the critical first three years of life (rather than the kindergarten years – 3 to 7 years old – which is the main focus of other Steiner early childhood trainings in the UK). The course therefore fills a crucial gap in early childhood training provision in the UK Steiner movement and as well as offering a learning journey that sits alongside, but goes



way beyond, the remit and scope of mainstream early childhood professional trainings.

The course is fully founded on the profound insights of Rudolf Steiner into the nature of the human being and early childhood.⁴ In addition, the discoveries and experience of exemplary child care from the Pikler Institute provide the training with the necessary understanding and skills of how to care for the young child in a way that fulfils Steiner’s insights into child development and needs from birth to three.⁵ These two different but complementary streams have been brought together in other countries and now come together in the UK in this course. I have trained at Sophia’s Hearth in the USA⁶ where the two streams have been brought together in a Birth to Three training and have also visited initiatives such as Der Hof in Germany where the integration provides an exemplary model of care in day care settings and also parent support groups.⁷

In the UK this crucial period of a child’s life between birth and three and the importance of parent support and guidance are generally undervalued and, I believe in some areas, dangerously misinformed. On the one hand the UK government has been ruthless in its drive to ensure children are placed earlier and earlier into nursery care and subjected to formal learning and assessment. On the other, there is overwhelming evidence of deep malaise in too high a proportion of young children, and that at government level, as a *top* priority, there needs to be improvement in the care and support for very young children and parents.

Recently, in January 2015, an All Party Parliamentary Inquiry called “Conception to Age Two – The First 1001 days” was launched. The chair of the Inquiry has said the first 1001 days of a child’s life should be as important to ministers as the ‘defence of the realm’!¹⁸ The aim of the enquiry is “To promote a holistic approach to the antenatal and postnatal period, specifically with regards to the early years and infant mental health”. 1001 sounds a bit like a slogan and the word “holistic” is worrying! For me, holistic means fully embracing the spiritual



Gerhard Reisch
Life Work 1899-1975

“Only one who dares greatly ...”

archive of original pictures and writings
books - reproduction - schooling - forum

Nussbaumweg 5, 88699 Bruckfelden, Germany
Tel. + 49 (0)7554 989 9979 Fax 989 9981
www.gerhardreisch.com

as well as the psychological, physical and cognitive developmental unfolding of the young child, and there is no evidence of that in the mainstream understanding of the young child. The lens we see the child through dictates what we see and, as Steiner said, we learn about the young child through observation (and a mind open to new thoughts?). Emmi Pikler knew that too.

To take just one small example, in my parent and baby group support groups⁹ I take parents through the first year of their child's life. One aspect of our time together is to encourage parents to allow their infants to be able to stand up and walk by themselves, without any interference – that means not sitting them up before they find that position themselves, not helping them to stand and walk before they are ready. Giving them time to explore and play without our instruction (in balance to respectful bodily care which is where bonding and partnership naturally and primarily form). This is what I have learnt from Steiner and the Pikler Institute – that an infant will come fully, confidently and beautifully into standing and walking if allowed to go through the archetypal unfolding of gross and fine movement development on their own (and generally not to official developmental benchmarks). Free and full movement in the first year is at the basis of everything that comes next – learning to speak, to think and play fully and creatively. It is what happens. There are fundamental needs in the first seven years of life that are the foundations for all further healthy development. Quite simply, the children who are allowed this freedom come into life from a new level and it shows.

Over nearly five years of running my groups, I see the same unfolding in each child – although each child will move through the process in their own utterly individual way. Every child has crept or crawled and none have 'bum shuffled'. I can see how the will of the infant drives her into life with such devotion and enthusiasm (and sometimes good old frustration) and how a deep wisdom guides the whole process. However, 'culturally' (by that I mean by the so-called prevailing wisdom in our culture today) parents are advised by professionals to sit their children up by 5 months so that they are ready for baby-led weaning at 6 months. This one piece of advice unfortunately cuts across the child's natural unfolding and stops dead a large proportion of infants from ever experiencing a time of creeping and crawling. And is there also an effect of different nappies, designer infant jeans and slippery floors on this fundamentally important natural process? Sally Goddard Blythe, a national expert on child motor development,¹⁰ who creates programmes for children in school with sensory and reflex integration issues, says that in her research many school age children have reflex integration issues. Could there be a direct link between cultural blind spots, faulty advice that professionals give parents and some of the difficulties many children have later on?

The attention given by the current government

to upgrading the quality of training criteria for early years professionals and the introduction of the Level 3 Early Years Educator criteria in 2014 is one way these worrying trends in child health are being addressed. The course was conceived as these new EYE criteria were being unveiled by the government, and the vision for the course, in the largest sense, was to offer a fundamentally different and truly 'holistic' approach to the new Level 3 EYE Diplomas – one that meets the necessary criteria but goes deeper and broader to provide a new benchmark of care that fully embraces the needs of the whole child – needs that include the spiritual and psychological as well as physical and cognitive, all from a wide and deep perspective.

With its unique birth to three emphasis, a main aim of the course, apart from providing an alternative Level 3 (EYE) qualification to main stream carers of children from birth to five, is to offer a nationally recognised qualification to those in the Steiner movement in the UK who wish to care for pre-kindergarten children and support parents – this includes those who wish to follow vocations in parent and child group work, childminding, and as carers of children of birth to three in care settings. At the moment there is no training or qualification for those working in these specialist non-kindergarten areas of care in the Steiner movement. The course is in part a response to the growing realization over the last ten years or so that the health of families generally, as well as healthy family numbers in Steiner kindergarten and school settings, depends on the strength of parent support work, most notably parent and child group work.¹¹ This vocational calling requires very different skills to kindergarten teaching work, but because there is no formal training the work has been generally undervalued and underpaid.

In addition, there has been a reluctance in the UK Steiner movement to provide day care for children under kindergarten age or train childminders who could care for pre-kindergarten age because of the understanding that it is best if young children are looked after at home. However, this ideal no longer holds as the national trend grows for both parents to return to work after the child reaches nine months or so, as is the norm on the continent and elsewhere.¹² The lack of training for those who would care for pre-kindergarten children in the UK Steiner movement has also meant that development in this area of care has been very slow and tentative.

From an Anthroposophical perspective is it possible to provide quality care outside the home? Yes indeed! There are Steiner models of early childhood care in other countries – 'home from home' care in childminding settings, small day care pods and outdoor nurseries, for example, which provide the level of care and protection that we know the young child requires in order to be healthy on all levels. There are a range of models that are well established abroad based on an



Holistic Baby and Child Care (EYE)

WE ARE ON OUR WAY!

**The course now has full Level 3 EYE accreditation
and will start in September 2015**



This exciting and pioneering part-time Baby and Child Care Level 3 Diploma synthesises Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood education guidelines, the Pikler approach, the Early Years Foundations Stage and the UK government's Early Years Educator criteria (Level3). Embracing child development from birth to seven it has a distinctive birth to three emphasis. It will be held at Rudolf Steiner House, London with residentials at Emerson College.

Led by Dorothy Marlen and a team of experienced professionals, the course offers a unique learning journey and a recognised qualification for childminders, Parent and Child group leaders and all those who wish to care for the pre-kindergarten child in the Steiner movement and children from birth to five in mainstream settings. Completion of the course will lead to the CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Holistic Baby and Child Care (Early Years Educator) (VRQ) (601/5636/3), certified jointly by Crossfields Institute and CACHE.

For information about Open Mornings at Rudolf Steiner House, London and application forms for the course, please contact the Emerson College registrar: **registrar@emerson.org.uk**

For more information about the course content, please contact the course leader **Dorothy Marlen: Tel: 01904 612683 ~ Email: dorothy@dorothymarlen.net**

anthroposophical understanding of the young child.¹³ It is hoped that the course will produce early childhood professionals who can confidently create new models of exemplary care and family support in the UK that will attract the attention of mainstream trainings and policy makers – significantly contributing to ‘shifting the current paradigm’, as referred to above.

Crossfields Institute, an awarding organisation that develops qualifications inspired by holistic and integrative approaches¹⁴, has been instrumental in helping to prepare the various units and the course specification for CACHE, the awarding body, and the government regulators. This has required a new language – learning outcomes, unit descriptions, the creation of course units and descriptions and assessment criteria which include ‘evaluate’, ‘analyse’ and ‘evidence’. These requirements do not sit easily in a movement (here I mean the many wide-ranging initiatives and individuals inspired by Steiner’s anthroposophy) where we deeply value freedom of how we decide to do things. With its knowledge of Steiner education, Crossfields has been the only organisation who could facilitate the specification and accreditation process. It will also oversee the ongoing quality control of the course, providing assessment training for the course tutors and assessment and quality monitoring.

The other organisation which has been instrumental

in making the course possible is Emerson College, the Anthroposophical adult education centre in East Sussex. An arrangement has been put in place whereby the course is licensed to Emerson College, although the actual directorship and day to day running of the course remains under the full control and responsibility of the course leader. The course pays for Emerson College to provide services including student registration, accounting and publicity as well as the hire of lecture rooms, accommodation and meals required during residential weeks. This sharing of administration and publicity has been crucial to the successful launching of the course.

Rudolf Steiner House in London¹⁵ is also involved. It will be the main host for the course which will run part-time over a year, with a mix of Saturdays and weekends at Rudolf Steiner House, arranged on a monthly basis. In addition there will be three five-day residentials at Emerson College, at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the course. The first course will start this September 2015.

The biggest challenge in designing the course has been how to weave together the necessary material to fulfill newly developing Steiner/Waldorf birth to three training guidelines¹⁶, the necessary aspects of the Pikler approach as well as the EYFS¹⁷ and EYE criteria¹⁸. In the end twelve units were created, four

assigned to four 'sections' – The Principles (knowledge and understanding units); The Heart of Care (practical skills based units); The Embodiment of Understanding (professional practice units); and Self-Development for Early Years Practice (integrative units). A four-foldness emerged. The five core tutors, including Dr Richard House, have had responsibility for designing the units that reflect their expertise and will now deliver them. There will also be a number of specialist tutors who will be invited to join the course along the way. There are assignments and a range of other various student assessments as well as work placements that are required and these will have to be completed for the students to receive the Level 3 (EYE) Diploma.

With accreditation in place the Holistic Baby and Child Care course is through its first major hurdle. I feel a great relief and deep appreciation to all those who have helped the course in each of the steps it has had to take. Now we are entering the process of registering students for the September 2015 start. There are open days planned and articles being prepared for anthroposophical and main stream organizations and magazines. It is an exciting time.

There are ongoing questions. Will it be possible to run a financially viable course whilst not making the fees prohibitively expensive for students? Can students find sympathetic financial help in hard times in the form of grants and loans? And most important will the level of administration with regards registration, assessment and on going quality control prove just too excessive and deadening? All these questions will need to be continually revisited and reviewed. However, there is nothing more potent than a vision rooted in the needs of the times and this course is a deep response to the needs of our times – a response to the call “Hark, look after your children, they are the hope of the world”. The hope is that the course will grow strong and healthy along with the children and families it will serve and will foster a new paradigm for the care of very young children and families in the UK, founded in the spiritual origins of the human being.

Dorothy Marlen is a freelance early childhood trainer and consultant advising and running workshops in Steiner and main stream settings. She lives in Yorkshire, England. www.dorothymarlen.net.

Endnotes

1. Dot Male, *The Parent and Child Group Handbook, A Steiner Waldorf Approach*, Hawthorn Press.2006
2. www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335504/EYFS_framework_from_1_September_2014__with_clarification_note.pdf
3. www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211644/Early_Years_Educator_Criteria.pdf

Movement: Therapist/Teacher/Counsellor



Workshops, In-Service Days and Courses given in:

- Living Anatomy
- Movement re-education
- The Healing Art of Circus Skills
- Creating good foundations by working with the 'four lower' senses.

Background in working as an Osteopath & Spatial Dynamic/Bothmer Gymnastic Teacher.

Experienced with in-school remedial work for children
Individual consultations available for Adults and Children

Please contact and discuss with: Valerie Taylor

Tel: ++44 (0)7963 727757 Email: vetyaylor@gmail.com

4. See for example: Rudolf Steiner, *The Child's Changing Consciousness As the Basis of Pedagogical Practice*, Anthroposophic Press 2014
Rudolf Steiner, *The Kingdom of Childhood.(Foundations of Waldorf Education*, Anthroposophic Press 1995
5. Introducing the Piklerian developmental approach. *The Signal*, Newsletter of the World Association for Infant Mental Health Vol 18, no 3-4 July-December 2010. Emmi Pikler (1902-1984) Bulletin no 14 Sensory Awareness Foundation Inc. 1994. Available from www.pikler.co.uk
www.thepiklercollection.weebly.com
6. Sophia's Hearth, NH, USA
www.sophiashearth.org
7. Der Hof www.der-hof.de
8. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/c.mallparty/register/conception-to-age-two---the-first-1001-days.htm
9. www.agentlebeginning.co.uk
10. www.inpp.org.uk
11. Kimberley Lewis and Susan Weber (Eds), *Creating Connections – Perspectives on Parent-and-Child Work in Waldorf Early Childhood Education*. WECAN 2015
12. For example Helle Heckman's kindergarten Nokken in Copenhagen is for children 1- 6 years old, 5 days a week for 6 hours a day.
Der Hof in Germany cares for children 8 months to 6 years old in care that is 5 days a week.
13. Brigit's Hearth, Ireland www.brigitshearth.org
Lifeways North America “Home from home” care. www.lifewaysnorthamerica.org
Der Hof, Germany www.der-hof.de
Awhina day nursery New Zealand www.awhinachildren.co.nz. Sophia's Hearth, NH, USA www.sophiashearth.org
14. Crossfields Institute, Stroud House, Stroud, Glos. GL5 3AN www.crossfieldsinstitute.com
www.crossfieldsinstitute.com/cache-level-3/
15. Rudolf Steiner House, London
www.rsh.anth.org.uk
16. www.iaswece.org/waldorf_education/training.aspx
17. www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335504/EYFS_framework_from_1_September_2014__with_clarification_note.pdf
18. www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211644/Early_Years_Educator_Criteria.pdf

Concepts such as child-centred practice, children's agency and active participation feature strongly within Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy. They have been shaped by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Thus children are increasingly recognised as being "able, willing and reliable contributors within their own significant social contexts of home and school" (Wyness, 2000, p. 2-3). What role do policy makers play in ensuring that the vision for children espoused in policy becomes a reality within practice? Drawing upon a doctoral study, this paper identifies multiple barriers to realising children's agency in daily practice. Discover the world's research. This new vision is based on the current neuroscience, child development research and international promising practices in early childhood education and care. The article chronicles the progress that has been made from 2009 to the present in implementing full-day kindergarten and provides an update about the current status of Ontario's childcare modernization activities. Ontario's vision for early learning addresses big questions: What is the purpose of early learning? ECCE or ECE: Early Childhood Care and Education. ECD: Early Childhood Development. ECDAN: The ECD Action Network. Unicef's programme guidance for early childhood development. As a multisectoral agency with global reach and long-standing experience in ECD, UNICEF is uniquely positioned to translate new scientific evidence into innovative programmes and bring partners together to deliver results for young children. Building on existing work, the ECD Programme Guidance does the following: — Provides a framework for articulating a vision, corresponding goals and indicators linked to the commitments made for ECD within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Strategic Plan (SP) (2018-2021)