

From South Africa – Personal Reflections on Prof Dan Stern

By Astrid Berg, Cape Town, Western Cape Association for Infant Mental Health, South Africa

Prof Dan Stern's work became known to me in 1995, after the first Conference on Infant Mental Health was held in South Africa. With my interest in babies awakened, I bought and studied his book "The Interpersonal World of the Infant". It has remained my most referred-to text since that time. Prof Stern's ability to bring together the internal, subjective world of the baby with the objectively researched infant has been for me his greatest gift. He built a bridge between what is intuitively known, what psychoanalysts have grappled with over many years, and the infant in the laboratory - measured, videotaped and coded. He did so in a deceptively simple way with straightforward language – all of this is only possible when there is in-depth knowledge of both fields. For these insights and for creating this bridge I remain forever grateful to Dan Stern.

In the year 2008 I had the pleasure of seeing and experiencing him twice – I will start backwards, with the more personal meeting in November of that year.

This was at a Conference in Milan, Italy on «The Body from - 1 to 6 years - Drive, Phantasy, Emergence» and was held under the auspices of the International Association for Analytical Psychology. Dan Stern himself did not speak, but had come to listen and also to confer with Alessandra Piontelli with whom he was doing some research at the time. I met with him per chance one morning in the breakfast room of the hotel – he had a freshly squeezed orange juice and I remember him looking not well, but his mind was full of vigour. He spoke about the research, which, if I recall correctly, he was conducting with a team in Geneva on the intentionality of fetuses. He was working with a group of mathematicians who were calculating the trajectory followed by fetuses moving their arm towards the uterine wall, thereby trying to ascertain the probability of intent. I am not at all sure whether I had understood this correctly and whether

my recollection now is accurate – but this is what I remember and what I carry with me. I was amazed and in awe: what a productive, creative and innovative mind he had, how his curiosity was alive and intense – I was deeply moved but also concerned about his physical infirmity.

The other time I saw him was a few months before, at the WAIMH Congress in Japan in August 2008. He delivered a plenary address "Perspectives on Infant Mental Health" and focussed on the state of research generally speaking and in particular as it relates to infant mental health. It was an erudite, provocative 'call to action' which I will never forget. Stern challenged many sacredly held beliefs on the reductionist approach of research that breaks up the whole into tiny pieces – the 'higher order' which the infant is capable of, is being dissected and ultimately rendered meaningless; he challenged evidence-based medicine, stating that we understand enough, that in the field of infant mental health it is time to do something else, to redress that which has been lost. What has been lost is that what babies need, namely mothering – we have more than enough evidence for this. He made an appeal to 'go big', to hold concerts with rock stars, and mobilize the people, so that the politicians may realize that the vote, the power lies with women and men who wish to reclaim the importance of parenting.

This was a man, frail long before his time, in obvious physical distress, but he was, until the end, bold; he had the courage to say what many of us may think, but dare not utter. His mind was colossal and deep, it had huge capacity for both analysis and synthesis; his spirit had the conviction, the daring to challenge and to swim against the stream. The world lost him too early and too soon. Our thoughts are with his family and friends.

Meeting Daniel Stern

By Kaija Puura, WAIMH Associate Executive Director, Finland

I met professor Daniel Stern for the first time in a small Congress in Riga, Latvia in 1994. We were both attending the City reception and he happened to stand beside me while we were waiting for the ceremonies to begin. He politely asked who I was and I naturally told him that I had read his book *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, and that it had absolutely loved it. With the cheek of a young researcher I also told him that I disagreed with him. «Oh, I'm interested to hear with what», he said. I told him that I thought that sense of being would come before sense of becoming. He smiled at me warmly with a glint of amusement in his eyes and said «Well, that is a possibility, but I think I'll stand behind my own opinion.»

I met him several times after that in various WAIMH Congresses but thinking of our first encounter always brings a smile to my face. I remember him as a warm person, who treated everybody with respect and was curious about people and their ideas, while at the same time standing firmly behind his own.

Reflections from Turkey

By Elif Gocek and Nese Erol, Turkey

We, as the Turkish scientific community, would like to express our profound grief and deep sorrow for the loss of Dr. Stern. Some people simply watch history, some people truly make history. Dr. Stern truly made history through his research, observations and profound expertise in infant development. He made exceptional theoretical contributions to our understanding of «infancy» and «motherhood» that continue to influence every researcher in this field to this date. Dr. Stern was a great thinker who dedicated his life to promoting «Infant Mental Health». From the very beginning, his comprehensive research, vision and expertise enlightened and inspired many professionals who are working with infants and their families. Dr. Daniel N. Stern's contributions to science and his legacy will continue to inspire many Turkish professionals for many more generations to come.