



Consciousness at the Beginning of Life

By Wendy Anne McCarty, PhD, RN

I began my career in Kentucky as an obstetrical nurse and childbirth educator in the 1970's. I loved caring for parents as they birthed and raised their babies. To be at the leading edge of my work, I got my master's degree in early development and my doctorate in counseling psychology. I thought I knew a lot about babies and the best practices for their care. Then, in 1989 my notions about babies were turned upside down! I attended a conference on Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology (PPN). Even though I had been a psychotherapist and a nurse working with birth, I couldn't imagine what the conference session on psychotherapy with a three-month-old baby for birth trauma would be about. How could someone do psychotherapy with such a young infant?

At the conference, I learned that the PPN field grew out of therapists wanting to share their clinical findings of adult clients who in their search for the origins of their current issue, often time unexpectedly found themselves revisiting their earliest experiences in the womb and at birth. Their clients' memories included perspectives from outside the womb as well as inside of it. Even in the womb, they were exquisitely sensitive and emotionally and energetically responsive to the emotions and events around them. They wanted their parents and others to relate to them as a conscious, feeling person from the beginning of life.

Intimate Dialogues

During his conference presentation, Dr. William Emerson, explained that after working with thousands of adults on their prenatal or birth related traumas, he developed therapies to address these issues with children and then with infants. He showed us a therapy session video of his holding and having an intimate dialogue with the 3-month-old baby about the baby's difficult birth. Through the baby's movements, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact, it was clear that he was not only a conscious and responsive participant in the dialogue, but he seemed grateful that William was empathizing with him about his experiences.

In those moments, I saw a level of presence, comprehension, awareness and meaningful communication in the baby that I didn't believe to be possible.

I was deeply moved yet shaken. Their mutual communication had such truth, such beauty in it, yet I had never SEEN that before in babies I had been with. How could I have missed it? Looking back, I believe I never saw this potential in babies because I was trained to believe it was not possible.



I realized that all my training and knowledge about babies had come from external observations and assumptions that were rooted in scientific materialism assumptions. The modern view of early development had assumed babies' biology and brain development to be the foundation for consciousness and personhood. Yet, the PPN field was bringing together a wealth of clinical experiences that revealed early development from the baby's point of view, a landscape that was entirely different. *Their findings portray babies coming into human life with mature multidimensional capacities and a sense of personhood.* The clinical experiences sadly told stories of the life-diminishing effects of our materialistic scientific assumptions.

This new expanded perspective of who we are at the beginning of life called to me, but all these new notions were just that—new notions. I needed to understand this new multidimensional landscape through my own direct experience. So, I wholeheartedly delved into my own pre- and perinatal experiences through a wide variety of healing modalities.

This was the most powerful personal growth work I had ever experienced. It brought me to a new level of integration of my spiritual heritage as a conscious being and my embodied human self, as I remembered and reintegrated these “separated” parts of myself.

During this time, I also trained in PPN therapies and opened my marriage and family therapy practice to young children and their parents, incorporating the PPN perspective. The most difficult part for me was deprogramming my assumptions about what these kids could possibly be showing me. Over the years, I was awed, stretched, and provoked to expand my notions of who we are at the beginning of life, what babies experience, and how these early experiences form the core subconscious programming through which we live our lives.

Young children would accurately portray important aspects of their newborn experiences, their birth, and experiences in the womb all the way back to the beginning of their human life. In the therapy, I was repeatedly amazed at the connection between early life experiences and children's current problems. As we recognized, acknowledged and held their womb and birth experiences with them, empathizing with their side of the story, their unmet needs, or trauma, their current life patterns transformed into more life-enhancing ones.

One of the most remarkable phenomena to me was the spontaneous changes when parents decided to talk to their children about what really happened during their birth or prenatal period. Time and time again, current challenges dissolved, and parent-child relationships improved with these conversations.

One mother wrote after she took my advice to talk to her four-year-old son about his difficult birth. She had always told him a “positive version” on his birthday. Now she told him the more “real” birth story that included the complications, pain, disappointments, and his coming out screaming with deep indentations in his forehead and bruising. “That must have hurt your head, and you cried so loud for a very long time, and I couldn't come to hold you. I'm so sorry. That must have been really hard for you.”

Her four-year-old didn't say much, but later at home, she said to herself, “Something's different. What is it?” Then she realized that her son's life-long patterns of talking very loudly had gone away. She shared that as a baby he cried very loudly, and when he talked, he always shouted. It was such a problem that they got his hearing checked, which proved to be normal. No matter how much they worked with him, he consistently shouted. In that moment, she realized he wasn't shouting, nor did he return to that pattern after their talk about his birth.

I have witnessed hundreds of times over the years the remarkable healing power of acknowledging what really happened and showing empathy for the baby's experience.

In 2003, Ray Castellino, D.C. and I opened a non-profit research clinic to further develop the PPN work with babies and to mentor other professionals. Again, the babies led the way to our discovering more of how babies hold their earlier womb and birth experiences in their body, their state of being, and their current needs. Even very young babies demonstrated their already individualized belief patterns and responses to the world that appeared to be derived from their earlier experiences.

For example, little three-month Anna looked terrified as her parents carried her into the treatment room for our first session. Her eyes were frozen wide, her body stiff, and her agitated stress sounds all portrayed how unsafe she felt. As we interacted with her, directly acknowledging her fears and adjusting our actions to help her feel safe, and as we empathized with her earlier frightening and painful experiences during her birth and as a newborn in the NICU, she began to relax and heal.

Again and again, as we came into relationship with the babies, communicating and processing their issues directly with them, they responded, and their old constrictive patterns dissipated. They became more self-regulated and happier. As parents saw how aware their babies were, they naturally began to relate to them more directly. It was beautiful to see the whole family transform. Today, there are many therapists providing PPN-oriented care for infants to address early stress/trauma and to teach parents how to be in more direct conscious relationships with their babies in the womb and as infants.

Marti Glenn, PhD, approached me in 1999 to co-author the first master's and doctoral degree programs in prenatal and perinatal psychology and in 2000 we opened Santa Barbara Graduate Institute. While developing the curriculum, I felt a tremendous tension from the schism between the prevailing Newtonian theories of early development and the expanded view of prenatal and perinatal psychology.



Mainstream thought was still steeped in Newtonian views focusing on biology as foundation of our being. Yet the PPN perspective naturally aligned with the new sciences—physics, noetic science, holographic models, integral approach, and energy studies.

What was missing was an early development theory or model that synthesized what we had learned in 30 years of PPN work. I took on that task and the outcome was my book, *Welcoming Consciousness* (2009). I spent a year reviewing current mainstream writing as well as my PPN colleague's writings and clinical findings and what I had directly experienced with families I worked with over the years.

Consciousness studies have established that adults have abilities to perceive, influence and be influenced by events that happen outside our usual sensorial world and demonstrate that we are innately wired to function and share information energetically and non-locally (mind-to-mind) as well.

Many people seek to develop a more conscious rapport with these abilities, such as intuitive perception, heart coherence, and distance healing.

Recently, multidimensional abilities and spiritual dimensions of experience during childhood are receiving more attention. The PPN perspective brings a piece of the puzzle. The heart of the PPN

findings can only be held within the new paradigm because it points to our non-local consciousness as our primary nature. Our findings consistently show that we have a non-local, ever-present consciousness that has awareness of our own being. We know “I am me and you are you” as we come into human life. From this Self-I perspective, we have non-local capacities prior to conception and throughout our early development. From this perspective, our perceptions are similar to the qualities we have come to know from the near-death research. Our vantage point is from outside our physical body. We have lucid awareness of events and people’s thoughts, feelings, and intentions. We relate telepathically, have intuitive perception, and often know things out of the future.

Our PPN findings reveal an intimate dance of our non-local consciousness and our developing human body and self. We are aware, communicating, learning, and imprinting our experiences in the womb and during birth, at multiple levels of consciousness, with the energetic levels as our bridges between. Our human need for love, belonging, being valued, and included are present from the beginning of life. We are immersed in a period of incredible learning/imprinting period. We are learning intimately about human life in our family and culture and forming our subconscious foundations of self. In *Welcoming Consciousness*, I explore these multiple levels in more depth with many stories that show how these perspectives are expressed.

The transcendental perspective has eluded our modern understanding of babies because this notion of a prior consciousness directly contradicts the Newtonian assumptions [prevalent in our current scientific worldviews]. Sadly, as we denied and disregarded our innate multidimensional nature, we diminished our ability to become our most true self and were left with myriad troubling symptoms because of the separation from Self and our primary source.

Whole new potentials for human evolution emerge as we nurture and cultivate greater connection between the transcendent and human levels of our being from the very beginning of life. When we meet babies as conscious, capable *multidimensional* beings who are also vulnerable, sensitive, and dependent *human* beings seeking connection with us; and when we help prevent, mitigate, and heal stress and traumatic experiences, we find the children are then grounded in their bodies and being. They are empathic, intuitive, loving, and creative. When we welcome babies’ consciousness in ways that support the full expression of their timeless, whole self, we help them establish core human functions and patterns that will serve them the rest of their lives.

Most of us grew up with the mainstream’s view of babies. We’ve birthed and raised our children within these limiting assumptions. I have found it is never TOO EARLY, nor TOO LATE to acknowledge what happened during their prenatal, birth, and newborn periods with our children. It isn’t about being perfect – it’s about being genuine. I have come to trust that “some part” of us knows what happened. Rather than have family secrets or silent regrets, talking with our children at any age, while respecting the child’s own experiences during that earlier time, is healing. Even if the pregnancy did not go to term, and the baby did not survive, having a genuine inner conversation with the baby’s spirit consciousness about that earlier time can bring renewed closure for all.

In 2008, leading PPN clinicians collaboratively distilled the field’s key findings into a user-friendly set of principles for families and professionals: *12 Guiding Principles to Support Human Potential and Optimal Relationships at the Beginning of Life*. I’ll close with our guiding vision:

Imagine a world...where every baby is welcomed, loved, nurtured, and seen for the amazing, conscious and aware being they are from the beginning of life. As these babies grow, so does their capacity to love, to empathize with others, to be in relationship and to live in joy. As our first generation matures, we see the ripple effect grow to encompass greater learning capacity, emotional intelligence and creativity, the emergence of new leaders, and healthier families and communities. Our potential is unlimited.

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