

Fall down seven times, get up eight

Why this ability is needed now more than ever

by Emily Harrison with Karin Kalbantner-Wernicke

Emily Harrison talks to Karin Kalbantner-Wernicke about what shiatsu life is currently like in Germany, a new online course for practitioners, and why the characteristics of a tumbler doll is needed now more than ever (hint, it's not just for babies).

This interview was recorded in August 2020.

EH: How has life changed since you were last in Australia?

KKW: Like everywhere, everything has changed completely. Before we always had a busy travel-teaching schedule throughout the year — visiting Japan, Australia and Europe, but now everything has stopped.

Since July we can slowly start to teach again, but no touch is allowed, which for both training in Baby Shiatsu and Shonishin is very difficult! So for Thomas, my husband who offers training in Shonishin, he would have to throw his needle from a distance, or need a 1.5m long tool to be able to demonstrate...!

For me, the shiatsu trainings have also stopped and so has the Parents and Baby / Children classes. This is a big problem as the families with children have had to stay in the house up until the end of July, a bit like in Melbourne right now, and many have small homes with no chance to go outside, and so the incidence of family violence increases.

So during this stay-home period we worked with a government service for youth and family in the north region with ideas of what they can do at home.

EH: What kind of ideas did you come up with?

KKW: Some techniques for mother and babies if they are not sleeping, ideas for the

older children with games from the samurai program, and we have some 'survival tips' for parents to help calm and regulate, so the violence might be less likely to happen.

EH: Are you able to practise shiatsu now?

KKW: Just in the past four weeks we are now allowed to do shiatsu in the clinic. The practitioner has to wear a facemask, and the client also wears a facemask and they bring their own sheet and blanket. And of course after each treatment, disinfecting surfaces. In Germany it is summertime and the temperature has been around 35–38 degrees, so with no aircon and wearing a facemask... it is a hard job.

The parents and baby classes are not yet going as many parents are still scared to come to a class. But what has been very difficult is the volunteer work we did with the samurai program in senior homes, as this is not allowed and this creates a big, big problem.

EH: How so?

KKW: Because people there have dementia, and even those with mild dementia decline rapidly without contact, touch and no sensory feeling.

So we have just started a pilot project with three homes. We worked with a company together to make a plastic shield, like what you see at the supermarket, and they made one for us with the hole for the hands to go underneath. We go with the relative and show

them how to do the hand treatment from the samurai program through this window.

The hand treatment is activating the brain/ mouth/ communication and of course touch — to be touched. And the relative has the chance to touch their parent. We see some become more active, to talk, or share memories, one started to sing a song.

It was very difficult to find three homes to participate in the project because of the fear. We are trying to find possibilities. Like everyone, we are trying to find ways in these difficult times.

EH: And one of these ways is through online. Tell us about the new courses you have?

KKW: Since we found many parents were afraid to come to classes, but still needed support we've created online classes for both parents and practitioners. We have a parents program in German, and just now we have our English course on the Developmental Concept: Finding the Centre.

EH: Who is this course for?

KKW: The course is for anyone working with babies, children and parents. As a practitioner, enriching your knowledge with both the Eastern and Western perspectives offers a much broader view of development, as well as insights into the behaviour of children and people. Because development is not just for the time period when we are young, the actual concept we can use for adults too.

EH: So it presents a combined model of development?

KKW: Yes, in the course we introduce the Developmental Concept, which is where Eastern knowledge meets modern science. It is a whole-of-life approach. And it is also the story and philosophy of how to be a daruma, or tumbler doll through life.

In Japan, there is the saying 'fall down seven times, get up eight times.' It is likened to the ability of the daruma doll, which tumbles but does not fall flat. Instead it can return upright, find the centre and try again. And this ability is needed now more than ever — and not just for babies and children as they develop.



Karin Kalbanter-Wernicke with two daruma dolls

So even if the program name and focus is about supporting babies, the actual concept is for adults too. And if we understand the principles behind, there is still a lot we can do as adults to support and nurture our inner resources.

EH: So the framework can be useful even if you don't work with babies or children?

KKW: Yes, the course focuses on the first year of life and specifically what 'finding the centre and discovering your own boundaries' means and the meridian group it belongs to. Understanding this basic foundation can go a long way to explaining problems that can then show up later in life and in the meridians. So it is not only for people working with children, but to also look back as an adult, or even for adult clients.

In the course we learn that it is in this early period of life that we begin to develop our inner resources, and through understanding this we can also help adults reconnect to their resources.

From our point of view, the ability to find your centre and at the same time feel your own boundaries, and be able to keep your own boundaries help you to deal with all the challenges we have in modern life.



EH: What practical skills can people take away from the course?

KKW: One example is to show you step-by-step how to teach handling.

In Germany, many parents learn in clinics through the midwives how to do correct handling to support healthy baby development. So if the parents go to a practitioner and they don't know how to, then the parents are unlikely to trust or feel they are professional. What surprised me in teaching in so many countries is that it is not so common to know these baby handling methods. Which is why we created this resource for practitioners to learn and practise.

EH: Why does handling matter?

KKW: Through something as seemingly simple as handling, we can support structure and movement patterns, as well as the developing nervous system and meridians.

We now know from brain research that babies actually understand much, much more. Whereas 20 years ago it was thought their brain was like an empty white paper. We can only learn if we can do something by ourself, so if you move the baby very fast, or in a passive way, then they don't get the understanding of how they can do it later by themselves. This sense of self-efficacy can actually start very early on through handling. And this then links in with having the inner resources to deal with stress later in life, as

you've had the practice and learning of being able to find a solution in difficult situations.

EH: And Thomas also makes a guest appearance on the course?

KKW: Yes, another point of view in baby / child development and also for adults is the topic of KISS (Kinematic Imbalance due to Suboccipital Strain). If this asymmetry is unresolved, then a lot of problems can arise in childhood and later in adult life. For example, we might see children in different types of therapy for behaviour problems, or motoric problems or speech problems, but these therapies are not necessarily successful because of the underlying KISS problem.

So in the course Thomas explains what it is, how you can see it, what the results are if not treated, and some ideas in the early baby time of how you can help offset.

If it's a topic people don't know much about and they are interested in, then I encourage them to learn through the course.

EH: How was the process of making an online course?

KKW: Well, this ability of 'falling down seven times and standing up eight times' is really needed to make an online course! We have been working nearly 40 years with babies and families but I have no friendship with computers, and to start to do an online course...we had no idea.

Our first thought was to use a projector with images and talking and it was terrible. Our next idea was sitting beside the computer and filming and we only had blue waves on the film.

So then I saw in the newspaper two young men offering classes to seniors on how to use the cell phone and produce little films. I called them and said I don't need help with the cell phone but I need help with an online film...and they were laughing very hard. But they told us which program to use and we went to a camera shop and we learnt more. So step-by-step, we make lots of mistakes and we find our way, and now we have a professional course. It shows you are never too old to learn something new!

For me one of the biggest challenges was speaking in English. As even in German I have a southern dialect. It is a bit like the story of parents — we want to be perfect.

But if people are laughing because of my English, then I offered them some laughter in these difficult times.

EH: Well I have a lot of admiration for being able to speak in another language. Do you think online will become more of a feature — and how much of a place do you think it has in touch-based professions like ours?

KKW: I'm thinking a lot about this, and somehow we have to find some sort of hybrid way. This is what we are doing in Japan as we can't go there this year. We have started our Baby Shiatsu course online and next year it will be hands-on when we can (hopefully) be there.

I don't think we can teach our topics only online as we need the self-experience and to understand the quality of touch. I think in the future it will be a combination.

EH: We had hoped to see you both back in Australia early next year but it looks like the pandemic has postponed these plans?

KKW: Yes, instead we think about 2022, but like everyone, no one knows what will happen. Hopefully we can still stay connected through online for now.

EH: Thank you for your time Karin.

KKW: Thank you Emily for giving me the chance to speak to Australian colleagues.

The Developmental Concept:

Finding the Centre course is available through China Books Education online

<https://chinabooks.com.au/education/product/sku/C-KKW001/>

The website at:

developmentalconcept.com has information and updates.

Karin Kalbantner-Wernicke

is a Shiatsu Teacher and Paediatric Physiotherapist. She is a pioneer of shiatsu for babies and children and teaches these programs internationally. Together with Thomas Wernicke (Paediatrician and Acupuncturist) they have developed the Developmental Concept approach, refining it over many decades of clinical practice and teaching.

Emily Harrison is a Shiatsu Practitioner and Somatic Movement Educator. She has trained with both Karin (Developmental Shiatsu for babies) and Thomas (Shonishin).