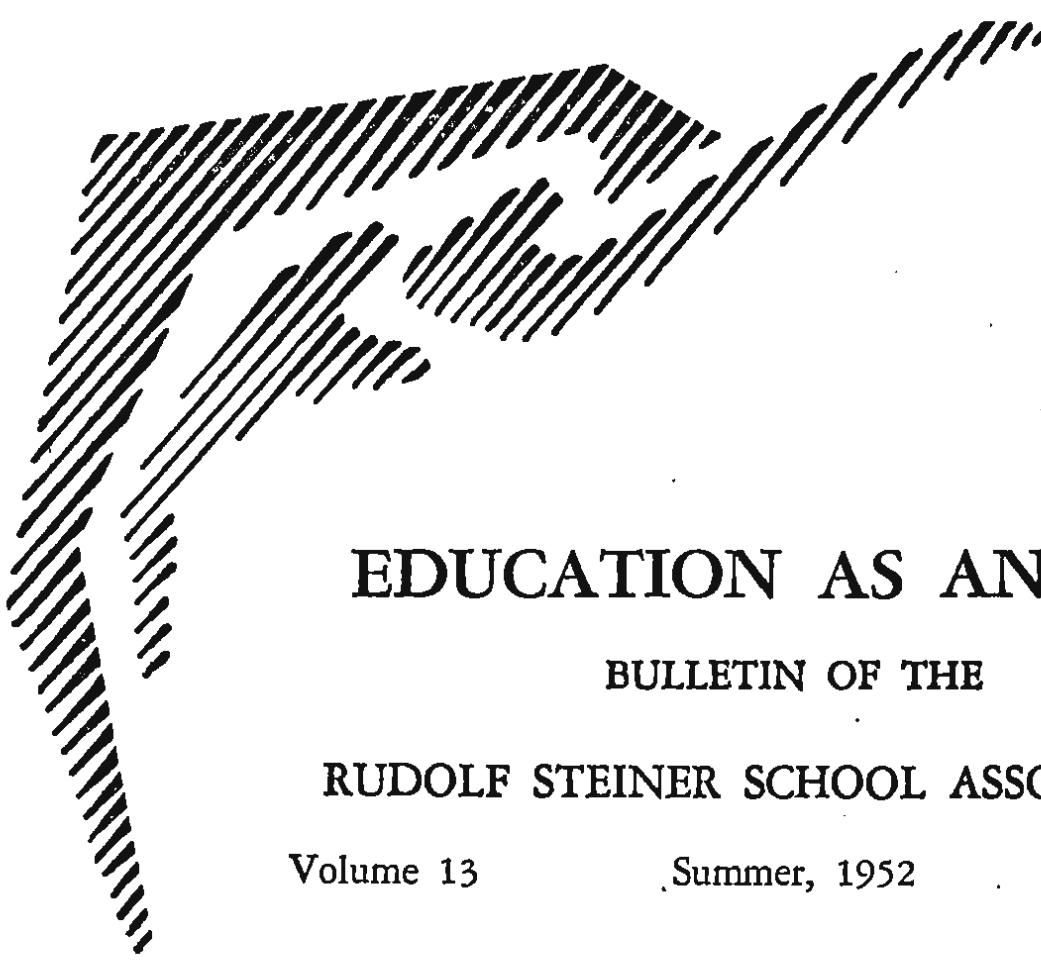




EDUCATION AS AN ART

BULLETIN OF THE

RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

Volume 13

Summer, 1952

Number 2

CONTENTS

Educating Young Children to Face the World — Dorothy Harrer
A Milestone

Poems for First Grade

School Fair and Year Book

Our Children's Achievements in High School — Margaret C. Wesson



THE QUESTION OF EDUCATING YOUNG CHILDREN TO FACE THE WORLD

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the common light of day.

—from the Ode, *Intimations of
Immortality from Recollections
of Early Childhood* by William Wordsworth

"The child has to face reality, and the sooner the better," said the mother.

This is not an unusual statement. It was made in a conversation following a recent parent-teachers' meeting, at the school, when a discussion of visual

education had circled pro and con, and with certain fascination, around the question of television's effect on young children.

Begging the question as to the educational value of television, or its importance as a reality of our time, it is obvious to everyone that the younger the child, the less of a sense for reality does it have. And by *reality* we usually mean "the world as it is."

Two-year-old Michael, one morning, found his father's hammer and began to make use of it. His grandmother, from the kitchen, heard a splintering of glass out on the front porch. Michael had hammered a hole through the window pane. Although he had had no previous experience with hammer and glass, he did understand the scolding and the punishment which would teach him never to hammer a window pane again. He sobbed with remorse. A half-hour later Michael was heard out on the front porch again. Grandmother, in alarm and fearing a repeat performance, hurried out there ready to take further action. She found Michael with the kitchen broom in his hands trying to sweep the hole off the window pane.

Of course, as teachers and parents, we would not want to fail in educating our children toward a wide-awake understanding for the world as it is. But how?

The following parable may suggest a point of view.

The asters had been planted in a seed-bed at Easter time. The gardener was not a professional, nor was gardening her avocation. She had a vague idea that asters would provide a riot of color at one end of the garden. All summer long she watched and waited and cultivated the asters. It was a rainy summer. Perhaps that was the reason that no blooms appeared, even after the plants were more than fourteen inches tall. By the end of August a few buds had opened, but the summer had passed without a riot of color in the aster bed. When, in September, having crossed the Atlantic Ocean, our disappointed gardener found the flower gardens in Switzerland gleaming white and pink and blue-violet with asters at their fullest burgeoning, she recollected, "But of course, they are fall flowers!" It was with some chagrin that she saw her own garden again late in October, the aster bed loaded with its withered, frost-bitten blossoms. They had bloomed in their proper season. The rain, the sunshine and the compost in the soil had all served the blossoming time, neither delaying nor hastening it.

Plants can be forced to bloom out of season. So can children be forced to wide-awakeness, matter-of-factness and logical thinking ahead of their time. Enough has been written, out of the experience of some of the teachers, in other issues of this bulletin to provide a more comprehensive picture of the way children best learn at various age levels. Whatever system of child psychology appeals to an adult, it is hard to apply what the book says. It is even harder to read, for oneself, from direct experience with children, whether or not the book is right.

Our "book" here, at the Rudolf Steiner School, often points out that a young child under approximately seven years of age, does not yet have at his command a faculty for reasoning, judging, and thinking things out. The following incidents, from this year's work with a first grade, confirm this point of view. All the patience and care we use in trying to cultivate the growth of young children only serve the moments of development which have their natural season.

The first graders were all delightedly copying a sentence from the board, drawing it as carefully as they could in big capital letters:

A RED HEN MET TEN MEN

After they had read what they had written, Johnny with much enthusiasm asked, "May I write a sentence of my own?"

"Why surely," said I; then, thinking to give him an idea, I added, "You could write it just the other way around, 'Ten men met a red hen.'"

Johnny went back to his desk to take up his task. When it was completed, I read what he had written:

MEN TEN MET HEN RED

Seeing that he had begun with the last word of the original sentence and had literally written it backward, I laughingly corrected him. "It isn't just the words, Johnny, you have to think of the sense they make."

Johnny had an irrefutable answer to that. He said, still enthusiastically, "I can't."

At about ten o'clock every morning we have what we call "the circle". The children have had some oral work, or a story, and are ready for some exercise. This takes the form of either rhythmic movement or simple dramatic action together in a circle. The way the teacher approaches this part of the lesson is important, for it can lead the class into restlessness, confusion and a certain nervous fatigue, or it can result in a general relaxation and refreshment which gives the little ones a happy interest in returning to their desks for writing or drawing. When I make the mistake of trying to get the children to *put their minds* on what we are going to do, this is the way it goes.

Teacher: "Now we are going to walk a triangle instead of a circle."

This seems to mean, "Let the future take care of itself." It is a signal for Mary to start chattering with Eddie. In a twinkling Donald and Michael have started to tackle each other. Ripples of activity spread around the circle. The teacher takes measures to quiet the children and to get their attention again.

Teacher: (still driving the same horse) "Now, children, you will have to listen quietly if you want to know what we're going to do." The tone of voice impresses the class and there is attention while the teacher names the three who are to take their places at the corners of the triangle, and then leads the others to their places along the three sides.

Teacher: "Now we are ready. What have we made, children?"

Class: (with joyful acclaim) "A triangle!"

Teacher: "Yes, a triangle with three very straight sides and three sharp corners."

In the exercise which follows, the aim is for the class to step along counting 1 2 3, 4 5 6, 7 8 9, a short-short-long rhythm, keeping to the straight sides and the sharp corners as they move around in the form. Almost immediately the straight sides bulge out in curves like a circle, and over half of the class loses track of the corners. Several times the teacher stops the walking and tells the class to notice how the triangle has lost its shape. Certain children begin to feel playful again. To meet the threat of more confusion, the teacher leads the children quickly back to their desks; and as they get ready for their next task, there is a certain tension among them which makes it hard for them to settle down.

The reason for the lack of success lay in the teacher's appeal to the children's presence of mind. The next day I developed the same exercise so that they could *act it out*, rather than think it out. We began with three kings wearing golden crowns, each one standing in his corner of the triangle. While the rest of the class watched, the three kings carefully stepped forward to the next tower (corner) in a very straight path. Now three more children came into the form, each taking his place half-way between the kings (corners). They could imagine that they were the first stones in three very straight walls between the towers. Now, as each king marched from corner to corner, the 'stones' also marched carefully from half-way point to half-way point along the sides, making a sharp turn at each corner. Gradually, three at a time, the whole class came in to form the straight walls between the towers. Soon the whole triangle was moving quietly and carefully without losing its form, each child completely attentive and absorbed. The feeling of accomplishment was a happy one and when they went back to their seats, the children were ready to concentrate.

To come back to the opening remarks in this discussion, the question is not whether a small child should be exposed to the world as it is, but how—and when. The gardener can't gather a bouquet before the plants have blossomed. The blossoming can be forced to meet the demands of the market, and children can be sophisticated beyond their years. If, as teachers and parents, we want our children to grow in alertness and self-confidence, we must let them experience the world at their own level. Premature appeals to capabilities that are as yet dormant weaken the educational process.

Dorothy Harrer

* * *

A MILESTONE

It was a significant moment for Steiner education in this country when, on May 2nd, a group of some twenty high school students from High Mowing School gave a performance of eurythmy at 211 Madison Avenue, New York City. The performance was repeated next day at Bard College, near Poughkeepsie, N. Y. The students who took part have been pupils of Sabina Nordoff for varying lengths of time during the last two years.

Every seat in the hall was taken, and people were standing in the aisles, when Mrs. Emmet, founder and head of High Mowing, rose to speak a few opening words. Paul Nordoff played the music which he had composed especially for the first number, *The Seven Days of Creation*. The curtain opened and, as the words of Genesis were read, patterns of moving figures unfolded and reformed upon the stage. The clear, sure gestures of the boys and girls were suggestive of the beauty of the old Greek friezes yet were in no sense imitative of the past. Because the gestures were not merely a form of "self-expression", but the imaginative, flowing and disciplined expression of something larger than the participants themselves, they achieved a spontaneity and purity most moving to watch. The audience responded whole-heartedly to this and to the varied and beautifully performed group of solos which followed. Two of the poems were written by the performers themselves. Later came a charming sequence of *Æsop's Fables* done with great spirit and humor. Both the eurythmy and reading of *The Jabberwocky* made an especially delightful

number. Finally a group of *Mother Goose Rhymes*, ending with the *House That Jack Built*, swept the audience into joyous laughter. The two sequences were each fused into a unit by Paul Nordoff's lively music. It was a great pleasure to the faculty of the New York School to recognize eight of their former pupils, some of them excellent soloists, upon the stage. The last curtain swung busily back and forth for curtain calls and the hall echoed to applause from both the stage and the house for Sabina Nordoff. She has succeeded in awakening for this new art a contagious enthusiasm seldom found and urgently needed in the high school world of today.

C. B.

POEM FOR A LITTLE GIRL

*The sweetest little flowers grow
In a secret place I know.
Fairies come there every morning
With their wands the flowers adorning,
Bringing sunshine to each flower
Every day and every hour.*

*To each sunflower, bowing down,
The fairies give a golden crown.
Then every daisy near and far
Shines like a lovely morning star.
And when the fairies touch a rose
A warm, red heart their wands disclose.*

*From my pretty secret garden
Flowers I bring to all dear children
That each one may have a part
From the garden of my heart.*

Dorothy Harrer



THE LITTLE GNOMES

(The gnomes are asleep in a ring. The sun rises. They awake, stretch, jump. Remembering their prayers, they kneel and sing: *Father We Thank Thee*, then stand and prepare for their day's work).

*Look about little gnome,
Father Sun calls: To work!
Say good-bye to your home.
Hurry up! Let's not shirk!*

*Hammer high! Sack on back!
Away we go, down the track!
Jump for joy! Laugh and shout!
Kick your heels! Turn about!*

*Look to left! Look to right!
Jewels flash in the night:
Ruby red, sapphire blue,
Twinkling stars ev'ry hue.*

*Tick, tick tack!
Crick, crick crack!
Pick and pack!
Stuff the sack!*

* * *

*Heavy pack
On his back
Tired gnome
Turns toward home.*

Henry Barnes

SCHOOL FAIR AND YEAR BOOK

The combined and concentrated effort behind our Christmas Fair and Year Book netted us the handsome total of \$4,200 this year. Our gratitude is extended to all the parents and friends who contributed in many different ways to this endeavor.

Helen Simon, Chairman of the Fair.

OUR CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL

A STUDY BASED ON THE RECORDS OF ONE CLASS

"How do students of the Rudolf Steiner School succeed academically in the various high schools and colleges?" This is one of the questions most often put to the faculty and to parents of our alumni. Parents and educators are also interested in knowing how these children adjust themselves emotionally and socially to the larger groups in big public high schools or in private schools. "Are they prepared in the tool subjects?" parents often ask.

To assist the faculty in answering such questions, we plan to collect the scholastic records of all our graduates. So far we have the complete record of only one class and are making this report on the basis of this information. A second phase of this study is being made by means of a questionnaire sent out to parents of the alumni asking what extra-curricular activities the children have engaged in and what special honors or responsibilities they have been given by their new school, either by teachers or students. Parents have also been asked certain questions regarding the organization and principles of a Rudolf Steiner school. The following is the record of students from one class made at the end of their first year in high school.

The class which graduated from the Rudolf Steiner School in 1950 consisted originally of eighteen students who were together up through the sixth grade. Two of the students moved out of the state before completing the full eight years. A third entered the seventh grade in a private boys' school in New York City, and the fourth completed the seventh grade at the Rudolf Steiner School and entered the ninth grade in the same boys' school. We have the records of the fourteen graduates.

It is worth noting that five students went to public high schools in greater New York City and the remaining nine went to private schools either in the city or outside the state. Some of the schools attended were *Dalton, Trinity, Chapin, Grier School, Brooklyn Technical High School, Elizabeth Irwin, Washington Irving, Newtown High School, George School, Hunter High School* and *Friends Select*, Philadelphia.

Scholastic recording has and is still being changed. The type of records made by the various schools falls into four categories, i. e., the more formalized numbers—100, 92, 73 etc.; A - B - C - D - E; Superior, High, Average, Below Average, Failure; and Superior, Good, Medium, Low, Failure.

No student in this class rated below average, or 75, in any subject taken in the first year in high school. No difference was found between the ratings of students who went to public high schools and those who attended private schools. That is to say, students did as well when making the transition from our smaller private elementary school to a large public high school as they did in going to an average size private school.

As you probably know, we start with two foreign languages in the first grade in Rudolf Steiner schools. Four students chose French as their foreign language in high school. Of these, three were given credit for one year of French, the fourth took French with a Superior or 95 rating.

The chart below gives a concise picture of the subjects taken by these students and the average rating of the grades in each subject.

ENGLISH	MATHEMATICS
13 grades given—average 86%	14 grades given—average 86.4%
5 students rated Superior or A	6 students rated Superior or A
8 students rated High or B	8 students rated High or B
Highest grade — 95	Highest grade — 95
Lowest grade — 75	Lowest grade — 77
SCIENCE	HISTORY
9 grades given—average 84.1%	11 grades given—average 85.4%
2 students rated Superior or A	4 students rated Superior or A
6 students rated High or B	4 students rated High or B
1 student rated Average or C	3 students rated Average or C
Highest grade — 95	Highest grade — 95
Lowest grade — 75	Lowest grade — 75
FOREIGN LANGUAGES	ART
(<i>French, Latin and Spanish</i>)	(<i>Drawing, Silver Work, Technical Drawing</i>)
10 grades given—average 86.1%	8 grades given—average 82.2%
4 students rated Superior or A	3 students rated Superior or A
6 students rated High or B	4 students rated High or B
Highest grade — 95	1 student rated Average or C
Lowest grade — 82	Highest grade — 91
(3 students received one year's credit for French without having to take it).	Lowest grade — 75
MUSIC	MISCELLANEOUS
5 grades given—average 86.1%	Shop—1 grade75
2 students rated Superior or A	Health Education—7 grades, Avr....84
2 students rated High or B	Speech—1 grade, Avr.....95
1 student rated Average or C	Religion—1 grade, Avr.....95

To summarize the above chart—the highest average was in Mathematics at 86.4%. However, the averages vary only four points in all subjects taken. You will notice that the majority of students rate Superior or High in all subjects. One can safely say that in their elementary schooling these students have been given an excellent foundation in the tool subjects.

Extra-curricular activities: The activities chosen by these students were: Dancing Club, Dramatic Clubs, Orchestra, Social Committee, Hospitality Committee, Basketball and Riflery.

Offices: Two students were elected Class Presidents. One was elected to represent the Freshman Class on Student Government, another as lunch room Monitor and a member of the Student Squad. One was elected an editor on the school newspaper and another was on a Committee for Class Play and Dance.

Honors: One student received a certificate of excellence from the Department of Mathematics in Brooklyn Technical High School. Two students were on the honor roll during the entire Freshman year and another was granted a fifty per cent scholarship for his sophomore year.

Parents Comments: Parents were asked to tell how they thought the Rudolf Steiner School had contributed to the development of their child. The majority felt that it had definitely helped the students to organize and carry through specific tasks. Many felt that their child had developed a sound feeling for human rights and cultural values.

A matter of interest to both parents and teachers is the effect of the class teacher's continuing with the same group through eight classes. The majority of parents felt that this was an excellent aid both to the teacher and the pupils. Such comments were made as that this enabled the teacher to come to know each child thoroughly and to observe him and assist him better in his growth and development. Some said that this procedure was more favorable to the child than the usual system, since he did not have to go through a new period of adjustment and adaptation each year. Some felt that it was an excellent plan through the fourth grade, but that a new teacher should carry the class through the last four years. Others thought that the plan's advisability depended entirely upon the personality of the teacher and his ability to eliminate any possible antipathies and disharmonies between himself and the pupil.

There was a general expression to the effect that the spirited way in which subjects are taught in the Rudolf Steiner School awakened the child's inner being and that as a result he responded more enthusiastically to his school work and to other experiences as well. Parents spoke of the fact that pupils developed a greater feeling for the group at the same time that they became strong individuals.

We want to thank those parents whose responses have made this report possible. We hope that it may be helpful to other parents and teachers, as well as to the faculty.

Margaret C. Wesson

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Membership in the Association, including the quarterly Bulletin,
is \$2.00 per year. Single copies of the Bulletin, 25c each.
