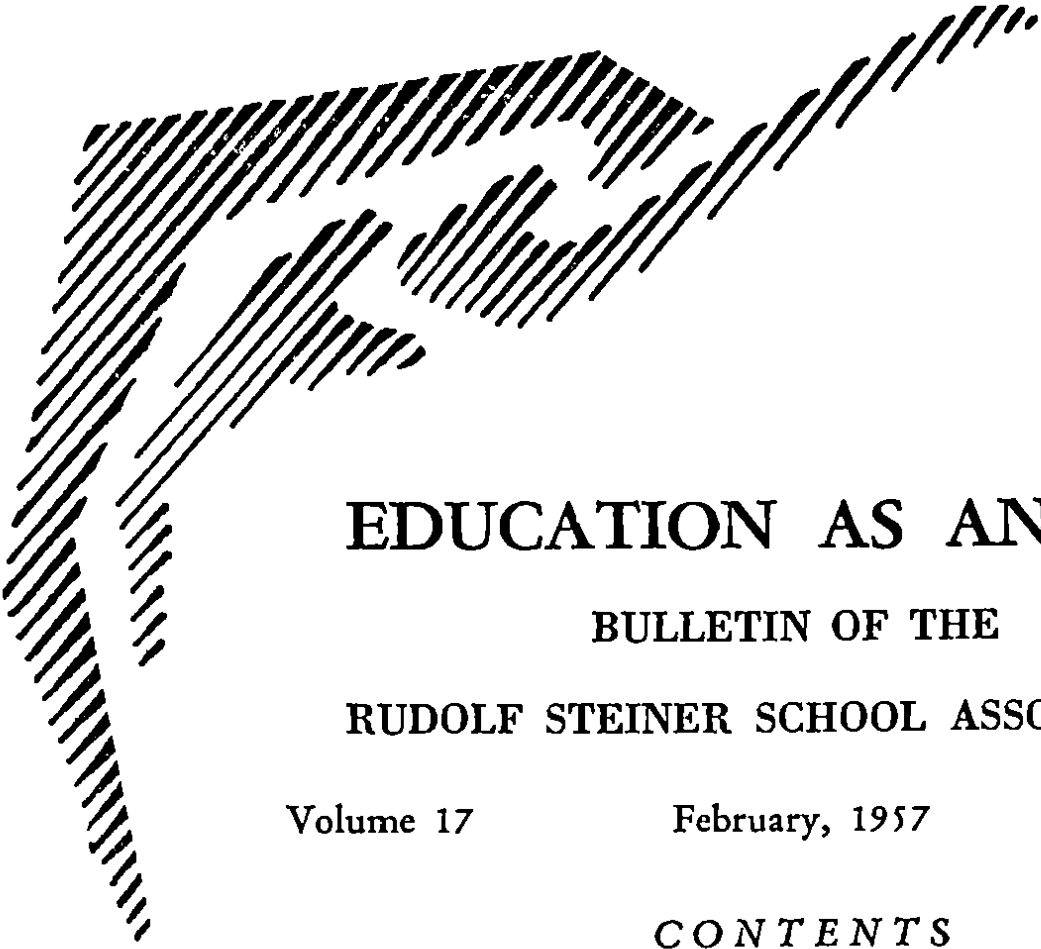




EDUCATION AS AN ART

BULLETIN OF THE RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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THE NEW HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING

A Speech to the Children Before Its Dedication

It was twenty years ago today that I first joined the Rudolf Steiner School at 20 West 73rd Street. There were about fifty students in the school and I was given a class of a dozen students, ranging from the sixth to the eighth grades to teach. They must have been very smart too, as they all but one, as far as I remember, graduated at the end of the school year.

Twenty years is a long time, and it must seem to you, the pupils, even longer than to me since it is way beyond the present experience of your life times. A school like ours is like an organism that grows like a human being, and, as you all know from experience, there are sunny days and rainy days. Joys and sorrows come and go. One often speaks of growing pains, and the Rudolf Steiner School has not been spared them. But there were always, from the very start, people connected with the school who were not afraid of growing pains, who were able to instill into the growing organism, enthusiasm and courage; people who carried in their hearts the conviction that this newest child of education must live and grow.

For many years the homes of the school were rented shelters, but at the age of eighteen the school came of age. With a feeling of admiration and gratitude we remember the friends of the school, who at that time had the initiative, courage and drive to venture to buy the building we are in now. It was a turning point in the history of the school. It did not take long for the school to grow enough to feel the limitations of this building even, and several years ago, it became apparent that the school was just not complete without a high school. But it was also clear that this building could not house both the elementary and the high school. Again it was due to the initiative, courage, and tireless drive and work of the friends and members of the school that we are now in possession of a second building—the high school building on 15 East 78th. At the end of the last school year it looked like an empty shell. Today when we go over for the dedication, you will see it transformed. Although it is not yet quite completed, a tremendous amount of work has changed the empty shell into a home with clean, beautiful rooms.

If this building were to be used for the elementary school, I would compare it with a garden plot that has been newly prepared for planting, but, since it is rather for the high school, I think it is more appropriate to compare it with a musical instrument, or rather instruments. Musical instruments yield no music unless some people play them. We have been given this instrument. Now every musician will tell you that a musical instrument improves in quality the more it is played with care, devotion and skill, and a good instrument can be ruined if rudely misused. The instrument which has been given to us, although beautiful, is yet devoid of tone, and it is up to us to make it sound, to fill it with music.

Let us aim not just for the ordinary, or even for very good skill, but let us set the aim higher still and let us develop an orchestra capable of producing music that will ring out into the world and make the world listen and take notice of it.

If we try hard enough, I believe even the angels will stop short with their singing and listen, and join us and give us a helping hand.

William Harrer



TO FIRST GRADERS

Words Spoken On Their First School Day

This summer you might have wandered into a garden, and, as you looked around, you may have seen one of those long, green, many-legged creatures called caterpillars. I have watched them often, thinking, "One day he will turn into a butterfly, but now he knows nothing about that. Now he is simply eating."

You see, the caterpillar is so hungry that he eats and eats and eats . . . even to the point that he eats what he sits upon which is mostly leaves. And, as it is with everyone who eats very much, he begins to get fat, then Fatter, then really FATTER until (would you believe it) he doesn't fit into his skin anymore, but pops right out of it! It's all right, however, because he has another, bigger one underneath.

If you were to pop out of your skin, you might decide to go on a diet, but that hardly matters to the caterpillar at all. He goes right on eating as if nothing drastic had happened to him, and you would be exactly right to think, "If he doesn't stop, it might happen again . . .!" It does!

Now what do you think happens? He eats and eats and eats until he splits himself out of a third skin, too, and finally he seems to notice something peculiar about himself. It is as if, in a slow, lazy way he would decide to fix that coat once and for all because he starts to spin one that will last a long time. He spins all day long in the sunlight. His shimmering thread is wound around and around himself until he's quite inside and can't be seen at all. To look at that small, still, cocoon one could hardly believe that there is anyone in there at all. Yet, day after day goes by in that dark, secret place, until one day, the butterfly emerges, and spreads his wonderful wings for the warm sun to dry.

Looking at the first grade reminds me of that little green caterpillar. When first graders come to school they learn and learn until they grow so big that they grow right out of the first grade and into the second. The second grade grows into the third. The third grade pops into the fourth, and it happens to everyone in the whole school, even the teachers.

Inside of everyone of us there is a silent, secret place where something like a beautiful butterfly is growing. One day it will emerge just as the caterpillar emerged from his cocoon. How and when that happens, however, is something we must wait to see, because I am not going to tell you any more.

Danilla Patrick

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF STEINER EDUCATION

A Radio Interview on WNYC

June 18, 1956

Mr. GRAVINA: This afternoon we shall learn something about Rudolf Steiner, whose name some of you may already know. Steiner lived at the turn of the century. He was a most important philosopher and one of the most creative thinkers of his time. He came from Austria. I read recently that, as a result of Steiner's philosophy and his teaching, more than sixty schools bearing his name are now established in various parts of the world.

I thought you might enjoy speaking with the chairman of the faculty of the Rudolf Steiner School here in New York, Mr. Henry Barnes, who is our guest this afternoon.

There are of course, Mr. Barnes, some basic differences in the educational concept of the Rudolf Steiner schools and that which we associate with the ordinary public schools in America, and perhaps elsewhere in the world. Do you think we might begin by trying to distinguish between the two approaches to education?

Mr. BARNES: First of all I'd like to say that all good teachers who are sincere teachers in their fields have a great deal in common, but I do think that there are differences between the Rudolf Steiner school and other schools, including the public schools. They range from more fundamental questions of point of view to practical questions of administration and of method.

One of the differences in administration is that each Rudolf Steiner school is administered by its faculty. This means that every teacher shares in the responsibility for the administration of the school and has to learn to deal with questions which face any school administrator and to take responsibility for the school as a whole.

Mr. GRAVINA: The faculty actually shares ownership of the school?

Mr. BARNES: In the case of the Rudolf Steiner school in New York, that is true. But this varies from school to school. Each Steiner school is quite independent of the others and each school is set up in a way that is most practical for the country and the situation in which it finds itself. Another very fundamental difference is that in the elementary school we follow the principle that the same teacher who begins with a group of children in the first grade stays with them in their main-lesson subjects throughout the whole course of the elementary school.

Mr. GRAVINA: That is quite an innovation.

Mr. BARNES: That it is, and it is one that I know is often startling to people when they hear it for the first time. Immediately the question comes up: Well, suppose they get a bad teacher? And that is a very understandable query. But our experience is that if you do stay with one group of children you get to know them better than you could ever do in a single year. At the end of the first year you feel that you are only just ready to begin to go to work with them. If you also know that you are going to face problems which you may or may not solve now—if you are going to face those problems later you have the greatest possible incentive to try to meet them now and not simply shelve them, as is so often the case.

Mr. GRAVINA: It seems to me that it has the advantage of keeping the teacher interested also, which is not always the case in the other system.

Mr. BARNES: That's right. I think that a teacher who stays with the same group of children cannot get into a rut, in the way that a teacher who teaches the first grade year after year might easily do. You grow with your children. You have the excitement of exploring new fields of knowledge with them. You are faced with new subject matter, which of course means that you have to prepare yourself each year anew. This may be strenuous, but it certainly is rewarding. In our school the children also have contact with many other teachers during the course of the day—but this class teacher teaches them their basic academic subjects. These are taught in a long, two-hour lesson at the beginning of the day while the children are freshest and least distracted. We try then to schedule the non-academic work—the more active physical and artistic work—later in the day.

Mr. GRAVINA: While you're on the subject of the administrative technique used in the Rudolf Steiner school—in New York, at least, Mr. Barnes—I understand that your school functions without a principal in the ordinary sense.

Mr. BARNES: That is true. We consider the administration as centered in the faculty itself. All basic questions of school policy are brought to the faculty for decision. This doesn't mean that everybody does everything. Too many cooks would certainly spoil the broth. But the Chairman of the Faculty is elected by the faculty for whatever period of time the faculty wishes him to act, and he acts as the representative of the faculty and not as an administrator imposed upon it.

Mr. GRAVINA: That seems logical . . . Thus far we've been talking about *how* you teach. I think perhaps our listeners are curious now to know something about *what* you teach. What do you see as the goal of education for the students who come to the Rudolf Steiner school?

Mr. BARNES: That of course is a big question but I think that fundamentally our goal would be that the inherent individuality which exists in every human being, with his gifts and his limitations, shall come to the fullest possible expression. That implies that each individual must have a chance to receive an all-round education, that not only his gifts shall be fostered but his weaknesses shall be strengthened, and that, in the end, as an adult he shall be able to make the best possible use of the particular gifts and talents which he has.

Mr. GRAVINA: Can you give us any examples of how you try to accomplish this?

Mr. BARNES: One way in which we work is through a very carefully integrated curriculum which extends right through the full twelve grades of elementary and high school. It is our aim in the elementary school to bring to the children an introduction to each of the basic branches of knowledge, so that, for instance, in history, beginning in the fifth grade, we give the students first an introduction to the earliest beginnings of history—going way back into the pre-Christian cultures—and bringing them as far as the end of the Grecian period in the fifth grade. In the sixth grade that is continued with the study of Rome and the early Middle Ages; in the seventh grade, with

the period of the Renaissance and the Age of Discovery; and in the eighth grade we bring them right up to the present day.

We also try to give them a broad introduction to the sciences, starting in the sixth grade with an introduction to physics, with geometry and algebra, and continuing in the seventh grade with physics, an introduction to chemistry and physiology, and concluding in the eighth grade with a general summary of the sciences which have been introduced to them in the earlier grades.

Then this is all taken up again in high school so that what they learned in the elementary school in terms of picture, narrative and biography, in a more elementary fashion, is then studied anew and the effort is made to get them to understand the laws which are at work behind the phenomena and the stories of history, and behind the phenomena of science.

Mr. GRAVINA: From time to time, Mr. Barnes, as I'm sure you know, we read in our papers and we learn from our friends—many of whom are parents—that the question of the spiritual values comes up quite often in relation to the education system, although I must say that in the majority of cases it never seems to go beyond the stage of "Should a prayer be recited at the beginning of the school day" or "Should students be released for religious training elsewhere?"

Mr. BARNES: I think this is one of the most important questions with which we are faced in American education today, and of course it does go back to what one's basic conception of a human being is. If one thinks of a human being as just a chance happening in the universe who has no meaning and no destiny, then one will teach him in one way. But if you have the conviction that a human being is more than that, and that there is in every human being something that is essentially spiritual, one will then present everything which one brings to the children from that point of view. One of the concepts which we feel is fundamental to all good education is the idea of the dignity of the human being—that there is a dignity inherent in man which distinguishes him from the animals and from the other kingdoms of creation, and we do our best to awaken—especially in the little children—a real sense of respect and reverence for older people, for the material world, for the world of nature, and for the world of a higher order which has created them and which has created the world in which they live. We feel that that basic attitude toward life—which is one of respect and gratitude—is then transformed into a capacity for a positive, undivided ability to live in the world, and to act without fear and without hesitation. Rudolf Steiner once made the very interesting remark that hands which have learned to pray in childhood can bless in old age.

Mr. GRAVINA: That's a wonderful statement . . . We know of course that the public schools in a general sense have faced, and are facing, a serious shortage of teaching personnel. What has been your experience in attracting good teachers to private schools such as the Steiner School?

Mr. BARNES: I believe that a good teacher is born and that any teacher who really wants to teach is an idealist. The fundamental motive that will either bring him into teaching or will keep him out of it is not so much the salary—although of course he has to have a salary sufficient to live on—but is whether or not he feels that his creative capacities can truly come to expression

in his profession. If he feels that in becoming a teacher he is going to be limited in what he can do, if he is going to be so systematized that he has no opportunity to do a creative job in his own work, then the creative person is going to stay out of the profession.

If on the other hand he sees the possibility of doing a pioneer job—and every teacher's job is really a pioneer job—it is always a new beginning with every child—then the person with pioneer initiative will come into teaching in spite of the fact that the salaries are not what they ought to be. I don't want to argue that the salaries shouldn't be much better than they are.

Mr. GRAVINA: Well, this is probably the first time that many people are hearing of the point of view that the teacher shortage can be explained in terms other than low pay: the possible lack of creative goals for teachers.

We've been talking about the schools in some detail, Mr. Barnes, and I realize we haven't said much about the man who is responsible for this development—Rudolf Steiner himself. I think our audience might enjoy hearing something about the kind of man he was and also something of his varied interests.

Mr. BARNES: Although I never had the opportunity of meeting him personally—from all that I know of him I think that he must have been a most extraordinary person and certainly he has had a very far-reaching influence on his day. His lifework has touched a great many different fields. There is a movement in agriculture, known as bio-dynamic agriculture, which derives directly from indications which he gave to farmers. There are a great many doctors who are working in the field of medicine with ideas which he gave. And as you have already mentioned, there are over sixty schools now which are either called Rudolf Steiner schools or in some way directly owe their existence to the initiative and the ideas which he stood for.

Mr. GRAVINA: Did some of these schools actually come into existence while he was still alive?

Mr. BARNES: Yes. The first school of this kind was founded in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1919, immediately after the first World War, and Rudolf Steiner was asked to found that school and to direct it. That is the school known as the Free Waldorf School, founded by a man by the name of Emil Molt, who was the owner of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory. He was a very far-sighted industrialist and realized that the end of the "hard times" had not yet come and that the new generations which were coming were going to have to face conditions even more difficult than those they had just gone through in the first World War. He wanted to do something of fundamental value for those people, and he asked Steiner whether he would be willing to found a school for the children of the workers in his factory. Steiner agreed, on the condition that it would not be restricted to any one group, economically or socially, and that he be entirely free of all external control, economic, political, or religious, to build up the school as he saw fit. That was the beginning of the Waldorf school movement, or the Rudolf Steiner educational movement that we know today.

Mr. GRAVINA: And certainly a marvelous example of the kind of enlightened cooperation you could have between industry and education.

Mr. BARNES: That I think is something which we have yet to see

developed in this country, although I do know that leading industrialists are realizing that their biggest potential resource is not material but is human, and that if they do not reinvest some part of their profits in conserving and developing this human resource, than industry itself is also going to fail.

Mr. GRAVINA: Of course there has been and is a tremendous movement on the part of many organizations, including business groups, toward the scholarship technique, and that is praiseworthy; and yet if we have to question the basic educational method itself, it becomes a matter of deciding where efforts, time and money should be best spent.

Mr. BARNES: Yes. And I think there is another question involved there and that is one of specialization. A great deal is said today about the need for engineers and for scientists, and the point of view is taken that if you have better science courses and specialize sooner in the scientific branches of knowledge you are going to get better scientists. I think this is a fundamental mistake. I think that the best scientist is the best and most creative thinker and the best all-around individual, and that the task of education is first of all to educate human beings, who can then become scientists. As long as industry limits its support to technical schools, where they hope to get a direct benefit as a result of the money they have spent, I think they are not going to accomplish the goal which they hope to accomplish.

Mr. GRAVINA: How good a chance do we have in the near future, Mr. Barnes, of bridging the gap in educational thinking and concepts that exists now between the system used at the Steiner schools and those used in the public schools?

Mr. BARNES: Of course the private school, or independent school, has one great advantage and that is that it is independent, and is therefore able to adapt itself to new ideas more completely and more quickly than any big system such as the public school system. But I think that the source of education is the same for the public school teacher as it is for the private school teacher. That source is a knowledge of the human being, and to the extent that they draw their inspiration from the same source the results limited by the difficulties of working in a big system can be applied equally well in either field—because a good teacher is a good teacher in whatever kind of a school he teaches.

THE RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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