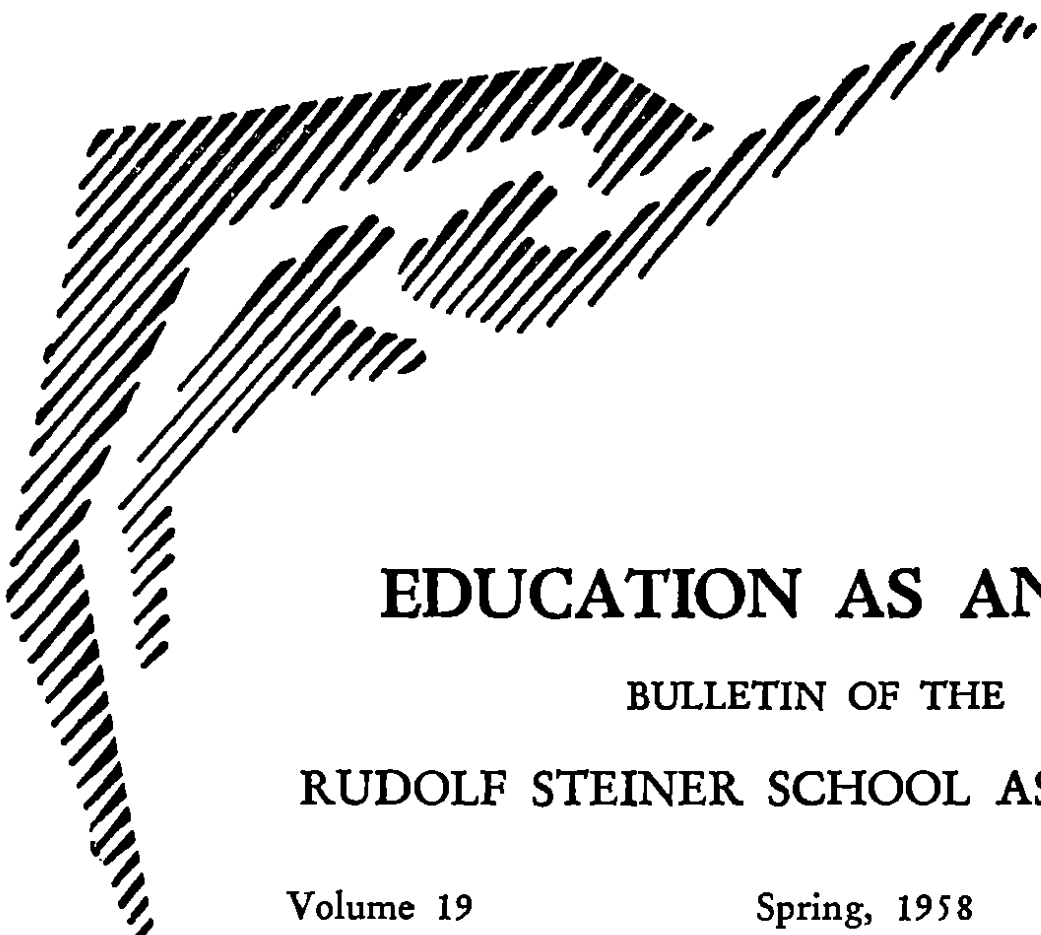




# EDUCATION AS AN ART

## BULLETIN OF THE RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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### SCHOOL HEADS SPEAK

#### *The Academic Pressures on Our Children—Their Cause, Effect, and Cure*

*This article by Henry Barnes was printed as one of a series to which the heads of Allen Stevenson, Buckley, St. Paul's and Medeira schools also contributed. It is reprinted from THE OBSERVER, February, 1958, with the kind permission of the Junior League of New York.*

Every good teacher knows the difference between teaching and cramming for an examination. One is a creative effort in which teacher and student are engaged with their whole being, and the prize is life itself. The other is a mechanical imitation of education. Testing one's achievement is, of course, essential to learning and good teaching includes preparation to pass examinations, but cramming to pass an exam is a short-range intellectual exercise which eventually defeats its own purpose. The incentive does not lie within the work itself and cannot, therefore, be self-sustaining, or self-renewing. When examinations become an end in themselves they lead to superficiality and the debasement of learning.

Theoretically there can be little disagreement with the thought just expressed. It is axiomatic to sound education. Yet we are systematically undermining the integrity of our schools by permitting the pressure for mechanical testing standards to influence curriculum and teaching methods at almost every level of instruction.

It is well known that so-called "objective" tests, standardized for mechanical simplicity of scoring and statistical evaluation, test only a fraction of a student's experience and real ability and/or achievement in any given field. What they reflect with a high degree of reliability is the student's intellectual ability and the speed of his comprehension. Yet even as tests of knowledge and of the ability to reason, to weigh cause and effect, to develop judgment, such tests fail to represent more than a standardized fraction of the full intelligence. Despite this, we are permitting ourselves to gear our schooling more and more to competitive examination scores and testing techniques. Starting at the university and college level, pressure is exerted through the secondary school right into the elementary grades.

Will my child get into a good college? is a question that already haunts parents of fifth and six graders. Their anxiety prompts them to sacrifice all-around educational values for competitive achievement on the basis of an abstract marking system. We cram their heads all morning and syphon off their unused vitality on the playing field all afternoon and the full heart of learning, which is a creative process rooted in experience, escapes us.

The tendency to substitute a test score for a living, individual judgment; to teach in order to pass an exam and not for the sake of the subject itself and the student's growth, will yield us generations who may know all the answers, but who have little idea what to do with them. It will further deepen the split between intellectual knowledge and moral character which threatens to destroy mankind. And, with all this, it will not serve to achieve even its limited aim over a longer period of time. Inevitably, I believe, the colleges and universities will seek other qualities in their students than those that can be readily tested and mechanically evaluated. Just because of the pressure of enrollment, the leading colleges will come to rely more and more on the recommendation of the school and the impressions of a personal interview to supplement the examination record.

Our universities are responsible for educating tomorrow's leaders and we need leaders who can face life with conviction and independent judgment. These qualities can not be evaluated statistically. We must not allow the pressure of anxiety to weaken our confidence in the very goals for which our education exists.

*Henry Barnes, Chairman of the Faculty*

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## INDEPENDENCE IN EDUCATION

The aim "so to educate children that they will be of themselves able to impart purpose and direction to their lives" was founded by Rudolf Steiner not only upon the what, when and how of teaching, but upon the concept of a school as a free spiritual institution. Spiritual freedom is that which allows full expression of conscience, as choices and decisions are made and responsibility for results is borne. A view of educational goals which include the development of capacities of initiative and conscience must also include the ground in which they find root—the school itself. A school in which the teachers are its conscience, and are free to shape the life conditions of the school out of their concern for education, stands as a free institution. Education for freedom evolves to the extent that the ground from which

it springs is free. This is what Rudolf Steiner points toward when he shows that "education, lying as it does at the root of all spiritual life, must be put under the management of those people who are educating and teaching."

There is no question but that this point of view would be revolutionary to the authorities on school administration in both public and private school systems in America and elsewhere. Yet it deals with and goes deeply into the question of academic freedom which is becoming more acute as political and social problems are intensified by the world situation. It also contributes in a fundamental sense to the question of the future of Western civilization and its stewardship over the free spirit of man.

The extent to which the idea of a faculty-administered school is a revolutionary one is apparent when, in the pages and columns on modern education, one tries to find some recognition of the status of teachers as professional persons with a need for self-determination in the practice of their profession. On the whole, the emphasis on freedom presses into the school room, however immature the little community of the class may be; and in the adult sphere the teacher, who must nourish the spiritual and moral growth of the children, occupies a position that is far from being self-determining.

The education of children for life in a free world may be complicated by the very effort that is being made to foist the pattern of democracy on children, while at the same time the adults, under whose influence they form their attitudes, depend for their jobs on a school system which is managed by non-teachers. The immaturity of childhood is challenged to exercise self-determination. Those who prepare the challenge are themselves estranged from it. Whether in a public or a private school, the teacher's position is on the lowest rung of a ladder supporting a hierarchy of administrators and supervisors, which in the public school system is intricate and controlled by political means. Even in independent schools there exists the differentiation between administrators and teachers. School administration, a field in itself, is preferred over teaching. The school principal is responsible to trustees who, generally speaking, are not educators. A teacher's professional freedom depends on the personalities who carry the responsibilities for the school as a community institution. In contrast to this picture of what is general practice in the field of education, the notion that it is the teachers who must also carry the responsibility for the school would indeed be radical.

Rudolf Steiner recognized the fact that modern man has evolved a spiritual life to a very great degree dependent on state institutions and economic forces, and that the extent to which the individual can contribute from his spiritual resources to the welfare of the community depends on the emancipation of his spiritual-cultural strivings from control by methods which have their proper place only in the political or economic branches of social life. Two of the "Four Freedoms" which have become the gospel of the free world, Freedom of Worship and Freedom of Speech, hint at that which Rudolf Steiner carried further in his consideration of education as an essential part of public spiritual life. He observed that "human beings, growing up to life, are within the spiritual domain of the body-social, and will go forth with views of their own to put into practice". He urged the point of view that with each child there are new abilities growing up and that these will really be passed on into the life of the community when the care of developing them

rests entirely with people who can judge and decide on spiritual grounds alone. Because it is the teaching profession which forms the bed-rock in the ground of any educational system, he suggested that the anti-social results of education, which flare up in the individual tragedies as well as the world conflagrations that threaten our age, point back to an anti-social configuration in educational systems, in so far as "the young have been brought up and taught by persons who themselves are made strangers to real life by having their lines of work laid down for them from outside".

"Educators," he said, "need to fix their lines of work themselves, from the smallest things up to the biggest. When they cannot do so, they grow unpractical and remote from life. And then you may give them any principle to work on, laid down by apparently the most practical people, and yet their education will not turn out people really practically equipped for life."

In making it clear that the people who determine administrative policies must be at the same time actively engaged in teaching, he centers and unifies the whole field of responsibility within the most reasonable realm of influence. Faced with their immediate problems as teachers, the members of a faculty approach questions of administration from the point of view of pedagogy. The faculty meeting as such emerges as the governing influence in the school. Here is the time, the place and the occasion in which the whole life of the school is centered and from which all progress proceeds. The faculty elects its executive members who are entirely responsible to the faculty. The personal attitudes that may at times interfere with efficient cooperation for the good of the school have to be overcome through individual experience and effort. These are the attitudes, usually taken for granted in less consequential situations, of the prima-donna, the agitator, or the one who needs to lean on authority. Each teacher finds that spiritual growth is demanded of him for the sake of the whole. The faculty meeting of a Rudolf Steiner School is the center of its freedom. In this body each teacher is responsible for the whole school. The exercise of freedom is in the adult realm where it belongs. Reflected back, into the classroom, through the teacher's mood and conscience, is the spirit of self-direction which the children look up to as an attainment of adulthood. Through this reality the children grow in the understanding of what it means to become truly social human beings.

In the practice of self-government the teachers in an increasing number of Rudolf Steiner Schools, in Europe, Great Britain and America, have been tested for more than three decades, and theirs is an essential contribution to the social life of the future.

*Dorothy Harrer*

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#### WORDS OF A FORMER STUDENT

Perhaps it is the privilege of a former student to hesitate and to wonder if it is possible to put into words the true meaning of any cherished educational experience. Certainly it could be mine merely from the point of view of time as I entered school in 1930 and graduated from the eighth grade in 1936. Those years hold not only happy memories, but have had, I believe, for all of us who were there together, an important influence on later educational and day to day experiences. When asked to describe how the Rudolf

Steiner School prepares its students for higher education and for living, one pauses, for one inevitably finds that the greatest values are the hardest to explain since in many respects they are intangible. It may help to illuminate the deeper influences which create those "intangibles" to look back upon a few examples of the curriculum and the methods of teaching which I assume are still incorporate in the school.

The sense of joy and wonder which we felt in relation to our work may well have been developed during the leisurely, unbroken periods of time spent on one subject. For instance, if English literature was our prime concern for one month, there was the time to memorise and recite poetry together, time to write and illustrate our own stories, time to clarify grammar by parsing a sentence visually and in color—in color—not just our paintings in art class, but the most important details of all our newly acquired knowledge were preserved in color in special notebooks. This surely helped to develop a child's natural feeling for color so fundamental for the future study of any art or craft. But still more valuable, whether he was to become an artist or not, was that it awoke a sensitivity towards color which seemed to enrich the individual's entire vision.

In contrast to the long work periods on a main subject we also had the briefer, daily, or twice weekly, classes in such subjects as arithmetic, languages, singing, dance and shop. But the relaxed pace of the main class seemed to satisfy a particular need for concentration without pressure. I can recall my sense of shock and confusion when, at the age of about eleven, I visited another school and sat in on some of the brief sessions allotted to each subject—short classes punctuated by bell-ringing, scuttling to other rooms and sudden shifts of attention just as one became interested in and able to understand what was going on. With this somewhat superficial comparison I first became aware that there was something different and special about our Steiner School.

Another difference—the value of which was evident only in later years—was our early contact with subjects of study usually considered too advanced for our age group. The pre-high school child who has been in a Latin play, recited Goethe and Schiller in German, performed Shakespeare, started astronomy, physiology and physics, has already had a taste of what it can mean to delve deeply into the mysteries of learning. The fact that our class studied early English epic poetry, concentrating on *Beowulf* for weeks and weeks until we could recite it, act it out, and illustrate it episode by episode in our notebooks, did not mean that we were trying to become experts in a remote and highly specialized subject (I later discovered the same material was to be found at Radcliffe College only in the graduate courses.) Rather it meant that we were absorbing and experiencing many fundamental elements of literature that might be drawn on in later years.

This concept of teaching, this ability to make the student reach up to the material, implies a respect for a child's mind that is rare and inspiring. You see, we were given advanced studies as naturally as if we'd been expected to have an inherent understanding of them. This was the challenge capable of launching us on an educational adventure that had life-long possibilities.

*Leslie Paul*

## PREPARING FOR COLLEGE

The Rudolf Steiner School is only now in progress of building up its high school and will graduate its first senior class in June, 1959. Although Rudolf Steiner schools in many countries are successfully meeting the problems of university entrance, it is not possible for us to discuss the question of college preparation on the basis of our own immediate experience. What may, however, be of general interest are the school's aims in this regard and the particular means by which we hope to achieve them.

Our aim is a full twelve-year school which shall provide better than average college preparation within the framework of a sound general education. To accomplish this end, the following provisions have been made.

Throughout elementary and high school the curriculum advances in what may be described as a spiral movement, in the course of which the basic elements of knowledge are brought to the children each year at a new level of experience related to the level of their increased maturity. For example, the study of physics is introduced in the sixth grade and is continued thenceforward, each succeeding period of study building on what has gone before — reviewing and consolidating earlier experience and progressing to new knowledge. Chemistry and biology are begun in the seventh grade and continued throughout high school. The history curriculum takes the children from earliest times, starting in the fifth grade, up to their own day, in the eighth and ninth grades. Ancient history is then taught again in the tenth; the transition from medieval to early modern times in the eleventh and in the twelfth grade a review and reevaluation of world history is presented. In the high school, each subject is re-entered from the vantage point of awakening intellectual maturity.

Such a "spiral," or cumulative, curriculum would not be feasible if it were not for the basic academic lesson with which each day begins. This lesson — one and a half to two hours in length — is taught by the class teacher in the elementary and by the specialist subject teachers in high school, and for a period of several weeks at a time these uninterrupted early morning lessons are devoted to the concentrated study of one of the main academic subjects of the year. These intensive periods of study — five days a week for several weeks at a time, known as the main lesson — rotate during the year, scientific subject giving way to humanistic, creating a certain variety and balance. In this way, geometry, for example, instead of being taught as a one-year course in sophomore year in high school is introduced in the sixth grade and studied each year thereafter for short, intensive main lesson periods.

This type of schedule offers a special advantage in regard to the difficult question of how to maintain the aim of a fundamentally sound human education and yet meet the competitive standards of college preparation. The main lesson, in which each class participates in its entirety, is taught from the point of view: How can this subject contribute best to the all-round development of these children? Following the main lesson, the day is arranged in forty-five minute periods and the foreign Language classes, as well as certain supplementary classes in English and mathematics, may be divided into groups selected according to achievement and ability, which cut across class lines. It is possible for instance, that children who have studied both French and

German in the elementary school, to go directly into French or German II in their Freshman year thus enabling them to complete their college language requirement at the end of sophomore year. In order to meet the special problem of college requirements in science and/or history, a college preparatory elective course is offered in junior and senior years to supplement the general curriculum in these subjects.

One other aspect of the question deserves mention. It is our conviction that every child, in high school as well as in elementary school, should have the opportunity to develop bodily skills and to have the experience of genuine creative artistic work. The high school curriculum, therefore, includes work in arts and crafts, in music, dramatics, eurythmy, as well as in physical education, for all students. With the exception of music, eurythmy and physical education, these subjects are taught in double periods (1½ hours) twice a week in the afternoons in a rotating schedule so that each class has a balanced program in these activities during the course of each year.

It is our belief that we can best serve the American college — and thereby best serve our own children and our country's future — by offering a genuinely all-around education, based on fundamental human needs and values, including within its framework a thorough college preparation. College entrance is, we are convinced, a natural consequence of sound education, not its reason for existence.

*Henry Barnes*

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THE LIVING WORLD OF PLANTS (Continued)  
*by Gerbert Grohmann, translated by Virginia Field Birdsall*

LICHENS

You often see on the barks of trees — especially on the weather side, and likewise on bare stones — a grayish, greenish crust in the form of scales: these are lichens. You would not suspect that they were growing if you did not know it, for their growth is amazingly slow. In the damp mountain forests, thread-like, branched mosses hang down at times like long beads from the trees. In other regions, too, you will often see clumps of lichens on the trees. These are not beard lichens, but scale lichens.

Lichens, like mushrooms — to which they are related in many respects — grow out of a plantlike soil, such as the barks of trees, wood pine needles, etc.; but they appear also on naked stone and bare sand. This they can do because they are dependent upon sunlight and so acquire a greenish color. You can find, in fact, that lichens appear only in those places where the sun can penetrate easily.

Lichens form no roots. They hold fast, it is true, to the bark of trees or to stone, with fine, sucking threads, so that one can scarcely tear them away; but they take out of the air the substance which they need for food.

Lichens have one very remarkable trait. They readily dry up, or completely shrivel, without suffering any harm. Then, if it rains, or if only dew or mist falls, they suck up the moisture like sponges and are full of life again. How else would the rootless lichens be able to subsist in tree crowns or on the sides of rocks, if they could not endure periods of drought without harm?

Since lichens have no roots, they can have neither stalks nor flowers. Nor have they the power to stand erect; and when they grow longer, they simply hang down from the trees like loose threads or curly masses of leaves.

Lichens found in dry spots of wood-soil sometimes look enchanting. Some have the shape of antlers; others, such as the cup mosses, are like ruined castles. Reindeer moss, which appears in great masses in northern lands and covers wide areas like a kind of cushion, has great importance, even for man, furnishing almost the sole nourishment of the reindeer. Still other lichens thrive when the wood-soil is more profusely moistened. These are called leaf lichens, for they are larger and resemble grayish-brown rags fastened to stone or tree roots.

It is especially when lichens are about to form their spores that they show how nearly related they are to mushrooms. From time to time, indeed, a little mushroom grows on the lichen plant; sometimes it is even so vividly colored — usually red or yellowish — that one wonders where the glorious, intense colors came from.

These little mushrooms produce spores. Some are content simply to allow, from time to time, the growth of a disc, or little cupshaped formation, upon whose surface the spores are produced. Lichens can also propagate their kind by means of little parts which separate themselves, are then blown or floated forth, growing up to new lichens. So they spread out, gradually covering the forest-soil or wood, and the old tree trunks. Some lichens look as if they could easily crumble to pieces. If you touch them your fingers are covered with light green dust.

Wherever lichens grow, the sun is at work; it would like to call forth plants, but it cannot penetrate deeply enough into the earth. The earth, too, would like to produce plant life. In the places where lichens spring up, however, the earth has so little force that there arises those strange crusts or patches, which lie only on the surface, or appear like half-dried mushrooms.

The nature of lichens can best be recognized from the earth-zones where they occur. When you step over the timberline of the North, you suddenly come to regions where only lichens and mosses colonize the earth. The earth-force is no longer strong enough to form trees; the sun-force has also become too weak, so that no weeds can sprout. Its rays fall slantingly upon the earth and penetrate only a little way into the ground. So the forms of plant life are limited to surface lichens, and extend no further.

High mountains also have their lichen-zones. Where plant growth has come to an end and the naked stones are often made wet by the clouds, this strange form of life still flourishes and is almost to be regarded as a transition from the stones to the plants.

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### THE RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

15 East 79th Street, New York 21, N. Y.

President: Sonia Tomara Clark  
Secretary-Treasurer: Ruth Finser

Editors: Christy Barnes and  
Virginia E. Paulsen

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