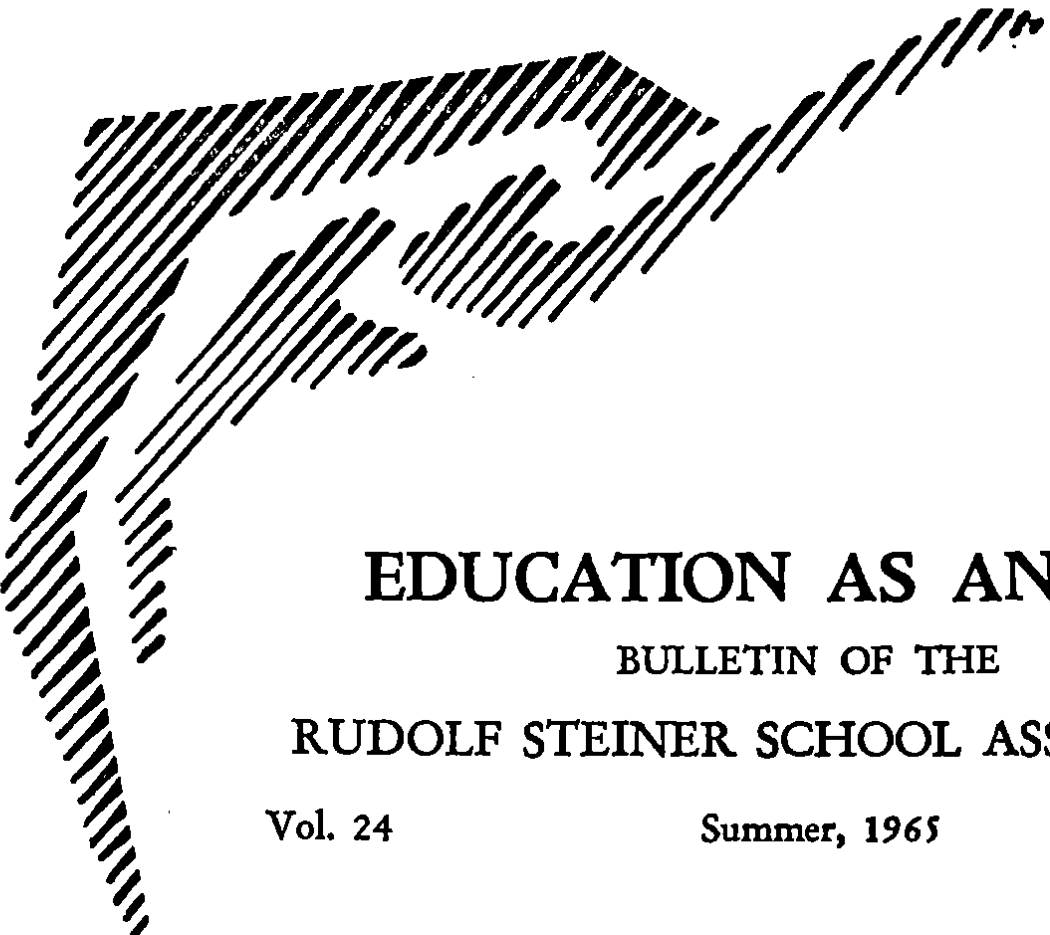




EDUCATION AS AN ART

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INDEPENDENT IDEAS IN A STATE SETTING: BERN'S STEINER TEACHERS

*Reprinted, by kind permission, from the
London Times Educational Supplement of September 25, 1964*

The test of a new educational theory is perhaps not how well it can grow in its nursery bed, but what sort of a show it makes on transplantation. This was impressed on me when I recently heard a Swiss teacher, Mr. E. Bühler of Biel, give one of the finest series of lectures I have heard on the Steiner method of education, only to discover that he had no connection whatsoever with a Steiner school as such, but was the head teacher of a Bernese Volksschule.

A subsequent trip to Biel gave me the opportunity to learn more. Biel is a town of some 65,000 inhabitants, a centre of the watchmaking industry, lying at the foot of the Juras and overlooking the rich agricultural land of middle Switzerland. Mr. Bühler's school, which lies on the edge of the town, is a modern building, with chromium fittings, tiled floors, wide windows and harmonious colours, set in some 8,000 sq. metres of lawns, trees, flowerbeds and playing fields.

The school's aspect is south, with — on a fine day — a wonderful view of the distant snow-covered Alps. The inattentive child in such a school who spends his time "looking out of the window" may well be getting as good an

education, if only in the Wordsworthian sense, as the one who "keeps his eyes on the board."

WIDE SPECTRUM

The school accommodates some 600 children of the district, who can remain there, unless they move on at 11-plus, until they leave school at 16. Though none of them seemed poor (is there any poverty in Switzerland?), there are as many pupils, Mr. Bühler assured me, from working and labouring class families as from business and professional ones.

Mr. Bühler has been the head teacher of the school for the last 10 years. He was chosen as such on the recommendation of the staff, this being the practice in the Canton of Bern. The staff's recommendation not only has equal weight with any other, but more often than not is the final choice.

The independent nature of the individual cantons with the Swiss Republic needs no elaboration. But Bern is particularly noted for its vigorous and progressive educational policy, and the fact that by law its teachers are free within the limits of the curriculum, to teach as they see best.

Such conditions perhaps explain why a Freie Paedagogische Vereinigung — an Independent Pedagogical Union — whose avowed object is to permeate the public educational life of Bern with the methods and impulse of Rudolf Steiner, can flourish there with the full approval of the Canton.

Steiner himself, moreover, chose Bern in which to say in April, 1924, that the anthroposophical art of education concentrates on the "how" of teaching and can therefore be introduced "by individual teachers everywhere, in every kind of school and for every kind of instruction".

PROFESSOR EYMANN

The F.P.V. was founded just over 21 years ago by a well-known and well-loved figure in Bernese public life, Professor F. Eymann. Its influence is felt throughout the Canton, even in remote alpine villages. It has just on 200 members, from about 90 public schools, of whom some 175 are primary and the remainder secondary teachers.

Four times a year the F.P.V. holds weekend conferences for the study and practice of Steiner's methods, and a large seven-day conference every autumn for the same purpose in Emmenthal. This is apart from weekly meetings arranged by local F.P.V. groups in the various districts.

As head teacher Mr. Bühler does 24 hours' teaching of the basic 30 hours required of other teachers. He has secretarial help with his clerical work; what he does himself, he mostly does out of school. For he looks upon himself as a teacher, not an administrator.

No class may exceed 30, and Mr. Bühler has a staff of 21. Once a month they have a teachers' meeting in the evening. The main item on the agenda is discussion of the work of one of the teachers.

This has been prepared for by the rest having attended in a body a lesson by that teacher.

Of the complete Steiner method as practised in the Steiner schools as such — the same class teacher, for instance accompanying the children through eight years from 6 to 14, or the morning main lesson at which one subject is dealt with for two hours over a period of up to five weeks — Mr. Bühler and his staff incorporate what they can.

WRITING FROM DRAWING

They carefully follow, however, Steiner's suggestions for the progressive introduction of new subjects at the appropriate age, and for teaching writing through painting and drawing, and reading from writing; the analytical as distinct from the synthetical approach to arithmetic; the elucidation of the principles of geometry from a progressive study of forms (beginning with the simplest of symmetrical exercises in the first class); and the abundant use of fairy stories, legend and mythology in the younger classes as a basis for the imaginative work in writing, reading, acting, modelling, drawing and painting.

The children pursue every form of group activity in speech, flute playing, singing and drama. For the drama they have a beautifully appointed room with stage and lighting, and a props room with every conceivable kind of costume, weapon, etc., all made in the school or by the parents. There is some eurythmy but it is not yet a full part of the curriculum.

The school is fortunate in having every practical resource at its disposal which a generous authority can supply. I saw one workshop fully equipped with hand and machine tools for woodwork, another for modelling, another for bookbinding. In yet another the children make mosaics by collecting pebbles, trimming them by a method not unlike that of the old flint-knappers, and then setting them in concrete to patterns of birds and beasts of their own design.

The domestic science room was a combined modern kitchen and dining room, with enough stoves and sinks for a class of girls to work comfortably. Every girl does four hours cooking a week during her last year at school. They had a lofty and well-lighted gymnasium. There was a special room where children whose mothers go out to work can return after school to do their homework.

The school's latest acquisition is a room for curative education or remedial work. Here children in the first three classes with special difficulties in behaviour or learning are taken by a teacher chosen for the work, till they are able to return to their ordinary class.

It is possible, Mr. Bühler and his staff claim, to bring the full spiritual impulse of Steiner's vision into public education, and an increasing amount of the detail of the method as circumstances allow. This is epitomized for them in a stained glass window by Max Hunziger in the foyer of the school. The window portrays the growth of a child as a harmonious working together of the spiritual forces of the divine world from which man comes and to which he aspires, and those of the human society in which he lives and learns.

The school works towards this end with the full confidence of the public and the educational authority. Mr. Bühler and his staff work, not as a group of enthusiasts introducing something new, but as a professional body of trained and experienced experts practising their craft in the best possible way they know.

It may be that a private school is still the best nursery for a new educational idea. But the time must come when it must pass over into the educational life of the community as a whole, if it is not to stagnate or become the privilege of a minority. It appears that the Canton of Bern is not only awake to this but through the F.P.V. and schools such as the one I saw in Biel is ensuring that what is best in education shall reach the widest circle of its child population.

—ALAN HOWARD

THOR'S HAMMER
(A Play for the Fourth Grade)

I

Scene 1. Asgard. Sif lies sleeping on stage; Loki enters.

LOKI

Loki am I, mischief-maker,
Working ill where'er I can.
It is always my endeavor
To bring strife to gods and man.
Mischief can I ever boast of,
Working good is not my will.
Idun into Tjatse's power
I betrayed upon the hill.
Asgard's dwellers then grew aged,
Fearing death was everyone,
'Til the fruit which made them
youthful
Back to Ithavoll had come.
Also I stole Freya's necklace,
Slandered god and goddess fair.
Yet, I must work other mischief —
I will cut off Thor's wife's hair.
(Cuts it and runs out)

THOR enters

I am Thor, the god of thunder.
Many weeks now have I fought
Against the frost and mountain giants
For the cold which they have brought.
Home to Asgard I have journeyed,
Here to see how each one fared,
And, above all, soon to greet now
Sif, my wife, the golden-haired.

SIF

Woe is me! My beauty's vanished!
What was once my pride and joy
Is no more! Is cut off — severed!
Now I've nothing to enjoy!
All bereft of beauty am I
And my heart does sorely bleed.

THOR

By my troth, none else but Loki
Could have done this shameful deed!
I will straightway find the rascal.
He will suffer at my hand.
I'll not rest until I search in
Every corner of the land.
(Goes out with Sif. Loki
runs in and hides.)

THOR enters

Now I have you, trouble-maker!
I will smash your bones, and then
I will fling you to the dogs,
And none shall speak your name again!

LOKI

Thor, have mercy! Grant me pardon!
You, whom men and gods adore.
With much gold will I appease you.
Stop your thund'ring, brother Thor.
Cunning things in gold and silver
Shall the dwarfs now make for thee,
Sif shall have new golden tresses
If thou lettest me go free.

THOR

Go now, traitor, and be sure you
Keep the promise you have made.
Thunder strike thee, doer of evil,
If thy debt is not soon paid!

Scene 2. Swartheim.
(Two groups of dwarfs)

DWARFS

We, the dwarfs, are clever craftsmen.
'Tis below the earth we dwell.
In dark caves, we cunning people
Hide our cunning knowledge well.
Swords we fashion, tools we smith,
Working ever day and night.
For our skill we're often summoned
By the gods of Asgard bright.

LOKI

Dvalin, harken to my words now.
Of thy skill I stand in need.
Thor is angry; I have hurt him
With my latest shameful deed.
Quickly fashion worthy objects,
One for Odin, one for Frey.
For I must appease their anger
E'er we see another day.
Quickly fashion golden tresses
To replace the ones I sheared.
How I wish that I had also
Had a chance to cut Thor's beard!

DVALIN

Loki, I am at your service.
I will show to you my skill.
I will hammer, I will smith,
And my hands shall not be still.

FIRST DWARF

Odin, the great god of wisdom,
Shall win even greater fame,
Hurling Gungnir, spear of magic,
Never will it fail its aim!

SECOND DWARF

And to Frey, the bright and noble,
Shall be given Skidbladnir.
Best of boats, it sails forever
Both through water and through air.

THIRD DWARF

Dvalin also fashioned for you
Here the finest golden thread,
Which when taken up to Asgard,
Shall grow fast on Sif's shorn head.

LOKI

Dvalin, cleverest of craftsmen!
Of your praise I loudly sing.
No one has more skill in Swarheim
Than do you, all craftsmen's king!

BROCK

Sing the praise of Dvalin ever.
Loki, sing, if that's your will!
But you haven't seen the proof of
Brother Sindri's magic skill!

LOKI

Yes, I know that Sindri's skillful,
But I tell you, boastful one,
I would bet my head on Dvalin
That the gods choose what he's done!

SINDRI

Brother, I accept the wager!
Let us work with skill and zest!
'Til we've fashioned three such objects,
And the gods will choose the best.
Brother, blow the bellows steady.
Not one moment may you rest!
And the magic powers grant us
Favor for our skill's great test!

LOKI (off to one side)

As a gadfly I will sting the
Boastful one, to make him fail!
He shall soon regret his boasting,
And his misery bewail!

BROCK

Ouch! This gadfly does torment me.
It has stung me near the eye!

SINDRI

Oh, for shame! Too short the handle!
Curses on you, hateful fly!

BROCK

Brother, thank you! These three gifts
which
You have wrought are wondrous fair,
And in Asgard all the gods soon
Brock, as winner, will declare!

Scene 3. Asgard.

LOKI (presenting gifts)

Odin, Lord of Asgard's wisdom,
You shall win yet greater fame
Hurling Gungnir, spear of magic.
Never will it fail its aim.
And god Frey, the bright and noble,
Shall receive boat Skidbladnir.
Best of boats, it sails forever,
Both through water and through air.

As a yellow-flowered garment,
Like unto a field in spring,
Sif will be, once she's adorned with
Purest gold thread which I bring.

BROCK (presenting gifts)

Mighty Aesir, lords of Asgard,
Magic gifts I bring today.
Odin's is the wondrous Draupnir,
Gullin-bursti is for Frey.
And the mighty hammer Mjöltnir
Is the special gift for Thor,
And the Thund'ers greatest weapon
It will prove forever more!

BROCK & LOKI

Gods, we wait for your appraisal
Of the gifts presented here.
Which of us has won the wager?
Anxiously we wait to hear.

ODIN

Greatly praise I magic Gungnir,
I shall hurl it far and wide,
And the wondrous gold ring Draupnir
Is, indeed, my joy and pride.

FREY

A fair treasure is Skidbladnir,
Of all ships it is the first.
Best of chargers, golden-bristled,
Is the wild boar Gullin-burst.

SIF

Wondrous fair are my new tresses,
As adorned once more I stand.

THOR

And the trusty hammer Mjöltnir,
Best of weapons in my hand.
Asgard I'll defend forever,
With this weapon in my hand.
'Gainst the giants I shall hurl it
Down in gloomy giant-land.

ALL THE GODS

We agree that Sif's new tresses
Far surpass what he did shear,
But invaluable is Mjöltnir
When dread Ragnarök is here.

ODIN

Triumph, Brock, the head of Loki,
It is yours. Your bet was such!

THOR

It is yours, Brock, for the taking,

LOKI

But my neck you may not touch.

BROCK

Since I may not take full vengeance
By obtaining Loki's head,
I will stop his spiteful speech by —
Sewing up his mouth instead.

GODS

Where's your ever-ready slander,
Loki, most loquacious one?
Where your venom, malice, hatred?
Where your foul and scornful tongue?

LOKI

Who is Thor without his hammer?
Sif, his wife, without her hair?
Who is Odin without Sleipnir,
Or without his magic spear?
Power of yourself you have not!
Weaklings are you, one and all!
Lords of Asgard, you are puny!
I'll rejoice the day you fall!

II

Scene 1. Asgard. Loki is asleep on
stage. Enter Thor.

THOR

Wake up, Loki! Listen Loki!
Don't you hear me? Wake, I say!
While at night I lay a-sleeping,
Someone took my hammer away.
It is stolen, Loki, stolen!
I have sought it high and low.

LOKI

Silence, Thor! Don't storm so loudly,
Only you and I must know.
If the giants hear about it,
They will soon in Asgard be.

THOR

If I do not have my hammer,
They will treat us shamefully.

LOKI

I suspect I know the thief who
Stole your hammer and did flee
Back to Jotunheim to hide it.
I will find him. Follow me.

(Enter Freya)

Freya, whose eternal beauty
Shines on us both day and night,
Will you lend your falcon dress that
I may help Thor in his plight?

FREYA

Yes, I'll let you use it, Loki,
May my plumage serve you well.
It will help retrieve Thor's hammer.

LOKI

Thank you, Freya, and farewell.

Scene 2. Jotunheim. Enter Loki.

THRYM

Ha, 'tis Loki! What news bring you
Of the gods and of the elves?
Why to Jotunheim did'st journey
You, alone, all by yourself?

LOKI

Bad news bring I, Prince of Giants,
Ill fare gods and ill the elves.
Have you hidden hammer Mjölner,
And will keep it for thyself?

THRYM

Eight miles underneath the earth lies
Mighty Mjölner, god Thor's pride.
Back again shall no man bring it,
Until Freya be my bride.

LOKI (aside)

I will take what Thrym has told me,
Back to Asgard and decide
How to punish Thrym the giant.
He shall have a lovely bride!

Scene 3. Asgard. All the gods are
assembled. Enter Loki.

THOR

Loki, speak! What tidings bring you
Out of gloomy Jotunheim?
Who's the thief that stole my hammer?
Who is guilty of the crime?

LOKI

Thrym, the giant, has your hammer,
Mighty Mjölner, god Thor's pride.
Back again shall no man bring it
Until Freya be Thrym's bride!

THOR

Freya, you must wed the giant,
Or my hammer shall remain
Down beneath the earth forever,
And the gods will soon be slain.

FREYA

Never will I wed the giant!
You must find some other way
To retrieve the mighty Mjölner!
Thrym? My husband? No, I say!

TYR

Mjölner, the defense of Asgard,
Must come back to Thor's right hand.
Yet, what can we do about it?
Who will go to giant-land?

FRIGGA

Council we must hold together,
And decide how we may gain
Back the hammer, mighty Mjölner.
Freya with us must remain!
(They hold council)

HEIMDALL

Mjölñir must come back to Asgard.
In our quest we cannot fail.
Let us trick the stupid giant!
Bind on Thor the bridal veil!
Let some keys around him rattle,
To his knees hang woman's dress.
Let him wear the beauteous necklace—
Such a plan will bring success!

THOR

I am Thor, the god of Thunder!
And unmanly it would be
To appear in woman's garments.
No, friends, this just cannot be!

LOKI

Silence, Thor! And listen to me.
If your hammer comes not back,
Giants soon will dwell in Asgard.
Very soon they will attack.
(Thor consents; the gods
dress him. Loki dresses
himself.)

LOKI

Now to Jotunheim let's journey.
Let us hasten, Odin's son.
As your servant-maid, I follow.
Watch now, we shall have some fun!

Scene 4. Jotunheim.

THRYM

Stir, ye giants, set the table,
Freya comes to be my bride.
Bring the mead and bring the oxen.
Look a little dignified.
(Thor and Loki enter, sit
down and eat.)

THRYM

Who has ever seen a bride eat
One whole ox and salmon too?
Who has ever seen a maiden
Drink more mead? Friends, tell me,
who?

LOKI

Eight long nights has Freya fasted.
Neither food nor drink she took.
Now that she is with her lover,
She can eat again, just look!

THRYM

(lifts Freya's veil and jumps back)
Freya's eyes are burning fire.
Is it fear or love I see?

LOKI

Eight long nights no sleep had Freya,
So she longs with you to be.

GIANT'S SISTER

Freya, put off all your rings now
From your hand if you would win
All my love and happy welcome,
Then our friendship shall begin.

THRYM

Bring the mighty hammer, Mjölñir,
Lay it on the maiden's knee.
Let us ask my sister's blessing.
Soon my wife will Freya be.
(Thor receives the hammer,
jumps up and swings it. All
the giants fall down.)

THOR

Home to Asgard let us journey
Let us leave dark giant-land.
Once more mighty hammer Mjölñir
Has returned to my right hand!
(Curtain)

—ALMUTH KRETZ

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