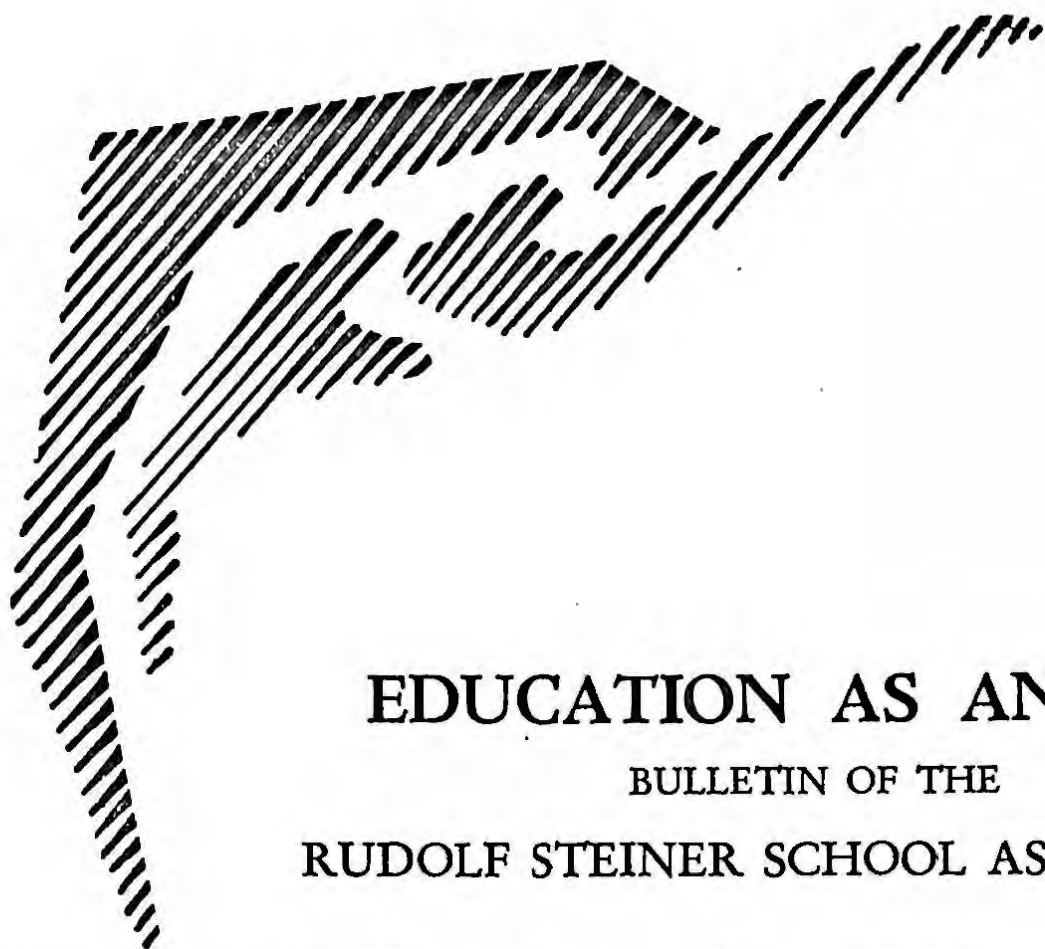




EDUCATION AS AN ART

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THE NURSERY CLASS

AS A FOUNDATION FOR LATER LIFE

As a layman closely interested in the education which Rudolf Steiner has given to the world, and particularly occupied with the study of modern society, I am increasingly impressed with the fact that social problems of very many kinds can be traced to individual disharmonies which arise very early in the child's life. We can, I think, see quite clearly how certain political conflicts can only be understood as large-scale expressions of innumerable tiny stupidities which have been daily enacted in the nurseries of an earlier generation.

At a recent conference on Rudolf Steiner's methods in education, attention was drawn to the dramatic cleavage which exists in the modern world between the people who have excellent intentions, but somehow do not manage

to seize the reins of power, and the people who are notably devoid of real morality, and even not particularly intelligent, but whose strong will-forces carry them inevitably into the seats of the mighty. We have the spectacle of millions of human beings enduring the rule of dictators, simply because, although they may dislike such a life very much, they have not the faintest idea how to create for themselves the kind of social life which they can imagine as ideal. Moreover, it is quite clear that a deep distrust of self is typical of modern people in general, and that most of us feel habitually that it is the job of someone else to know how things ought to be done, and our function to find such "leaders" and follow them.

This must mean that for a great many human beings, there is a deep inner gulf between knowledge and action. This gulf seems often to be particularly wide in clear-thinking people. An enormous amount is written and said by such people about how to make the world a better place, but a mysterious inertia, an inability to seize opportunities for actual creation, seems very characteristic of them — of us. For the most part, we are so dreamily enclosed in the beautiful web of social reform which we spin out of our heads, that we can never rouse ourselves to buttonhole the important man who is probably passing at that moment and would, with his influence, be an invaluable colleague. Still less can we live actively enough into the lives of other human beings with whom we must work in order to organize and keep in being the great living fabric composed of actual people in which our ideas must find embodiment.

One can understand how this characteristic of a man, which determines whether he is going to be a thinker only, or a doer as well, must have been pretty well settled in the first seven years of life. One can see how in this period, as never later, boys and girls live in their will, in constant movement. Movement of some sort is their natural reaction to every experience; in muscular activity they find their relationship to the world. It is obvious that anyone who, failing to appreciate this, systematically tries to make a child sit still and be taught, runs the risk of ruining the child's character in two ways at least. In the first place, the child will certainly become educated, but in a way foreign to its nature, so that in later years its outlook on life will be artificial and unsatisfying, however correct in matters of fact; in the second place, the check to spontaneous expression will become permanent, and the adult will certainly have the characteristic I have depicted of finding great difficulty in carrying thought into action. A Rudolf Steiner teacher, on the other hand, though certainly using periods of quiet in a rhythmical way during the nursery-class day, will actually teach entirely through the child's imitative faculty, its talent for experiencing in action whatever is suggested to it.

It is quite appalling to realize how widespread to-day is the paralysis of those creative powers which could be present in every human being. We really are a generation of spectators and listeners and bystanders and readers. Nor is this confined to persons of strictly academic type. How do subordinate clerks, artisans, and labourers (who make up the majority of our population) employ their leisure hours? They read books, they sit in cinemas, they watch football and racing, they listen to music, they listen-in to the radio. All these things can be good in themselves, but they are all passive, absorbent. Lenin described religion as "the opiate of the masses": nowadays we should assign that title to football, or rather, the watching of football.

No human being can be fundamentally satisfied by perpetually listening and reading and watching. I think it no exaggeration to say that war remains possible in our time, in spite of all we know about it, because fundamentally, large numbers of people are in the habit of expecting something external to provide interest for them, instead of making life interesting through their personal creativeness. Deep down, they are perpetually bored, and dangerously ready to seek self-forgetfulness in some vast catastrophe which will at least give them something exciting to do — *something to do*.

It may seem a far cry from world-war to the nursery class, but it seems quite reasonable to me that a child who has not been given conditions in which it can play joyously, rhythmically, beautifully, in the first years of life, will inevitably become an adult deficient in actual creativeness and therefore a bored and dangerous being. I can quite understand that ground lost in this way in the first seven years will never be made up except in comparatively rare cases where the adult undertakes a difficult, conscious self-training in later life. And a person who can do that could have gone still further ahead if the ground lost earlier had not needed to be made up.

It seems to me clear also that the quality of our moral impulse must be very largely determined within a very few years after birth. Cannot we see quite clearly how the man who behaves himself only for fear of the consequences — legal punishment, loss of caste, unpopularity, Divine wrath, and so on — must have been a child brought up in early years under cries of "Naughty, naughty child!" and punishment? Parents really ought to be forbidden to use the word "naughty" during the early years. It is a sterile abstraction, meaning simply that the action complained of is antipathetic to the parent and — usually — will be visited with painful consequences to the child. Thus an inner morality grows up consisting wholly of prohibitions. The adult comes to feel subconsciously "Evil is that which brings pain to me: Good is that which does not bring punishment upon me." His morals are thus entirely negative, and the motive of warm love for what is good and true does not exist in him.

I can see, too, that direct moral instruction to a small child is rather worse than useless. If the child is intelligent, it will from such instruction acquire an intellectual code which may happen to be theoretically good: but its morality as an adult will be of the kind which consists in conformity to some abstract creed, and has no real roots in character. Moreover, the killing influence of ethical theorizing upon the minds of children must surely be responsible for the painful feeling so many adults have that moral acts are rather dull, and that most really satisfying things are slightly naughty.

How very much better to shape a child's whole day so that it is entering with positive enthusiasm into a skilfully varied succession of occupations, which are beautiful and good because the teacher quietly sees to it that they shall be! How much more inspired, when a child embarks on some harmful act to deflect its impulse delicately into some activity which will satisfy the same inner impulse wholesomely! There is no need here for a sermon: the child inwardly experiences the harmony of the right way as contrasted with the ugliness of the wrong. By these methods, the foundation of morals for later life becomes a positive enthusiasm for healthy and shapely living — as contrasted with an

uneasy tightrope progress over an abyss of innumerable evils. In this way morals are taught incidentally, as an inseparable principle of an Art of Living.

I understand that Rudolf Steiner said that the best environment for a young child was that of a large family, brought up of course with insight. One can see, however, that even if the large family exists, the parents are unlikely to have their attention sufficiently free from the other business of life to give their children that subtle supervision which can mean so much for later life. Hence the necessity for the nursery class in the modern world. There could hardly be a more valuable social investment, if the considerations I have outlined here are as weighty as I feel them to be. It may very well be that in the gentle intimacy of the *Kinderreich*, the Children's Kingdom which Dr. Steiner said every nursery class should be, our teachers can silently settle for us many of the problems which have baffled the statesmen of all the Grown-up Kingdoms for centuries.

—G. L. ROWE

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A TALK FOR THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

(especially for Grade 6)

One fine, sunny day a child went to school for the last time of the year. Summer was on its way, and this child had been waiting for it since the first cold day of October.

The last warm days of school had been awfully hard. All the teachers had seemed to be trying to find fault with him, to find out what he hadn't learned. "Tests" and "records" and "check marks" were set like traps, and the child fell into every trap.

Now this child knew that all year long his teachers had been trying to get him to *listen* and *look*, and to get on with his *work*. He hadn't been able to do these things as the teachers had wished.

So it was the last day, and he could get away from all the traps and tests, and rush out to meet the coming summer without a care in the world.

"Goodbye to trying to learn," he thought, "and now there are no more school days to be counted!"

At last summer arrived, and he went with his family to the country. No one asked him to get anything done. Someone might have said, "Go out and play."

That first summer morning in the country he stepped out of the house and took a deep breath. He saw a robin on the lawn. It was listening for earthworms. It used first one ear, then the other, turning its whole head from side to side and back again. Suddenly, hearing a sound in the ground, it drove its beak down into the grass and pulled up an earthworm, which clung for dear life to the soil which was its home. The robin tugged and pulled and finally captured the worm, and flew off with it dangling from its beak. Soon the robin was back again, listening for sounds in the ground.

The child crossed the lawn into the meadow starred with daisies. They had white eyelashes and round yellow eyes, like the sun. They all seemed to be looking upward toward their *teacher*.

Reaching the road, the child went down it to the lake and stretched himself out on the sandy beach. He shut his eyes, and when he opened them again, he saw a hole in the sand near his nose. He pulled his head back because the hole was full of crawling ants. They were working hard, each one doing its share of the work of digging out a tunnel into the ground. An underground ant-city was becoming an ant-hill, as each ant crawled downward and carried upward a grain of sand to deposit on the surface of the hill, which grew, grain by grain, to form a little cone of sand shaped like a tiny volcano. As soon as an ant had deposited a grain of sand on the hill, it hurried back into the tunnel again to bring up another grain. The child dropped a pinch of sand into the hole, filling it up. Those ants that were caught outside scurried around frantically looking for their tunnel, until all of a sudden there was a movement and a break in the hill, and out came an ant from below, bravely bearing upward its load of yet another little sand crystal to deposit above ground. Soon the tunnel was open again as the ants continued their efforts.

The robin, the daisies and ants, as they listened and looked and worked, made the child remember some words he had heard before the summer started.

They were in Latin: "Audi, vidi, et labora."

He remembered what the words meant in English: "Listen, look, and work."

"Well," thought the child, "why should I bother about these words . . . just now?"

—DOROTHY HARRER

YOU CANNOT PICK A DANDELION

"Isn't it wonderful," said the teacher, "when you go out into the woods and fields, to see what strange and beautiful things are coming up out of the ground! Trees and flowers, grass and bushes, and all kinds of plants, no two alike, with all sorts of different shapes and colors — have you looked closely at some of these?"

Certainly they had. They were normal youngsters, nine-, ten-, and eleven-year olds, naturally interested in anything they could push, pull, touch, lift, examine, taste, hear, or smell.

"Tell me what you have seen," said the teacher. In no time they had recalled berry-bushes, Indian pipes, Jack-in-the-pulpits, many kinds of trees — with commentary on which were best for climbing — and a variety of field flowers and stinging nettles.

"Well," said the teacher, "I wonder if any of you know about something I saw the other day. If you know the name of it, don't say it, but raise your hand if you think you know. Walking across a field I saw a slender stem coming up about nine or ten inches from a small plant, and on top of the stem a little ball of white, fluffy stars. If you pick the stem and blow, *whoof*, they

scatter into a whole galaxy of stars." There were shining eyes and eager hands raised —

"DON'T SAY IT!" said the teacher. "But I wonder if any of you know what was there before the ball of stars appeared? If so, what did it look like?"

"There was a little yellow flower, with lots of tiny petals all crowded together," said one.

"It looked something like a little sunflower, only there was no brown center," said another. "It was all full of the little petals, like an aster or a chrysanthemum."

"Right!" said the teacher. "And what was it like before that yellow flower opened?"

"It looked like a little umbrella, upside down and almost closed, with a yellow lining showing," said a girl, holding out one hand, palm up, thumb and finger tips together making a bud-like form.

"Right!" said the teacher. "And what was it like before that? Somebody else."

"A tight little cone-shaped green bud," said a boy, making a tighter bud with his fingers, lower down, remembering the stem was then not so high.

By this time some were fairly bursting to name it. "No," said the teacher. "Don't name it yet. But what was it like before that?"

"Just a little bunch of leaves coming out from the center, a sort of green rosette," said a girl.

"And before that?"

"Just a tiny little bit of green coming up out of the dirt!"

"Right!" said the teacher. "Now what do you call all of this?"

"DANDELION!" they exploded in chorus.

"YES!" said the teacher. "Do you like dandelions?" he continued. Of course, they liked dandelions. Who doesn't enjoy the green buds with yellow linings, the cheery gold blossoms scattered among the grass, and the marvelous airy globes of elfin stars — until he has acquired a prejudice, and learned to resent them as an intruder in lawns?

"Did you ever pick dandelions?" Yes, they had all picked dandelions.

"No you haven't!" said the teacher. "*You cannot pick a dandelion! It is impossible to pick a dandelion!* What was it you picked, Bill?"

"It was like what you said at first," said Bill. "The whole ball of fluff that you can blow."

"What! No yellow flower? No little bud, like the upside-down umbrella, nearly closed, with the yellow lining showing? No tight green cone? No cluster of green leaves all coming out from the center? — What was yours like, Anne?"

"I've picked whole bunches of dandelions as yellow flowers," said Anne. "You know, we used to take one and hold it under somebody's chin and say, 'Do you love butter?' Then we'd look to see if the yellow color was reflected from under their chin."

"But when you got a yellow flower, you couldn't blow any white stars from it, could you? And did any of you bother to pick dandelions when you only saw tight green buds, or the plant leaves? But you all said that a dandelion is really *all* of this. Whatever you picked, you only got a fragment of something.

"You cannot really pick a dandelion — for a dandelion is not a thing that exists all at once. It is a *performance*. And it only happens when the sun and earth, the sky and water are all working together. The pattern may be in the seed, as the pattern of music is in the score, but it doesn't come to life till the players *play* it, or the singers *sing* it. The score becomes music only as the players and singers pour themselves into the performance, just as the sun and earth and air and water pour themselves into a dandelion. And every plant, and every living thing is really a world performance — even you."

They were suddenly quiet for a moment.

This was the first lesson in botany.

"*Every living thing is a world performance.*" This is the heart of it — a realization that illuminates not only botany but every human life and action.

—ARTHUR P. MOOR

Dr. Moor, a retired editorial consultant for The World Book Encyclopedia, is also a former Waldorf School parent. His article is reprinted with kind permission from The Freeman, April, 1964.

A SENIOR'S SPEECH TO THE SCHOOL

(at the last school assembly in June)

This is one of the last times that our class will be fully assembled. In three days we shall be scattered throughout the city. In three months we shall be dispersed over some 20 campuses throughout the United States. Assemblies like ours today, to a greater or lesser extent, will take place in thousands of schools this year, and everywhere groups of seniors much like ourselves will be faced by the same future. We will be entering a highly competitive, highly complex, ever-changing world. It is not the world which greeted last year's seniors, nor is it the same world which will receive next year's graduates. It is a world of untold wealth where millions go hungry, where men deny each other basic rights, where they kill each other in the streets while "striving" for peace. It is *not* an easy place to live in. We look to the east and see . . . what? . . . a wall in Berlin, an undeclared war in Egypt and Israel, bloody riots in Africa, stormy revolution in the Dominican Republic. We look to the west and find Viet Nam and Laos, and in our own country, race riots which have cost numerous lives. In the East we grapple with Communist Russia, in the West with Communist China, and on both hands we play a dangerous game of international politics, a game of bluff and give and take.

These are some of the conditions existing in the world today and this is the world we will have to face, but it affects not only us, but everyone, young and old alike. Generations yet unborn will feel the weight of the decisions we of this age make. Such decisions cannot, must not, be made by men who do not understand fully the world of which they are a part, or who are biased in their estimate of it. The world desperately needs educated men and women who understand their fellow beings, and it is up to today's schools to produce such people. In expecting this, we place a great responsibility upon the shoulders of our educators. Not only must they constantly keep pace with the ever-growing intellectual needs of their pupils, but they must also keep up with the ever-expanding horizons of knowledge, and it is knowledge, properly applied, the key to understanding, which will eventually make possible a time when there will be a free interchange of goods and ideas between men and nations. Great progress has been made in this field during the past 100 years, but the project has scarcely begun. It is a simple plan but its execution cannot be instant. The required result will not be obtained in five years, or ten, perhaps not for generations, but each and every person in the world can and must do his share, for we are, after all, involved in mankind. We do our part simply by learning, by expanding our awareness. In these past four years of high school we have come to understand this tremendous need for education, if not in its totality, then at least in part, and we have experienced the type of education that is called for, an education that goes beyond facts and figures and in a subtle way teaches us to become integral parts of this multifaceted world. We have rebelled at times, as our teachers can testify, but that is why the world continues to change and grow and blossom, because its young people have the energy and initiative to overthrow old dogmas, superstitions and traditions and to build new monuments in place of the old. This tremendous energy of youth can easily, all too easily, be misguided and the result is chaos and confusion, externally and internally. That is why it is so very important to have a proper education as a guide at this critical period of our existence. I believe that during these past few years, indeed also in elementary school, our teachers have furnished such guidance, and now that our association with this school draws to a close, I am sure that all my classmates will join me in thanking them for what they have done for us and for what they will continue to do for future classes.

—GUIDO EGGER, '65

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