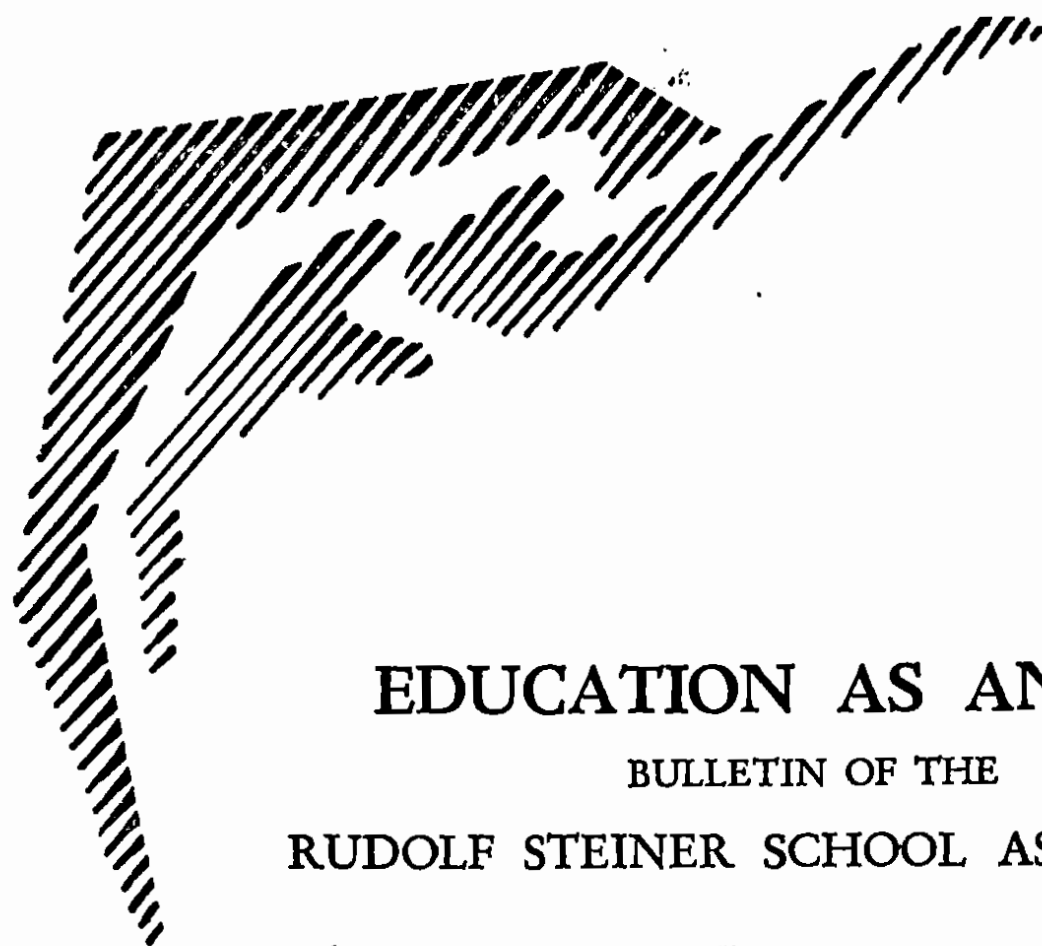




EDUCATION AS AN ART

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THE QUESTIONS OF A SMALL CHILD

Our century in its concern for "the child" has even directed its thought to an education of the very youngest, and has suggested, recommended and undertaken all sorts of projects to this end, from gymnastics for babies to 'schooling' in Montessori and other kindergartens. Rudolf Steiner calmly placed himself in opposition to all this. When he was asked, "What shall we do with a small child?" he answered, "Nothing special". That sounds simple, — but it places the greatest responsibility imaginable upon parents and teachers. It means no more nor less than this: *Everything* we do in its presence affects the small child. A child younger than seven is still only loosely connected with his physical body; he can be said to "hover" around it; he is spread out over his surroundings, completely surrendered to them.

"Impressions of his environment ripple and flow through his whole organism; they sound and ring in him."* From our gestures, our movements, our tone of voice, he is aware of all that is going on within us. The forming of his physical organs is influenced by this in a healthy or an unhealthy way. "And so it is that in the presence of a small child we cannot permit ourselves to think

thoughts, to feel feelings other than those which can safely continue to vibrate within the child.”*

In a small child, imitation is not just an occasional occurrence; it should not be understood in the narrow sense of isolated gestures or forms of speech, but in the widest sense: he imitates all the time because he is taking part in everything. Just as the waves of a pond continue to stir the water within the fisherman’s net, so it is with the surroundings that flow into the child. If we want to do our best for him, we should carry this knowledge as constant awareness within us. Otherwise we can never have the right understanding for such a thing as children’s questions, much less the right answer to them.

What are questions? That we ask them has to do with our inmost being. Without them, man would not be man. Wonder is the seed out of which will sprout knowledge. The child, who has come down from another world, is himself a question put to his surroundings. An adult makes progress only at the point where he succeeds in asking the right question. Parsifal attained the supreme crown of humanity, as King of the Grail, when he learned to ask a question. Whoever stops asking becomes a cold Philistine, dead in spirit. The being who is most full of life, a child, has the most questions. With an incomparable drive for knowledge, an all-encompassing interest that can be regained in later life only by truly great men, he asks questions of us which we have long given up asking. He asks more and better questions than we ourselves could think of asking. We often object to this; we reject the question because we do not know the answer. But at such a moment we feel within us that we have done the child a wrong, for we have rejected precisely what was his best, his finest offering to us. Then a child’s questioning becomes a question to us.

The most important time for a child’s questions lies between his 5th and 7th years. At this age he is a little thinker and philosopher. He wants to know something and understand something about everything, about even the most profound, most exalted matters. Yes, it is of the profoundest things that he likes to talk most of all. “Where was I before I came to the earth?” Sometimes he tries by his questions to confirm his own thoughts that he has already formed. They are often of surprising depth and wisdom. A child who had never heard about reincarnation asked, “After we die, we’ll be small again, won’t we? Then I’ll be your mummy, won’t I, and you’ll be my child?” . . . “If God is almighty, can He even make a stone so heavy that He can’t lift it Himself?” This is a question of unheard-of courage and brightness; I believe it might catch a theologian off balance.

A little girl once asked her mother, “How can people be beautiful inside?” She went on to explain in detail that outwardly she found her mother not at all good-looking, yet within she was beautiful. When we listen carefully to such questioning, we know that the child still lives in an entirely different world from us. Only by knowing this can we find the right answers . . . but it takes presence of mind. We cannot serve up something warmed over from our grownup knowledge; on the spur of the moment we must create a picture or a little story. When we make this effort, however simple, what we say will

*Rudolf Steiner, *The Essentials of Education* (1924), London, 1926

continue to vibrate in the child. "Don't ask silly questions," or "You won't understand that," repulses the child, even loosens the bond to the parent. If one cannot find the answer right away, one can lend one's ear sympathetically to the questioner; the promise of a story later on will do for the moment. And if one "moves in one's heart" whatever the child has asked, the promised answer will come. One will begin to feel what the child is looking for.

He is not logical in our sense of the word. Even when he asks, "Why?" he really wants inner connections, a survey of the whole in picture form, not a chain of cause and effect. It is best to answer in the freest possible way; no one is further from pedantry than a child. With special care avoid that "appeal to the intelligence" which permeates our textbooks and literature for the young, making them as barren as a desert. "Nothing but the truth" as a principle only shows one's helpless submission to what is coarse and commonplace materialism. Sex education, for example, at this early age is not only senseless but harmful. A child does not want to know about his physical beginnings but about the origin of his spirit-soul. Questions about nature or technical matters require a different kind of answer than one would give an adult or a fourteen year old. "Who is pushing the clouds?" and similar questions point to the fact that the child is asking about the *beings* which are at work behind the veil of sense reality. To explain these things mechanically is a kind of falsehood, and because a young child can not grasp an abstract thought or explanation, it leaves a vacuum which can lead to illness.

If it is hard rightly to understand a child between the ages of 5 and 7, how much harder is it in regard to a younger one, between 3 and 5. His nature is still more removed from the adult's; his world is still less "earthly". In *Memoirs of My Youth*, Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert relates that at this earlier age he sometimes heard his sister recite a ballad: "Lenore rose up in the red of the dawn . . ." These magic words filled him with the imaginative vision of Lenore rising up in the air around the morning sun. That is the child's world. In his inexhaustibly rich and sensitive book on education, *Levana*,** Jean Paul describes the child who asks, "Is the moon good or does she cry?"

This is the time when questions multiply ad infinitum and become a sort of game to juggle language and logic. Often the content of the question is not at all important; it sometimes becomes so senseless that it soon taxes the patience of any grownup unaccustomed to the world of the small child. When we go down a hill together, for instance, why ever does he ask, "What makes the road go down?" To learn to understand young children, one needs to develop reverence in oneself. This alone will lead to the conviction that what is asked, what is spoken, is usually less a quest for knowledge than a need for reassurance from the parent. The child goes from "mother's milk" to the "mother tongue"; speech is nourishment . . . of the soul. Jean Paul says perceptively: "A child loves so much to *listen* that he asks only because he wants to hear your voice." The sound of a beloved voice, a word filled with its own secret force, is what builds up the child's physical- and soul-being at this age. Considering what was said at the beginning, how everything surrounding the child vibrates inside him, we will see clearly what a rough, vehement, sharp answer can do to the soft, delicate organism.

**Jean Paul (Richter), *Levana*, or The Doctrine of Education, George Bell, London, 1901

Questions that seem to be unanswerable can be satisfied if we find the gesture, the inner attitude, the outer expression, that corresponds to an answer. The way we say 'angel' can be more creative than a long definition. At this age the child already asks questions whose answers will stay with him, perhaps for the rest of his life. In a wonderfully logical way he will not accept answers that are insufficient. — All children who are served meat will some day ask about the 'animal' they are eating. "Why do we eat fish?" a little three-year old girl asks. "Because that's what they are for," answers her mother, trying to put an end to this difficult problem. "But then why do they like to swim and are alive?" asks the little one. Avoiding both false sentimentality and cold cynicism, the grownup at such a moment has to find the way to an answer which more in sound than in content conveys a feeling for the animal's sacrifice.

Going back into the past, into the depth of a child's life, we come to a portal where at the age of three, or thereabouts, the human being awakes and says "I" for the first time. Before that, he still looks at himself from the outside. The penetration of an ego-consciousness sometimes shows up in a wonderful way. A little boy who had just begun to say "I" was given a new hat. He looked in the mirror and said, "Am I still Charlie?" Between the picture of his changing appearance, and the glowing feeling of an unchanging Ego, between both of these, the young child still wavers back and forth.

Even before the age of three, a child asks questions. For a while it asks all the time, "What is that?" It wants to find the names of things. But in general at this early age the question is not even spoken out; the further back we go, the less it is so. "The religious character of the child's bodily nature," as Rudolf Steiner characterizes the first seven years, is strongest at this time. The body surrenders itself to its environment. In teaching the small child we should deeply cultivate 'a feeling for educating with *priestlike* reverence'; through us filters the communion with the world. One can observe that a year-old baby, who asks with his eyes, "May I?" and is answered, "No," just a little bit too severely, will start to cry bitterly. Not from stubbornness nor from being refused what he wants — one can hear that — but because he is hurt by the aggressive tone of our voice. Certainly we should not be too sweet and sentimental with these little ones; what they need is gladness, warmth, kindness. "A love which streams through the physical environment of the child with warmth may in the truest sense of the word be said to 'hatch out' the forms of the physical organs."*

The souls of children given us in trust expect this kind of love from us. When they come to us from higher realms, they ask us their *first question*: "Do you, whom we have chosen to be our father and mother, want to lead us into this life on earth in such a way that we can fulfill our tasks for the future? in such a way that we can build up a healthy body which will harbor a healthy soul and spirit life? in such a way that we will be fully able to incorporate strongly in our lives the message of the heavenly worlds which we have to bring down to earth?"

—MARTIN TITTMAN
(translated by Clara von Woedtke)

*R. Steiner, *The Education of the Child* (1909), London, 1955



APPRENTICES TO CULTURE: THE HIBERNIA SCHOOL

*Reprinted, by kind permission, from the
London Times Educational Supplement of September 17, 1965*

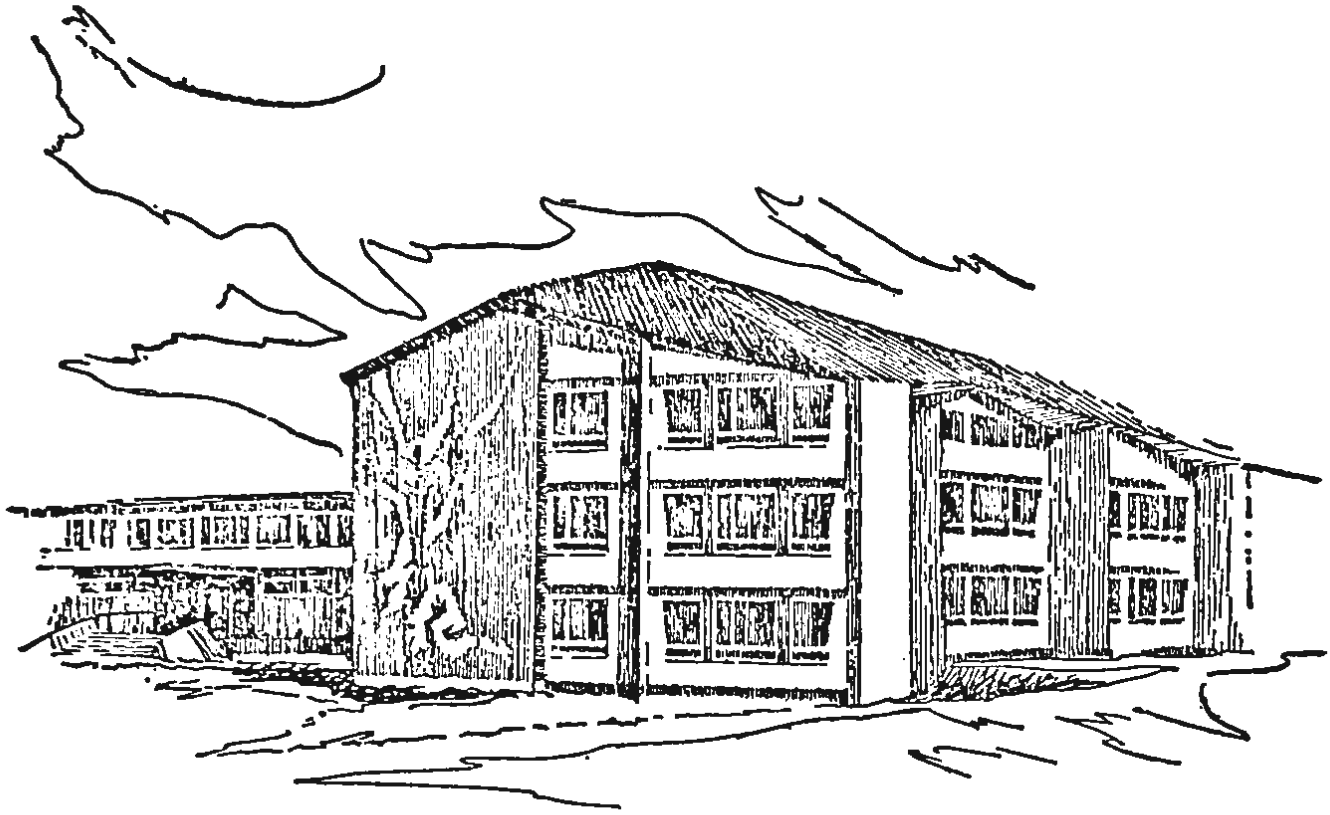
It is not altogether impossible these days to build a complete school — architecturally speaking — from the top downwards. To do this, however, with its educational programme and activities is another matter. Yet something like this has been done in the Hiberniaschule in the Ruhr, whose new building at Wanne-Eickel comprises classrooms and workshops for the education of the children who live — and who are for the most part destined to work — in this heavily industrialized district of West Germany.

It all started in 1945 when Dr. Emil Kühn began the education of apprentices in the furniture industry. He was president of the industry's institute (Fachverband der Möbelindustrie) in West Germany, and a member of the executive council of the Union of Waldorf (Rudolf Steiner) Schools (Bund der Waldorfschulen).

Dr. Kühn was convinced of the need to integrate education for culture for a chosen few — a survival from the past — with education for the modern world, which must be something for all. It has taken mankind hundreds of years, he argued, to arrive at the highly technical civilization of today, and young people must not be indiscriminately thrown into it, but educated for it. He, and later, Mr. Reinhold Börner of the firm Hibernia-Chemie, enlisted the help of a resourceful and courageous educationalist, Dr. Klaus Fintelmann, and started apprentice courses on these lines.

It was soon discovered that it was possible to decrease the hours spent on training, so that the apprentices could be given something of a general cultural and aesthetic education as well. Before long neighbouring firms became interested and joined in, particularly Hibernia-Chemie from which the school derives its name.

At first the school was for boy apprentices only. Then, women being also part of modern industrial life, girl workers and trainees were included. By 1960 it had become an independent school, under Dr. Fintelmann, comprising what corresponded to classes 9 to 12 of an ordinary Waldorf (Steiner) school.



From the first however, it was obvious that if the school was really going to fulfill the ideas of its founders, it had to do something about the education of its pupils before they took up their apprenticeship. The integration of a young person into the world of modern industry from 14 onwards cannot really be done properly if before that time he has been starved of imagination and art. So ultimately eight classes were added to the school, for children from six-plus to 14, together with a kindergarten.

Inspired as it was by the spirit and aims of Steiner's original Waldorfschule in Stuttgart (a project, incidentally, which was also promoted by a group of industrialists), the founders of the Hiberniaschule found the Waldorf school pattern the most suitable for their purpose. Its humanistic approach to all objects of study gave them the prototype for integrating the specific demands of practical training with an effective general education.

So, in the Hiberniaschule, after the usual period in the kindergarten, the children enter the primary school where for six years, under the same class teacher, they learn the basic skills and associated subjects with the usual artistic-imaginative emphasis common to all Waldorf schools.

For the first four years, with specialist teachers, they also learn English and Russian. In the fifth and sixth years Russian is dropped in order to get in some Latin and Greek as a cultural amplification of what they will be doing in history and the general growth of civilization, in those years. English is kept up till the twelfth year. During this primary period all children learn to sing and to play an instrument, and they have regular painting, drawing and hand-work lessons, and do creative work in clay and wood in classes 5 and 6.

The middle school begins with class 7 and ends with class 10. Here practical and theoretical work begin to be more sharply divided. The children's attention is drawn more directly and separately to observation, so that the faculty of judgment can begin to grow out of the more spontaneous responses of earlier years. Gardening, carpentry, and blacksmith and locksmith work begin, together with, in classes 9 and 10, machine construction and practical electrical and chemical work.

A greater distinction is now made between the sexes, and at this stage the girls turn more to practical work in housecraft, nursing, domestic science and the care of young children. It is during this period, too, that the pupils are encouraged to think about their future, so that by the end of this time they have more or less decided on it.

This enables the boys and girls in the upper school — classes 11 and 12 — to concentrate more on the practical work connected with their chosen occupation: gardener, joiner, fitter, turner, mechanic, electrician, laboratory assistant, child welfare, catering, &c. The timetable and the curriculum are adjusted accordingly.

In both the middle and the upper school departments the Hiberniaschule is nevertheless a *school*, fulltime and day.

Theoretical and cultural work and language, religion, music and eurhythmics are done by everybody in the morning in the middle school. In the afternoon the pupils separate for practical workshop activities and artistic work in modelling, painting and carving. This procedure is reversed in the upper school, where practical instruction — now completely aligned with the pupils' chosen careers — takes place in the morning, in school, on the factory floor and in the training centres of neighbouring firms; in the afternoon the pupils continue their theoretical cultural work in the usual way.

The Hiberniaschule workshops form one half of the school building. They are joined to the classrooms which form the other half by a foyer which is the main entrance to both, and which is artistically decorated to symbolize the ideals of the school.

These workshops are real workshops, just as the school is a real school, turning out firstclass products needed for the upkeep of the school. The school garden supplies vegetables for the school kitchen and the midday meal, the carpenter's shop furniture and apparatus, the machine shop appliances for use in the school.

When the new building was opened in May last year, the whole electrical installation had been put in as part of the practical work of the trainee-electricians, who also maintain it. In a similar way the school nursery, cookery and laundry are looked after by the girls who work in this line.

Tremendous reality and vitality are also given to the school from the fact that here the college of teachers (which in a Waldorf or Steiner school takes the place of the head) had to be expanded to include persons who, while not teachers in the strict sense, none the less impinge somewhere or other on the life and work of the school. At the college's weekly meetings and Easter conferences these persons make their contributions no less than the teachers, and education in theory and practice is placed in its widest possible context.

"One of the main tasks of education", writes Dr. Fintelmann* "is to transform a child's play into capacity to work."

It would appear that the Hiberniaschule is achieving what many feel must come in the school of the future. The conviction is practically world-wide that the concepts "school" and "education" must be completely rethought. The whole pattern of social and economic life has changed since the time when grammar schools and universities became the arbiters of culture. The purely academic criterion must expand into something wider.

—ALAN HOWARD

*In one of eight articles on the Hiberniaschule in the August, 1964, number of *Erziehungskunst* (published by the Bund der Waldorfschulen at 44 Haussmannstrasse, Stuttgart, West Germany).

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