

The Making of a Teacher

by

Henry Barnes

Waldorf Journal Project #2

Who is a Waldorf teacher? What distinguishes this education? How often have we asked ourselves these questions! Is it teaching in blocks? Organizing the day around a main lesson? Continuing as a class teacher from year to year with the same group of children? Teaching in pictures? Knowing about reincarnation and karma? Teaching woodwork, painting, bookbinding, recorder, eurythmy?

Rudolf Steiner says, "What is of most importance for the teacher is his conception of life and of the world. . . . The inspiration that flows to the teacher from a world conception inwardly and ever newly experienced is carried over into the soul constitution of the children entrusted to him."¹ In other words, this means that we should learn to "read" the world and the riddle of man's being in quite new ways. "There must arise in the whole human nature of the teacher an intensive impression of the child, again as one whole being, and what is perceived in the child must awaken joy and vitality. This same spirit-awakening joy and vitality in the teacher must be able to grow and develop, till it becomes immediate inspiration, answering the question, 'What am I to do with this child or with that?' . . . We must pass from the reading of human nature in general to the reading of the individual human-being!"²

This conception of what constitutes the central life force in education should pervade the training of teachers from beginning to end—or, better said, from the beginning on, for there is actually no end. The older a teacher gets, the more he knows that he is only at the beginning!

In the extraordinary little book from which we have quoted above, known in English translation as *The Essentials of Education*³ (five lectures, Stuttgart, April, 1924), Rudolf Steiner devotes a brief passage in the central lecture to the possibilities inherent in a whole new approach to the education of teachers. His few remarks open up perspectives for a lifetime of endeavor. He points to a fourfold penetration into man's full human being. Describing this, as he does again and again, he points to the fact that we are not only the human being whom we observe with our ordinary senses. In addition, this physical organism is imbued with life, and it is further permeated by consciousness, and the physical body, life body, and consciousness are all in their turn penetrated and organized by the individuality itself, working spiritually into the members of its total being. To the trained investigator of the spirit, each of these four realms of forces is perceptible to the appropriate organ. Just as our physical senses observe the physical, so other senses, not dependent on the physical organism, can be developed to perceive the realms of living processes, of consciousness, and of the activity of the ego. Our effectiveness as teachers depends on the ability to experience these four realms in man and in the worlds to which he belongs and on our ability to learn to see how they unfold from one stage to the next in the development of each child. Learning to "read" the nature of these forces, how they reveal themselves in the bodily organism, and how they develop throughout the first twenty-one years of life is basic education for the teacher. The burning question for the teacher is: How can I school these faculties of perception and learn to read, in a new way, the language of a child's development?

In the third lecture of *Essentials in Education*, Rudolf Steiner hints how this might be done. Fundamental is a thorough knowledge of the child's physical being and of the physiological changes that are the outer milestones of his inner development. Beyond this, the teacher should learn to experience those forces of growth and vitality, which mold and differentiate and organize the physical, working like an invisible sculptor during the earliest years of life to shape the child's organism in the image of his or her own individual blueprint of development. To this field of vital, sculptural, image-forming powers, Rudolf Steiner gives the term "etheric-formative forces." We come to know this realm, he says, "when we live into the formative-molding process, when we come to know how a curve or an angle grows through the shaping power of inner forces." We cannot understand the etheric body through the ordinary laws of nature, but with what we experience in the hand, the spirit-permeated hand. Hence, there ought to be no training of teachers without activity in the sphere of plastic art, of sculpture, an activity proceeding from the inner being of man. It is not at all necessary to know masses of modern examination matter. Though there is no harm in referring to an encyclopedia, no encyclopedia can give us that mobility, conferred by *able knowledge* and *knowing ableness*, necessary for an understanding of the etheric body, because the etheric body does not proceed according laws of nature; it permeates the human being in formative, sculptural activity.

If, with the help of the "spirit-permeated hand," we gain a feeling for the quality of the etheric-formative forces, even though we may yet be a long way from experiencing them in full awareness, we find that we can teach the elementary school child in quite a new way. These forces worked invisibly as image-making powers within a child's physical organism during the imitative years and are now partially liberated, after the change of teeth, as the powers of imagination. For these are the forces

with which the child learns to divine the hidden meanings within and behind the pictures in which the world presents itself to his awakening consciousness. We must also be well aware that the spirit-permeated hand has itself been intensively trained and educated. It is no longer the hand that is limited to the shaping of the merely useful or practical, important as these are, nor the skillful hand which can reproduce outer likenesses, nor the talented hand which creates interesting abstract three-dimensional forms. Rudolf Steiner refers to the hand that can penetrate the shaping, mobile powers which have created the crystal and the plant, the animal bodies, and the dynamic symmetries of man. To reveal these powers is the goal toward which the great sculptors of our time are striving, and the teacher must awaken kindred powers in herself if she wishes to know “how a curve or an angle grows through the shaping power of inner forces.” She will not be satisfied merely to know about these sculptural forces, which have built the collarbone and shaped the pelvis and the skull, but she is willing to experience them in the disciplined work of her own hands. Therefore, she will seek out teachers who have themselves gone a certain distance along the path toward a new sculptor’s art, such as practiced in the Goetheanum School of Sculpture, part of the School of Spiritual Science arising out of Anthroposophy.

And if the teacher wishes to know something of the reality of those powers set free for the use of the soul at puberty, he must strive to discover what lives in the whole dynamic world of musical experience. He must learn to hear, in the acoustics, the inner movement, the intervals, and move from tone to tone in the scale. This body of forces is the bearer of consciousness, of sentience, of feeling in the animal and in man, what Rudolf Steiner designates as the astral member of man’s being. It is, he says, “not natural history, natural science, or physics; it is music. . . . A man who studies the outer human organization insofar as it is dependent on the astral body must concern himself with physiology not as a

physicist, but as a musician. He must know the inner, formative music within the human organism.”⁴ And again, the teacher who wishes to gain access to this realm will turn to those who have preceded him along the road toward mastership in the art that Bruno Walter spoke of as “intrinsic musicianship.” This art opens to us “that vast, transcendental realm of the soul that harbors the springs from which music flows.”⁵ And in this effort, he will soon discover that he has an invaluable guide in the study of musical eurythmy wherein the intervals, tones, rhythms, and beat come to visible expression in movement.

But the teacher who intends to work in the spirit of Waldorf education knows that he cannot stop with an understanding of the physical, etheric, and astral realms. Without the individuality there is no capacity for memory, conscience, thought, motive, or speech. The single animal is the expression of his species. Man transcends his species and becomes the bearer of that indivisible entity that alone can take responsibility for what he thinks, for what and how he feels, and for what he does. It is this fourth member of man’s being that Steiner refers to when he speaks of the human ego. To arrive at experienced knowledge of the ego, Steiner says that we must learn to understand the inner structure of speech. Not speech merely as conveyor of meaning, but the formative power of the sounds and rhythms of language as creative activity of the spirit in man. In this sphere, eurythmy is of invaluable assistance as it unites in the language of visible speech the vowels and consonants, the grammatical structure, as well as the elements of rhythm, picture, and meaning.

In these brief indications of Steiner’s lies the seed for a radical re-orientation of all teacher training, not only for those studying to become teachers, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, for those who are already teachers and wish to grow and to deepen their capacities. As one works with the ideas Steiner sketched out for us seventy-five years

ago, one comes to realize that behind them stands a conception of the world that places man as a being of body, soul, and spirit in living relation with the spiritual background of the cosmos and of world evolution. One comes to realize that it is indeed this world conception, “inwardly and ever newly experienced,”⁶ that becomes the source of inspiration for the teacher and gradually, over many years, awakens in him the creative capacity to know what he has to do in a given moment with a given child.

Footnotes:

1. Steiner, Rudolf. *The Essentials of Education*, London, 1968.
2. Walter, Bruno. *Of Music and Music-Making*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1961.
3. Steiner, Rudolf. *The Essentials of Education*, London, 1968.
4. Steiner, Rudolf. *Human Values in Education*, Ten lectures given at Arnheim, Holland, 1924, London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1991.
5. Steiner, Rudolf. *The Essentials of Education*, London, 1968.
6. Steiner, Rudolf. *Human Values in Education*, Ten lectures given at Arnheim, Holland, 1924, London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1991.