

Reading, Writing, and Reading Comprehension

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My research at present concerns three areas: a framework for a monograph, suggestions for teaching reading and writing in grades 9–12, and suggestions for teachers, especially on class structure and teaching style regarding skills classes. This report addresses the first and third of these areas. Suggestions for teaching reading and writing in high school will form the core of future research.

All education concerns itself with the future. Most educational systems strive both to build up a student's character, through the content of the lessons, and to develop a moral fiber, sometimes called duty, by presenting appropriate challenges. On the surface, Waldorf education makes the same claims. It has a curriculum based on age-appropriate content, and in many lectures, for example in *Balance in Teaching*, Rudolf Steiner speaks directly about duty being inculcated in the student through hard, even unwanted, but necessary work.

Educational programs that recognize that the human being is a spiritual entity embodied in a soul that walks the earth—I am aware of none other than Waldorf education—can educate with regard for human destiny. Educational programs that are mere cultural manifestations usurp the destiny of the individual and replace it with an intention to continue the past, its values, and its duties. With an image of the human being as a spiritual ego, it is possible to educate students to become more than citizens who just obey rules. As necessary as these goals of citizenship are, they are not sufficient for spiritual beings who have incarnated for unique, individual purposes.

In *Balance in Teaching*, Rudolf Steiner says that an educator should teach in a way that a

student's ego gains a proper, balanced relationship to the sheaths or bodies that accompany it from birth—the physical body, the ether body, and the astral body. When the ego becomes too attached to these bodies it becomes materialistic; when it is too little attached to these bodies it becomes fanciful and unfruitful for the evolution of the earth. Neither extreme offers a viable future, not socially and not individually.

How then can we educate students and yet leave them free as individuals? Artistically. What does that mean? In the context of reading and writing in the high school, to teach artistically echoes Aristotle's insight that human beings benefit most from what entertains and instructs. Reading and writing are certainly used to entertain and to instruct. To teach artistically is also to mirror in our education the process through which writers are creative agents in the world, writing about their active relationships to nature, culture, themselves, and others. Readers respond creatively to the rendering of those relationships. In both reading and writing, then, we have vivid pictures of the ego and its relationship to the bodies that it accompanies from birth and finds in the surrounding world of nature and humanity. Finally, to teach artistically is to free a disciplined ego so that it, and not, for example, the astral body, will be the true voice of human experience. These and other considerations will inform future research and writing.

Skills Classes

What is essential in skills classes as they are taught in the United States? Form? Which form? In any learning situation, we work best

if we work rhythmically. We will see how such rhythms and habits of reading and writing, suggested for grade 9, metamorphose through grades 10, 11 and 12. We need rhythm in our skills classes because high school students and teachers tend to become cerebral and fact-oriented. Rhythm softens boundaries and can lift us and our students out of the hardened world of fact. In the long run the content of a lesson—which is almost certainly to be forgotten—will prove to be of less importance than the rhythm we use in our lessons. This is true for all skills classes, not just those in the humanities. The most powerful rhythms deal specifically with the past, present, and future. I suggest the following class rhythm:

- Review: a reminder of the previous class's work, best made as a picture from which is drawn the concept.
- New material
- Activity: students should be given time in class to write something about that day's lesson. It helps the students do more and better homework; it alerts teachers to trouble spots. I will discuss the relationship of this to a three-day rhythm in the monograph.
- Reprise: a valuable aid to the student is a reverse-order objective statement of that day's activity. It takes two minutes. It helps those students who do not naturally organize their lives. The very act of going over one's work actively supports the idea that must be more prominent in high schools: that students benefit from reworking their assignments. And, most importantly, it awakens the feeling of responsibility in the student.

When a teacher no longer talks right up to and even beyond the end of class, students will not leave unsettled, the teacher will be more certain of what has just occurred in the class, and social relationships that depend on timely action will be strengthened.

Style

What is a teaching style? If it is narrow, it is a prophylactic. If it is too filled with itself—as is often the case with the charismatic teacher—then it is simultaneously attractive and repellent: attractive because it seems to be liberating, repellent because it is only self-liberating.

A teaching style is that device that a teacher uses to meet a class. It is a tool of the ego that should not be bound by its relationship to its other three bodies.

Students' natures make demands on us. These demands form our approach and our activity in the classroom as much as the content of our lessons—possibly more. We all have physical bodies that make demands upon us. We have temperaments. And we have astral bodies. Yet, in the end, we as teachers will succeed in relating the student's ego properly to the three other bodies—not too deeply and not too loosely—only to the extent that we ourselves are free.

