Artistic Feeling in the Art of Education – Part 2

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Artistic feeling, Empathy and Reverence

What differentiates the character and quality of artistic feeling in the art of education from its use in all other art forms is that the medium we are concerned with is not a lump of clay to be moulded, a string to be plucked, or a drum to dance to – but a growing young person. Artistic feeling in the 'great art of life' is, therefore, not only an artistic but also a moral-aesthetic imperative. The nurturing and development of this art is possibly the primary task of human culture in our time. The parameters of this task were outlined over 200 years ago by Friedrich Schiller, writing in response to the French Revolution. In a passage chiefly concerned with pointing out the ways artisans and artists approach their material, he contrasts these to the way things are for a third, the educational and what he calls the political artist:

'With the pedagogical or political artist things are very different indeed. For him Man is at once the material on which he works and the goal towards which he strives. In this case the end turns back upon itself and becomes identical with the medium …The consideration he must accord to its uniqueness and individuality is not merely subjective, and aimed at creating an illusion for the senses, but objective and directed to its innermost being.'[1]

But what unique quality of artistic feeling is it that permits the 'pedagogical artist' both to work creatively with the child's 'innermost being' and at the same time perceive and acknowledge its objective status?

The innermost being of the child is sacred. Unlike that of an adult, the child's inner nature is connected to the world in manifold ways – bodily, psychologically and spiritually. In his or her relationship to the child, the artistic teacher combines artistic feeling with a mood that can only be described as sacramental. It is in this sense that the qualities of feeling that make education an authentic art form were highlighted by Rudolf Steiner in the closing paragraphs of Lecture 10 of the Study of Man:

'We are together in the classroom: in each child is situated a centre for the whole world, for the macrocosm. This classroom is a centre — indeed many centres — for the macrocosm. Think what it means when this is felt in a living way. How the idea of the universe and its connections with the child passes into a feeling which hallows all the varied aspects of our educational work. Without such feelings about man and the universe we shall not learn to teach earnestly and truly. The moment we have such feelings they pass over to the children in underground ways …Education must not be a science, it must be an art. And where is the art which can be learned without living constantly in feeling? But the feelings in which we must live in order to practice the great art of life, the art of education, are only brought to life through observation and contemplation of the cos-

1 Friedrich Schiller 'On the Aesthetic Education of Man' – Fourth Letter, p. 18: Translated by E.M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (German text included), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1967.

mos and its connection with the human being."[2]

In the art of teaching a sacramental mood of reverence constitutes an essential ingredient in the teacher's relationship with children and supports an artistically based understanding of them. Indications for this basis of mood appear as a 'leitmotif' in the opening lectures of the Study of Man course, and reappear again later. In the first lecture, soon after the presentation of the College Imagination, mention is made of the 'right mood and feeling' for all aspects of educational practice; a mood dependent on the teacher being fully aware, when working with a young person, of continuing what higher beings have done before birth[3]. In the second lecture this mood is described as giving the necessary consecration to all aspects of educational practice, "…for without this consecration it is impossible to educate at all"[4]. The closing paragraphs of the tenth lecture describe how such feelings 'hallow' all aspects of educational work, enabling teachers to teach with conviction and sincerity, and connect with the children in hidden ways[5].

A reverential mood such as this can only be nurtured through an empathetic connection between teacher and child. Empathy involves a capacity for feeling into the other, but unlike sympathy it does not involve a loss of objective distancing. The word empathy had its roots in the aesthetic domain before its inclusion into the language of psychological discourse. This capacity of 'feeling into the other' – (einfühlen), originally referred to a special quality of artistic feeling, a heightened form of feeling lifted beyond the solely personal and the subjective. In other words, it is a quality of artistic feeling, merging subject with object, i.e. the artist or onlooker with the object of his or her attention[6]. In the arena of the classroom an authentic mood of empathy and reverence represents the essential pre-condition for the particular quality of artistic feeling required in the practice of teaching – a sacramental mood of reverence awakened through the teacher's empathetic relationship with the children.

Through an artistically based empathetic relationship with the children, and supported by an ongoing contemplative study of the human being, the realisation may dawn on the teacher that he or she is not alone as the sole creative agent in the classroom, and when the teacher recognises that the child is an active participant in his or her own creative process of self-becoming, and sup-

2 The Study of Man, L10, p. 148: Rudolf Steiner Press, London 1991(GA 293).
3 Ibid. L1.
4 Op cit. note 13, L2.
5 Op cit. note 13.
6 The word 'empathy' is surprisingly new in the history of language. Its origin was originally connected to 'einfühlen', used by Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807-1870) in relation to architectural form, and then expanded further by his son, Robert Vischer (1847-1933) to include works of art and nature in his, 'On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics' 1873. In 1858 the word ´empathy´ was possibly first coined by Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1817-1881) using the Greek, 'empatheia' (passion), from 'en-' (in)+ 'pathos' (feeling). From 1902 onwards it began to be transferred from aesthetic discourse to psychology by Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) the founding father of experimental psychology, and especially his follower, Theodor Lipps (1851-1914). It is widely believed that another follower of Wundt, Edward B. Titchener (1867-1927) introduced the word 'empathy' into the English language. (Source: History of the Evolution of the Word, Concept, Phenomenon Empathy. http://cultureofempathy.com/references/History.htm).

ported by other creative powers – cosmic creative beings – then an authentic mood of reverence may awaken.

The attitude of the teacher ought, therefore, to be different from the practitioners of all other arts. The teacher as artist is not a prima donna in the classroom, but a co-creative participant in the educational process as a whole, and in a higher sense than simply that of sharing a timetable with fellow colleagues. As with the anonymous creators of the late medieval cathedrals, who considered themselves in communion with the creative angelic powers of the world, so the teachers in a school are co-artists together with a community of creative spiritual beings involved with the developing human being. It is the child that is the total work of art; and the school is the architectonic structure in which the total artwork, 'the greatest artistic achievement of the Cosmos'[7], can unfold, thrive and live.

The Teacher as Artist

The significance of a reverential mood for the art of teaching helps explain Rudolf Steiner's provocative injunction towards the end of the first Study of Man lecture, that the colleagues he was speaking to should '… pay attention not merely to what you do, but also to what you are'[8]. What the difference is between such a teacher and another is that the former brings a 'constant trend of thought into the classroom'; thoughts on the 'evolving human being', which, considered in the context already outlined, nurtures the sacramental mood in the atmosphere of the class. In a lecture three years later he repeated the injunction in a further challenge to the existential status of the teacher, but in this case directly related to the practice of teaching as an art form:

'Moreover the teacher must work in such a way that he not merely puts before the child the True, the Good and the Beautiful, but — in a sense — is these. What the teacher is passes over into the child, not what he teaches. All that is taught should be put before the child as a concrete ideal. Teaching itself must be a work of art, not a matter of theory.'[9]

But how in practice does teaching become a work of art in relation to what the teacher is? A comprehensive response to this question is presented in Rudolf Steiner's opening lecture of "Balance in Teaching"[10]. In it he introduces a further aspect to the qualities of artistic feeling characterised so far – that is, the feeling of the teacher's own relationship to the children as a creative process itself.

On a number of occasions Rudolf Steiner referred to the art of teaching as being quickened by knowledge of the evolving human being with what he called 'pedagogical intuitions'. But in this lecture he emphasised how the potency of such knowledge can only be acquired through an ongoing empathetic engagement with the unfolding child and that; 'In this regard we must as teachers become artists'[11]. Such knowledge, therefore, cannot be effective through theoretical study alone, but with constant practical and creative engagement with children in the classroom. It is at this point that he possibly made the most important injunction to the colleagues of the first Waldorf School when he emphasised the fundamental existential mood which the teacher shares with all other

9 A Modern Art of Education, L1: Rudolf Steiner Press, London 1972 (GA 307).
10 Op cit. note 13, Lecture 1.
11 Op cit. note 5.

authentic artists in practice – that is, the feeling of being an artist in a process of an ongoing self-becoming;

'…it is not ready-made knowledge that has value in life, but the work that leads to this finished knowledge and particularly in the art of teaching this work has a special value. In reality it is no different here than in the arts. I cannot consider anyone a right-minded artist who doesn't say to himself on finishing a work: only now are you able to do this. I don't consider a man properly disposed as an artist, if he is satisfied with any work he has done … This proper sort of inward modesty, this sense that we ourselves are still in becoming – this is what must sustain the teacher, for more will come from this feeling than from any abstract principles.'[12]

The significance of this injunction should not be underestimated. Artists act in the immediate present in response to the immediate challenge the objects of their creative activity confront them with. Only through a constant process of self-evaluation in direct relation to the medium concerned, can the artist gauge the relevance of his or her responses to the needs of the creative moment.

However, what is also significant is that, for the authentic artist, the inner motivation for this reflective process is a constant feeling of dissatisfaction with any result achieved. In the case of the teacher this mood is particularly poignant, as it often takes on the character of shame and guilt. In extreme instances these feelings can be overwhelming. They may either lead to a sclerosis of the will, completely undermining the confidence of the teacher as a positive, creative, self-empowered presence in the classroom; or, with a similar consequence, harden the teacher's resolve into a habit of imposing his or her own will on the children, forcing them to comply with pre-set outcomes for the lessons. How then can such an artistic feeling of dissatisfaction be a positive motivating factor in the classroom?

Rudolf Steiner's answer is the challenge to acknowledge that our teaching will always be bad unless after a year of work we are unable to put to ourselves the question, '…who is it now that has really learned the most? – and then finding the answer, 'It is I, the teacher! ':

'…we would most certainly have taught the best of all if we had entered the classroom each morning in great trepidation, without very much assurance in our own capacity, and then at the end of the year could say, it is really I myself who have learned the most. For our ability to say this depends on how we have acted, on what we have done, on always having the feeling: I am growing by helping the children grow. I am experimenting, in the purest sense of the word. I can't really do very much, but a certain capacity grows in me by working with the children … we leave the campaign quite a different person from when we entered it; we have learned to do what we were incapable of doing when we began teaching a year before. We say to ourselves at the end of the year – yes, now I can really do what I ought to have been doing.'[13]

Explaining the consequences of this process of self-evaluation even further, Rudolf Steiner outlines one of the most important reasons why a class teacher should continue with the same group of children over several years:

12 Balance in Teaching: Anthroposophic Press/Steiner Books (GA 302a).
13 Ibid. L1.

'…If you go through your teaching duties with inwardly true and noble and not foolish doubts, such as I have described, you will draw out of this diffidence a new and imponderable power, which will make you particularly fitted to accomplish more with the children entrusted to you …You will achieve something different in quality, and that is really enough. For everything that we acquire in the way described, with the necessary noble diffidence and heartfelt humility, has the effect that we are able to make individualities out of those we teach, individualities in the widest sense. We cannot have the same class twice over and send out into the world the same copies of a cut and dried educational pattern. We can however turn human beings over to the world who are individually different. We bring about diversity in life but this does not derive from the elaboration of abstract principles. In fact this diversity of life is founded on a deeper grasp of life, as we have just described.'[14]

This capacity for self reflection is no different from that of an artist in his or her own striving. However, the imponderable power that might be gained is the particular quality of artistic feeling unique to the teacher's own practice. Connected to his ongoing empathetic relationship with the child it empowers the teacher's own creative engagement at any given moment with what Rudolf Steiner described as a kind of intuition or instinct:

'Everything depends upon the contact between teacher and child being permeated by an artistic element. This will bring it about that much that a teacher has to do at any moment with an individual child comes to him intuitively, almost instinctively.[15]

Artistic Feeling as a Foundation for Pedagogical Insight

In the third lecture of 'Balance in Teaching' Rudolf Steiner characterised the contemplative study of the human being as a meditative activity with a distinct character different to what is normally associated with scientific enquiry[16]. It also serves to gain knowledge of the human being, but with a quality of understanding that aims to open up a capacity for pedagogical insight that meets the educational needs of the growing child with immediate effect.

In the example for meditative practice contained in this lecture he gave special attention to how judgements arise in the affective domain with its physical location in the region of the rhythmic system of heart and lungs. He suggested that we can gain the fruits of such an understanding through building up a detailed imaginative picture of how pictorial and musical perceptions are transformed along a remarkable polarity of pathways in the human bodily constitution.

It is to these pathways that Rudolf Steiner is alluding when he indicates how we should focus our attention on the whole organic process where 'soul currents and bodily processes'[17] interact. For instance, in any given act of visual apprehension three inner activities can be identified – perceiving, understanding and remembering. Firstly, we perceive the object with our eyes – an organ of the neuro-sensory system. Secondly, we understand not with the neuro-sensory sys-

14 Ibid.
15 Op cit. note 7, L6.
16 Op cit. note 21, L3.
17 Ibid.

tem but with the rhythmic system. And thirdly, we absorb the content of our understanding in our memory, which in turn is connected to delicate inner processes of metabolism and the activity of the will.

In the case of musical perceptions these stages are the same, but proceed in the opposite direction, beginning with the act of hearing involving subtle metabolic processes in the ear, through understanding in the domain of the rhythmic system, and so to a creative remembering in the realm of inner perception.

Using this imaginative picture, three steps in a process of focussed meditation follow these same pathways from perception through judgement to a creative remembering:

'Thus we start with a receiving or perceiving of the study of man, then comes an understanding, a meditative understanding of the study of man that goes into its inner aspect where the study of man is received by the whole of our rhythmic system; and then comes a remembering of it out of the spirit …You must see the human being in such a way that you constantly feel these three stages within you. And the more you come to the point of saying to yourself 'There is my external body, my skin, and that contains the power to receive the study of man, the power to understand the study of man in meditation, the power to be fructified by God in the remembering of the study of man' – the more you have this feeling within you, the more you will be a real teacher.[18]

What is central in this process is how the second step, the meditative activity itself, is located in the rhythmic system where the two pathways of pictorial and musical perceptions meet in the realm of understanding and feeling,

'…the rhythmic system is connected with understanding, understanding becomes intimately connected with man's feeling. And whoever looks at himself very closely will see the connections between understanding and actual feeling. Actually we have to see the truth of something we understand before we can agree with it. For it is our rhythmic system that supplies the meeting place for our understanding of knowledge and the soul's element of feeling.'[19]

Here we find a confirmation regarding the role of feeling in a cognitive judgement as described earlier; but in this case, directly related to artistic/aesthetic judgements arising from pictorial and musical perceptions[20]. It is through such a meditative activity located in this middle realm that such perceptions are transformed into artistic feelings for empowering the teacher's creative will.

Not only did Rudolf Steiner demonstrate how the teacher's artistic feeling can be developed as an organ for pedagogical insight through meditation, but also in the practice of other art forms. In one of his last lectures he emphasised the need for teachers to practice some of these art forms to awaken differentiated artistic feelings for a comprehensive knowledge of the child's ego and bodily sheaths[21]. He stressed how teachers would only grasp an understanding of the child's

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Op cit. note 11.
21 Human Values in Education, Lecture 8: Rudolf Steiner Press 1971

etheric body through training in the modelling of the human organism, the astral body through music, and the ego through a refined feeling for the structure of language. [22]

Artistic feelings developed through meditative practice, artistic activity, an awareness of his or her own development as a teacher-artist, combined with an authentic mood of reverence and an empathetic relationship with the children, empowers the teacher to respond creatively to the immediate challenges each child presents. Each challenge allows for a relevant response that may fit the needs of the child as representative of the present time. The effectiveness of the art of education represented by the Waldorf School Movement depends on the actuality with which such creative moments can be achieved every day, in every classroom and in every school. It is, therefore, upon the development of artistic feeling that the relevance and identity of the Waldorf School Movement ultimately rests.

22 Teacher training in some Waldorf teacher training centres was originally structured around the artistic practice of sculpture, music and speech: the three 'Lehrerkünste'.