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Rudolf Steiner's Art of Education is based on the understanding of the human being as described in his World Outlook, Anthroposophy. A renewal in many branches of work and knowledge has resulted from what he had to give, and Education is just one. Medicine, Movement as expressed in Eurythmy, Architecture, and many more could be cited.

In the six thousand or so recorded lectures, not to mention his many books, he shows how Man is a spiritual being, using a material body to carry out his actions upon earth. The spirit, or Ego, incarnates gradually from birth until at the age of about twenty-one, it has reached a certain completion of this process. He shows how at each stage it has achieved another milestone and then how the subject matter dealt with must be appropriate to this development. And, which is equally important, how it must be offered to the children, who by the way are grouped according to chronological age and not according to intellectual achievement. The teacher also modifies his approach according to the temperament of the group he is addressing, for he seats his pupils in the four groups, Choleric, Sanguine, Melancholic, Phlegmatic, keeping the Sanguines just in front of him, as they are the most likely to be distracted, and can be most helped by his nearness. The Melancholics, on the other hand, prefer to be somewhat towards the back of the class. Each temperament has very special gifts, also dangers if allowed to go to excess, and Rudolf Steiner goes into great detail on these points, as indeed he does on all aspects of his work.

To return to the incarnating of the Ego; we see the first manifestation of this in the child's efforts to stand upright at the age of about one. The animal keeps his spine in the horizontal position; only the animals highest in the scale of evolution approximate to the vertical.

At the age of two the child begins to speak, stringing words together; and at three he utters the word, 'I'. Previously he has referred to himself as 'baby' or 'Tommy', as if he were outside of his body and pointing to it. Now with this word he speaks as from within. It is however not until the first three times seven years have been fulfilled that the 'I', or individuality, has completely settled into the human organism. Dr Steiner details this gradual development in his many lectures, pointing to observations we can make to verify what he says.

Then from another point of view he describes how Man consists not only of Body and Spirit, but between them he has an organisation of life forces which he calls the Etheric Body, and the Soul, or as he sometimes terms it, the Astral Body.

Just as the Ego comes to its fulfilment at the age of 21, when it should be prepared to face the world and play its part in it, so does the Astral Body or Soul reach a point where it has settled into the Physical at the age of 14; the outward sign of this being the change of voice and the onset of puberty.

The Etheric Body achieves this settling in at the age of seven.

Because the forces of the Etheric Body are required later on to be used in thinking, a Steiner education delays the teaching of intellectual subjects till after the seventh year. Should we use them for this purpose before that age we are depleting the physical body of its full potential and depriving it of much needed life force in the later years of life. The pre-school class has so much to do in the way of activity and art that these strengthening pursuits more than fill the time available.

When the child comes into the first class of the school proper, around the seventh year, he comes under the care of his class-teacher, who takes the first lesson each morning. He knows that he will have the same children for the next eight years for this first lesson each day, and that he has a certain curriculum to cover. But how he chooses to do it is for him to decide. In those eight years he has to make an introduction to all the academic subjects, and many more beside, e.g. Farming, Housebuilding, Astronomy, to mention but a few.

His aim is to interest the children in life, and develop their social qualities, as well as solving some of their deeper problems, which could easily be missed where a change of teacher took place each year, if not more frequently. In the time that he has he gets to know his children intimately, a necessity if one is to be able to offer the maximum help. After the first lesson the children have their specialist teachers for the other subjects, such as Languages, Gymnastics, Eurythmy, Handwork, Woodwork, Singing, Art, etc. - and so have the opportunity of meeting all the teachers in the course of their work.

Lest it should be thought that a class teacher might give an excess of the subject he most favours, the way of working amongst teachers keeps a check on this. There is no head master. All the teachers work as a college, even sharing out the various responsibilities such as finance management, buildings, timetable, etc. to those whom they agree are most suited to discharge them. Each Thursday the whole college meets to discuss children, business, etc. and to study a lecture of Dr Steiner. In this meeting when the work of a particular class

comes to be discussed, any shortcoming on any subject becomes obvious, and the specialist teacher who will be responsible for that subject in the upper school, that is when the children are fifteen and over, will be the first to point this out, and see that it is rectified.

For when the children reach puberty at 14 the main lessons are taken by specialist teachers, each qualified in his own subject.

The main lessons in a Steiner school, that is the first one each morning lasts for nearly two hours, and the subject is continued each morning for two, three or four weeks at the direction of the teacher. In this way a continuity of interest is maintained, and the time of two hours, because of the way in which the lesson is taken, is often not long enough.

Man is a threefold being in his make up of Thinking, Feeling and Willing, and an equal emphasis, or greater on one or the other according to the age of the child, is the secret of a successful main lesson, combined with a knowledge of, and a working with the temperaments.

So the change of teeth, about the seventh year, is the signal that the Etheric Forces have completed their first task of rebuilding the body structure, as medical science also points out. The child then enters Class One of the school proper, and the three Rs are gradually introduced. In the first year or two the child still lives strongly in his Will, and so the more intellectual work only works up to a crescendo in the latter years of the seven to fourteen period, when the thinking, because of its early protection, now becomes strong.

The middle two or three years of this seven year period is very much an expression of the Feeling life of the child. It is the time when the 4 to 1 rhythm of blood circulation to breathing is stabilised and the child is very sensitive around these years.

Rudolf Steiner in his many lectures shows how some physical or psychical change accompanies the passing of the years and how and why the various subjects should be introduced at that particular age.

The upper school should go to age eighteen, when the external examinations can be taken if required.

Perhaps the best way to convince oneself of the results of a Steiner education is to meet some of the senior pupils who have been fortunate enough to have had that education throughout - of course, children can join the school at any time - or better, perhaps, to meet the old scholars who are now taking their part in life. A practical experience of this description is far better than any theoretical claim I can give.