

Education is perhaps the Supreme Art because it works with the human being as raw material, the most malleable material of all. The human race itself as raw stuff of future life on earth holds the key to the future. If human beings become degenerate, even evil, through misguided forms of education, evolution will go backwards. The right forms of education can, on the other hand, lead to a gradual regeneration of our ailing civilisation. We are at a critical turning point in the present time since both creature as well as destructive ideas are exerting their different pressures in schools. If education is a powerful key to the future it places great responsibility in the hands of all educators. Fundamental regard for human freedom has to prevail otherwise education becomes a dangerous tool in the hands of those who seek to manipulate human raw stuff for their own ends. We see the beginning of this in Marxist activists who infiltrate schools for political reasons.

In my own life I have found that Rudolf Steiner education is education towards freedom. It answers needs not only of children but also deeper social needs of parents, for they too remain in the 'School of Life', and find important stimuli in such schools which help their own development.

Many modern school and college buildings, despite the thousands spent on them, seem stereotyped compared with the existing architecture arising in Germany for the Rudolf Steiner schools and colleges there. How can boring blocks ever stimulate? - they only produce fatigue. The environment for learning should be truly beautiful, and our feeling for the beautiful should expand to include quite new forms. The forms should have a rhythmic flow, all long static deadly corridors and four square rabbit hutch classrooms could become a 'thing of the past'. Materials should be sympathetic and natural, creating with glowing colours a warmth almost touchable. The building should also harmonize with its environment and should express the meaning of the work going on in it, it should not be merely functional. Sussex University buildings answer some of these requirements.

Drawing on my experience as a Kindergarten and music and movement (Eurythmy) teacher, I feel that children should not start formal schooling until they are at least six years of age, preferably seven! It is good if they don't learn to write and read until about the time their first teeth are beginning to change. Ideally a child should be with its mother until it is four or five, then the transfer to Kindergarten should be gentle. Here the children should not be overstimulated but should live in a dreamy playful atmosphere.

There ought to be no question of computers in primary schools for children as young as five. This is the intrusion of very sophisticated adult software into the world of the child. Real childhood needs special safeguards today, it is threatened on all sides. Arithmetical calculations can come after seven and it is good to involve the whole body actively in clapping, stamping, skipping the numbers, so that the bodily experience of numbers counteracts all tendency to abstraction. Computer learning leaves out the heart and will, involves the head, but children live in a world of will, of doing.

Foreign languages, on the other hand, do have their rightful place in the Junior school. Properly taught, they can lay the basis for world consciousness.

Writing should come before reading and the early writing of letters should be linked with pictures just as in the early days of hieroglyphs. As an example, teacher could draw a wave on the blackboard and slowly let the W arise out of the picture. This could be in colour and the children could also paint it, dance it, step it. This counterbalances the danger of the abstractions of modern letters which put many children off reading, writing and learning. In this country we have, after all, thousands of school drop-outs who cannot connect themselves with what they are taught.

From my own experience I know that artistic work in schools and colleges is of great importance. Not because we want to turn out artists, but in order to give people special qualities for life, courage, sensitivity, flexibility, imagination. We need to bring much more colour, music and movement to a society which is already so very intellectual in so many of its dealings. To some extent even the most unintelligent people cannot avoid being intellectualised!

In puberty and adolescence the teenagers should find their real thinking powers awakening, especially if the earlier education has been full of pictures, otherwise premature intellectualism can frostbite many young minds. A vacuum is created in the middle sphere, the heart region. Once this is weakened, drives and instincts from the will sphere and cravings rise up demanding fulfilment. Is it surprising that we have a 'drugs' problem, or that more children in the U.S. smoke pot than those who don't?

The signs of crisis are all too abundant and yet the methods used to deal with them smack of outmoded 19th century thinking. The great changes that will have to come about to avert social catastrophe will have to be made in the educational system. Present day, materialistic, scientific, technological and even psychological

systems of thought are all inadequate to deal alone with the problems. The Rudolf Steiner schools and colleges pave the path for new directions. I have witnessed the work arising in these schools. It is a living testimony of a new form of consciousness. This consciousness is emerging anyway all over the world. We need schools, colleges and universities that can recognise what is happening and take part in the great educative purpose of freedom. The freedom to find oneself, be oneself. The alternative is an educational system that so conditions its human raw stuff that it can be endlessly manipulated all its life without ever realising it, no true freedom.