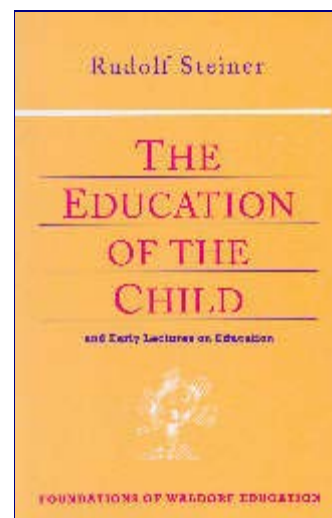


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A READER'S JOURNAL

The Education of the Child, GA# 34
by
Rudolf Steiner
Early Lectures on Education [1906-1911]
including
The Education of the Child in the Light of
Spiritual Science
Published by Anthroposophic Press in 1996
A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2003



In his introduction to this volume of collected lectures, Christopher Bamford says, "Steiner strove to unite in an integral modern epistemological form knowledge of the spiritual worlds with knowledge derived through the senses." In these lectures Steiner uses his knowledge of the spiritual side of human development during childhood to prescribe appropriate ways of assisting children in their development so as to minimize future problems and foster a healthy growth into adulthood. Steiner spoke from his own intuition, and the word intuition must be understood as his direct experience. This deep wisdom of Steiner's is the kind that Ralph Waldo Emerson refers to in his essay *Self Reliance* thus:

We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin.

In his classic lecture that begins the book, *The Education of the Child in the Light of Spiritual Science*, Steiner explains how the plant in its leafing stage contains already the flowers and fruit of its future life. One who has already learned the nature of the plant can predict what the flowers and fruit will be like - they will appear like previously borne flowers and fruit. But, he says:

[page 2] Human life is present only once; the flowers it will bear in the future have not yet been there. Yet they are present within a human being in the embryo, even as the flowers are present in a plant that is still only in leaf.

The very nature of free will, of freedom as a spiritual activity, makes the fruit of a human life unpredictable. As Emerson said further in the same essay quoted above:

The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried.

Every parent, caregiver, and educator would do well to hold the thought in mind that the power that resides in their charges "is new in nature" and thus cannot be fit into some already existing, culturally determined mold or procedure. They would best come to understand their job is to assist these wonderful new creations in achieving what they came to earth to achieve. This way of thinking of teachers as assistants to children pervades Steiner's view of education. But do not be fooled into thinking that the assistance does

not include providing a model for authority. A friend who is a Montessori teacher told me that she thought the Waldorf Schools were too authoritarian. Steiner points out that the child between the ages of seven to fourteen needs authority figures that they can relate to and emulate. In Table I. I have brought together the educational needs of the child during the school years as laid out by Steiner in this book. One can see that while authority plays an important role in the middle years 7-14, it is only a phase that young adults grow through on their journey into adulthood. The requirement for the younger children is for models to imitate and for the older children, rules and principles on which to base their actions. Only by shaping the form of education to the changing needs of the growing child can a teacher hope to foster the innate qualities of the child as it grows into adulthood.

Table I

PERIOD	AGES	NEEDS
1	0 -- 7	Model to Imitate
2	7 -- 14	Authority to Emulate
3	14 -- 21	Rules, Principles to Follow

The design of education, if it is to integrate knowledge of the spiritual and sensible worlds, must begin with an understanding of the four bodies that compose the human being. First the physical body - this is the body that is composed of materials and forces that are sensible to the human being. The physical body, without the next body, would be a lifeless and inert mass, and that is why this body is alternately called the *life-body* or *etheric body*. "It is the builder and shaper of the physical body, its inhabitant and architect." [page 8] "The etheric body is a *force-form*; it consists of active forces, and not of matter." [page 9] As such, the etheric body of the human body is invisible to the normal human senses, and coincides with the shape of the physical body, filling it.

The third body is the *sentient body* or *astral body*. The plant, lacking a sentient body, has no feelings, no sensation. While the plant may respond to a movement of the sun, what the plant lacks is an inner response to movement of the sun, as a human might have when it experiences a sunset. Why the name *astral body* for this sentient body? The astral body is composed of star stuff. The best physicists today tell us that all elements above the atomic weight of iron [57] must necessarily be formed in a supernova. Thus we as human beings must necessarily be star stuff, but that is the physical body the physicist is talking of, not the star stuff that Steiner says composes the astral body. But one can see that the star stuff of both the physical and spiritual worlds is present in the human body. [For more information, see ARJ: [Spiritual Hierarchies and the Physical World](#)] "In human beings it presents an elongated ovoid form in which the physical and etheric bodies are embedded. It projects beyond them - a vivid, luminous figure - on every side." [page 9] This is the view of the astral body as seen by a skilled seer, and is exactly the "luminous egg" as described by Don Juan Matus in many places in Carlos Castaneda's books.

The fourth body is the *I body* or *Ego body*. The word *I* is the only word that can be used to name oneself and not someone else. The use of this word is a faculty that only appears in the human being, not in animals or plants. "With the *I*, the *God*, who in lower creatures reveals himself only externally in the phenomena of the surrounding world, begins to speak internally." That faculty of saying *I* is the fourth body of the human being and the working of the *I* on the other three bodies of humankind is the basis for the growth and development of the individual as well as all civilization and culture.

With this prologue, dear Reader, read what Steiner says about how this growth and development takes place:

[page 11] The etheric or life-body is simply the vehicle of the formative forces of life, the forces of growth and reproduction. The sentient body gives expressions only to those impulses, desires, and passions, which are stimulated by external natures. As human

beings work their way up from this stage of development through successive lives or incarnations to higher and higher evolution, the I works upon the other members and transforms them. In this way the sentient body [astral body] becomes the vehicle of purified sensations of pleasure and pain, refined wants and desires. And the etheric or life-body also becomes transformed. It becomes the vehicle of habits, of human beings' more permanent intent or tendency in life, of the temperament and memory. One whose I has not yet worked upon the life-body has no memory of experiences in life. One just lives out what has been implanted by Nature.

It is the working of the I body on the other three lower bodies that forms the basis of the life-long education and contributes to the growth of civilization and culture. One of the principles that must begin in childhood is to always be reading and studying subjects of interest that are beyond one's current understanding. [Author's Note: in my reading of Steiner, I have found this to be ever so.] Steiner here quotes from Jean Paul's *Science of Education* to describe how important it is to talk beyond a child's understanding:

[page 29] Have no fear of going beyond the childish understanding, even in whole sentences. Your expression and the tone of your voice, aided by the child's intuitive eagerness to understand, will light up half the meaning and with it, in the course of time, the other half. . . . A child of five understands the words "yet," "even," "of course," and "just." But now try to explain these - not just to the child, but to the father! In the one word "of" there lurks a little philosopher! . . . Always speak to a child some years ahead - do not those of genius speak to us centuries ahead in books?

Later on page 31 Steiner explains how the stored memories of the 7-14 age group come to the fore later in life. "It is necessary for human beings to remember not only what they already understand, but to come to understand what they already know - that is, what they have already acquired by memory in the way the child acquires language." Thus he makes the case for continuing the process of memorization by children of subject matter that they do not fully understand at the time they memorize it. How many of us as adults have recalled to mind a quote from some poem we were *forced* to memorize as a child, only to find some new meaning infusing our life in the process of calling it to mind?

I hope by now you have begun to see along with me that the process of education is too important to be relegated to the child to decide what subjects to study and when.

[page 45] It is an erroneous belief of our materialistic times that very young children should learn to decide for themselves. On the contrary, we should do everything possible to hinder that. During this period of childhood [7-14], children should learn though authority.

[page 46] If we force children into critical thinking before the age of fourteen, it is particularly disadvantageous for them and forces them to create their own conclusions or lose the well-intended power of the surrounding persons of authority. It is very bad if children cannot look up to anyone. The etheric body becomes stunted, weak, and shallow from lack of good examples on which to build.

What are some good examples on which to build? I was in a supermarket recently and noticed the 16 year old girl bagging my groceries. She was completely immersed in making decisions: how much to put in this bag? how to get the fruits and vegetables into the same bag? can the milk carton go in the same bag as the wine bottle? how to keep the egg carton from being squashed? how to keep the bag from getting too heavy? how to arrange the bags in the cart so that the heavy items won't smash the lighter ones? Every customer that comes to her station presents a unique problem to be solved. Her eight hour shift is filled with decisions to be made, rules to be followed, and principles of physics to be applied when she does the seemingly simple operation of filling grocery bags and placing them into her customers' carts safely. What

a wonderful training for later life to go through the difficult struggles of bagging groceries during the period of time in her life [14-21] when she needs to learn to follow rules and apply principles. [See Table I above]

Many years later, this period of time in her life will be forgotten or remembered simply as drudge work. But as Steiner shows us repeatedly this will be an important formative time in her life.

[page 93] As things slip from memory and sink into the subconscious, they act creatively on our souls. We are essentially made up of what we have forgotten. Seen concretely, what are human beings other than *how* they are joyful or courageous, and so forth? If we look at people as they manifest, not abstractly, then we must say that they are the harmonious interweaving and interplaying of their characteristics, so that they are the results of what seeps into the deeper layers of their consciousness.

To many people education is about how the child should behave. I hope you have come to see that Steiner's view is that education is about how the adult should behave so that the child shall mature appropriately for the child's sake. The behavior of adults in front of children speak more loudly than the commands they may give the child to behave.

[page 105] Most people would ask how a child should behave, but anthroposophy comes along and says that adults should learn how to behave in front of children, even in words, attitudes, and thoughts. . . . It is not enough to hide things from children while allowing yourself thoughts not intended for them. We must have and live the thoughts that we feel could and should live in the child.

Plants take root in the soil of the earth and form themselves according to their individual plant nature. Humanity is the soil in which the human grows. For the human child, that soil is provided by parents, caregivers, and educators. As you would provide the most fertile soil for your plants in your garden, you would certainly provide the finest soil for your own children. You, *caregivers all*, your behavior, attitudes, and actions, are the soil in which your children grow.

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