

Education as a Healing Agent

By CAROLINE VON HEYDEBRAND

IN the new teachings which Rudolf Steiner gave to those concerned with the education of children, he showed that teachers really have to administer a kind of general Therapy. He taught them to realise that everything proceeding from the spirit and soul of the teacher has an effect upon the spirit and soul of the children and can give rise to healthy life-processes or unhealthy deposits of the metabolic system. The foundations of health or disease, in short the physiological basis of the children's moral qualities and firm hold on life in the future, are thus laid by education. If, for instance, we lovingly help the little child who is learning to walk, we are laying the foundations for a healthy old age. If we force the child, if we try to make it stand upright and walk too soon, we are establishing the preliminaries of rheumatism and gouty troubles in later life. If we think untrue thoughts in the environment of children, if we speak insincerely or in foolish 'baby language' to them, we are setting up incipient disorders of their breathing and digestive systems later on. And we are laying the basis of nerve troubles if, during the age when thinking is unfolding from out of speech, our actions are not consistent, if for instance, we tell the child one minute to do this and another minute to do something else.

Rudolf Steiner gave us many examples of this

kind, not only with reference to the tiny child, whose sense-experiences are still working directly at the formation and development of its organs, but also with reference to the child at school between the time of the change of teeth and physiological maturity.

A subtle vein of anxiety and fear runs through the abstract shadowy life of ideas and thoughts in every human being. We grown-ups are only conscious of this at certain moments, but it is directly perceptible in the child. In his course of lectures to teachers at the Goetheanum, Dornach in 1921*, Rudolf Steiner speaks of the knowledge of health and disease which every teacher should possess and he tells us that children whose memories have been overloaded with too many intellectualistic concepts grow paler and paler; conditions of fright and anxiety make their appearance, until finally derangements of growth actually set in. These phenomena are often to be seen in city children who are in many cases intellectually over-developed.

Rudolf Steiner explained to us how, on the other hand, certain choleric, passionate tendencies inhere in the life of will. This life of will is bound up with the bodily nature and as a rule people are quite unconscious of these latent tendencies. In the child, whose will is even more strongly bound to the body and who has as yet few conscious ideas, we can observe the urgings of the life of will, particularly when the memory and intellectual faculties of the child at school are being insufficiently nourished. Such a child develops too high a colour, is choleric, screams and cries. Later on, irregularities of the breathing process make their appearance. After physiological maturity such children

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frequently show a tendency to acute inflammatory troubles, inflammations of the throat, for instance. This type of child is often to be found in country districts where it may be difficult to provide for adequate education, or when the teacher thinks it wrong to allow children to learn anything of an intellectual nature.

And so the deep understanding of the human being upon which Rudolf Steiner based his Art of Education leads us on the one side right down into substance, into matter—the end of God's path—just as on the other side it leads us upwards to the world of Spiritual Beings who surround man in the realm of Spirit just as stones, plants, animals and other human beings surround him in the world of Nature. In very truth, the teacher is collaborating with Gods and the deeds of Gods, for the Gods are working in the pre-natal forces which continue to form and mould the body of the child in the earliest years of life. These forces build up the child's future destiny which is so deeply affected by education, for the relation of teacher to pupil is in the deepest sense one of destiny, not limited to a single earthly life.

Rudolf Steiner told us that before the teacher can help to bring about a healthy development of the spiritual qualities of the growing human being, he must have a knowledge of the nature of *healing forces*. When the little child is born into the earthly world from the world of spirit, when it "dies to the Heavens" in order to live as a citizen of Earth, it builds up a body of matter and is nourished by its metabolic system. The metabolic processes generate fatigue and illness, and although they are always active in a delicate, subtle way, excessive activity is present in cases of children who eat too much or whose bodily movements are too violent

or spasmodic. For this reason, all gymnastics, all hand-work should have a certain rhythmic quality in them. The forces of breathing and blood-circulation are the great healers of the human being, working against the disease-bringing processes of the systems of metabolism and the nerves-and-senses. Neither the breath nor the heart-beat tire during the life of man between birth and death; their activity is unbroken, day in and day out, right up to death. Dr. Steiner told us that we must teach the child to breathe properly at the very beginning of education. This is absolutely essential. But we do not teach the children at the Waldorf School how to breathe by giving them external "breathing exercises" any more than we, as teachers, work upon them through remedial substances in medicines, as the doctors do. The doctor brings about effects in sick children or adults by administering certain substances, but the teacher translates this "medicine" into a purely *spiritual process* in the healthy child who has to be educated, and also "healed" from the condition of "illness" that is necessarily bound up with earthly existence—although of course it lies latent in the normal child. If we are really masters of the true Art of Education, we always work upon the child in a *spiritual* sense. We stimulate the healing processes of the rhythmic system by appealing to the delicate movements of the child's life of perception and thought. Our healing powers depend upon an artistic quality being brought into the lessons, for Art is the wonderful, health-giving force which regulates the child's breathing in a legitimate way, harmonises the blood-stream and allows the life-forces to circulate freshly and freely. *Eurhythmy* as inaugurated by Rudolf Steiner brings rhythm and inner life into the

arbitrary, spasmodic movements of the child's limbs and charms the chaotic expressions of the will in the restless little being into an ordered beauty that is full of the quality of soul. *Music* calms the impulses that make the child scream and shout, even as Orpheus with his lyre tamed the wild animals in the forest to gentleness and obedience. *Recitation* gives form to the chaotic sounds of childish prattle, brings rhythm and measure into them and awakens an artistic element that is much more akin to the real nature of childhood than the intellectual content of the spoken word. In *painting, drawing, modelling* the children not only give outlet to the insistent creative urge within them, but they bring form and stability into the prolific activities of the etheric body—the "body of formative forces." These forms do not tend to make the child's nature rigid and arid, but keep it flexible and plastic. The chaotic life-forces are restrained and permeated with the forces of consciousness and intelligence. True education largely consists in keeping the forms of the child's life of thought mobile, vital and full of an imaginative quality as befits the nature of childhood, but at the same time in spiritualising the chaotic love-forces, freeing them from the body and making them fresher and gentler. (We can see evidence of an intense attraction to the surrounding world in children when they romp and rush wildly about).

And so by true methods of education we can obviate unhealthy metabolic deposits and inflammatory conditions that arise in later life. Through the pictorial, plastic element which should also permeate the matter of History and Geography lessons, Nature-study and so forth, we build up healthy forces in the soul, and these in turn counteract the feverish activities of the

will. The child feels support and is able to unfold a healthy conscious life. Through the musical, lyrical element we mollify the hardening influences of the intellectual life of concepts and ideas and preserve the freshness of the life-forces.

Education is indeed an *Art*. As Art it appeals to the soul and the life of feeling in the growing human being. And a warm, tender life of feeling expresses itself in healthy in-breathing and out-breathing, in the fresh, calm, streaming of the blood. The breath and the blood re-act on the movements of the metabolism and incipient illness is constantly healed. And so the actions of the teacher are always a *Therapy*.

Rudolf Steiner once told us that when men and women wish to train to be artists in the sphere of education, they must begin on the one hand by studying pathological processes in human beings and the possibility of healing them. Thought will finally become so conversant with the material, perceptible world, that it will really grasp the essentials of true education. On the other hand, Dr. Steiner showed how the true knowledge of man which is needed by the teacher—including as it does the higher members of human nature—may be developed from an artistic understanding and practice of modelling and painting, of music and the laws underlying speech and sound. Here we have two sides of the training of teachers, uniting in a most wonderful way into a great whole.

In the Waldorf School at Stuttgart, we have over a thousand children, among them a large number of curious, so-called "difficult" cases, and as a result of all the inner and outer forces of decay in modern civilisation and the curiously complicated destinies of the individual souls in the course of their earthly lives,

we seldom find an absolutely "normal" or harmoniously developed child. But all these things present the infinite variety and the vital enigmas facing the teacher in the child's life at school and at home. No one child is exactly like another, each has his own little psychological "peculiarities" which it is only a matter of studying with loving care. Let me here give two examples.

A boy with a very small head and a little mouse-like face. He has a brilliant memory for ideas and for names. He is well-developed intellectually, but he has no gift of observing life around him and absolutely no imagination. He likes best of all to sit with his little nose deep in a book. He also likes making tiny sketches with neat outlines, preferably square houses. It is good in his case to make him paint, with liquid colours, forms with indefinite outlines. If we introduce a great deal of artistic matter into his lessons we may perhaps in time succeed in changing the expression of his face; his intelligent, blinking, mouselike eyes will gradually become lighter and clearer, his cheeks more rosy and even his thin, bony little limbs rounder. There is as yet no need to take this child to a doctor. We are caring for him in his education, knowing that we, as teachers, have to heal his stultified, limited little nature.

And now another case—a thick-set boy with a very large head and rather loose, indefinite features. Everything about him is round and loosely formed. He has practically no memory for names or anything he learns in his lessons, but on the other hand he can tell interesting stories of what he has observed in his walks and the various excursions he is always making into the world around him. It is deeply interesting

to watch him during the recitation lessons. He says a few words in chorus with the other children and then stops, for his ever-wandering eyes have noticed something that attracts their attention. Then he suddenly realises what he ought to be doing and recites another line or two; again his attention is diverted. His eyes spring from one object to another like a bird from twig to twig. This is why there are so many gaps in his memory-store. When he *observes* anything his eyes flash with joy; when he is asked to repeat or think about something he is supposed to have learnt, his expression becomes vacant, helpless, absent-minded. He is only gradually learning to concentrate by being made, among other things, to repeat short poems and stories, sometimes with the episodes in backward order. We also give him drawings to which he must add the symmetrical figures, or we make him paint very definite forms.

In such cases the teacher can himself be a healer by virtue of a purely spiritual activity with which he approaches the sense-life and mental powers of the child. He sets out, in the first place, to influence the system of nerves-and-senses in a healthy way, realising of course, that he is thereby working on the child's breathing and blood circulation and that he may either stimulate the healthy flow of the nourishment-fluids in the body or unduly retard them. If his teaching is pedantic or tedious, if he develops a purely mechanical power of memory in the child or overloads it with dead concepts and ideas, he is injuring the digestive processes. This kind of teaching has a "deadening" effect upon the child—at all events it will tend to make the child poorly and ailing.

Perhaps nothing makes us so conscious of the

marvellous Art of Education inaugurated by Rudolf Steiner as the realisation that educational methods—which by their very nature are rooted in the soul-and-spirit—affect the ideas, thoughts, feelings and will-impulses in the child and work into all the expressions of its life. We teachers have it in our power to make our children's cheeks rosy or pale, to accelerate or retard their breathing, every time we tell them stories, for instance. The breath, the circulation of the blood, the rhythm with which it pours into the muscles—all these things determine not only the well-being of the child and its bodily vitality, but they affect the marvellous processes by which the bones themselves grow and are formed.

In this sense, then, every teacher is a healer and education a healing process. And just as Rudolf Steiner desired that the teacher should be conscious of his healing functions, he also wished the school doctor to be himself a teacher, with a practical knowledge of purely educational methods and of the psychology of children. A healthy collaboration is thus possible between doctor and teacher—this being one of the essential features of the Waldorf School education.

As a teacher, one can observe the tendency that inheres in nearly every grown-up man or woman to disharmony either of soul or body. One realises that this disharmony is symptomatic of a great, far-reaching sickness of our epoch and civilisation—a sickness that is everywhere so apparent and to which Rudolf Steiner repeatedly referred in forcible, touching words. Truly this age needs, for its healing, an Art of Education that touches the very hearts and wills of men and women, affecting, not only the head, but the deepest forces of life and heart. Such education

is indeed a "spiritualised medicine," and would be a mighty power for the healing of our cultural life. Right well could it counteract the powers of death creeping over our civilisation. An Art of Education that is at the same time a cultural Therapy—this is what Rudolf Steiner has bequeathed to us. It is permeated with those Divine powers that are revealed, in Art, in their garb of Beauty. It leads to those sources of life whence health and healing flow to the growing human being. In this educational activity, as a member of the community of artists in life, the teacher may feel himself in all humility, to be priest and healer as well.