

Methods before the Age of Nine

Written and translated by Ted Warren

Introduction

In the lectures Rudolf Steiner held on education, we find a peculiar combination of four major topics:

1. *Educational principles which give our work direction,*
2. *Methods for how we can teach and how children can learn,*
3. *Knowledge of the human being that helps us understand how our children develop, and*
4. *Exercises for teachers that can help us develop the right mood for our work.*

None of these topics is given in isolation, and together they create a vast resource that teachers, parents and children can develop further during the coming centuries.

Between 1919 and 1924 Rudolf Steiner expanded on these topics in roughly two hundred lectures. All four sources of educational insight and practice are given according to the child's ideal development in the stages of: before the age of nine, before the age of twelve, before the age of fourteen and after the age of fourteen. This essay covers the first stage of Waldorf education, before children reach their ninth year, as Rudolf Steiner introduced these opportunities to the new and inexperienced teachers at the first Waldorf school in late August 1919. The course is known as *Practical Advice to Teachers*.

Educational Principles

During these initial fourteen lectures, Rudolf Steiner developed eleven guiding principles for work with children before the age of nine. These principles are intimately connected to the methods he suggested as well as the knowledge of the human being he developed. I take them out of their context in those lectures to highlight them here.

At the Waldorf school we do not simply use artistic activities to educate our children, the entire learning process comes from the artistic realm. Why is this so? The artistic element works particularly strongly on the will nature

of children. The activities enable the children to penetrate into something that is connected with their whole being, not merely something that takes place in their head. This strengthens their interest in the entire world. No matter what subject we teach, the artistic element permeates the lessons, even in conventional activities such as writing and reading and arithmetic. Soul substance, or more vividly expressed, nutrition for the soul of the child is taught each day. The key to Waldorf education in the early years is to help the children combine meaningful movements with inner picture creativity each day.

In the very first lessons in the first grade, every child learns to draw and paint-draw. Then we foster music so they can handle a musical instrument. Artistic feeling is awakened and the children sense something in their entire being that is more than the conventional learning process.

Steiner's educational principles not only provide direction for the teachers' educational development but also for the school's organization. We work together on the principles. In these introductory lectures I have found eleven principles that cover such powerful themes as: harmonizing the spirit and soul human being with the bodily nature, allowing the children to experience the inner law of things they experience in the world, using antipathy to comprehend and sympathy to love, and striving to balance out the polarities in the children by using two streams of art, the sculptural/ pictorial forces with the musical/poetical forces.

Further principles challenge teachers to use their courage to invent their own examples of content in the lessons and present them enthusiastically. Teachers of arithmetic should proceed from the whole to the parts, so the child is thereby placed in the world in a living way. Teachers should not drill children to respect authority but act in a way that will help the children's feeling for authority arise. We should educate the children's will, not by forcing them to use their will to understand the meaning of everything, but by letting them do things that do not require them to lay bare the meaning of things: by introducing rhythm, beat, melody, the harmony of colors, repetition, and many other activities including playing!

We nourish the children's heart forces and inner life of feeling when they learn something by heart without understanding it and without explanations of the meaning, if they remember at a later date what they have learned and now understand it more fully. Lastly, we guide the children into drawing and painting and into the music realm to develop their will, which supports them when they move from gymnastics into eurythmy. Below you can read Rudolf Steiner's own words and you will discover new dimensions to these principles.

Educational Principle #1

Our method will deal with the harmonizing of the higher man, the man of spirit and soul, with the physical, bodily nature, the lower man. The subjects you

teach will not be treated in the way they have been dealt with hitherto. You will have to use them as means with which to develop the soul and bodily forces of the individual in the right way. What matters for you will not be the transmitting of knowledge as such; you will be concerned with handling the knowledge for the purpose of developing human capacities. You will have to distinguish between subject matter which rests on convention or tradition and knowledge founded on a recognition of universal human nature.¹

Educational Principle #2

What should live within the children is their inner closeness to the forms themselves, be they in nature or on the blackboard. Between the ages of seven and fourteen we strive to awaken a sense for the inner law of things. This does not happen by mere copying. The sense for the inner law of things will enable the individual to cope with life later on.²

Educational Principle #3

For the child's life of will you will be a good educator if you endeavor to surround every individual with sympathy, with real sympathy. These things also belong to education: antipathy that enables us to comprehend and sympathy that enables us to love.³

Educational Principle #4

As educators we shall have the task of constantly quickening what is dead and protecting what is approaching death in the human being from dying entirely; indeed, we shall have to fructify this dying with the quickening element we develop out of the will. Therefore we must not be apprehensive about starting right from the beginning with a certain artistic form in our lessons while the children are still young.

Now everything artistic that comes towards mankind is divided into two streams: the sculptural, pictorial stream and the musical, poetical stream. These two streams of art—the sculptural and pictorial and the musical and poetic—are indeed polar opposites, though just because of their polarity they are also especially capable of a higher synthesis, a higher union.⁴

Educational Principle #5

Ask yourself, what is more important? To take in a historical fact with great effort and then strenuously weave it into your lessons, or to invent your own examples to offer to your pupils with your own enthusiasm?⁵

Educational Principle #6

Just as in arithmetic we start not from the addenda but from the sum which we divide into parts, so here too we proceed from the whole to the parts. The

advantage is to place the child in the whole world in a living way. The child maintains permanent links with the living whole if we proceed this way. Learning individual letters from pictures gives the child a link to the living reality.⁶

Educational Principle #7

We do not drill children to respect authority, but by acting in a way that will help their feeling for authority to arise, for instance by teaching spelling in a way that places it on a foundation of authority.⁷

Educational Principle #8

If you want to do the best you can for an individual's faculty of cognizing through thought, you will have to analyze the meaning of everything that he is to take in and retain. It is indeed a fact that by first one-sidedly analyzing the meaning of everything we can go a long way in the education of man's observation of the world. But we would go nowhere in educating his will, for we cannot force the will to emerge by throwing a strong light on the meaning of anything. The will wants to sleep, it does not want to be awakened fully by what I might call the perpetual unchaste laying bare of meaning.

Human life calls for more than education in the realm of meaning, it calls for education in what the will experiences in its sleeping condition: rhythm, beat, melody, the harmony of colors, repetition, any kind of activity not calling for a grasp of meaning.⁸

Educational Principle #9

For thinking and knowing we must certainly undertake measures that involve the revelation of meaning: reading, writing and so on. For willed activity we must cultivate everything that does not involve just the interpretation of meaning but requires to be directly grasped by the whole human being: everything artistic. What lies between these two will work mainly on the development of the feeling life, of the heart forces. These heart forces are strongly affected if the child is given the opportunity of first learning something by heart without understanding it and without explanations of the meaning, though of course there is a meaning, and if he then later, when he is matured through other processes, remembers what he has learned and now understands what he took into him. This subtle process must be taken into account in teaching if we want to bring up human beings who have an inward life of feeling.⁹

Educational Principle #10

All these things, painting-drawing and drawing-painting, and also the finding of their way into the music realm will be, for us, during the children's first year at a school, a wonderful element in developing their will, which is something

almost totally removed from present-day schools. And if we can also lead over ordinary gymnastics into eurythmy, we shall be promoting their will development to a special degree.¹⁰

These educational principles given by Rudolf Steiner have been used by teachers and schools during the past ninety-three years. In addition teachers have created their own principles and schools have worked together on their principles. Steiner gave us direction, he did not create dogmas that anyone should follow. No one has the answer to education. We can continually renew our work according to what we see in our children.

Methods

For our work with children before the age of nine, Steiner gave to the original teachers during the first lectures not only principles, but approximately thirty-six methods. After twenty-one years of teaching I was led to these lectures one evening by some tough questions:

- How many methods do I use in the course of a main lesson?
- How much time do I spend preparing content and how much time do I spend preparing methods?
- Which methods do I use in the subject lessons?
- What are my methods in the social interaction in the class?

I also realized there are two sides to these questions:

- Which methods do all of my children need during the main lessons?
- Which methods of learning do my children use in order to learn when I teach?
- Which methods do they need in the subject lessons?
- And in their social interaction, which methods do my children use each day?

These questions led to new questions. I searched for a better understanding of my pupils' learning styles. In the parent conferences that semester in Princeton I asked the parents to tell me how their children learn. We compared notes and a picture of the peculiar needs arose. I also realized the learning style of each child lies deep within his or her soul and it will continue throughout high school, college and their professional lives. Therefore I decided to restudy the introductory lectures by Steiner to see how he prepared the first teachers, particularly with methods.

The Waldorf school movement has grown and prospered for close to a century, yet it feels like we have only just begun in terms of using the original *methods* taught by Rudolf Steiner. And we have only just begun to develop our

own methods based on the *educational principles* and our *knowledge of the human being*. The real questions I face every day is: How do I teach my pupils and how do they need to learn? When we look into their eyes and read their faces, they show us more than words can describe. My job is to respond to those perceptions.

Let us deepen our understanding of the methods Steiner introduced for children before the age of nine within the following categories:

- The first day of school
- The next lessons
- Painting
- Drawing
- Music
- Eurythmy
- The role of feeling and the will
- Writing and reading
- Arithmetic
- Vowels and consonants
- Grammar
- Spelling
- Penmanship
- Storytelling
- Nature

The First Day of School

Certainly one of the biggest experiences in any Waldorf teacher's career is the first lesson on the first day of school. You present something that will continue to enliven all of the following lessons. And all of the following lessons will be used to make that which takes in the first lesson more and more valuable for the child's entire education.

Steiner spoke to his teachers as if he were holding the first lesson. All of the children are in the classroom for the first time and he tells them: "You have now come to school. Now I will tell you why you have come to school. You have come to school to learn something. As yet, you have no idea of all the things you will be learning in school, but there will be all sorts of things that you will have to learn. Why will you have to learn all sorts of things in school? Well, you have no doubt met some adults and you must have noticed that they can do something that you cannot do. And so that one day you will be able to do what the grown-ups can do is the reason why you are here. One day you will be able to do something that you cannot do yet.

“Look how grown-ups have books and can read. You can’t read yet. But you will learn to read and when you have learnt how to do it, you will also be able to take the books and learn from them what the grown-ups can learn from them. Grown-ups can write letters to each other; in fact they can write down anything they like. Later on you will also be able to write letters, for as well as learning to read, you will also learn to write. As well as reading and writing, grown-ups can also do sums. You don’t know what doing sums means. But you have to be able to do sums when you go out into life, for instance if you want to buy something to eat or to wear, or if you want to make something to wear. You will also learn to do sums.”

Then the teacher moves on to something else: “Children, look at yourselves. You have two hands, a left one and a right one. These hands are for working; you can do all kinds of things with them.” After you have spoken with the children about their hands, let them do something skillful with their hands. You might even do this in the first lesson. You might say to them:

“Watch me do this. (Draw a straight line.) Now take your hand and do it too!” We let them do this as slowly as possible. It will be a slow process if we let them come to the blackboard one by one, letting them make their mark on the board and then return to their seats. The most important thing is that the children digest the lesson properly. Then you might say:

“Now I am going to do this. (Draw a curved line.) And now you can take your hands and do it too.” Each child does so in the air, on the board or both. When they have all finished you say: “This one is a straight line, and this one is a curved line; with your hands you have just made a straight line and a curved line.” The teacher should help the clumsier children and each child should do it as accurately as possible from the start.¹¹

The Next Lessons

Let the children make a straight line and a curved line in the following lessons. Steiner suggested you make a straight line on the board again and let the children copy it. Do the same with the curved line. Then you ask individual children: “What is it?” “A straight line!” Then you draw a curved line again and ask them: “What is it?” “A curved line!” The teacher uses the principle of repetition. You let the children copy the drawing and then, let them name it themselves. This is a subtle but very important nuance.

Painting

The first steps in drawing are followed up by the introduction to painting. It is a good idea to take out a box of paints and set aside a glass of water quite soon with the children. After you have pinned a white paper to the blackboard, you take up a brush, dip it in the water, take some paint and make a small yellow

patch on the white surface. Then you let each child come forward and paint a similar small patch. Each patch must be separate from the other patches so that in the end you have so and so many yellow patches.

Then you dip the brush in the blue paint and put some blue next to your yellow patch. And then you let the children come forward and put some blue next to the yellow. When about half of them have done that you say: "Now we shall do something else; I am going to dip my brush in the green paint and put green next to the other yellow patches." Avoiding as well as you can making them jealous of each other, you then let the remaining children put on the green in the same way. All this will take a while. It is indeed essential to proceed very slowly, taking only very few small steps in the lesson. The children will digest it well.

Now the time has come for you to say: "I am going to tell you something that you will not yet understand very well, but one day you will understand it very well. What we did at the top, where we put blue next to the yellow, is more beautiful than what we did at the bottom, where we put green next to the yellow!"

This will sink deep into the child's soul. It will be necessary to repeat it several times but he will also ponder it. He will not be entirely indifferent to it. From simple, naïve examples the child will learn to understand how to feel the difference between something beautiful and something less beautiful.¹²

We should introduce the child to colors as early as possible. And it is good to let the child use colors on colored as well as white surfaces. And we should endeavor to awaken in the child the kind of feelings that can arise only out of a spiritual scientific view of the world. One discovers, for instance, when using blue, that it lies within the blue color itself to characterize the whole realm of inward absorption. So if we want to paint an angel moved by inwardness, we quite automatically have the urge to use blue because the nuances of blue, the light and dark blue call forth in the soul a feeling of movement arising out of the soul element.¹³

Drawing

When we guide children into the realm of what can be modeled, we must see to it that they follow the plastic forms with their hands. By feeling the way he makes his own forms, by moving his hand and making a drawing, the child can be brought to follow the forms with his eyes but also with his will emerging through his eyes. It is no violation of the child's naïvete if we teach him to follow the forms of the body with the hollow of his hand or if we make him aware of his eyes, for instance by letting him follow a complete circle with his eyes and then saying: You are making a circle with your eyes. This does not wound the child's naïvete; it engages the interest of the whole human being. We must therefore be aware that we lift the lower part of the human being up into the higher part, the nerve-sense being.¹⁴

Music

A similar method may be used when you introduce music into the lesson. It is good to start with one note or another. There is no need to tell the children the name of the note. You simply strike the note in some way. It is good to let the children also strike the note, thus here too combining the lesson with the will element. Afterwards you strike a second, concordant note and then let a number of children strike it too. The next step is to strike a note followed by a discordant note and again let the children do the same. You try, just as before with the colors, to awaken in the children a feeling for concordance and discordance of notes, not by talking to them about concordance and discordance but by speaking of beautiful and less beautiful, thus appealing here also to their feelings. These things and not the letters of the alphabet are the starting points for the early lessons.

The class teacher will hold these conversations with the children. It would be good if the music teacher could conduct similar conversations, though oriented more towards the musical, and go over the same ground again and again. This should help give the school a more cooperative character. In weekly meetings the teachers should develop a cooperation by discussing themes and activities that can bring about unity in the lessons.¹⁵

In the first year we will not only have singing but also start learning about music in an elementary way with the help of instruments. We should lead them to an instrument in addition to singing. We teach them the first elements of listening to the relationship between notes. And we endeavor to hold the balance between bringing out the musical element from within through song, and listening to the tonal element from outside or the producing of notes through an instrument.¹⁶

The educational influence we exert by using the musical element must consist in a constant harmonizing by the Apollonian element of the Dionysian element welling up out of man's nature. While it is a deadening influence that has to be quickened by the sculptural, pictorial element, something that is alive in the highest degree in the musical element has to be dampened down so that in music it does not affect the human being too strongly. This is the feeling with which we ought to bring music to the children.

The children should gain a clear idea of elementary music, of harmonies, melodies and so on through the application of elementary facts, through the analyzing by ear of melodies and harmonies, so that with music we build up the whole artistic realm in the same elementary way as we do the sculptural, pictorial realm where we similarly work up from the details.

Human beings are brought together as one through music and poetry; they become individuals through sculpture and painting. The individuality is supported more by the sculptural, pictorial element, and society more by the

living and weaving in community through music and poetry. Early on the child should know what is truly poetical. It is important to draw the child's attention to the musical element on which each poem is founded. The lesson should be arranged in a way that allows the element of recitation in the school to come as close as possible to the musical element. The abstract explanation of poetry, verging almost on grammatical dissection, spells death of everything that ought to work on the child. The interpreting of poems is something quite appalling.¹⁷

If we were to use art in its two streams in this way to harmonize the human nature through and through, we should indeed achieve a tremendous amount. Consider alone the fact that something infinitely important in man's harmony with the world is achieved when he sings. Singing is a way of reproducing what is already present in the world. When the human being sings he expresses the momentous wisdom out of which the world is built. We must also not forget that in singing man links the cosmic element of the actual sequence of notes with the human word. This brings something unnatural into singing. We can feel this even in the incompatibility of the sound of poem with its content. It would be a step in the right direction if we could present each line in recitative form and quicken only the rhyming word with melody, so that the line flows along in recitative and the rhyming word is sung in an aria. This would ensure a clear distinction between the sounding of a poem and the words which actually disturb the musical part of man.¹⁸

Eurythmy

As teachers we bestow upon our children the ability to take their place artistically in workings of the world. A child is a born musician. This inner capacity is most present in the third and fourth years. We should dance with children. Permeating their bodies with elementary eurythmy overcomes heaviness in their limbs. Parents can learn these elements and do eurythmy with their children. Then, at the change of teeth the musical element would remain.

It is from this musical element that the separate senses arise: the musically attuned ear and the eye for shapes and forms. The musically attuned ear and the eye appreciative of line and form are specializations of the total human being. Thus we definitely cherish the idea that in drawing on the artistic element we assimilate into the upper man, the nerve-sense man, the disposition of the entire being. By means of music or by means of drawing or modeling, we lift the realm of feeling up into the intellectual sphere. This must happen in the right way.¹⁹

It is very important for the school to add another factor to healing the physical body in gymnastics, the physiology of bodily functions, namely healing the soul. A hygiene of the soul is possible when the gym lessons alternate with eurythmy lessons. Eurythmy gives the soul what gymnastics give the physical

body. These activities work into each other. We need to educate our children to show respect for their fellow man in the outer world.²⁰

The Role of Feeling and the Will

As regards method, it will have had an extraordinary good effect on the children to have spoken to them so early as the first lessons about writing, reading and arithmetic and how they cannot do these things yet but will learn them all in school. As a result of this, a hope, a wish, a resolve forms in the child and through what you yourself do, he finds his way into the world of feeling through the teacher. This acts as incentive to the realm of the will. This is an educational method: You do not present the children directly with what you want to teach them; instead you leave them for a while in a state of expectation. This has an extraordinarily good effect on the development of the will in the growing human being.²¹

Whatever the circumstances, the education of the heart forces suffers if the children have a new teacher each year who cannot follow up what has been instilled into their souls in previous years. It is a part of the teaching method that the teacher moves up through the school with his pupils. Only if this is done can he work with the rhythms of life.²²

It is good to consider how quite specific educational motives can be repeated year by year. Select things you want to take with the children, make a note of them and return to something similar every year. This is effective even with abstract subjects. For example, teach addition in the first grade, repeat it in the second grade and teach again in the third grade but in progressive repetitions.²³

Structure your lessons meaningfully so that you can immediately reveal whatever meaning is contained in all that you have to offer. We can only guess what this demand actually means when we have gradually developed a feeling for life.²⁴

If you let the child repeat sentences that he is nowhere near to understanding because he is too young, if you make him learn these sentences by heart, you are not working on his faculty of understanding since you cannot explain the meaning which will only emerge later on for him, but you are working on his will, and that is what you should, indeed must do. You must endeavor to bring to the child things that have an abstract meaning in such a way that, though he cannot understand the meaning as yet, he will be able to do so later on when he is more mature because he has taken them in through repetition and can remember them. If you have done this you have worked on his will. And quite especially you have also worked on his feeling life, and that is something you should not forget.²⁵

We have speech to thank for much that lives in our feeling of Self, in our feeling of being a personality. Our feelings can rise to a mood of prayer: I hear

speech in the language surrounding me; there the power of the Self flows into me through speech. When you feel this you can awaken the same feeling in the children. Then the feeling of Self will not be awakened to egotism but in other ways. There are two ways to awaken the feeling of Self in children. The false way awakens their egotism, the correct way awakens their will power.²⁶

Writing and Reading

Waldorf teachers move from the whole to the specific. From drawing we move to writing, from writing to reading handwriting and from reading handwriting to reading print. In this way we build reading skills on the basis of drawing. The child has an inner experience; for example, he sees how a sound he breathes finds its expression in reading and writing.

When the children have reached the point where they can master straight and curved lines with their little hands, show them that there are such things as letters. You may start with the fish and F. The sequence you follow is immaterial and you do not need to proceed in alphabetical order.

Let us see what success we have in proceeding to evolve writing and reading out of your own free imagination. I would now say to the children: You know what a bath is. (It is very important to have something up your sleeve that can contribute to the children's education. In this sense it is good to use the word 'bath' for it reminds them of cleanliness without admonishing them. Choose examples that help the children think of moral and aesthetic attitudes.) Then continue: You see, when grown-ups want to write down what a bath is they do it like this: *bath*. This is the picture of what you express when you say *bath*, when you mean a bath. Now I let a number of children copy this on the board, just copy it so that whenever they are given something like this it also goes straight into their hands so they take it in not just by looking but with their whole being. Then I say: Watch how you start to say *bath*; let us look at the beginning of *bath*: B. The children have to be led from saying the whole word *bath* to just breathing the initial sound, as I illustrated with the fish.

The next thing to make clear to them is that just as *bath* is the sign for the whole bath, so B is the sign for the beginning of the word *bath*. Then I explain that a beginning like this can be found in other words. I say: If you say *band* you also start like this; if you say *bow*, like the bow some people wear in their hair, you again start in the same way. Have you ever seen a bear in the zoo? When you start to say *bear* you again breath the same sound. All those words start with the same sound. Thus I lead the child from the whole word to the beginning of the word, finding the transition to the single sound or letter, always finding the initial letter from the whole word.²⁷

It is important that you yourselves develop the initial letter in a meaningful way out of the drawing element. You will imagine this very well if you simply

use your imagination and say to yourself: The people who first saw such animals as those that begin with B, like beavers and bears, they drew the animal's back, its hind paws standing on the ground and its forepaws lifted up; they drew an animal in the act of rising on to its hind legs, and their drawing turned into a B.

You will always find that the initial letter of a word is a drawing, an animal or plant form or some external object; you can give your imagination free reign and there is no need to delve into cultural histories, which are anyway incomplete. Historically the fact is that if you go back to the most ancient forms of Egyptian writing, which was still a sign-writing, you find a great many copies of objects and animals in the letters. Not until the transition from the Egyptian to the Phoenician culture did the change take place that brought with it the development of the picture into a sign representing a sound. It is this transition that the children must experience over again. Let us therefore gain a clear idea of it ourselves in theory.

When writing first began to develop in ancient Egypt every detail that was written down was written in picture-writing; it was drawn, although the drawing had to be as simplified as possible. If somebody employed in copying this picture-writing made a mistake, if for instance a holy word was misrepresented by him, the scribe was condemned to death. We see how seriously anything connected with writing was taken in ancient Egypt. All writing at that time (3200 BC) consisted of pictures of the kind described. The cultural life was taken up by the Phoenicians who lived more firmly in the external world (2750 BC). By them the initial picture of a word was retained and transferred to represent the sound.

Since we are not here to study Egyptian languages, let me give you an example that is also valid for Egyptians and is most easily adapted in our own language. The Egyptians knew that the sound M could be depicted by watching mainly the upper lip. From this sign the letter emerged that we use for the beginning of the word for mouth, the letter that is also valid for any other word beginning with this sound. In this way the picture-sign for a word became the sign for a sound because the picture for the beginning of the word was used.²⁸

We do not build reading and writing exclusively on this method. We remain in the artistic element and use the principle involved here to introduce the letters and then whole sentences. In these sentences the child will notice shapes, for instance the F he has become familiar with in *fish*. He will notice other shapes besides, which through lack of time cannot be dealt with individually. The next step will be to write the different printed letters on the blackboard. And then one day we put a whole long sentence on the board and say to the child: This is what grown-up people have in front of them when they have formed out everything in the way we formed out the F in *fish*, and so on. Then we teach the child to copy down the writing. We make sure that what he sees passes over into his hands

so that he not only reads with his eyes but also forms what he reads with his hands. In this way he will know that he can himself form whatever may be on the blackboard.²⁹

After this we may reverse the procedure. We split up the sentence we have written down and by atomizing the words we show the forms of the other letters we have not yet derived from the elements; we proceed from the whole to the parts. For example: horse. The children copy it from the board and then the teacher asks them to write h o r s e. The sequence of starting with the whole and moving to the parts is practiced in everything we teach.

Arithmetic

We use this principle of starting from the whole and proceeding to the parts in everything we teach. We might take a piece of paper and cut it into a number of pieces. Then we count the pieces; let us say there are 24. We say to the children: "Look, I describe these pieces of paper I have cut by what I have written down here, 24 pieces of paper. (It could just as well have been beans.)

"Now watch carefully. I take some of the pieces of paper away and make another little heap with them; then I make a third and a fourth heap. I have made four little heaps out of the 24 pieces of paper. Now I shall count the pieces; you cannot do that yet, but I can. The pieces in the first heap I shall call 'nine,' those in the second, 'five,' those in the third 'seven,' and those in the fourth 'three.' You see: First I had one single heap, 24 pieces of paper. Now I have four heaps, 9 and 5 and 7 and 3 pieces of paper. It is all the same paper. If I have it all together I call it 24; and if I have it in four little heaps I call it 9, 5, 7 and 3 pieces together." In this way I have taught the child to add up. I did not start with the separate addenda from which a sum total could be derived. This would be quite out of keeping with man's original nature.³⁰

Apply the opposite process in order to the next step in arithmetic. You say: "Now I shall put all the pieces of paper together again. Then I shall take some away, making two heaps. And I call the heap I have taken away 'three.' How have I come by this 3? By taking it away from the others. When they were together I called it 24; now I have taken 3 away and call the remainder 21." In this way you proceed to the concept of subtraction.³¹

Vowels and Consonants

In order to establish inner contact with the children, we let letters arise from pictures. We always explain the consonants in relation to external objects. Then we do the opposite with vowels, for they express internal feelings, that live in the sympathy we have towards things. For even if we are afraid of something, this fear is founded on some mysterious sympathy. We would not be afraid of something if we did not have a hidden sympathy for it. It is relatively easy to

observe that the ‘O’ sound has something to do with astonishment, the ‘U’ sound with fear and anxiety, the ‘A’ sound with admiration and wonder, the ‘E’ sound with offering resistance, the ‘I’ sound with drawing near to something, and the ‘AOU’ with veneration.³²

Therefore speech is a confrontation between antipathy and sympathy. The sympathy lies in the vowels and the antipathy in the consonants. Insofar as speech consists of vowels it encompasses something musical, and insofar as it consists of consonants it bears within itself something like sculpture and painting. In speech we have a genuine synthesis, a true uniting in the human being of the musical with the plastic element.³³ Once again Steiner leads us back to both streams of art. In doing so he deepens our understanding of the role of sympathy that enables us to love and antipathy that enables us to comprehend in education. You may remember this as educational principle #3 in this essay.

Vowels always render man’s inner being and his relationship to the outer world. For example, you are teaching the vowel A. Say to them: “Think of the sun that you see in the morning. Can any of you remember what you did when the sun rose this morning?” Perhaps one or other of the children will remember what they did. If none of them remembers, you will have to help them recall. How they must have stood there and how if the sunrise was very beautiful they must have said: *Ah!*

It is a note of feeling that must be struck, the resonance that sounds in the vowel must be called forth from the feeling. Then you must try to say: “When you stood like that and said *Ah!* it was just as if, from your inner being, a beam of sunlight spread out from your mouth. What lives in you when you see the sunrise, comes out of you and streams forth when you say *AH*. But you do not let all of it stream out, you keep some of it back and then it becomes this sign: *A*.”

You should try to clothe with a drawing what lies in the breath when a vowel is spoken. In this way you will find drawings that can show you in a picture how the signs for the vowels have come about.³⁴

We can always evolve the vowels out of drawing. For example by appealing to the children’s feelings you can try to make them imagine themselves in the following situation: “Think what would happen if your brother and sister were to come to you and say something you did not straight away understand. After a while you begin to understand what they mean. Then what do you say?” One of the children may answer or you may have to point out to them that they would say: “*Eeee*.” (In German this is the letter I.) The shape of the sound *Eee* when it is drawn contains a pointing towards whatever has been understood. Indeed it is a rather rough expression of pointing to something. In eurythmy you find it expressed very clearly. So a simple line becomes an ‘I,’ a simple line that ought to be fatter at the bottom and thinner at the top, only instead of that we make a

line and express the thinner part with a smaller line above it. In this way every vowel can be derived out of the shape of the aspiration, of the breath.³⁵

You need not be at all shy of calling to your aid certain ideas that arouse in the feeling life, something that really did live in the process of cultural development. For example, you could say: “Have you ever seen a tall building with a dome on top? But then you have to make the D upside down so it look likes a half moon on its face. But this was awkward, so people upended it and made D. People wanted to make things simpler so out of the D they made a small d.” By always pointing out the transition from form to form and never teaching in an abstract way you help the children to progress so that they can find the genuine transition from the form derived from the drawing at first to the shape the letter really has today in handwriting.³⁶

Grammar

What is it we do when we raise unconscious speech to the grammar realm, to the knowledge of grammar? We make the transition with our pupils of lifting speech from the unconscious into the conscious realm. Our purpose is not to teach them grammar in a pedantic way but to raise something to consciousness that otherwise takes place unconsciously. Whether consciously or semi-consciously, man does indeed use the world as a trellis up which to climb in a manner that corresponds to what we learn in grammar. Grammar tells us, for instance, that there are nouns. Nouns are names of objects, for objects that are in a sense self-contained in space. That we meet such objects in life is not without significance for this life of ours. All things that can be expressed by nouns awaken our consciousness to our independence as human beings. By learning to name things with nouns, we distinguish ourselves from the world around us. By calling a thing a table or a chair, we are here and the table or chair is there. And we separate ourselves from the table or chair when we name it.

It is quite another matter to describe things as adjectives. When I say: “The stool is blue,” I am expressing something with a noun I am dissociated from; but when I describe it with an adjective, I become one with it again. Thus the development of our consciousness takes place in our relationship to things when we address them; we must certainly become conscious of the way we address.

If I use the verb, as in “The man writes,” I not only unite myself with the being about whom I have spoken the verb, I also do with him what he is doing in his physical body. I do what he does, my Self does what he does. When I speak a verb, my Self joins in with what the physical body of the other person is doing. I unite my Self with the physical body of the other when I speak a verb. Our listening, especially with verbs, is in reality always a participation. What is so far the most spiritual part of man participates, only it suppresses the activity.

Only in eurythmy is this activity placed in the outer world. In addition to everything else, eurythmy also gives the activity of listening. When one person tells something, the other listens, he performs in his Self what lives physically in the sounds, but he suppresses it. The Self always does eurythmy in participation, and what eurythmy puts before us through the physical body is nothing other than a making visible of listening. So you always do eurythmy when you listen, and when you actually do eurythmy, you are making visible what you leave invisible when you listen. The manifestation of the activity of the listening human being is in fact eurythmy. It is not something arbitrary but rather in reality the revelation of what the listening human being does. People are of course today fearfully slovenly in themselves, so at first when they listen they do some fearfully bad inner eurythmy. By doing it as it should be done, they raise it until it becomes real eurythmy. Through eurythmy people will learn to listen properly, for nowadays they cannot listen properly.³⁷

Then you teach the children the concept of activity, a verb: “Sit in your chair. You are a good child. *Good* is an adjective. But now you stand up and walk. You are doing something. That is an activity. The word you need to describe this activity is a verb.” Thus we lead the child to the fact and then we make the transition from the fact to the words. In this way we teach the children without doing too much damage what is a noun, an article, an adjective, a verb.

The most difficult is to understand what an article is because the children cannot yet understand the relationship between the article and the noun. We shall have to flounder in abstractions in order to teach the children what an article is. But they have got to learn it. And it is better to flounder in abstractions, since it is anyway something unnatural, than to think up all sorts of artificial ways of making clear to the children the significance and nature of the article, which is anyway impossible.³⁸

Spelling

And if we take pains to converse with the children for a long time and let them do plenty of retelling, making an effort ourselves to speak correctly, then we shall at first introduce the matter of right or wrong spelling by making only a few corrections without introducing the two as different aspects of learning to write. In spelling we remain in the realm of speaking as long as possible and only let this merge into actual correct spelling last of all.³⁹

In this, a great deal of what could be revealed as our own individuality is rubbed off in what we have to develop for the sake of living together with others. We should feel that this is so, we should be taught to feel that we do such a thing purely for social reasons. Therefore when you begin to orient your writing lessons towards spelling, your starting point must be a quite specific set of feelings. You will again and again have to point out to the children that they

should respect and esteem the grown-ups, that they are themselves growing up into a world that is already formed and waiting to receive them, and that therefore they must take notice of what is already there. This is the point of view from which the children must be introduced to things like correct spelling. Spelling lessons must be run parallel with developing their feeling of respect and esteem for what their predecessors have established.

Spelling must not be taught as an abstraction as though it existed as an absolute on the basis of the divine—or shall we say, law; you must develop in the children the feeling. The grown-ups whom we are to respect spell like this, so we ought to follow their example. From this will result a certain variability in spelling, but it will not be excessive; there will be a certain adapting of the growing child to the world of the grown-ups. And we must count on this adapting. It is not our task to create in him the belief: This is right, this is wrong. The only belief we should arouse, thus building on living authority, is: This is the way the grown-ups do it.⁴⁰

Penmanship

During the second year it appears even more predominantly as a separate subject: good penmanship. Since we shall let writing evolve out of painting and drawing, there will be no need for us to draw a distinction between poor penmanship and good penmanship. We shall endeavor not to distinguish between bad writing and good writing and ensure that all our writing lessons are such that the children always write well, so well that they never distinguish between good penmanship and bad penmanship.⁴¹

Storytelling

The educator must see to it that the whole being of the child is moved. Consider from this point of view the telling of legends and fairy tales: If you have the right feeling for these and are thus able to tell them out of your own mood, you will tell them in a way that enables the children to feel with their whole body something of what is told. You are then really addressing yourself to the astral body of the child. Something rays up from the astral body into the head, which the child ought to feel there. You should sense that you are gripping the whole child and that it is from the feelings and excitement you arouse that an understanding comes to the child of what you are telling.

You may therefore consider it ideal, when you are telling the child legends or fairy tales or while you draw or paint with him, that you do not explain anything or work with concepts but seek to move the child's whole being so that when he leaves you, he only later out of himself reaches an understanding of what you have told. Try therefore to educate the Self and the astral body from below upwards in such a way that the head and heart follow later. Try not to tell the

stories in a way that causes them to be reflected in the head and understanding; tell them in a way that evokes a kind of silent thrilled awe—without limits—and also pleasures and sorrows which echo on when the child has left you and only after a while are transformed into understanding and interest. Try to let your influence arise out of your close intimacy with the children. Try not to arouse interest artificially by counting on sensationalism, attempt rather to achieve an inner connection with the children and then let interest arise out of their own being.

Take a simple example: I want to make clear to the child the continued life of the soul after death. I shall only be deceiving myself and never make it clear to him if I merely teach him theories about the subject. No kind of concept can teach a child under the age of fourteen anything about immortality. I can, however, say to him: “See this chrysalis; it is empty. Once there was a butterfly inside, but it has crept out.” I can also show him the process when it happens. It is good to demonstrate such metamorphoses to the child. Then I can make the comparison: “Imagine you yourself are a chrysalis like this. Your soul is in you; later it will emerge just as the butterfly emerges from the chrysalis.” This is, of course, rather naïvely put. Now you can talk about this for a long time, but if you yourself do not believe that the butterfly is a picture of the human soul, you will not achieve much with the child when you use the comparison. You ought not allow yourself the utter untruth of seeing the whole idea merely as a comparison. It is not just a made-up comparison but a fact placed before us by the divine world order. The two things are not just invented by our intellect. And if our attitude to such things is right, we learn to believe in the fact that nature offers us comparisons for actualities in the realm of soul and spirit.

The child must understand not merely through his ears; communication must be from soul to soul. If you take notice of this you will make progress.⁴²

During the first year cultivate as much simple speaking and conversation with the children as possible. We read aloud as little as possible but prepare ourselves so well we can bring to them in a narrative way whatever we want to tell them.

Then we seek to reach the point where the children are able to retell what they have heard from us. We avoid using passages that do not stimulate the imagination and make as much use as possible of passages that stimulate the imagination really strongly, namely fairy tales, as many fairy tales as possible.

And having practiced this telling and retelling with the children for a long time, we then start in a small way to let them give brief accounts of something they have themselves experienced. For instance, we let a child tell us something he likes telling about. With all this telling of stories, retelling, and telling of personal experiences we develop without being pedantic about it the transition

from the local dialect to educated speech. This transition is necessary in German-speaking countries and many other countries.⁴³

Nature

There is something, that we must not neglect when we take the children out into the mountains or the fields, when we take them out into nature. We must always remember that lessons on natural science have their right place only inside the classroom. Let us assume that we step with the children out into nature where we draw their attention to a stone or a flower. In doing so we should strictly avoid any allusion to what we teach inside the classroom. Out of doors in natural surroundings, we should draw the children's attention to nature in a way that is totally different from the method we use in the classroom. We should never forget to point out to them: We take you out into the open so that you may feel the beauty of nature, and we bring the products of nature into the classroom so that indoors we can dissect and analyze them. We should compare these two experiences. The kind of feeling we should seek to arouse in the children is: Unfortunately we have to dissect nature when we bring it into the classroom. But the children should nevertheless feel this as a necessity, for the destruction of what is natural is also necessary in the building up of the human being. We should certainly not imagine that we are doing any good by giving a scientific explanation of a beetle out of doors in natural surroundings. The scientific description of the beetle belongs in the classroom! When we take the children out into the open we have to arouse in them delight at the sight of the beetle, delight in the way he runs about, in his drollness, delight in his relationship to the rest of nature.

Furthermore we should not neglect to call forth in the child's soul a clear sense of how something creative lies in music, something transcending nature, and of how man himself shares in the creation of nature when he develops music. This will be formed as a feeling only very primitively of course, but it will be the first that must emerge from the element of music—that the human being feels himself within the cosmos!⁴⁴

Knowledge of the Human Being

As director of the school, Steiner had deep relationships with his teachers and pupils. He saw in their eyes what they needed and answered their questions. His responses came not only in conferences and daily conversations but also in approximately two hundred lectures on education. In each of these supplementary lectures he included new insights into our *knowledge of the human being*.

Steiner introduced his insights in the morning lectures for the first teachers, now known in the English language as *The Foundations of Human Experience*. Some of these ideas spilled into the afternoon lectures when he also presented

educational principles, methods and exercises for teachers. In the first afternoon lecture he set the tone for all of our work: “We have to realize that in employing our method we shall be dealing in a particular way with the harmonizing of the higher man, the spirit and soul, with the physical, bodily nature, the lower man.”⁴⁵

We use the subjects to develop the child’s soul and physical forces in the right way. We use knowledge to develop human capabilities. Therefore we need to distinguish between subject matter that is conventional and knowledge that is based on universal human nature.

Sympathy and Antipathy

Steiner introduced the role of sympathy and antipathy in his methods, especially when he gave practical advice on working with speech.

Sense activity is really a limb activity in which sympathy holds sway while antipathy comes forth from the nervous system. When sense perceptions enter the head the nervous system is interrupted. This interruption is based on antipathy from the child. The child uses antipathy to understand the sense perceptions. The same is true of the act of seeing. Sight comes about when sympathy in the blood vessels in the eye meets the antipathy in the nervous system of the eye.

Both forces also meet in the child’s chest where their whole being is active. If a child becomes scared, he reacts immediately. His instincts send reflexes into the subconscious that are mirrored in the brain, in the soul, and create a picture element.

In the child’s chest a sympathetic activity interacts continually with a cosmic activity of antipathy. These activities unite in human speech. We understand speech when the meeting of antipathy and sympathy in the chest is accompanied by the brain. In the chest it is more real, in the brain it fades into an image. Speaking and feeling rest on the constant rhythm of sympathetic and antipathetic activity.

Steiner described how speech is rooted in human feeling; all that the individual brings to the world from his own feeling of astonishment meets the cosmic relationship in the vowel ‘O.’ The feeling we have of emptiness is related in ‘U.’ The feeling of admiration is expressed in ‘A.’ The feeling of offering resistance is expressed in ‘E.’ The feeling of approaching and becoming one with something is found in ‘I.’ Vowels express inner soul moods.

When we bring consonants to meet the vowels, we provide antipathy. Our tongue, our lips, our palate make themselves organs of antipathy.

Steiner considered speech as a genuine synthesis in the child of the music with the plastic element. Vowels encompass something musical while consonants encompass something sculptural. Once again both streams of art appear as the source of the artistic element for all of our teaching.

Exercises for Teachers

One of the biggest problems I met while teaching in America is the gap between the experts on education and the people who do the teaching. I know experts with PhDs on the most important aspects of teaching who have little or no daily experience in the classroom with children. I also know teachers who do not feel entitled to researching their own work, for they are to carry out the plan and methods created by the so-called experts and approved by the politicians. In addition politicians and businessmen, with no experience in the classroom, assume the right to be experts in education in the name of democracy. The right connections are not being made between teacher and child. Methods are not effective. Vast human and financial capital is being wasted on systems that do not meet the needs of our children.

Why exercises for teachers? They provide methods for bridging the gap between adults and children. Only when we learn to change and grow can our children discover our growth as human beings. When they notice us changing, they also may be inspired to change. The thoughts a teacher brings into the classroom not only provide more effective teaching but also are the source of a possible spiritual relationship between the teacher and the children.

Steiner gave his first teachers practical advice on how to bring the right attitude into the classroom. To achieve inner connections with the children and then enable the children to develop their interest for the world out of their own being, the teacher can practice an understanding of himself as part of the cosmos and not just as a person limited to the classroom.

Much depends on the nature of the teacher's feelings towards the growing child, and how much we can really revere the growing human being in the child, as a mysterious revelation of the cosmos. Very much depends on the teacher's ability to develop this feeling in his own life. Then he can more powerfully revere it in the children he works with.

As usual Steiner does not tell teachers how to do the exercises. Steiner merely suggests it is totally up to the individual to take the initiative and try out what works for him. In lecture two he helps the teacher broaden his perspective by looking into the relationship between breaths taken each day and the Platonic year, which is the cosmic revolution of the sun.

The human being takes about 18 breaths a minute. In four minutes this is 72 breaths. In one day it is $18 \times 60 \times 24 = 25,920$ breaths per day. Or we could take the number of breaths in four minutes, 72. Instead of multiplying 24×60 , I can multiply 6×60 and get 360. Then $360 \text{ days} \times 72 \text{ breaths}$ is also 25,920 per day.

Our breathing is a miniature of what the sun does each year. Steiner poses the question: What is sleeping? In waking and sleeping we also breathe something in and out. When we go to sleep, we breathe out our astral body and our self and

we breathe them in every time we wake up. In one year we complete something similar to what we complete each day. If we live roughly 72 years and we multiply that with 360 to find how many days we have breathed our astral bodies and self in and out, we have again 25,920 times. Now we have two breathing processes, each day and each year.

A third breathing process follows the course of the sun. During 25,920 years the sun moves gradually around the ecliptic in one planetary cosmic year. Our individual breathing process is an image of the great cosmic process.

“Overcome the illusion that you are a limited human being; conceive of yourself as a process in the cosmos, which is a reality, and you will be able to say: I am myself a breath drawn by the universe.”⁴⁶

Exercise for Teachers #2

Here the goal is to better understand the child’s inward life of feeling. This is her mood of soul. People shy away from such observations because they do not like infringing upon others. Yet teachers are in the classroom every day with children who have a certain mood. The children want to be seen.

To improve the ability of understanding their mood, Steiner suggested we practice by observing the soul life of a person whom we have known for some time, who has recently died. We can ask what was the state of his soul six years ago? We take everything into account that we know of him and find that his soul mood six years ago already had, unconsciously playing into it, the preparation for the death he was soon to meet. It played unconsciously into his feeling life at that time, his mood of soul. A person who is soon to die has quite a different mood of soul from one who still has long to live.

You begin by creating a clear picture of the state of soul someone had in the past. You form a picture of the mood of soul of the person by selecting some of the things he produced that year. You ask: What played into his soul life in that year? Then you look at what happened from his birth to the year you have selected. And then you look at everything from that year until the person’s death.

Steiner used his understanding of Goethe as an example. In the year 1790 his soul was filled with a combination of what was to come later, as well as what he had already experienced.

“A teacher must be able to regard life more profoundly, otherwise he will never succeed in handling the growing human being in an appropriate and productive way.”⁴⁷ This is important. We can learn to see our children in new ways. We dare ask ourselves what their mood of soul may be. We try to understand what has been in the past and also what may unfold in the future. This helps us meet them more deeply in the daily work. The next time we see them we may see something new!

Sources

All quotations are from *Practical Advice to Teachers*, Rudolf Steiner, Stuttgart, August 21 to September 5, 1919, GA 294, Rudolf Steiner Press, 1976.

(Typographer's note: Quotation marks have been omitted from much of the material from Steiner's lectures for readability. All sections are duly referenced in these endnotes.)

Educational Principles:

1. Lecture One, August 21, 1919, page 9
2. Lecture One, August 21, 1919, page 17
3. Lecture Two, August 22, 1919, page 39
4. Lecture Three, August 23, 1919, page 40
5. Lecture Five, August 25, 1919, page 74
6. Lecture Five, August 25, 1919, page 75
7. Lecture Five, August 25, 1919, page 83
8. Lecture Six, August 26, 1919, pages 88 and 89
9. Lecture Six, August 26, 1919, page 90
10. Lecture Thirteen, September 4, 1919, page 177

Methods

11. Lecture Four, August 24, 1919, pages 55–60
12. Lecture Four, page 61
13. Lecture Three, page 47
14. Lecture One, page 21
15. Lecture Four, page 61
16. Lecture Thirteen, page 180
17. Lecture Three, pages 48–51
18. Lecture Three, page 52
19. Lecture One, page 21
20. Lecture Four, page 66
21. Lecture Four, page 62
22. Lecture Six, page 93
23. Lecture Six, page 94
24. Lecture Six, page 94
25. Lecture Six, page 89
26. Lecture Four, page 69
27. Lecture Five, page 71
28. Lecture Five, page 73
29. Lecture One, page 14
30. Lecture One, page 16

31. Lecture One, page 16
32. Lecture Two, page 30
33. Lecture Two, page 32
34. Lecture Five, page 76
35. Lecture Five, page 77
36. Lecture Five, page 78
37. Lecture Four, page 64
38. Lecture Thirteen, page 181
39. Lecture Thirteen, page 184
40. Lecture Five, page 82
41. Lecture Thirteen, page 183
42. Lecture One, page 24
43. Lecture Thirteen, page 179
44. Lecture Three, Page 53

Knowledge of the Human Being

45. Lecture One, page 9

Exercises for Teachers

46. Lecture Two, page 36
47. Lecture Six, page 92