

# Encouragement for Sculptural Modeling

by

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Many class teachers find sculptural modeling (*plastisches Gestalten*) to be difficult to do regularly or at all with their students. Frequently responsibility for this activity is given over to art specialist teachers. This can mean that students only begin to model in the ninth grade in high school. Modeling is felt to be messy and dirty, and Rudolf Steiner's statements on the pedagogical justification and vital importance of this artistic activity are often overlooked or ignored.

These few short provocative comments should already indicate that what we have here is basically a problem of will and courage. And yet we have at our disposal a quite sufficient wealth of warm, enthusiastic insights and basic knowledge to fire up our wills and inspire us to model again with our children.

## **Curriculum Overviews can Be too Abbreviated**

The research document *Rudolf Steiner's Curriculum for Waldorf Schools* by Karl Stockmeyer provides a few scanty generalizations as preliminary information on the subject. They appear, however, as rather abstract and are therefore not especially encouraging. The second half of this book offers a few summary statements on modeling:

- The child should start modeling at the age of 9 or 10,
- The child should be taught to feel and follow the malleable forms with the hollow of his/her hands,
- Forms should be made purely for form's sake,

- The child should only discover afterwards similarities with outer material objects, and
- A real knowledge of the forms of the human organs can awaken a desire in the child for modeling which, however, should not become mere copying.

Such indications call for us to consider and study them in the actual contexts in which they appear in the various pedagogical lectures. Only then will they lose their abstractness and reveal, contrary to Stockmeyer’s opinion, that there are actually many indications. They have only been “forgotten.”

### **Basics out of Form-Feeling**

In the “Second Curriculum Lecture” (in *Discussions with Teachers* p. 198, GA 295, September 6, 1919) Rudolf Steiner outlines the subject matter for lessons in the grades. Just as geometric forms are to be developed in grades 1–4 out of form drawing and the fundamentals of painting introduced, so elementary aspects of sculptural activity are also to be practiced. The *zugemessene*, expressed importance, of this subject and its learning goals are made clear:

We continue this (fundamental artistic work in grades 1–4) by moving on to three-dimensional, malleable forms, using plasticine if it is available and whatever else you can get if it is not—even if it’s mud from the street, it doesn’t matter. The point is to develop the ability to see forms (*Formanschauen*) and sense forms (*Formgefühl*, form-feeling).

In the same context with the development of form drawing out of basic elements, modeling can:

awaken in the children the feeling for form before the urge to imitate outer objects awakens. . . . Do not let children imitate anything until they have cultivated their feeling for independent forms which can be imitated later. Stick to this principle even when you move on to a more independent and creative treatment of drawing, painting and modeling (*Bildnerischen* not translated and omitted in the 1997 English translation).

(“Second Curriculum Lecture,” *Discussions with Teachers*, p. 199)

In “The Third Curriculum Lecture” is a brief and unequivocal statement advocating early modeling:

Sculptural modeling should begin before the ninth year: first spheres, then other forms, and so on. Also with modeling one should work entirely out of the forms.  
( *Discussions with Teachers*, p. 178)

That the modeling Steiner had in mind does not consist of simply making “balls” or “spheres” will be shown in the end in this lecture (*zum Schluss gezeigt*).

Steiner returns to this idea of penetrating a changing, metamorphosing form with one’s feeling life (*des lebendigen Einfühlens in die werdende Form*) rather than a copying or imitation of finished, fixed forms in more detail in “Lecture One” of the course *Practical Advice to Teachers*. Just as with form drawing, the main point of the modeling activity is to experience and understand it as a process of transformation by “inwardly growing together with and into the form itself. The similarity with an outer object may be seen only afterwards. The capacity to experience and work with the “inner laws of sculptural formation,” as Steiner characterized them, cannot be awakened through external imitation. This capacity is optimally developed between ages 7–14. After this time, the ability to acquire this capacity wanes and dies. When it is not developed at the right time, according to Steiner, “human beings have a more difficult time mastering life’s struggles.” To help us experience and understand the sculptural process, he provides a methodological insight: just as in drawing, the unconscious movements of the hand can be raised into consciousness by following the forms with our eye movements, similarly a three dimensional, sculptural form can be felt by following and touching it all around. In this way, a person can become involved in a process that engages the fullest interest and proceeds from will activity over feeling into the beginnings of conscious awareness. This is an example of the educational method that gradually leads from will activity to the development of the intellect.

### **The Theme of Freedom**

In the “Christmas Course of 1922” we find the following statement:

However inconvenient it may be for the teacher, he or she should always encourage the young pupils to form shapes of all kinds out of any material they can lay hands on. True, one should avoid letting the children get unduly, dirty, and messy, for this can be a real nuisance. But what children gain in these creative activities is worth far more than remaining clean and tidy. In short, especially during the early years, it is of great value for them to gain an experience of the artistic element.

Anything that has to come from the child first has to be introduced in a way appropriate to its nature. And if artistic activities are introduced to the child in his first school years, in the way

indicated, the learning of other subjects will become easier. Foreign languages, for example, will be learned with far greater ease if pupils have done artistic work beforehand.

*(Soul Economy and Waldorf Education, GA 303, Lecture XII , January 3, 1922, p. 211)*

The expression “to come from” the child has to do with his/her “predisposition”: the child is inwardly a “sculptor.” That is to say, he/she builds his/her interior organs with the help of the formative life forces body that still predominate in the growth process up to ages 9–10. This inwardly plastic predisposition wants “to come out” first in the feeling and emotional life of the child which, in turn, works on and activates the will and from there gradually leads to the development of the intellect. From this methodological and developmental point of departure, the art of education can be developed. For this reason the examples of painting and modeling are presented in this lecture: (For other insights on the learning of writing and arithmetic, see the lecture on December 31, 1921).

Steiner explicitly indicates what he deems to be the most fundamental guiding thought of the entire art of pedagogy, which offers the possibility to the spiritual-soul part of the human being to develop out of the physical-bodily part:

From which educational maxim does such an attitude spring? It is the outcome of a total dedication towards freedom. It springs from the ideal to place the human being into the world in such a way that he can unfold his individual freedom or, at least, that physical hindrances should prevent him from doing so. *(Soul Economy and Waldorf Education, GA 303, Lecture XII, January 3, 1922, p.203.)*

The opposite of such an education would be the mere training of ready-made concepts and ideas without any respect for the physical-etheric development of the child.

### **The Theme of Balance**

A further indication for early modeling was given in the Ilkley Course of 1923 (GA 307). In Lecture 12, held on August 16, 1923, Steiner attributes a new role to the artistic element, which from the beginning was to be the basis of all teaching: as soon as the principle of cause and effect starts to enter the lessons, this more intellectual approach needs to be balanced out through an understanding of art. Modeling belongs in this realm:

Modeling too is cultivated as much as possible, albeit only from the ninth or tenth year and in a primitive way. It has a wonderfully vitalizing effect on the child’s physical sight and on the inner quality of soul in his sight, if, at the right age, he begins to model malleable

forms and figures. So many people go through life without even noticing what is most significant in the objects and events of their environment. As a matter of fact, we have to learn how to do it (*Sehenlernen*) before we can see and observe in the way that gives us our true position in the world. (*A Modern Art of Education*, Lecture XI, p.192)

In the same lecture Steiner says about the practical aim of “learning how to see” that sculptural dexterity is also necessary in order to grasp plant formations. The experience of transformations in sculptural activity creates the ability to direct congealed concepts (which only comprehend mineral and physical reality) into image forms.

### **“By Itself...”**

In Lecture 13 of the Ilkley Course, Steiner speaks about connections between sculptural modeling and craft lessons; the artistic and practical overlap.

To lead play gradually into to the creation of artistic forms and then to the practical work . . . is to act in complete harmony with the demands of man’s nature. And it is increasingly interesting to find that the children’s malleable, artistic activity turns quite naturally “by itself” (i.e., through the children’s own creative initiative with the right kind of teacher support and guidance) to the making of playthings and toys.

(*A Modern Art of Education*, GA 307, Lecture 12, p.197)

These words “by itself” should not be taken too lightly as it is assumed that the entire lesson is carried out artistically. In the lecture reference is made to an exhibition of students’ work and the theme of “by itself” appears again. In the lessons on human and animal forms are to arise not out of an imitation or copying but out of free creative activity after the children have “learned to read in the mind of Nature.” Behind this stands the method to not only occupy the head with knowledge, but also to clothe ideas in such image forms that they become living ideas and move from feeling into willing. Thus, it becomes possible for students to be able to make what they know. There then arises: “*Konnendes Wissen*” (capable knowing) and “*wissendes Konnen*” (the knowing capability). (*A Modern Art of Education*, GA 307, August 17, 1923.)

When one can feel ideas, then these ideas are not just dry concepts but living ideas, which grip the entire human being in thinking, feeling, and willing. Steiner formulates this paradoxically: “The idea is a malleable form. The child actually learns to do, to make, what he learns to think.” That sounds almost like the modern artist Joseph Beuys, but who inspired him?

But “by itself” does not mean alone without support, but rather the emergent expression should be the consequence of a developmentally appropriate lesson and of living ideas in the teacher herself. In the lectures from Torquay, England and Arnheim, Holland, Steiner brings an example of such a living idea. He speaks about the introduction of writing, once again making a case for early modeling. Besides “painting-drawing” (*malendes Zeichnen*) and “drawing-painting” (*zeichnenden Malens*) “we bring the child as much as possible into the artistic element and the modeling of small malleable works, without the teacher wanting anything other than what the child naturally wants to make out of the form from an inner creativity (*Human Values in Education*, GA 310, Lecture 3).

Here again the theme of “by itself” is touched and Steiner gives an example of it for the first study of the human being. When students have learned something of the dynamic of human bone structure artistically and not intellectually and have modeled bones afterwards, forms of even the simplest things become something more. Such aliveness can only come about when a child has a feeling for form. It does not come out of book knowledge in which everything is all lined up but unrelated and without visible interconnections. Steiner sets the bar very high for teachers when he assumes that they are entirely at home in the living reality of Goethe’s metamorphosis of the bones. “When the children holds a vertebra bone of the spine, they know its similarities to a bone of the skull; they develop a feeling for what the transformation of bones is. Then they live into human forms and the urge to express this artistically” (*Human Values in Education*, GA 310, July 19, 1924). And imagine! Steiner proposed this for 10–11 year olds!

### **The Etheric Body as Sculptor**

Working with the living in order to become alive oneself means to be in the process of understanding the etheric body better and better. In Lecture 4 of the Arnheim Course (July 20, 1924), Steiner calls it the greatest work of art because its essence makes it both a work of art and an artist at the same time. “Insofar as we bring the forming forces of art to children and model with them in a free way, we are bringing what is deeply related to the etheric body. “

Supplementary to this theme, we find in the Torquay Course that the etheric body is a modeler, a sculptor. It transforms the inherited model body of the child into an individualized, personalized one; the malleable, sculptural forces involved in this process become free and active in the soul. “This is why the child has an impulse to model forms or to paint them. For the first seven years of life the life body has been carrying out modeling and painting within the physical body. Now that it has nothing further to do regarding the physical body, or at least not as much as before, it wants to carry its activity outside.” (*The Kingdom of Childhood*, GA311,

Lecture 6, August 18, 1924) Again it is presumed that the teacher will only be able to provide guidance to the child when he himself has an artistic picture of the human organism. Mind you! It needs to be a truly artistic one, not simply an anatomical one as demonstrated in the recent exhibitions of dissected human corpses hardened in plastic—the exhibitions around the world called “Body Worlds.” Steiner’s recommendations for the training of teachers do not involve the copying of stuffed organs, but rather with the development of living principles of life. Modeling, should become a science seminar in which one can grasp the body of formative life forces (see *Human Values in Education*, GA 310, Lecture 8, July 24, 1924).

He suggests that teachers individually continue to work out further what they do not have time to explore sculpturally in teacher training. In this connection, I recommend *The Harmony of the Human Body; Musical Principles in Human Physiology*, (Floris Books, 1994) by Dr. Armin J. Husemann, MD. This book offers concrete suggestions for working with Steiner’s modeling exercises for the outer human Gestalt, for form inversion, and for the etheric body of the lung.

### **Pathways to Modeling**

How can one do justice to Steiner’s numerous and urgent appeals for early modeling? One can start by allowing these important ideas to penetrate one’s consciousness:

1. The etheric body as sculptor and the sculptural exercises that relate to its activity,
2. Goethe’s metamorphosis idea relating to both plants and bones, and
3. Steiner’s idea of the threefoldness of the human organism.

With respect to threefoldness we find stimulating indications for animal studies in the Torquay Course (*The Kingdom of Childhood*, GA311, Lecture 3, August 14, 1924): The human being is in a harmonious form, which brings into balance what lives itself out in the animals as all sorts of one-sided, specializations of form, in a kind of elastic metamorphosis, expanded or contracted, blown up or stunted organ systems and shapes (*Gestalten*)—all wonderful motifs for creative shaping (*Gestalten*) and re-shaping (*Umgestalten*). Steiner describes similar motifs of transformation in the animal world in Lecture 4 of the Arnheim Course (*Human Values in Education*, GA 310, July 20, 1924).

A wealth of practical advice is provided in the book *Plastisches Gestalten für all Alterstufen (Sculptural Modeling for All Age Levels*, Mellinger Verlag, Stuttgart 1969 by Anke-Usche Clausen and Martin Riedel: No English translation is yet available, but the hundreds of illustrations provide many sculptural ideas and

make this book universally valuable. Almost all of Steiner's indications for modeling are cited and taken up methodically in this book. One still has to work at developing a fuller picture of the subject for oneself and finding all sorts of interconnections by referring back to Steiner's pedagogical lectures. But the Clausen and Riedel book offers a treasure trove of quotations, suggestions and, above all, superb sketches indicating how to practically engage in the activity of modeling: modeling exercises for experiencing the creative space of our hands and elementary forms, examples for human and animal shapes and much more! They show how one might creatively and freely work with such a basic curriculum instruction from Steiner as: "Sculptural modeling should begin before the ninth year, first spheres, then other forms and so on. Also with modeling one should work entirely out of the forms." (*Discussions with Teachers*, Lecture XV, p.178). They provide inspiration for developing many possible sculptural ideas: round/elongated,/light/heavy/symmetrical/asymmetrical/oval/bulging in and out, drop forms and countless others that can arise out of the surfaces of the hands and fingers. Some "old hats" might find it remarkable that such a "well known book" that has been around for so long is being rediscovered at this time. But "new hats" and class teachers are entering the work all the time and may come to know how extremely valuable the standard work of Anke-Usche Clausen and Martin Riedel is even if it appears in a somewhat old-fashioned outfit.

### Summary

- From grade 1 on clay-modeling should be practiced in an elementary way as thoroughly, simply and in an imaginative method as the well known formdrawing and painting.
- The aims, which can be reached through modelling, are manifold: with short term and long term effects
- The appropriate methods were worked out by Anke-Usche Clausen in Hannover before 1969 and are to be found in the book:

Anke-Usche Clausen und Martin Riedel,  
*Plastisches Gestalten für alle Altersstufen*  
Mellinger Verlag, Stuttgart 1969.

A comparable resource for the education for the blind is Karl Spitzer and Margarete Lange's book *Tasten und Gestalten: Kunst und Kunsterziehung bei Blinden*, (Waldkirch, 1982). These methods have been used effectively from grade 1 onward. Steiner's indications are also included for the so-called healthy and normal students and are suitable all the more.