

# THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

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## PHYSICAL TRAINING A DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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The human body in its wonderful structure and marvelous mechanism is expressive of the highest that in art is conceivable. Its study, as an entity, as a living creation, invites the profoundest inquiry; it embraces the whole realm of human wisdom. To mold the living nature, as it were, is the matchless and priceless privilege of the teacher.

Three great art fields are distinguishable: that of the plastic art of the human body, as implied in all its developmental possibilities—in its activities; that of the cultural arts; and that of the representative arts.

This view, I believe, includes all the virility and elemental qualities fundamental to the modern superstructure of high culture.

The first, fundamental or preparatory field concerns itself with the physical as the basis of the psychical activities. Either, as power develops and matures, or both, constitutes the forces determining the harmonious adjustment necessary to success in all later endeavor.

The portrayal, indeed, of the living art-work constitutes the art of arts, and represents the highest aesthetical worth. Arguments for its emphasis, when presented on approved pedagogical principles, cannot be denied. The quickening influences, however, so essential to a recognition of its legitimate place and

bearing in education, have been slow to materialize, overshadowed as they have been in our time by the hue and cry of huge endeavor. Discrepancies in methods, consequent upon an over-emphasis of what constitutes the popular conception of physical training, as contrasted with the legitimate aspects of the work, are also responsible in no small measure for the hesitancy of even some of our most innovating educators in turning the tide of their solitudes in the direction of this fundamentally important work.

The general conception of an educational rationale has always been more or less tinged with the utilitarian hues of our material progress. The ideal of a product, mentally and physically superior in every respect, is with difficulty construed in terms of its proximate equivalent. The interpretation of the phrase, "physical, mental, and moral education," has been singularly one-sided. Broadly construed, physical training always has had a rather general significance. Specifically construed, it has not yet been satisfactorily or fully adjudged in its initial import as signifying a department of education, although its bearing upon education has been demonstrated beyond cavil and doubt.

There is as yet, it is true, no royal way to perfection. The inquiries bestowed upon the intellectual pursuits have not been focused in a like manner upon the purely physical. The sheer endless sources of profitable inquiry concerning the human organism and its adaptability, as affecting the superior qualities of conduct and habit, have remained more or less obscure, and, it may be said, despite our progress in the related sciences, that the present-day student is not enlightened with respect to his organism and its functions in a manner possible with the means and resources at hand. "Were it not for the marvelous self-adjusting and self-regulating power of the human machine," it has been pertinently said, "we should utterly fail in our faith in progress, as determined by the tardy application of the modern doctrine of the human body."

The very gradual elimination of confusion existing between truth and probability, however, has lent tone to the general

endeavor. Not "what is," but "what should be," is the stimulating motive of the exponent of progress.

Physical training, as an agent in our modern development, has steadily advanced through the demands for its better organization. This advance has not been in every way satisfactory, nor in concord with the purposes of education, whenever it resulted in a régime designated merely hygienic or recreative. It has been satisfactory whenever it reflected the needs of the individual, physical nature in nerve-stimulating and regulating work, "garbed in youthful pleasure and merriment," based upon pedagogical principles, and governed by the laws of mind and body.

Some of the methods nurtured in the schools owe their origin to conditions quite different from those prevailing in them, and are at variance with the avowed purposes of education. But, between the tenets of an ever-ready reasoning and the unsolved problems of the positive people, they serve their purposes in lieu of something better to displace them.

The probing of methods under the prevailing conditions is as futile as the inoperative demand in some of our school systems that the regular teacher shall adapt himself to this branch of work.

The solution of the problem of what shall be subservient to the most profitable results in physical training or education is a matter that must appeal to the professional schools, warranted by virtue of their determining influences in organizing well-equipped departments of physical training for the better guidance of the prospective teacher, in order that his interest in the physical welfare of his charges may become enabled to reinforce the superior mental equipment demanded in our time in all lines of pursuit.

It is gratifying, indeed, that the synthesis of opinion of a steadily growing coterie of critical educationists at present is gravitating toward the conviction that the most fruitful interpretation of the nature, scope, and spirit of this very interesting subject rests with its organization as a department of pedagogical discipline. A desire is being urged for an evaluation of the

correlated factors constituting the various aims advanced for physical training that shall conduce to a more pronounced general and rational progress. The enhancement of the work is demanded to the end that it be made more real and vital, rather than appear as an artificial makeshift—as content. As a legitimate agent in actual life it should find its enhancement in most subjects taught in the school curriculum, and notably in the biological sciences. Preferences for the quasi-approved procedures, whether hygienic, developmental, recreative, or remedial, are kept in abeyance pending this somewhat conservative stand.

Experiment and inquiry have proved much to augur this promising distinction. The growing conception of the value of pedagogy and personal skill, as applied to the intellectual unity presented in the child's body, for instance, must ultimately determine the course of true physical training, and obviate the vexatious uncertainties due to a lack of coherent procedure. The superficial notion of utilizing gymnastic instruction as a perfunctory means of recreation, and as an incidental expedient for remedial purposes, to the exclusion of its larger function in the curriculum, is rightfully viewed as somewhat narrow by all who have thought seriously of the matter.

Not only the steadily growing significance of physical training in our elementary schools, but the phenomenal interest in athletics in our secondary schools as well, confront the authorities, who must determine the policy of the schools with reference to the order of their importance, with an interesting situation.

Whatever the background of the underlying charm, the actuating motive, or the intelligence directing the respective activities involved in systematic physical culture and the qualities cultivated, the most salutary effects of this large, interesting subject can accrue only through a definite and comprehensive scheme, embodying all the factors determinative in the work—adaptation of physical culture to the youth of all ages. To become effective, such a scheme must find the teacher of the future indorsed for the views he holds with reference to it. This demand, already emphasized in many normal schools, will in

time insure a policy more in harmony with our interests than is the present athletic spirit.

In the interim, owing to the scant ingenuity displayed in a dissemination of knowledge and information, conveying the scope of physical training, the personal element discounts the pedagogical. The athletic interest exceeds the interest for a scheme of educational merit, the discomfiture of occasional criticisms being offset by the verdict that nothing short of these practices in a like manner can conduce to the sturdier and more desirable qualities developed in aspiring youth. The last resource in innumerable schools is had in a recourse to the seasonable in- and outdoor sports, admittedly the best substitutes for educative physical training. The principles or prerequisites of proficiency, as they affect the body of our school youth, are left to solve themselves. The characteristic alternatives represent the extremes of procedure on the one hand, and stimulation to supreme effort on the other—the distinction claimed for purely corrective work.

What is the function of organized gymnastics in the school? The function of gymnastics in the schools is to further the attainment of the ideal of education. This ideal may be variously expressed in a robust manhood of superior mental and physical quality and fiber, representing the qualities fundamental to an ideal citizenship; or, it may concern itself with the remoter concept of an exalted nationality, when it engenders a deep-rooted and fervent patriotism—a sentiment always to be transformed into a determining principle. With such an ideal as a motive, gymnastics represents more than a mere diversion—it attains a newer significance and becomes an art. “Living, acting, conceiving” form the triple chord within the child of every man, though the sound of this chord, now of that, and then again of two together, may preponderate.”

The gymnasium, as a school of self-realization, represents a social institution, where the “pleasure of being strong lies in the fact that others around us are strong, thereby furnishing us with companionship and healthy competition, the fuel of life.” Under this conception “health becomes incidental, and not the deliberate object of exercise.” The ever-increasing body of scientific knowl-

edge concerning the formative and developmental shapes of early life determines the means to be employed in its preservation.

Means, purposive in a hygienic sense alone, cannot be conducive to that interest in activity which represents the source of all volition, nor do they beget an atmosphere of cheerfulness. Gymnastics proper, on the other hand, which deal with ever new and interesting movement-concepts that train, not only in careful observation and estimation of distances and objects, and in the exercise of comparative judgment, and to reason in countless ways, and to appreciation of symmetry and form-beauty, but also to reason for the great perspective, the remote and final outcome, and to avoid the dangers of unprofitable deviations—such gymnastics must represent the school that would bring into play all the faculties.

The gymnasium should represent the very essence of community life. Through its work, help, play, and companionship, it influences and strengthens character toward the larger opportunities of life. It is a place where the growing boy's heart is thrilled with the power of right and robust resolution; where he is constantly brought into new relations; where encouragement bears fruit quickest and becomes most lasting; where reproof touches to the quick; where the varied phases of life-activity preclude all dry mastery; where power is developed to think and reflect, to execute and originate, not through direction alone, but also through exercise; "where order and propriety go hand in hand; where wilfulness is restrained, energy stored, and skill developed." So regarded, the gymnasium represents a correlation of factors emphasizing to the fullest all conduct.

Can the aspects of this training become realized in a scheme of school gymnastics? Thought and action be so adjusted, and motive so instilled, as to enhance interest in physical education?

Can there be any question as to who should assume responsibility in the espousal of this tremendous factor in our school life?