

HARMONIOUS RELATIONS BETWEEN PHYSICAL TRAINING & HANDICRAFTS.

Mens sana in corpore sano!

To those who have even casually studied the Ling System of Swedish Gymnastics, the harmonious working of these two points is immediately felt.

The prompt individual action required from each pupil, the gradual progress from simple to difficult exercises and the idea that “each individual is the unit by which his strength must be measured” appeal with force to the Educationist. Can this development of mind and body be still further carried out?

A few words on another Swedish educational system—Slöjd—may be an answer to the question.

The word Slöjd is recognisable in our own *sleight* of hand, and Slöjd or Sloyd the *thing* is a system of educational school hand work, which can be carried on throughout the whole of the school life of boys and girls. We say *can*;—ought it not rather to be emphasised that Sloyd is an essential part of every school curriculum and of paramount importance!

It should be clearly understood that it is Card-board Sloyd that is considered essential for the full development of the child, and not Wood Sloyd, which is of secondary and later importance.

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To each child is given a thin piece of card-board, a sloyd knife, a ruler marked off into centimeters, and a strip of glued binding. After a few essays in cutting and binding the child begins simple models, such as mats, key labels and other flat articles, which by gradual progression lead on to slip covers, boxes, portfolios, photograph frames, and eventually to bookbinding.

At first the fingers have little power of manipulation and the knife is an unruly instrument, but it is not long before complete command of tools and materials is gained.

Some of the immediate results of Cardboard Sloyd training are, deftness of fingers, accuracy of eye, and perfection of finish, all unconsciously acquired by the enthusiastic worker. In the opinion of experts no other handicrafts afford so good an ethical training as that gained through a course of Sloyd. The exactitude and truthfulness of the work promotes the tendency to veracity and uprightness in conduct; firmness in the use of tools leads to decision of action; while the discrimination between good and bad work, gained by experience goes far towards choosing between what is valuable or worthless in life.

Moral progress in the individual necessitates self-respect and self-confidence in the individual; therefore the feeling that he can create and complete his own model unaided is of the utmost educational value to the child.

Self-confidence should not in any way counteract the no less important virtues of admiration of good work in others, and a desire to give of one's best to them.

In considering Educational Handicraft Training, it is interesting to those engaged in Physical Training to see how much the one may depend upon the other for perfection.

It may be said that a perfect system of handicrafts tends to increase and refine on individual lines the powers of mind and body already developed by a perfect system of gymnastics.

We can see how the finger stretching and clasping paves the way for the individual use of the ten fingers, when binding or glueing a Sloyd model. The nerve and decision gained in the grasping and suspension movements help in the mastery and use of tools; while wrist exercises considerably ease the sweeping movements so often needed in wood-carving.

A complete course of Educational Handicrafts would

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include book-binding, wood-carving, embossed leather work, hammered brass, clay modelling, basket work, needlework, &c.

In Swedish Gymnastics as well as in Card-board Sloyd and other handicrafts we note (*a*) the materials used are adapted to the strength of the individual, (*b*) they are graded in order of difficulty (*c*) they must be interesting, and (*d*) that the best results are obtained by the concentration of the will.

Increased physical development necessarily demands as an outcome, some form of manual work. Concentrated animal force may become an evil, but provide a rational outlet and such force becomes a powerful factor in ethical progress.

To the brain-worker, the highly strung or physically delicate, the quiet influence of a handicraft is of great benefit—a delightful hobby, and a most restful recreation.

Brain energy can in some cases be stimulated only by means of increased activity of the fingers, and in these days of neurotics and highly strung persons of all ages, it is well for Educationists to realize how important a part Educational Handicrafts (based on a thorough knowledge of Card-board Sloyd) are likely to play in the treatment of normal as well as abnormal children.

The idea is borne in upon one, that in order to rightly carry out the spirit of the Ling System, more attention should be given to the careful articulation of the fingers in order that the mental powers may be further developed and strengthened.

It has been well said that some of us are “hand-brained,” and thus dependent to a great extent on manual dexterity for mental activity. Others may seemingly require no such stimulus, in which case handicrafts should be considered in the light of restorative nerve tonics.

It will be interesting to know how far a Swedish Gymnastic Teacher would agree with such further development of a system which aims at producing “in each individual the highest possible degree of health and physical culture.” The Teacher of Handicrafts sees a much greater advance in mental and moral force where the child is physically and mentally exercised on the splendidly sane lines of Peter Henrik Ling’s Gymnastic System. Thus arises the natural question:—Would not trained Gymnastic Teachers add to

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their scope of influence by taking Handicrafts as a Third Year Course? In this way not only gaining quiet recreative employment for themselves, but considerably increasing their professional value personally and pecuniarily.

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