American Physical Education Review (Volume 27)

American Physical Education Association

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THE NEWER AIMS OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND ITS PSYCHOPHYSICAL SIGNIFICANCE.

WILLIAM H. BURN HAM, CLARK UNIVERSITY.

In the present educational crisis no form of education justifies its existence which does not contribute something to world education, to the solution of the great problems of civilization, and render definite and significant service in the great. conflict between wisdom and folly, between truth and error, by developing health and sanity, attitudes of service and cooperation, and. active democratic ideals.

In this conflict physical education has done its part, as splendidly illustrated during the war; but recent studies from widely different points of view indicate that the significance of such education is greater than most people, even those engaged in the work, imagine. On the one hand psychological studies of the mental processes and attitudes show the important psychophysical results of physical training; and on the other hand, the studies of practical teachers of physical education emphasize its larger significance in the development of personal character.

In play, from the earliest years of childhood, in gymnastics of every kind, and in the higher and more complex sports and forms of athletics, not only is the raw material for thought–motor images, memory of various situations, and the like–furnished, but attitudes, associations and habits, significant for efficiency and morale, are developed.

The following are some of the psycho-physical aspects of the subject not usually sufficiently emphasized.

1. Firstof all, physical trainingis based on what we may call the most funda mental of all human impulses, the instinct, if you please, to activity. This is, in a sense, deeper than the instincts, so called, it is rather the matrix out of which the instincts are differentiated and developed. It is the impulse to activity for its own sake. This

is seen in the young child, impelling him to do the same thing over and over again, merely for the sake of the action itself; it appears, as we all know, even in the cradle, when the infant, for example, kicks himself free from the blankets that bind him and then exults in a debauch of motor activity. It is, too, the last thing that a real man loses when even his interests and emotions are lost in the stress of a hostile environment, as illustrated so vividly by Tack Londons story, "Love of Life."

Many readers will recall that the story is of a miner with a bag of gold and a pack of blankets, but with a sprained ankle, deserted by his sole companion, without food, with an empty rifle, far from human aid in the barren, desolate region of the Arctic. Day after day he limps painfully on his journey; gradually human instincts and passions go; the gold is kept, divided, finally thrown away. The sense of pain is numbed, the awful hunger dies; hallucinations come, wierd visions; reason becomes intermittent, spasmodic, finally abdicates; even fear seems dead; when he falls exhausted he sleeps, when he wakes, the instinct to action and the love of life drive him on, a mere human animal, impelled by this sole impulse and the remnants of human will; and this object, when discovered by a group of scientific voyagers is thus described. "It was blind, unconscious. It squirmed along the ground like some monstrous worm. Most of its efforts were ineffectual, but it was persistent and it writhed, twisted and went ahead, perhaps a score of feet an hour." Thus the last thing that remains is the manifestation of this impulse to activity. To this fundamental impulse we can always appeal.

2. Physical exercise in the form of coordinated activity represents in its lowest and simplest terms the training of the human will; and thus in all cases of defect the opportunity for training the will is offered in the various forms of motor activity. Here in simple terms and large letters is represented all that the human will in its highest forms of activity can accomplish; and thus in a very literal sense, movement, action, represents the Alpha and Omega of human life. Thought is unexpressed, love unknown, and the will a slave, unless the muscles contract. The sublimity of the human will, which, with the starry heavens above and the moral law within, divided the admiration of Kant, shares some of its grandeur with the tiniest muscle, because the development of the will has. been largely dependent upon the development of the muscles, because without them its autonomy would remain unknown.

3. The educational significance of physical training is seen especially in the attitudes of attention and concentration that are developed. Inattention seldom occurs in the movement plays, in the various forms of gymnastics and the like, and there is no dawdling. If it does occur the defect can soon be remedied.

4. Again, the significance of physical training is seen from the fact that it affords the means for control of emotion. The mechanism for expressing the emotions and the mechanism for motor activity are the same. If this apparatus is kept busy with coordinated motor activity, there is little opportunity or nervous energy for emotion. Thus the soldiers tell us that at the front they had no time to be afraid.

The significance of physical training lies largely in the fact that it gives a variety of opportunities for coordinated activity. This may not sound especially significant; but for many forms of mental disorder the best prevention or cure is some form of coordinated activity in orderly thinking or physical accomplishment. As day by day

one slowly enlarges the scope of ones coordinated activity, one builds a protection against distracting emotion.

The trying situations of childhood, "When a feller needs a friend," the occasions of worry, or fear, and rage, represent opportunity for the most important training. Everything is prepared for action. Vigorous action is normal. The repression of action probably means short circuiting and nervous strain. Normal activity for a child on occasion of fear, for example, may be to run away from the object of emotion or to attack it. The latter is morally better and usually safer and more healthful. By attempting always to do the best thing in a difficult situation, a habit of the utmost importance for the mental health is soon developed.

5. The significance of physical training is nowhere shown more emphatically than in the mental attitudes orsets of the mind developed. The Physical Education Committee mentions some of the more generic of these,–self-confidence, self-control, poise, alertness, resourcefulness, decision, courage, aggressiveness, initiative. These, formerly developed by farm life and home activities, must now be ensured by other means than the ordinary family can supply. To these I will ask your special attention.

We have learned at least one thing in education, and this has been emphasized by the war, namely, the fact that the important things are the attitudes, interests and morale developed in the school. Children carry away very little book learning from the schools, as everybody knows, but the attitudes and interests developed are of vital significance, not only for the success and efficiency of the individual, but for the mental health as well.

Such attitudes are of various degrees of concreteness and are connected with all our occupations.

The different concrete attitudes and the way they change with a slight change of the situation is illustrated over and over again in our daily life. It makes a great difference, for example, in ones attitude toward an automobile if he is riding in it or attempting to dodge it while crossing the street; and one easily forgives an unlawful increase of speed in the one case, but finds it hard to condone it in the other. It makes a vast difference in our attitude toward the tricks and mannerisms of our daily life whether they are performed by us or by our neighbors; when my friend drums with his fingers, or practices on the piano it is intolerable, but it acts as a nerve sedative when I do it myself.

Of the more concrete attitudes, illustrations from domestic life are likely to be trite, those from the laboratory, on the other hand, too technical. We get plenty of examples, however, from the playground and the schoolroom. Men who have played in the great football games tell us of the tremendous nervous strain that accompanies what looks to be an easy play. The mind is set for a difficult play and it does not shift easily to the unexpected easy play. And again they tell us that in difficult situations the player is often likely to have a sort of stage fright, due to a confusion, perhaps, of attitudes. His mind is cast for a definite play and it is often very difficult for him to do anything else. Thus a game like one of the ball games is the occasion of a variety of definite concrete attitudes.

The different plays, kicking, passing, catching a punt, tackling, in football; catching flies or grounders, and the like, in baseball, represent each a definite attitude or

adjustment of the psychophysic mechanism, and this is demonstrated not only by the introspection of the players, but by the inability of the player to change instantly from one attitude to another. Brickley, the Harvard football player, has given concrete instances of this, among which are the following:

"Catching a punt in the defensive back field in the face of a good pair of opposing ends calls for the highest degree of concentration, and especially if the kick is high and apparently easy. Men who have played this position in a big game, tell of the tremendous nervous strain that accompanies what looks to be one of the easiest plays in football. In baseball it is

Sunday Herald, November 17, 1912.

almost an axiom that the easiest play in a very critical game is the hardest to make. A very soft fly or the easiest sort of a slow grounder is most often harder to negotiate than the more spectacular chance. The mind is keyed to the most difficult sort of a proposition. It doesnt shift easily to the unexpected. "Tackling is another obvious illustration of the necessity of absolute concentration at a given moment. It is the easiest thing in the world to sit in the stands and watch one player chase another across the field, running almost neck and neck and yet not making an attempt to reach out and tackle. It is perhaps the most frequent exhibition of freezing up that football affords. The man in the stands nine times out of ten is prone to make the harshest criticisms. He doesnt realize that the player is trying his utmost to get his nerve wires into shape for the dive and clutch. He is just as much cast for the moment as the tumbler who finds that he cannot turn the somersault. His mind is wandering to an extent that makes it impossible to gather himself into the rather complicated operation of even the most rudimentary sort of a football tackle."

With sound psychological insight Brickley distinguished from his own experience these sets of the mind, the attitudes, to which modern research in the psychological laboratory has come to close quarters. Deeper than the world of sensations, images and ideas, what, as we say, is placed before the mind, the world of the Vorstellung as the Germans call it, is the world of feeling, will, and attitude, what is inherent in the mind, the Einstel-lung. The deeper structure of our psycho-physic mechanism is made up of a vast complex system of such sets and attitudes, with associated patterns and associated reflexes and habits.

In all the work of the school such attitudes are developed–attitudes toward the subjects studied, the discipline, the teachers, the school as a group, and more concrete attitudes determined by the instructions given, the questions asked, and the concrete situations of the classroom. No more than the ball player in the stress of the game are the pupils always conscious of these attitudes.

In physical education we now see the importance of these attitudes and they are rightly emphasized, since they so largely condition the nervous acquisitions and the mental health.

All this, as I am well aware, is somewhat vague and indefinite. But we see it more clearly than before the war. It has been pointed out that the waste of the war is not measured merely by property losses and the physical loss from disease and wounds, but also by the shock and degeneration of the nervous system of different peoples and the loss of these habits of healthful activity.

The higher and more complex acquisitions of the human nervous system and human character, the ability to do orderly and efficient work, to be contented and exercise self-control, habits of healthful activity of the most commonplace sort, represent complex acquisitions of the higher order. As a recent writer has pointed out, following the terrible nervous strain of the war, whole populations in Europe have dropped back toward barbarism by losing these commonplace habits of orderly and self-controlled living in society.

These habits and acquisitions of the nervous system and human character, that we find so tremendously significant as soon as they are lost, have been neglected or taken for granted. They have not figured as part of the aim of education. Hereafter the emphasis will be more upon them. They are precisely what right physical education develops.

In the development of physical education, roughly, three stages are apparent. In the first stage the aim of physical training was the healthful development of the body and improvement of its physical functions. Guts Muths, the grandfather, as he has been called, of German gymnastics, advocated physical training for the body directly, for the mind only indirectly. The end of gymnastics is, according to him, the perfection of the body, involving four things,–endurance, strength, skill and beauty.

In the second stage of physical education, the aim of bodily perfection of course still remained; but the mental value of it was recognized. Presence of mind, courage, beauty of mind, clearness and sharpness of thought, indirect aims with Guts Muths, were emphasized as among the primary aims. It recognized that all such forms of motor training develop the motor centers in the brain, ensure a store of motor images, represent the elements of human experience, and give the raw material out of which the fabric of our mental life is built. The importance of first-hand experience of ones own ability and of ones relations to ones environment, is now being realized from the fact that the higher forms of education, even formal education in arithmetic, reading, and the like, do not yield their proper value, unless based on wide experience with the concrete realities of nature. The scientific method itself demands the constant correcting of our thinking by reference to experience. Without this, one becomes at least pseudo-ieeble-minded, unable to reason correctly. In no way can such acquaintance with the facts of experience be given so well as in the different forms of motor activity, especially in the plays and spontaneous activities of children.-

We have now reached what may be called the third stage of physical education; the importance of such training for the body is still recognized, its significance in giving the raw material for thought, and as a condition of normal brain development, is recognized; but besides this it is seen that physical training has its supreme value in the training, as we loosely say, of the will, in the development of mental and moral attitudes, and the development of morale. While we may not go so far as Plato and say that God gave men music and gymnastics for mental culture alone, we do now emphasize the development of healthful attitudes and interests as the culminating value of such training.

Significant as emphasizing this higher stage and the newer aims of physical education is the recent report of the committee, composed of Professors Leonard, of Oberlin College, Mckenzie. of the University of Pennsylvania, and Raycroft, of Princeton

University, reported in School Life, February, 1921. This report to the Society of Directors of Physical Education in Colleges on the aims of physical training is significant because it places emphasis on the development of mental health, right mental attitudes, and the spirit of self-sacrifice, loyalty and co operation, as well as on the more conventional aims of physical education.

Since these attitudes are largely of social value the Physical Education Committee gives some of the more generic of them as their first group of the aims of physical education. They say:

"If we conceive the perfecting of the individual in his social relations to be of greater importance than more purely personal values we may well begin our list of aims with certain qualities developed by appropriate group. activities, particularly games and athletic sports, practiced under favorable conditions. It is through these agencies that the child and youth most readily and naturally acquire habits of obedience, subordination, self-sacrifice, cooperation and friendliness, loyalty, capacity for leadership, ability to lose without sulking and win without boasting, a spirit of fair play, and all that is implied in the word sportsmanship."

As I have already said, physical education has made its contribution; but it is unfortunate that its influence should be so narrow; that out of 500 pupils in a high school not more than 50 take an active part in the sports; that in a college with 2000 students not more than 200 share in the athletics except by cheering from the bleachers, and that after these men leave school and college their interest in active sports is not sufficiently intense to transfer to the kind of sport and physical recreation available outside, tennis, golf, riding, rowing, swimming, skating and the like; that the majority of men, both in college and outside, get their physical recreation vicariously, is most deplorable.

The test of physical education in the schools and colleges is in the permanent interests in such exercises that the students carry with them into life when they leave school. That the majority of urban residents get their only physical exercise in the subways is again unfortunate. Not that in any wise would I depreciate the value of this form of exercise! According to a recent writer, the owners of the subways have provided "the greatest outdoor physical training school for both sexes that the world has ever known. primarily a subway is not a railway but a gymnasium." I am ready to admit also the mental and moral advantages of the subway training, that among subway vir tues are stoicism, self-control, politeness, graciousness and patience. All this, how-ever, good as it may be, is not enough. Gauged in terms of interest, as all education should be, physical education is a failure that does not develop an interest permanent and intense enough to stimulate one to exercise after leaving school and college.

Note for a moment the still wider significance of our subject. Physical education offers one of the means by which we may hope to save our civilization and democracy. In the team sports we have actual training in democracy, obedience to law and authority, the sacrifice of individual interest for the sake of the group, cooperation, integration of the knowledge and ability of the group for a common purpose.

While it is regrettable, as some one has suggested, that so much of the energy of the players in the team sports is expended in quarreling with the umpire, there is here,

too, the opportunity for civic training of the first importance, since the players should be taught that in all such games no individuals judgment is infallible, but that some, one must decide things; and that a good umpire, like a good executive officer in civic life, is one who decides things and is sometimes right.

Whenever in the team sports the individual player sacrifices his own desires and his own interest for the success of the team, that is patriotism, and whenever the pupil in the school sacrifices his own interest for the sake of the school as a social group that is patriotism. The significant thing is that sacrifice of personal interest in the smaller groups, that is, training in patriotism in the smaller groups, is the best sort of preparation for the virtue of patriotism in the larger groups, the community and the state. Only by such training can we give preparation for actual democratic service in the larger social groups,–the state and the nation. Only from those who have had such training can we hope for democratic leaders.

As leaders in a democracy we need, not superior men who can dominate a group, who can force their own opinions upon others. We say in popular phrase, everybody knows more than everybody; yet what does it profit that the wisdom of the group is greater than that of the individ ual if every one wishes to dominate the group and to force ones own opinion upon others? What is needed is rather iik-! i who can subordinate their personal opinions, men who can learn from a group, men who can integrate the wisdom and ability of a group. Again, not those whose ideal is mere cooperation among friends but those who can cooperate with others of diverse opinions and conflicting interests; men like Lincoln, who could harmonize conflicting opinions, work with those personally opposed to him, integrate the wisdom of a hostile group; men like Root of to-day, who also has this ability to bring together opposing factions and integrate the wisdom of a group of diverse interests and opinions.

Finally, if one asks how physical training can be organized, what methods can be employed to bring about these higher educational results of the training, the key to this answer is to be found in play itself. The spontaneous plays of children, and especially at a later age the team plays, give the ideal form of training in the development of right attitudes and interests. And so the answer to the question must be found. in making a part o-f the physical training spontaneous, optional, allowing students to take one form of exercise or another, especially of the various outdoor sports, according to their personal choice.

We may well go back to Jean Paul Richter. Of play he speaks with his usual insight. The cause of the cheerfulness of children is their activity. Play is mans first poetry. In early life the plays of children should assist mental development; later ones should bring up the physical side, which is apt to be neglected by the schools. "Let the child toy, sing, look, listen; but let the boy and the girl run, climb, throw, build, sweat and freeze." "There may be many plays, but there should be few playthings. Much instruction should be given through play. Pleasure-and play-masters should be the precursors of the schoolmaster, and play-schools (like the modern kindergarten) should precede the schools for instruction."

Of course in the higher grades a certain amount of prescribed drill of definite kinds is essential because practically all students have an enormous number of bad motor habits. Dr. Lee at Harvard, for example, found that nearly all the Freshmen had bad

postural habits. Thus special gymnastic training is in large part necessary; but besides this should be a large amount of opportunity for spontaneous physical activity in plays and sports and the like.

In general the wider significance of physical training comes from its relation to mental hygiene in general; and what we often refer to as morale. It gives, as we have seen, the best of opportunity for developing right mental attitudes, right means of self-control, normal interests, habits of facing difficult situations, habits of expending energy, not in slacking and complaints, but in coordinated activity, in doing the best possible in a difficult situation.

To gain these larger ends, our sports must be kept clean. Corrupt baseball is a blow at democracy. Honest baseball gives democratic training. The playground is a great factor in American education. The amateur game of baseball is par excellence a democratic game. Professional baseball, as the national game, naturally has its influence on the amateur sport, as played on 100,000 playgrounds. The service of Federal judges at any price is cheap if it can purge the stain of corruption from our national game.

The worst fallacy in American education, and the worst defect in American schools is the dependence upon mere instruction, mere talk, and the neglect of actual training. How can we expect civic virtue and democratic action to prevail in the state when we have not time for this in the schools? The team sports have been the one part of American education where actual training in patriotism has been a vital part of the activity.

Physical training has also this great advantage over other forms of education, that it gives the best of opportunity for the training of the whole man–mind, body and character. As Professor Mac-Dougall has pointed out, it is free from the defect of a large part of our scholastic training, which divorces the intellectual from the physical and the moral. And it avoids that danger of dissociation which psychiatrists fear as the cause of nervous and mental disorder. This significant characteristic of physical training has been emphasized only by the few, notably by Plato in the early days, who saw the wider significance of play and gymnastics for mental and moral development; and by G. Stanley Hall in modern times, who has emphasized the fact that physical training bridges the gulf between knowing and doing.

Briefly to summarize the main points of this newer conception of physical education and its importance, we may note that the modern study of psychology and mental hygiene has put a tremendous emphasis on the significance of the various forms of motor activity, and especially what we call physical exercise. Its educational, mental and moral significance is greater than any, except perhaps a few of its most enthusiastic devotees, have imagined. Physical education is not yet mechanized and standardized. It furnishes opportunity for the training of the whole individual. The aims of physical education today should be clear. It is an essential of education. It should be for all,–not merely for the upper ten, or nine or eleven, but for all of whatever race or sex or creed.-It should give the funda mental basis of psychophysical development from which special forms of motor skill can be healthfully differentiated. It should in large degree furnish the raw material for the higher thought processes, not only motor images and experience of many concrete situations, but the psycho-physical attitudes

that lie at the foundation of efficiency, mental health and morality, and permanent interests that will carry over into life. It should develop that supreme condition of physical and mental health that we only suggest by the use of the word morale in its highest and broadest meaning. It should give actual training in democratic cooperation and train leaders who can integrate the wisdom and ability of a social group.

To the splendid and robust aims of the older physical training, as formulated in the famous watchwords,–Frisch, Fromm, Frohlich, Frei, which meant, roughly, health, character, happiness, freedom, should be added the keywords of the new physical education,–sportsmanship, morale, the spirit of the learner, the spirit of cooperation, mental health and development.

I pay rent each month for a little one foot by one foot space which I occupy mornings and evenings on the Long Island Railroad. The money for it I have earned during the last ten years by giving advice on the subject of recreation. I could tell the world how to utilize its spare moments in building up bodily energy, but until last May, I had never doped out a prescription that would work in my own particular case.

My Forest Hills home is at what you might call the world center for tennis, while golf courses exist accessibly in the surrounding region. But I have been able to use those recreational facilities only spasmodically. Some business trip, some conference that had to be attended, out-of-town persons who had to be seen–some inescapable engagement always broke into my sport program and, by interfering with its regularity, robbed me of the exercise which my muscles needed and the mental satisfaction that comes from growing skill.

The same sort of business interruptions knocked me out also of gymnasium class work. I joined such a class, but no sooner had I overcome the soreness caused by the first stretching of unused muscles than a series of important engagements bunched

their hits directly upon the "gym" class hour and I had the "loosening up" process all to do over again. After a little I dropped out.

Just-out-of-bed calisthenics I have of course also tried. I have extended my arms, forward and back, 1-2-3-4, and all the rest of it. I have done the muscle-resisting stunts of Swoboda. I have stood before the open window and deep-breathed. I have experimented with dumb-bells and Indian clubs and I have shadow-boxed. Each of those systems I followed–for awhile!

Why did I stop? I would start out enthusiastically enough and for awhile the world would be a wonderful place. Come out of the bath just bursting with energy and optimism–and all that. Then–well–an evening at the theater and the midnight train home would be followed in the morning by such a poignant sympathy with Sir Harry Lauders feeling about "lying in your bed" that, before I realized it, the tyrannous necessity of catching a certain train had cut out all pajama exercises for that morning. Perhaps some other kind of sleep-robber would knock it out the next morning also. Each time I had less energy to put into the days work. Each evening I was more tired than the night before and my nights rest less completely refreshed me. Even if I did do my exercise on such mornings, I would put less "pep" into it, or I would cut it short "just this once," and then perhaps repeat the shortening process on several successive mornings. In any case there always followed the same vicious circle. The letting-up of exercise resulted in a dwindling of vital energy, which meant a slackening of will power, which meant increased slothfulness and pillow-cuddling, which meant less exercise, and so on.

The thing which then happened to me I had prophesied for other men lots of times. Although only in the early forties and carrying only the ordinary load of cares and responsibilities, I began to break down physically. The winters work would leave me a wreck. I was a "mark" for colds and grippe. I arrived home so tired I had to take a rest before dinner. Running for the train made my heart pound like a flat wheel on a truck. New ideas ceased to come to me, and concentration was increasingly difficult. I began to worry and fret, which cut down my working ability, which caused more worry, etc., etc. The vicious circle had enlarged its ravages.

It was the business mens Plattsburg in 1915 and 1916 which saved me. The facts about the necessity of exercise which had previously rattled around in my mind-case were driven by the pack, the Springfield, and the saddle right home–right into a place in my mechanism where they engaged some of the other cog-wheels and for the first time really functioned. Whatever else was needed to complete my conversion was supplied by the army, so that in the fall of 1919, when I laid aside my uniform, I at the same time took on the conviction–as a part of my personal reconstruction program–that among such familiar necessities as eating, sleeping, wearing clothes and supporting a family, there was another one of absolutely equal rank and importance and that was daily exercise.

The specifications to be met by a satisfactory scheme of muscular activity, as I gradually worked them out, were as follows: It must take in all the larger muscles, be practicable indoors (so as to be free from weather interruptions), be available immediately on rising (to avoid clothes changing) and be interesting. The last requirement seemed to me perhaps the most important of all because I feared that if the business did