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PHYSIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPILS

(By Irene Gupton)

First of all and truly the most important phase of secondary education is the physical being of the child. All precautions should be made so that the pupils can grow splendidly healthful lives. There are innumerable reasons for the above statement with which any clear thinking person will agree.

No person can, will or should study if he is unwell. On the other hand, boys and girls with sound bodies will bring to their task minds more alert, spirits more cheerful and with more energy. Particularly is it true in adolescence that many who have unhealthy bodies, entertain morbid fears which better health can do so much to banish.

The means we have at our hands to help children retain health, are: Instruction in Hygiene, gymnastics, sanitary surroundings and athletics. There is a training in volition and discipline in obedience to order. For the timid nature athletics and gymnastics afford excellent means of developing self control. Thus boys and girls are helped in athletics not only by making them healthy and vigorous but because of the self trust inspired into them.

The aim also of our education from every aspect should be to equip our pupils as fully as possible with the habits, insights and ideals that will enable them to make America more true to its best traditions and hope.

In the eighties, the Herbartian conception of education, with its emphasis on proper psychological procedure and on character building as the aim of education, began to reshape our educational theory. Psychology has become the specific science of the day. It gives us both outward and inward views.

Theoretically, educators believe that health is more important than quantity of knowledge. Much is being done to meet the needs of the pupil. Desks are being adjusted for the physical well being of the child. That is one of the first essentials, for health is definitely related to the vigorous use of the trunk and legs. Instruction should be given in exercises and games which will bring into play these large fundamental muscles, and should be pushed far enough to stimulate circulation, respiration, and perspiration. Methods of study should be devised which will allow more freedom and bodily movement even in academic work. The following list are health items: A careful health examination which will include (1) medical inspection (2) mental examination (3) physical examination. Other points which a teacher should stress are: a healthful environment at home, instruction in health problems and a large amount of physical activity. If the above program is adhered to, first one must discover how nature has endowed the individual.

As has been stated, medical inspections should be made at the school to discover infectious diseases defects in the pupil and improvement of the sanitary conditions in the school room. The medical inspector should cooperate with the physical instructor in the correction of physical defects, and with the regular teacher or trained psychologist in the diagnosis and treatment of mental defects.

When the physical aspects of the pupil has been considered, the moral and mental aspect of the child is next to be considered. Mental examination should seek to ascertain the mental health of the pupil and his nervous and mental constitution.

The health of an individual depends in large measure upon a normal central nervous system and upon his attitude of mind toward his work. The time of entering the junior high school (seventh grade) is the most critical time in adolescence. Much stress in psychology is laid upon the necessity of correlating the program of the pupil with his dominant interest. It is probably unnecessary to give mental examination to every pupil. It is how? ever necessary to give such an examination to the subnormal and supernormal pupil. For the other pupils an examination of their grades in their subjects correlated with their grades in physical education and manual training, will give a very fair index of their nervous and mental health and constitution.

Care should be taken to differentiate between manual training and physical education. Manual training calls for the use of the small muscles of the eye and hand. In physical education the large muscles of the arms, legs and trunk should be used vigorously. The types of exercise used should be those which develop the large muscles, which are related to the development of vigor, endurance and power. This exercise should be supplemented by skill, grace and alertness. In every class room the teacher should give the correct amount of attention to good postural habits, while standing sitting and exercising.

Thirty two states have adopted a physical education program and others are preparing to do so. This is not a new wrinkle or fad, since physical education is the survivor of many centuries. The ancient Greeks divided their subjects of study into music and gymnastics. Each youth was trained in the gymnasium. The heroes of Greek literature were those who received the olive crown as the winner of some event in the Olympic games. Physical education is necessarily an integral part of general education. The whole body of the child goes to school, both body and mind. The American public school has until recently tried to develop the mind of the individual without thought of the body. The modern physical education program calls

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for games for all, for games which call into play the fundamental muscle groups involved in running, jumping, throwing and climbing; all form a large part of the program. Short story plays, rhythmic action plays and running games for the very tiny tots; folk dancing, competitive athletics, organized games and stimulating drills, for the older, are the tools with which a teacher has to work. Physical education through games makes for the social and moral developments of the child.

The play ground knows no race, class or social distinction. Recognition and acknowledgement of the rights of others must be observed in all team work. Cooperation and team work are synonymous. Where but on the play field does the child learn the elements of true sportsmanship? The successful team is the one in which all members are working together in close cooperation. Physical education centers the attention on positive health habits. Physical education concerns itself directly with the growth and development of the child.

The period of secondary education coincides very closely with the first half of that term of years between the ages of 12 to 14 years and maturity which is known as the period of adolescence. It is a period of growth for the body and mind. And it is with children who are passing through this adolescence state that we have to deal primarily. During childhood the boy is slightly larger than the girl who is the same age but during adolescence the girl seems to surpass him for about two years, there girls grows slowly a few years and stops, while the boy grows to a greater size than the girl. During the period of adolescence the rapid growth of the body and mind do not coincide. The central nervous system matures unevenly and thus we have a corresponding growth by parts in the mental life.

During adolescence the bones grow rapidly, thus changing the features of the body, giving decided change in facial expression. The heart and lungs grow rapidly which lessens the chest capacity. There is a great change in the voice of adolescence so the teacher should be careful to encourage the practice of pleasant tones. The brain unlike most of the bodily organs, does not increase much in weight at adolescence. However there are alterations in psychic life—the new instincts, feelings, ideals, motives and the general ripening of intellectual grasp that make up the psychological picture of adolescence, point unmistakably to corresponding brain activity.

Many careful observers believe that there is a period of a year or so just puberty when children, especially girls, show a surprising and irritating stupidity. If this observation be correct, it would seem to be connected in some way with the physical alterations of the period, as if brain growth stagnated while the body was undergoing transformation for the function of mature years. It is not true altogether that the mind is stagnant during adolescence for at this time memory expands and reaches its maximum at 16 or 17 years. There is not only one kind of memory, but there is visual memory, auditory memory, memory of faces, memory for poetry etc.

The increase of the nervous system cause the adolescence to deal with greater concepts than the child.

There is a very close connection between the body and mind so when the body is being made healthy, just so the mind is being developed during adolescence that the mind is reaching out desiring a story with an exciting plot. It is at this period that the youth has such great imagination, desires, tastes and preferences. The teacher is in a position to answer these longings. The question is, is the teacher going to fill the pupils mind with the essentials and uplifting things of life? The mind has the brain for its physical basis and as the mind thinks, impressions are made by indentations on the brain. The impressions of youth are more lasting because the lines and curves are capable of being made deep; that is why the best training should be given.

Also it is a time of habit formation and the teacher can be an important factor in determining the future advent of the adolescence.

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