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THE EDUCATION OF THE WILL IN THE CRAFTS LESSON

By Wolfgang Wagner

He who has had the opportunity of seeing. a class of children aged 9 to 10 tackling the task of driving a row of nails into each side of a wooden frame for the purpose of weaving, has had a living experience of that force we call "the will." It is here the still unspoiled, uncurbed will for the working into matter, activity uninhibited by ideas and reflections, the potentiality of the doing whilst the teacher or adult is naturally expected to give the answers to the "What do I do?" — "How do I do it?" —It is an experience that can make you aware in a rare way of the material the child brings to us to be educated, directed and harmonized until it can become activity in thinking, the most human of our human faculties.

When we begin our woodwork classes in class 6 there is still much of this blind zeal for the mere doing. Yet modelling lessons throughout the pre*vious* year have established a first more conscious contact with matter, though in the much softer material, clay, and in a purely artistic manner, — and have paved the way for a more observant approach to the material, wood, and its shaping. The first task that may be given in the woodwork lesson is to make a handle for the first woodworking tool laid into the children's hands: the rasp or file. The word "handle" already lets us discover its close connection with the hand: the hand which is the universal tool given to us by nature and whose working capacity we amplify by the use of a specialized tool. Thus we will study our hand, how it closes up and grips the tool that is made for the specialized job of rasping, and each child tries to shape the handle that fits most comfortably in his own hand when doing the movement of rasping. It is quite a long process, an interchange between shaping by rasp and judging the shape by gripping it with one's hand. The children learn to feel where there ought to be a mould for the palm and a support for the thumb until the square piece of wood is transformed into the tool-holder that gives more scope to the hand. Observation and imagination in the child are called up; the shaping has a purpose and a real connection with the doer. Comparing the rasp-handles in their final shape will then lead to discovering characteristic features which all have in common and some of the works might be called good examples for rasp-handles that everyone would be able to use.

The next tasks are simple utensils such as a dibble and letter-opener. Here the handle grows into a tool. Essential still is the handle, —they are, as it were, prolonged handles. Added to the further exploration of the hand in its movement and grip, the negative form of which can be seen in the handle, are experiences of the qualities of wood as such.

A good way to lead on from there is to extend one's observations of the hand and its functions to the arm, and to study the working process of hand and arm when requested to do the following: There is a tin with cold carpenter's glue that must be stirred. You must stir it in such a way that you reach into the corners of the tin. You have no utensil to do it with at your disposal. What are the movements of your hand and arm when you stir the glue? Observe them carefully, translate them into wood and you will create a really good stirring spoon that serves its purpose. The handle will be slightly curved, the spoon shaped so that it will reach into the corners. In this way the children do not make a wooden spoon according to an abstract idea or picture they carry in their memory, but create something that has been taken from the natural movement of hand and arm. And after some time, according to the children's choice, there will be a variety of spoons: flour spoon, tasting spoon, skimmer, measuring spoon, salad spoon and fork, etc., each revealing its purpose through its form.

The next step leads from the element of movement which can be experienced intimately through the functions of hand and arm, into something that has separated from it, i.e. the bowl. The task here is to find forms which have a direct connection with the two factors: the purpose and man. Between those two poles stretches the wide field artistic creativeness can unfold without becoming abstract or purely ornamental. The texture of the wood will inspire a multitude of shapes. The previous work has awakened the understanding for living movement which has now to be metamorphosed into the living gesture. The little bowl that keeps your jewelry over night encloses and guards its content, the fruit or bread bowl offers and encourages you to help yourself to what it contains. Here the actual carving work begins; one works into the wood, carves into it, whilst the previous things were worked on with the rasp and file. Handles and other utensils were shaped by slowly peeling off the raw outside of the lump of wood. Feeling and willing are mainly employed when rasp, file and sandpaper are at work; we feel the form and smoothness of it and the sense of touch is the organ of judgment. This work could almost be done blindfolded. Carving the wood means to be fully awake to direct each movement through observation, to be master of the will power that works into the material and directs its strength at any moment. The working process becomes now a rhythmical interchange of the two poles, will-impulse and observation, and between them weave the creative forces of the feeling life, the feeling for form, which we might call the artistic element.

In the course of the 9th and 10th class the craft lessons become Carpentry. The children are now in the upper school more freedom is granted and more self-control and responsibility demanded. The task given in the craft lesson is outlined precisely and must be carried out precisely with a variety of tools. Exactitude and discipline of all forces engaged are necessary to understand and make the joints that enable us to assemble parts into a firm whole. Thinking is actively engaged in this kind of work, which has to deal with geometrical forms in the three-dimensional and runs parallel to a main lesson period in technical drawing. A small piece of furniture made by the individual child might result from these carpentry lessons, or a larger piece can be planned and carried out as group-work which would carry the endeavour of an education of the will to laying the foundation for a social willing.

Thus in accordance with the natural development of the child and as one part of the whole of our education the craftwork, too, sets out on a path which enables the child, stage by stage, to get hold of this source of activity and become its master. It is a wonderful power and must neither be suppressed nor broken. But the child must awake to it, recognize it, and the developing mind must set it its tasks, or it will turn into a destructive force. The awakening process engages the child's feeling life first before the judgment of the eye and clear observation direct the action. The third step demands of the will activity to serve. In carpentry work it has to shed its selfhood and serve the mind and the world of objective laws.

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