Will-Developed Intelligence:* Craft and Movement Gesture in Education

By Bernard Graves
for The Hiram Trust, England

How do you do? More to the point, how do you learn to do, and what do you learn by doing? These questions challenge us today to find and demonstrate pathways from 'doing to thinking.' Doing implies movement of some kind, both inner and outer. And thinking about doing necessitates some degree of awareness of 'movement gesture,' a largely unconscious activity.

To move or not to move: hyperactivity and lethargy

It is clear that in a society becoming ever more sedentary and in which the keyboard is replacing the traditional pen, the child's need for 'primary engagement' through the sense of movement and gesture is being curtailed and undermined. Yet children and adults are involved in many daily movements, usually requiring transportation, to meet appointments and deadlines.

Instinct-led and compulsive movements are being written into daily life experience. Uncontrolled and aimless movement contrasts with the time spent in exercising at home or in the gym, to which a separate and measurable amount of time and income is dedicated. Alongside restricted play and formalized recreational activities, moving images in addition mask immobility and present a kind of barrier to direct engagement in purposeful activity. The overwhelming experience is of imbalance and a fight against the sapping or stunting of both life and soul forces.

Redressing imbalance

Life forces tend to be restored more consciously nowadays in a variety of ways: walking, gardening, holidays, health treatments. Plenty of suggestions

*The phrase "Will-Developed Intelligence" was coined by David Mitchell and used as the title of his book co-authored with Patti Livingston.

are given in the weekend newspapers and other magazines. The soul forces of thinking, feeling and willing, however, are not collectively acknowledged, let alone nurtured so as to strengthen, refine and harmonize them.

Will, as shown by Steiner in *Theosophy, Study of Man* and *Occult Science*, is a soul force that can be active in different parts of the human being.

1. Its most important activity is in physical energies that initiate 'movement' in the body.
2. Further, it can bring our life of 'feeling' into movement and so create and kindle 'imaginations.'
3. It can stir and activate our 'thinking pictures' to the point that they are no longer mere reflections, copies of the outer world.

Working 'willfully' and creatively with our thinking can enable this activity to become alive and assume an individual character. In this way such great thinkers as Goethe, for instance,could move beyond the botanical point of view of the plant world and come to an experience of the Archetypal Plant.

Rudolf Steiner mentioned on a number of occasions that he attributed his own creative thinking possibilities, his ability to come to a perception of the inner nature of things, through the efforts of will needed in the use of his muscles during adolescence. In particular he recalled the beneficial efforts of work such as chopping and sawing wood, digging and harvesting potatoes. "The more we take into account that intellect develops from the movements of the limbs, from dexterity and skills, the better it will be." (Rudolf Steiner, *Basic Course,* 1920)

However, comments made by Rudolf Steiner in 1924 during the 'Curative Course' indicate that already then he perceived the lack of practical ingenuity skills. The general teaching and educational practice of the day, he maintained, reflected the general state of 'consciousness.' Out of 800 children, only a handful could be said to have a practical aptitude for work. In referring to those children, Rudolf Steiner said:

> Living in the time of the flowering of intellectualism, the soul/Spirit or (astral-ego organization) of the children cannot penetrate the muscle system, it only connects to the bones. The result of this later in life is an even more dry, intellectual, dead thinking and a general life style of materialism. …A healthy way to develop the intellect would be, as far as possible, through the will. This we can do only by passing via the artistic to the developing of the intellect.
>
> – Rudolf Steiner, *Study of Man,* 1919

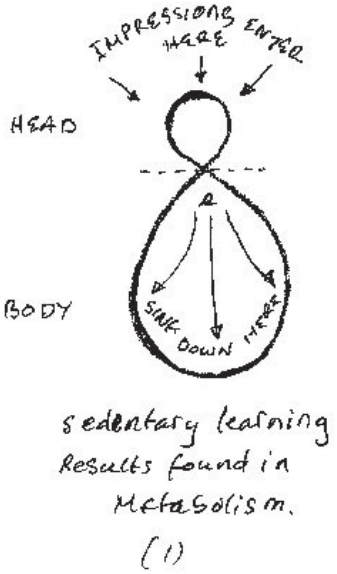
'Intellect,' as one of our most noble faculties, can only incline towards this type of materialism in the absence of aesthetic sensibility and qualities of will.

'Will,' on the other hand, inclines towards the spirit and requires anchoring and bringing into the world. Bridges have to be built between doing and thinking and from thinking to doing.

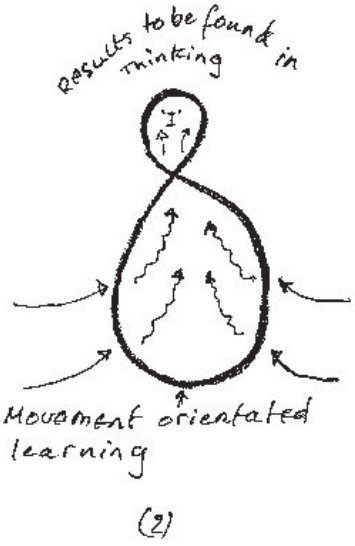
Again, already at the beginning of the century, Rudolf Steiner was painfully aware of the growing separation of the soul forces. He made several concrete efforts to address this problem, including Waldorf education and the ideas expressed in the 'Agricultural Course' regarding nutrition and its potential to assist in the integration of soul forces.

Waldorf pedagogy

One of his fundamental precepts is that when we engage the child in physical, practical activity, such as handwork or craftwork, we are working on the 'soul spirit nature' of that child. However, when we address the 'soul spirit nature' in storytelling, for instance, the healthy results are to be found in the 'bodily organism.' For the adult to form 'sound judgments,' to have 'balanced thinking,' depends far more on whether a child was taught to use her/his hands and fingers in a right practical way than as the result of doing 'logical thinking' exercises in later life. (*Waldorf Education for Adolescence*, chapter 4)



Education via the senses:
Sedentary learning process



The movement teacher works at Ego forming via the 'will in the limbs.'

Man Hieroglyph of the Universe – 1920

'Knitting supports a healthy development of thinking
as it emerges in the adolescent years.'

In the Curative course, Lecture 5, there is further support and evidence of how 'will begets intelligence.'

A Picture of Fourfold Man and Its Differentiation with the Body and Head

Picture 1 shows general path of evolution from Saturn > Sun > Moon > Earth. The physical body is depicted as the oldest, the wisest member, with the Ego depicted as the youngest and least developed member.

Past

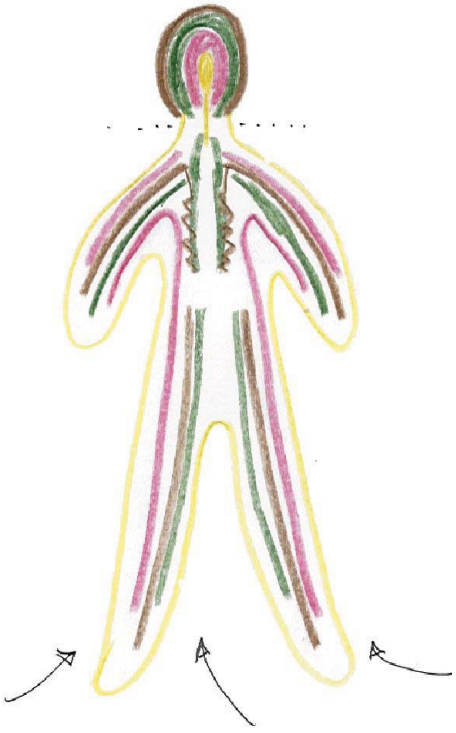
1. Physical body outside / Ego inside

Future

2. Ego outside / Physical body inside

Evolutionary development: Physical Body – Life body – Sentient body – Ego
Saturn – Sun – Moon – Earth

Picture 2. Here we have something that belongs to the 'Will Sphere' and consequently points to the future.



Transformation and metamorphosis with the body and head:

1. Head, a formed structure. Ego within small and undeveloped. The task of educator is to awaken the Ego here.
2. In the limbs the Ego spirit is very large and spread out over the surface of the body.

As movement-oriented teachers, we are Ego-forming via the limbs, working through the limbs rhythmically—the Craft Gesture. Kinetic education helps to develop the brain and develop the as-yet undeveloped Ego principle within the head.

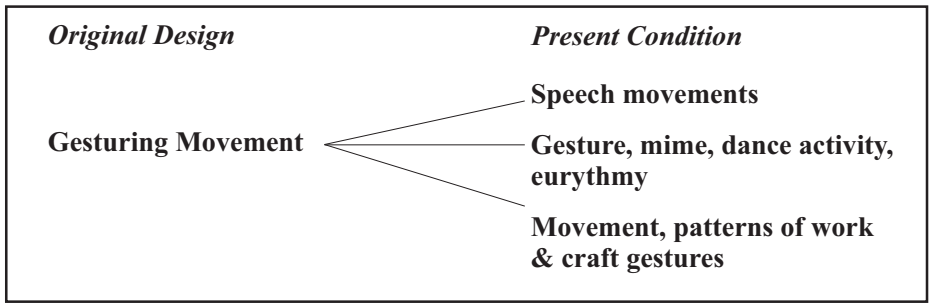
Today, some eighty years since the *Study of Man* lectures, neuro-physiological research supports what Rudolf Steiner put forward about movement and the development of the human being. Such research has reached the general public in works such as Frank R. Wilson's *The Hand: How Its Use Shapes the Brain, Language and Human Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998) and the abstract, "The Real Meaning of Hands-on Education" in *Rudolf Steiner Research Bulletin* 1999. This abstract by Professor Matti Bergstrom was found in an IKEA Catalogue a few years ago:

> The brain discovers what the fingers explore. The density of nerve endings in our fingertips is enormous. Their discrimination is almost as good as that of our eyes. If we don't use our fingers, if in childhood and youth we become 'finger-blind,' this rich network of nerves is impoverished—which represents a huge loss to the brain and thwarts the individual's all-around development. Such damage may be likened to blindness itself. Perhaps worse. For while a blind person may simply not be able to find this or that object, the finger-blind cannot understand its inner meaning and value. If we neglect to develop and train our children's fingers and the creative form-building capacities of their hand muscles, then we neglect to develop their understanding of the unity of things; we thwart their aesthetic and creative powers.
>
> Those who shaped our age-old traditions always understood this. But today Western civilization, an information-obsessed society that overvalues science and undervalues true worth, has forgotten it all. We are 'value-damaged.' The philosophy of our upbringing is science-centered, and our schools are programmed toward that end. …These schools have no time for the creative potential of the nimble fingers and hand, and that arrests the all-round development of our children—and of the whole community.

Thinking about doing: origins of movement

Given that anthropologists are offering widely different interpretations about brain development, the origins of language and the early use of tools (for example, see *The Perception of Environment* by Tim Ingold, 2000), it is worth examining our standpoint today on the origins of movement from the vantage point of Rudolf Steiner's research. When speaking on the origins of movement and speech in "Riddles of Humanity" (Sept. 2, 1916), Rudolf Steiner explained that the human being was originally designed not to be a speaking creature,

but rather to express him/herself through movement. What was originally intended changed; gesture became transformed into speech movement and other movements.



(After Dr. Peter Engel, September 1916)

The human being shares the ability to move with animals, but whereas animals learn the movements they require more or less at birth, the human being needs several years' practice to develop all the movements required to enable him/her to walk in an upright position. The newborn infant expresses a multitude of movements, of which he/she is not yet master. Control comes from above to below—eyes to legs and feet. Movement at first takes hold of the child from the outside as it were, and limb movements are only gradually mastered.

The primal reflexes are developed by imitation towards individualized mastery of movement patterns. Attaining uprightness and making those first tentative steps are, however, only the beginning. The expression of movement in the child leads to other faculties in the realm of the soul. Crawling, walking, and all manner of bodily movements lay the foundation for the acquisition of many finer skills. Speech and, ultimately, thinking processes are realized as a result of the internalization of outer movement habits.

Long-term benefits of acquired movement skills

Archetypal work gesture

The movements entered into in precision sequences such as handwork and craft activities are, similarly, more than training in motor skills; in the practice of work movements, which would be better described collectively as 'work gesture,' the will of the pupil and student of the craft is made subject to a greater governing order. It is in the very nature of this process that the character of the gesture works inwards to foster the unfolding and harmonious development of cognition, aesthetic sensibility and practical know-how.

The vehicle for this two-way process is what I call 'work gesture,' and is particularly evident in the movements of a well-practiced craftsperson. When acquired, these movements play upon the soul of the human being, giving a beat in the sphere of 'will,' rhythm in the sphere of heart and 'feelings,' and a melody

in the 'thinking' human being. This is the effect of the 'being of movement' and its resonance within the soul of the human being.

Each craft has its own symphony of working gestures, but as important to the acquisition of the actual skills, such as hammering/planing, is the realization of the point of rest and of the complementary gesture. The arm hammers, whereas the body moves away freely; it is free of this movement. This degree of separation cannot be achieved by an animal. The whole body of the woodpecker pecks, it follows the pecking limb, its entire body can but peck. In the human being this is supposed to be different, in that humans have been given the potential for 'free' movement. The point around which any set of working and complementary gestures moves is the center, the space of the human Ego. 'I' hammer, not 'it' hammers. How, then, are 'work gestures' acquired? Is it fundamentally a process of enhanced imitation?

Apprenticeship, for example, whether traditional or modern, entails the schooling of the will. This can still be considered the first step in the process of gaining the work gesture and is chiefly directed to the will. Playing a musical instrument also follows this schooling process. At first the student has to learn the movement until it becomes habit, unconsciously absorbed by the ether body. The sense of 'freedom of movement' comes at the point where the almost archetypally given movement form has in-formed, in its truest sense, his/her own habit. In 'entering an order' the self-discipline is met by the collective wisdom of that life practice.

Rhythm is another key element in all craft movement and musical practice. What is the right rhythm? Is this more than enhanced imitation? Listen to the beating of the blacksmith; there are secondary taps. An established sense of rhythm merges the archetype with the individual interpretation.

Lastly, although our limbs execute the movements, through which will activity acts to transform 'raw' material, the form that emerges comes from somewhere else. The realm of the idea holds that form. Yet the realization of the idea lies in the rhythmic 'time container' fashioned by the limbs and whole body.

In his lecture of 1922, now published as "The Human Heart," Rudolf Steiner describes movement gesture from a very different perspective, one which could almost be called the karma of movement. Our deeds, all our actions, outer movements are inscribed he says in 'traces' into the astral body. As well as these movements, what I have accomplished and my 'intentionality' are also inscribed there. This individually-inscribed astral body streams towards the etheric heart and is received by it shortly after puberty. Our 'cosmic treasure trove,' the 'etheric heart' now receives our own individually-fashioned treasure, a moment of immense significance for all adolescents. All these movement gestures, transformed and held by the etheric heart, are then at death given over to the

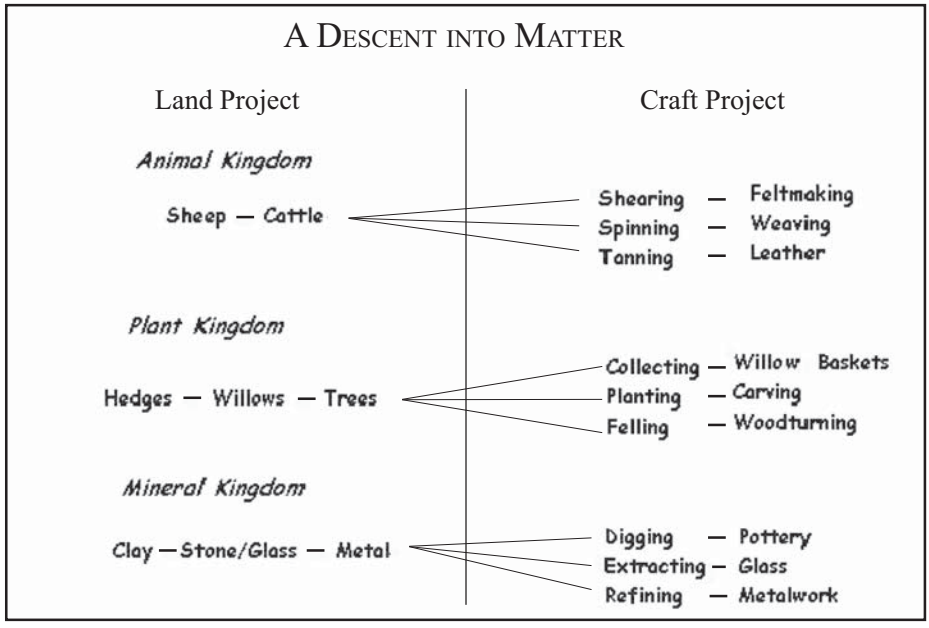
cosmos, sown as seeds for our further karma. Capacities of 'will' work into the future; 'thinking' stems from the past.

The descent into matter: an introduction to the work

Where, today, can young people find the opportunity to learn work gesture? Encountering the material world occasions many different processes. In our overly sanitized society, children need to be led and introduced to very basic materials and processes. Adolescents need a challenge that helps equip them ultimately with essential skills to manage the practical affairs of life and to develop a moral sense of responsibility for their environment, both natural and human. Using whole body movement and finer motor skill in particular provides a route to 'grounding' oneself. Yet what was for the younger child 'learning through play' must now become transformed into 'learning whilst working.' In an educational context, craft work still has much to offer in developing skill, work gesture and a knowledge of materials.

The following is a suggestion for a Craft Curriculum with an integrated approach to environmental projects. Materials are sourced from the three kingdoms of nature—animal, plant and mineral.

This "Descent into Matter" developed by Aonghus Gordon (founder of Ruskin Mill) also refers to the matching of raw materials to a child's stage of development as the child itself 'solidifies' into its adult form. Thus the soft, tactile experience of the wool in the early years is followed by green, woody materials in the middle school years, culminating in the shaping of more resistant substances such as seasoned wood and metal in the senior years.



Living and learning with nature

The objective in developing an integrated environmental and craft curriculum is ultimately to foster a sense for place and of one's place in the locality. If the curriculum is indeed working,* young people have the opportunity to discover real values along with many practical and social skills, values that have a bearing on the response to others' needs and the sustainable use of materials. Working with the hands in a creative and responsible manner is essentially a human capacity and therefore capable of reflecting humanity in essence.

*Wendy Titman, director of Learning through Landscape, a national organization that works in the mainstream sector, cites schools that have actively transformed their traditional tarmac surfaces into imaginative recreational and educational landscapes and has noticed a marked improvement in both the emotional well-being of the children and in their educational achievements.