

CHARACTER BUILDING THROUGH PHYSICAL EDUCATION*

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Physical educators have for years claimed to be builders of character. Not infrequently such claims are buttressed by reference to a few students who have engaged in physical education programs and who have changed in the course of a few years from being individuals of rather inconspicuous personality to individuals of outstanding character and ability. The physical educator has been prone to claim the credit for such metamorphoses. Examination of the evidence has not been impressive. The literature is strangely silent with regard to those individuals who took the same courses or belonged to the identical athletic groups at that same time but who have changed for the worse.

When one examines the methodology proposed to produce character education through physical education one usually finds such processes based upon faulty psychology and on methods of education long since abandoned by the leading educational philosophers.

Recent studies by competent investigators⁽¹⁾ have thrown much doubt on the character building efficacy of a number of institutions. When these studies are analyzed and compared with what is known of the learning process the wonder is not that character results have failed to come through either physical education or other such movements but that anyone should have expected such results to be forthcoming when the methods used were not specifically planned to secure changes in character and were not in harmony with modern educational techniques. We have in far too many cases trusted rather blindly to an all-wise Providence and to G. Stanley Hall.

This paper is an attempt to outline a process of character building through physical education, laying down the foundations of the process upon our present-day knowledge of how man learns.

DEFINITIONS

Before proceeding to discussion it would perhaps be well to define our terms. The term 'character' as used in this paper, is not in any sense limited to the realm of morals. It has been defined by Dewey as the 'interpenetration of habits'.⁽²⁾ Dewey, in his book *Human Nature and Conduct*, uses habits in the sense of learnings. This definition may be rephrased as the interpenetration of learnings. If everyone had read Dewey's book and understood his description of character this definition might be adopted as adequate.

* The writer is indebted to numerous authors in the field of character education. His greatest indebtedness for this paper is to Dr. W. W. Charters from whose book *THE TEACHING OF IDEALS* much has been drawn. The principal other sources aside from educational psychology are *HUMAN NATURE AND CONDUCT* by Dewey, *NATURE OF CONDUCT* by Symonds, the teachings of Professor Judd concerning the importance of verbal responses in transfer of training, and the interpretation of Dewey's philosophy by Professor Kilpatrick. The writer has drawn freely from these sources and wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness.

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