

**ESSAYS ON THE KINDERGARTEN,  
BEING A SELECTION OF  
LECTURES READ BEFORE THE  
LONDON FROEBEL SOCIETY, PP.  
8-149**

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*Lectures Read before the London Froebel Society*

SECOND



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are generally made to exemplify some little story or description, and which, being always accompanied with music, carry on the lesson of time and rhythm begun with the ball games, and are closely connected with that very important part of early kindergarten instruction, the art of *story-telling*.

Madame de Portugall places both languages and stories together, as belonging to the early series of exercises. We see, without need of explanation, how immediate is the connection between the child's first study of language and his first interest in stories. It will not be a grammatical study certainly. That will not come till long after, but a study of words and sentences, which the teacher will always make sure her little audience understands. New words, or new forms of expression, will often be purposely introduced into a narrative, and from these new words, names, probably, of things which the children are promised a sight of next day, or which they have seen but not noticed, a fresh tale may begin. For there are no set stories in the kindergarten, nor is it yet the time for fables, save of the most artless kind; the satire and worldly wisdom which underlie their apparent simplicity make them unfit for those who can as yet see a very small portion of the surface of things. The little narratives I speak of are just what the present object, or game, or child's question, suggests. The children, though generally eager to know, and prompt to feel, are ignorant of all, and the teacher knows so much of what surrounds their ignorance—at least we hope she does—that materials can never fail.

However, I have not undertaken to discourse here upon story-telling, but only to show how fitly stories are placed at the base of all studies connected with language, and how they all spring from exercises with that first fundamental form, the ball. We have already noticed that the earliest lesson upon colours will be given in connection with it; the only thing that remains to be noticed on this part of the table is modelling. The



first childish attempt in this art is directed to model a ball; and though the child never produces a correct sphere, he comes nearer to rolling up his lump of clay into a ball than he would at this same stage arrive at producing any object of greater complexity, or requiring accurate lines. No one who has seen a child model his ball will doubt that this first exercise of manual productiveness affords him a degree of pleasure which may give a new vent to the material instinct of activity within him, while exercising his eye and fingers; and few who have not seen it, realize how soon from the ball he will make an orange, clearly distinguishing the difference of form; and thence an apple, or a pear, which again lead him eagerly to want stalks, and leaves, etc.: or the ball is hollowed to form a nest, into which little balls are carefully placed as eggs, and thence follows pleasant talk of birds and their haunts, the trees, the hedges, etc. A little reflection upon this will show us how justly Madame de Portugal carries up her section of modelling right through the period of school studies till it reaches sculpture and the fine arts generally. Not one in twenty, perhaps not one in a hundred, it may be, of these children will ever reach that stage; they may have no taste, no talent, no opportunity for it. Yet should they not, the first great object of all education has still been forwarded, by the drawing out of a natural aptitude, a possession prepared for after use if needed, for delight whenever used.

If we follow on the table the other lines that are carried up from the ball games to the division of school studies, we see in the intermediate portion, *reading*, and *writing*, and *knowledge of native place*. It requires no explanation to show why the former should be placed immediately following language and stories, and therefore be marked with the same coloured lines. If we interest children with stories, it is to excite that pleasure in knowledge, that interest in the life around them, which will later seek its own food in books; and it is evident that

writing is only one branch of the study of language—written words are, in our state of civilization, only of secondary necessity to spoken words; and as soon as the child becomes apt in speech, he must be led to seek the art of tracing his words on paper. Reading and writing are taught, as you know, simultaneously in these schools; but not in the kindergarten proper. Fröbel had a dread of all the false notions, the half-understood words that children get hold of by early reading to themselves, and he knew also how short is the time we can command for that more important work of developing their faculties amid the phenomena of the visible world, before book-learning makes its inevitable and ever-growing claim upon the understanding and the memory. Thus you see on this table reading and writing are placed half-way between kindergarten games and school lessons. They are given over to the transition class which receives the child at seven years old to prepare him for the change from entirely concrete to partly abstract teaching; from that which appeals to the mind through the senses, and that which appeals to the understanding mostly or altogether. The knowledge of our native place, which occupies a parallel position on the table, is also derived, as we are shown by the colour of the lines, from language and stories, with the addition of gymnastic games. The connection of the latter, which may seem obscure to some, is easily traced; for the songs which accompany the games generally have reference to facts of the animal or vegetable life familiar to the children, and which are a part also of that later knowledge. They tell sometimes of the seed-time or the harvest, sometimes of the dogs or cows, the sheep, or the fowls and pigeons that come to be fed. The child's interest is thus excited in his immediate surroundings. He quickly wants to know more about them, and to noting the difference between field and garden, wood and common, hill and flat ground, pond and running water, is but a step. The transition-class takes up this

same familiar knowledge, and carries it on to the first notion of local topography, and thence to the first outline of physical geography, which, later, will make historical geography intelligible and useful, instead of being a mere list of names. The child has been led on, step by step, to acquire the knowledge he had come to wish for, and each step has helped to make a track he will only need to continue.

It is time now to turn our attention to the other two fundamental forms—the cube and the cylinder—which we have here on the right and left of the table. All the so-called *occupations* of the kindergarten, all that series of work by which the children are trained to accuracy of sight and manipulation while acquiring familiarity with the elements of arithmetic, with geometrical forms, and the beauty of symmetrical design, begin here, as the children learn to distinguish the various lines and angles, the surfaces and peculiarities generally of these two fundamental forms, to reproduce them, and develop other figures from them. Madame de Portugall, as we see, divides the occupations derived respectively from the cube and the cylinder into four groups, according as their starting point is either the solid itself, the surface, the line, or the point. All four groups are found under the head of the cube, three only, solids, lines, and surfaces, under that of the cylinder. *Points* are first distinguished by the child in the sharp corner of the cube, and therefore such occupations as deal with separate points or dots, as, for instance, bead-work, pricking, etc., belong to the cube-series only.

Let us begin with the solids. There we find modelling again in both series; the difference as it is practised in the one or the other being in the different forms, *whether circular or rectangular*, that are copied in each. Building, on the other hand, which is exclusively carried on with rectangular pieces, belongs to the cube-series only. If we follow up the lines from both these sections to the school work, we find that what has been