

**THE INDUSTRIAL ARTS IN THE PUBLIC
SCHOOLS : REPORT OF THE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, MADE
TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
AT ITS JANUARY SESSION, 1877**

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The industrial arts in the public schools : report of the committee on education, made to the House of Representatives, at its January session, 1877 by Various

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State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

THE INDUSTRIAL ARTS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

REPORT

OF THE

Committee on Education,

MADE TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, AT ITS
JANUARY SESSION, 1877.



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REPORT.

To the Honorable the House of Representatives, at the January Session, 1877:—

At the January session of 1876, the following resolution was adopted by the House of Representatives:—

“RESOLVED, That the Committee on Education be and hereby is instructed to inquire and report to this House, whether or not the public money now expended on schools above the grade of Grammar schools, could not be expended more to the public advantage in instructing the pupils attending the public schools in the Industrial Arts.”

The state of Rhode Island appropriates annually to public education, in addition to the Government Land Grant fund given some years ago to Brown University, the income of which is made available in the education of from thirty to forty students, the sum of ninety thousand dollars. Of the money thus appropriated, \$63,000 is distributed to the towns according to the number of children under fifteen years of age; and \$27,000 in proportion to the number of school districts in each.

As children ordinarily do not complete the Grammar school course, until they are over fourteen, it can hardly be assumed that any “public money” is expended upon

schools above that grade, if we interpret the expression "public money" to mean the amount mentioned as such in the statute relating to its appropriation, and the only amount over whose disbursement this General Assembly has any direct control.

We are satisfied, however, that such a strict construction of the resolution was not intended, and that the subject referred to us, embraced expenditures for, and instruction in all the public schools, whether under state or municipal patronage. This view of the general scope of the resolution offers us four special topics for consideration, which, taken in their order, appear to be,

- 1st. The proper limit of free education.
- 2d. The importance of the High School in the system.
- 3d. The variety and kind of instruction in the schools.
- 4th. Industrial Art education.

THE PROPER LIMIT OF FREE EDUCATION.

The fundamental principle underlying our public school system is, that the safety of the state depends upon the education of all its people; and although this principle is universally recognized, there exist differences of opinion as to the precise amount of education the state should furnish.

There are those who maintain that when a child is fourteen or fifteen years of age, and has mastered the rudiments of an English education, this modicum of knowledge will suffice to meet all the necessities of the case, and a boy without further scholastic advantages can enter upon some

mechanical pursuit, employment in commerce, or general business of life, and in due time fulfil all the requirements demanded by good citizenship. Others carry the idea still farther, in pronouncing more extended advantages of an educational nature a positive detriment to the body politic, because they have a tendency to diminish the number of good artisans, by fostering in the minds of the young an aversion to mechanical trades or manual labor in any form. They attribute the increase in the number of non-producers to a superabundance in the education of the masses, and aver that it is unwarranted in justice to tax property in order to afford greater opportunities for education than are now presented in the elementary schools.

These objections to an extension of the system beyond the Grammar schools are but a sample of the various opinions upon the subject, and they are perhaps among the most familiar to those who have carefully noted the history of public schools during the last few years. Emanating as these sentiments do, not merely from the ignorant and thoughtless, but also, in many instances, from those whose mental ability and liberal intellectual culture give weight to their opinions, and enable them to appreciate the advantages of a good education, we have given them careful and respectful consideration, but, nevertheless, feel constrained to withhold our concurrence.

A recent report of our State Commissioner of Schools shows that Reading, Spelling, Penmanship, Arithmetic, and Geography, are taught in all our schools of an intermediate and grammar grade. History of the United

States, and English Grammar, are taught in most of the grammar schools, and Vocal Music and Drawing in some of them. These branches are undoubtedly taught with varying degrees of thoroughness in the different schools, but allowing for an adequate instruction in all of them, we believe that such a curriculum embraces only the *minimum* which the state absolutely requires for its *safety*, and that more is essential to its *welfare* and *prosperity*.

Under our democratic institutions, the possibilities open to every child are far greater than under monarchical rule; the requirements, more exacting. We have no hereditary class, born to rule and hence educated for it from infancy, but, on the contrary, our future magistrates and legislators, national, state, and municipal, must come from the people generally, without regard to class distinctions. Already in our history, more than once, the chief position in our national government, has been filled by those who were born in the humblest sphere of life, and from Congress to Town Councils we have seen the various offices filled, not only by those who have previously enjoyed, but also by those who have been deprived of, good educational advantages.

The jury-box, too, that important feature in our institutions, draws its complement from no class, but from the whole people, and the welfare of all is dependent upon the degree of intelligence possessed by those placed in that responsible position. Ignorance in the voters is dangerous to the state, and a lack of suitable educational preparation in those who are to perform the multifarious duties attend-

ant upon the workings of democratic institutions in all their ramifications, is highly detrimental, to say the least.

Our state is largely dependent for its prosperity upon its manufacturing and mechanical industries, and these require a cultivated intelligence in order to keep pace with similar works in other states and countries in making constant progress in skill and improvements, in methods and machinery. With all these great interests in view, we cannot safely trust to the chance that natural ability will develop itself, or that those who could be really benefited by a higher education, will, in some way, manage to secure it. The example of other countries teaches us that supremacy can only be secured and maintained by advancing the general education of the masses.

The statement, that any advance beyond the rudiments of an English education tends to unfit its recipients for the practical duties of life, does not seem justifiable, unless it be granted that such advance is made under the tuition and supervision of persons deficient in the qualifications for the exalted position of teacher.

True education looks to the fostering and perfecting of all that is ennobling in character ; cultivates correct thinking and reasoning powers ; enlarges the mind to a better realization of the duties and responsibilities of every-day life ; helps to perceive the dignity of labor in every form, whether mental or manual, and prevents from narrow-minded or one-sided views of social questions. There may be a shallow imitation, giving a superficial knowledge of a few facts, dates or figures, which might engender self-conceit,

and puff up the mind of the scholar to such a degree as to cause him to depreciate honest labor, but if such a sham is disseminated in any of our schools, the sooner it is exposed and eradicated, the better for the community. An ideal education has not yet been obtained, and ideal educators are not yet found in every school, but to do them justice, our teachers, as a class, are striving earnestly to implant in the minds of their scholars correct views as to the proper conduct of life.

It cannot be denied, however, that false notions of life in all its details, do exist prevalently, permeating all classes of society, producing social drones, conducing to extravagance and caste in an odious form, setting at defiance all true principles of democracy, and tending to subvert the best elements not only of social life, but almost, it may be said, of true Christianity. While we deplore the existence of social influences so baleful in their nature, so repugnant to the spirit of our institutions, and as palpably absurd as they are widely diffused, it is not our province, even if it were in our power, to do more than give them a passing recognition as facts or problems requiring solution at the hands of experts in philosophy, religion and sociology.

We are compelled, however, as the result of our observation, to deny the propriety of ascribing them to our public school system, and venture the assertion that the closest analysis cannot locate their origin inside of our school doors, and connect it inherently with our school training.

We learn from reliable statistics, that not more than three per cent. of the pupils in our public schools ever enter a