MSI Golden Moments

“[T]he conscious controlling of the movements of a particular muscle or limb, as practised by athletes and others, is of little practical value in the science of living. The specific control of a finger, of the neck, or of the legs should primarily be the result of the conscious guidance and control of the

mechanism of the torso, particularly of the antagonistic muscular actions which bring about those correct and greater co-ordinations intended to control the movements of the limbs, neck, respiratory mechanism, and the general activity of the internal organs.” (*MSI* 1996, 130)

*Dealing with the pupil’s apprehension, i.e. worry about being wrong; i.e. trying to follow the teacher’s instructions and get it right even though he has no idea – no experience – of what he’s supposed to be doing.*

“Now, to bring about the correct performance of any act by the principles of my system of teaching it is not necessary at the beginning to call upon the pupil for any specific physical efforts. This very fact should remove immediately any cause for worry or apprehension, but in many cases it does not.

When this is the case the teacher must explain that the reason that the pupil is unable to perform the act correctly is that he believes that there is something for him to do physically, when as a matter of fact the very opposite is necessary. He *is doing* what is wrong. Obviously he should begin then by ceasing to do what is wrong, not by endeavouring blindly to do what is right. The process is this: Apprehensively he tries to do what he thinks his teacher desires him to do. The old wrong subconscious orders follow in their usual channels, and before he realizes the fact he is performing the act in the old wrong manner. Therefore he must learn to inhibit these incorrect subconscious orders, which result in undue physical tension and the imperfect use of his muscles. But instead of employing

inhibition, he adds to his difficulties by renewing his efforts on the old basis to put right what he is told is wrong, and he actually employs increased force in accordance with his own estimate of

the amount needed to perform the act. And why so? Chiefly because the ordinary human being has lost the habit of inhibition, and because he is guided here by his sense of feeling, in this connection the most unreliable guide.” (*MSI* 1996, 157-8)

*Ideo-motor action*

To perform an act voluntarily, you must have an idea of what it felt like to perform it on a previous occasion. In a lesson, the pupil gains the experience through being guided by their teacher.

“If, in voluntary action properly so-called, the act must be foreseen, it follows that no creature not endowed with divinatory power can perform an act voluntarily for the first time.” [James *Principles*, 1890, vol. II, 487] These representations are not of the action itself but, rather, of the perceptual consequences in the world (or in the body) of the action having been expressed. (Morsella et al. 2020, 264)

“My reader must not fail to remember that mental conceptions are the stimuli to the ideo-motor centre which passes on the subconscious or conscious guiding orders to the mechanism. (*MSI* 1996, 131)

The teacher must with his hands move the pupil’s body for him in the particular act required, thereby giving him the correct kinsesthetic experience of the performance of the act.” (*MSI* 1996, 158)

Once the pupil is skilled at inhibiting her response and maintaining the directions for the integrated functioning of the torso (primary control), she must ‘frame and hold’ her intention (e.g. to pick up the cup) until such time as the ideo-motor system has organised and only then give consent to gain her end. It requires a certain sense of non-attachment, almost like observing someone else’s body move, as the activity happens under the new conditions in a new and surprising way.

MW 8th July 2022

“The great thing, then, in all education, is to *make our nervous system our ally instead of our*

*enemy*.” (James, *Principles*, 122)