

Slöjd International: Translating and Tracking Nordic Curricula for Holistic Health, 1890s-1920s

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Abstract : This paper investigates the transnational circulation of European Nordic ideas about and programs for manual education and training over the decades spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Based on the unexamined but voluminous correspondence (English-language) of Otto Salomon, an internationally famous education reformer who popularized a form of manual training called "slöjd" (anglicized as "sloyd"), this paper examines its circulation and translation across global cultures. Salomon, a multilingual promoter of new standardized program for manual training, based his curricula on traditional handicrafts, particularly Swedish woodworking. He and his followers claimed that the integration of manual training and craft work provided primary and secondary educators with an opportunity to cultivate the mental, but also the physical, and tangentially, the spiritual, health of children. While historians have examined the networks who came together in person to train at his slöjd school for educators in western Sweden, no one has mapped the international community he cultivated over decades of letter writing. Additionally, while the circulation of his ideas in Britain and Germany, as well as the northeastern United States has been placed in a broader narrative of "western" education reform in the Progressive or late Victorian era, no one has examined the correspondence for evidence of the program's wider international appeal beyond Europe and North America. This paper fills this gap by examining the breadth of his reach through active correspondence with educators in Asia (Japan), South America (Brazil), and Africa (South Africa and Zimbabwe). As such, this research presents an opportunity to map the international communities of education reformers active at the turn of the last century, compare and contrast their understandings of and interpretations of "holistic" education, and reveal the ways manual formation was understood to be foundational to the healthy development of children.

Keywords : history of education, history of medicine and psychiatry, child health, child formation, internationalism

Conference Title : ICPP 2022 : International Conference on Philosophy of Psychiatry

Conference Location : Tokyo, Japan

Conference Dates : September 08-09, 2022