

Sloyd Models

BY DOUG STOWE



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Some of the Sloyd models from the 1902 series used to instruct beginning students. The numbers in the corner of each indicates its place in the progression, from #10 (relatively easy) through #37 (much more challenging).



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Bengt Svensson attended the summer classes at Nääs in the late 1950s, worked for 40 years as a Sloyd teacher, and then became a professor at the Department for Aesthetic Art (Sloyd, Handicraft and Design) at Linköping University, Sweden. From his home near Borås, fifty kilometers northeast of Nääs, he learned of an elementary school teacher Sven Alfred Kjellgren (1864-1937), who studied at Nääs Sloyd teacher training school for six weeks in 1898. His students made the objects of the 1902 model series, which took them just four lessons per week in grades 5-7.

Svensson met some of Kjellgren's students, who had saved their Sloyd models for over 60 years, and by following connections between students and their families, he managed to collect and photograph the entire model series from 1902 which he has made available either on CD or by internet download from his website: www.formitra.com. The collection also includes information about the intended educational value of the series.

Educational Sloyd was firmly rooted in the educational philosophy of Friedrich Froebel, the German educator who invented

Kindergarten. The addition of Sloyd to Schools was seen as a way to extend Froebel's theories beyond the earliest years of education. The key to an understanding of the use of sloyd models rests in Froebel's concept "self-activity." Through the careful arrangement by skills used in the making of the models, a student would learn from one model nearly, but not quite everything required to complete the next, which was designed to add one more layer of skill and complexity, enabling the student to tackle the next. And so on. Through following the complete model series the student could not only develop a set of skills, but would also come to a full understanding of themselves as self-directed learners.

Educational sloyd was criticized by some for being overly rigid and lacking opportunity for creative expression, and while some teachers like Kjellgren made exacting use of the models as presented at Nääs, Salomon urged his teachers to be creative, adapting the models to fit the circumstances in the communities in which they taught.

The 1890 Model series was developed by Salomon's lead teacher, Alfred Johansson, in two elementary school versions, one for

city and one for rural schools in order to keep the models relevant to the students, their families and communities. So while flexibility was encouraged in the use of models, Salomon asked that his teachers follow these rules:

The models should have practical value and be finished by the students themselves. They should be made entirely of wood—some soft, others hard. As little material as possible should be used. The work should not require polish. They should require little or no turning or decorative carving. They should develop the sense of form and beauty. The construction of the models should require the use of all necessary tools, and the performance of the most important manipulations connected with woodwork.

In notes written in 1890, Salomon introduced three model series associated with Näas: *The Fundamental Series for Country Elementary Schools*, the *Town Elementary School Series for Boys*, and the *Higher Boys School Series*. He notes, "The series for the higher girl's school has not as yet been completed."

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