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A PROGRAM OF ETHICAL INSTRUCTION

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In this discussion I hope to indicate some essential requirements for a more efficient program of ethical instruction in the public schools. Excepting possibly the home, our public school is the most influential factor in moral education. What it has done in the perpetuation and development of morality merits our praise rather than censure. Yet we must admit that there is vast room for improving its efficiency in moral training; and in the interest of social and educational welfare, we must discover ways and means of promoting the improvement.

After observing considerable moral training in the public schools, I am persuaded that the fundamental fault of current ethical instruction is its pedagogical aimlessness. Moral character, which has been the ultimate aim, is too vague and indefinite to give us any pedagogical direction. From the educational viewpoint, moral character needs some analysis and such a general purpose needs subdividing into specific aims. The fact is that certain phases of moral character are due to very definite modes of antecedent educational practice; and by controlling this practice we may control the outcomes.

Fortunately for educational procedure, Professor W. C. Bagley in his recent book entitled *Educational Values*, has given us an exceedingly useful analysis of conduct-controls. He shows that the controls of conduct are of five different types: (1) Specific habits; (2) knowledge, in the form of ideas, facts and principles; (3) ideals or "emotionalized standards;" (4) attitudes and mental perspectives; and (5) prejudices, tastes and interests. This analysis is fully as applicable to a program of ethical instruction as it is to training in language, drawing or numbers; and this application will suggest all of the essential requirements for an improved program. My aim, therefore, is to apply separately each of the five types of conduct-controls to ethical instruction.

First, *our public school program must provide for the development of a large number of specific moral habits.* The initiation of these habits may be incidental to other teaching or it may be accomplished directly in the ethics lesson; but their cultivation necessarily becomes incidental to the general instruction and discipline of the school. The point which I wish to emphasize, however, is that the incidental cultivation of these moral habits does not increase the

burden of teaching; on the contrary, the carefully planned cultivation of moral habits in connection with the other work of the school renders that work easier and more efficient. It is evident, for example, that the ease and efficiency of school government are very dependent upon the early formation of certain specific moral habits. Obedience to the teacher is one; caring for public property is another; and certain habits of politeness, punctuality, cleanliness, regularity, and neatness are a few examples of the many others which bear a direct relation to school government. The correlation of school government and moral training in matters of habit building, therefore, obviously renders both more efficient and yields a total economy in school work.

Just as clearly the incidental development of moral habits in connection with the teaching of other subjects gives mutual efficiency. Habitual neatness in all written work, drawings and construction represents at once a better workmanship and a more substantial moral foundation than if that element were lacking. It requires but little reflection on our part to see that the efficient teaching of the ordinary school subjects necessitates the concomitant cultivation of many specific habits of accuracy, politeness, perseverance, truthfulness, self-control, co-operation, etc.

Taking for illustration the incidental habits of co-operation, we find that in numerous cases the correlation is easy. In group singing co-operation is paramount; every individual must contribute his part to a total harmony. In dramatization, which deserves much larger recognition as an educational practice, co-operation is essential; each child has a part in presenting the unified story. In such subjects as geography or nature study there is ample opportunity and need for making a collection of specimens, and this can be done co-operatively; each child will contribute his individual effort to the undertaking. Even in arithmetic problems may be assigned to a group as well as to an individual, and the solutions will be the result of co-operative effort. These possibilities are enough to show how natural and easy the correlation is. I chose to illustrate especially these habits of co-operation because they need emphasizing. They are more distinctly moral at the present time than they ever were before. Co-operation is now the very basis of industrial, social, and civic life; and for the sake of general as well as moral efficiency it must continue to play an ever increasing rôle in educational methods.

Secondly, *the school must impart ethical information.* Because we have discovered the insufficiency of knowledge as the sole factor

of moral control and because we have seen the strength of its far more powerful allies, many persons have declared themselves against the direct teaching of ethical facts and principles. Hence this splendid analysis of Professor Bagley's is needful in restoring the proper balance. Knowledge is truly a controlling factor of conduct, and as such our ethical program must provide for it. This calls for a formal "ethics" course.

Many moral ideas and principles develop through the government and social life of the school. Every teacher knows that in school management there is no end to opportunities for imparting moral truths both to individuals and to groups; and as we get away from the older practice of arbitrary discipline these opportunities increase. In modern teaching we hold that pupils have a right to know the moral basis for the rules which govern them, and the obvious outcome of this practice is a great deal of incidental moral knowledge.

Incidentally, too, in connection with such studies as reading, literature, and history, we develop many moral concepts and principles. We should plan for these outcomes. In those schools where no formal ethics course exists, the planning should be systematic enough to provide a reasonable substitute. In most of the textbooks that I am familiar with more than half of the reading lessons have a moral content, but these are not selected with a view to covering systematically the whole field of juvenile conduct as an ethics course ought to do; they are random selections. This is another phase of the aimlessness of our ethics teaching of which I complained at the outset. The imperative need in general teaching at present is an organization of methods and material to insure the maximum incidental outcomes without detracting from any intrinsic functions.

My ideal, therefore, with respect to the knowledge factor in ethical instruction is that a formal ethics course shall adequately supplement the ethical information contained in other school subjects and in discipline; and this can be determined only by analyzing and estimating carefully the moral outcomes incidental to the life and curriculum of a given school.

In the third place, *application of this analysis to ethical instruction requires ample provision for creating, modifying, and developing moral ideals.* There are two principal influences to be considered in attaining this end. One is the formation of specific moral habits; the other is the admiration accorded to characters in life, in song or in story.

All that I have said regarding the cultivation of moral habits is equally applicable to the development of ideals. It has been shown that although practice in a specific habit may not be transferred to an unrelated process as skill, it does tend to become general through the agency of an ideal. For instance, a child who has formed the habit of always arriving at school on time is helped thereby to meet other engagements promptly, not through transference of practice but because his punctuality at school every morning has helped to establish promptness as his ideal of personal conduct. Since any act may become automatic through conscious repetition, we have thereby a definite mode of influencing any chosen ideal of conduct.

But the other influence upon the shaping of ideals is no less important. The admiration accorded by pupils to any character tends to fix the qualities of that character in their minds as an ideal. Consequently there are three other important provisions which the school should make with respect to developing moral ideals. They are an exemplary teacher, exemplary pupil leaders, and ample contact with the noble characters of literature and history.

Our certification laws should provide for the exemplary teacher. But the pupils whom the teacher develops into leadership should be also exemplary pupils. This provision is too frequently overlooked in the belief that pupil leaders, like poets, are "born, not made." It is my observation, however, that a certain policy of the school always determines the personnel of the group of leaders. Where the teacher, in order to make the bad boys "feel responsibility," appoints them to all the coveted monitorships, sends them on all important errands, and gives them the most spectacular positions on all spectacular occasions, those bad boys will eventually become the admired leaders of the whole group; on the other hand, a systematic recognition of the best children in school for all of these appointments will reverse the leadership, and instead of a deteriorating influence upon the development of moral ideals there will be one that is uplifting.

Unless children have also abundant opportunities for admiring the moral characters of literature and history, they will idealize exclusively persons of their acquaintance; and they will do so without making the necessary discrimination between abstract moral qualities. If a boy admires some man on account of his strength, his good humor or his agility, the man and not the quality becomes an ideal to the boy. If the man smokes, the ideal includes smoking; if the man is profane, the ideal includes profanity. An important

function of education is to organize into a composite ideal all of the desirable abstract qualities and to make that ideal as free as possible from any association with undesirable traits. We can do this in large measure through literary and historical characters, which are presented in such a way that only the desirable qualities become attractive.

By the application of Professor Bagley's analysis we find ourselves also responsible for the establishment of certain *moral attitudes*. We have known that pupils graduate from the elementary school with well-defined attitudes towards life; but we have not sufficiently located our responsibility for them in the program of the school. Too often we have considered them the uncontrollable outcomes of accidental environment. I can cite no better illustration of the school's influence in the formation of an attitude than the one concerning the liquor traffic. However unscientific the facts may have been, the temperance teaching which began to be forced upon the schools a few decades ago has functioned undoubtedly in attitudes and prejudices respecting the use of intoxicating beverages as completely as the promoters ever anticipated. The exodus of saloons from many sections of our country in recent years is an indication of the practical strength of these conduct-controls at the ballot box.

There are, of course, numerous attitudes towards social conditions and relationships which the school should foster. Our program of ethical instruction must provide opportunity for the repetition of certain moral judgments under varying circumstances until they become clearly defined attitudes. To take an illustration from the ethics course which I am at the present time supervising, the subject of cleanliness recurs twelve times at more or less equal intervals throughout the eight grades. Each time the lesson grows out of new situations, relates to new experience, and finds wider applications of life.

Lastly, *since the interests, the personal tastes and the prejudices of mankind are among the most important controls of behavior, a complete program of ethical instruction cannot neglect them.* These outcomes are the automatic emotional responses, developed by repeatedly making the same sort of response to given situations. They do not necessarily contain much of the intellectual grasp. For example, the grandchildren of a Union soldier will have one kind of prejudice concerning the Civil War and the grandchildren of a Confederate soldier will have another, regardless of how much or how little they know about it. Prejudices are going to exist in

large number and act as controlling factors in conduct; hence, the school must promote favorable moral prejudices and tastes and suppress or counteract the undesirable ones. It is desirable, for instance, that we develop a preference for "our own United States." To do so it is necessary that teachers show this feeling themselves, that flag drills and celebrations of patriotic occasions constitute a part of the program, and that in various ways the schools show a deferential respect for our national heroes.

Moral prejudices and tastes will develop in connection with other outcomes if the teacher is what we know as an inspirational teacher. The art of evoking the kind of emotional response desired in each situation is exceedingly difficult; and since it is a question of method and personality, I wish merely to emphasize its importance. In actual practice the art of determining emotional responses of the pupils must be cultivated and encouraged, for no ethical instruction is complete without it.

UTILIZING MORAL CRISES FOR ETHICAL INSTRUCTION.

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Having once had occasion, purely from motives of economy of time, to address larger bodies of our school, instead of individual students, on subjects which would now be called vocational guidance, I discovered that the interest thus spontaneously aroused in the students for the problems of making a living could be diverted and even more profitably utilized for ethical instruction. How this was done may serve as an introduction to the more interesting method of utilizing moral crises proper.

To the youthful student, in his *blasé* and sophisticated attitude toward life, the moral problem has no existence. His most immediate concern is solely and purely a struggle for pleasurable life, and any weapon which may be profitably and successfully employed in the attainment of the natural goal of juvenile self-indulgence is calmly and ruthlessly employed. The most natural weapon in the hand of the child in this struggle for unannoyed existence is that exquisite piece of moral, or rather unmoral, machinery known as