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### THE MORAL PHASES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

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# THE MORAL PHASES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

## IOWA

### MORAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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In November the following questions were printed and distributed at the Iowa State Teachers' Association in Des Moines. They were sent also to all county superintendents in the state:

1. From your own observation, in about what per cent of the schools of Iowa would you say that a specific effort is being made at moral training?
2. What definitely (if anything) are you now attempting in moral training?
3. Have you periods set aside for direct moral instruction? How often? How do you proceed? With what success? What books or other helps have you found useful?
4. Describe anything you are doing through the regular school occupations and studies. What ones do you find most useful?
5. What difficulties do you encounter—such as indifference of pupils, failure to vitalize the subject and the like?
6. What are some of the things in school life that you personally have found leading to immorality?
7. If you have in mind a program for moral instruction for schools of your grade, or even any suggestion, kindly outline it.

In all, forty-seven replies were received from superintendents and teachers, which, together with such inquiries as I have been able to make, may serve to reflect the work that is being done in the state.

#### I. The amount of attention given to moral instruction.

The massed judgment of the forty-seven persons replying estimates that 22 per cent of the teachers of the state are making specific efforts in this direction. This estimate is far too high. The replies came mostly from localities which are known to be doing lively work in this direction. All the county superintendents, for example, who are known to be doing most were among those who replied. Of the twenty-seven out of the ninety-nine county superintendents who responded thirteen admitted that nothing definite is attempted. It is reasonable to suppose that most of those who were silent had nothing to report. One superintendent gives what may be regarded perhaps

as fairly characteristic. "In spring of 1908, I secured the following report from Wright County teachers on this question:

TOTAL REPORTED, 184 TEACHERS.

71 reported no plan whatsoever.

69 by way of correlation or punishment only (a very poor way).

11 by example only. 6 of these had nothing of merit to offer by way of example.

25 in general way, in connection with other subjects or by correlation.

5 taught by definite plan and *daily*.

3 taught daily, stories, memory gems and short talks on manners and morals.

Note please that only five teachers taught the subject daily and by definite plan and at a time when the instruction will do good."

The degree of effort depends largely upon the personal interest of superintendents and the condition of public opinion in the localities. There are three counties and two or three cities where nearly all the teachers are making consistent effort at moral training, and several localities where there is considerable interest. It is safe to say that for most part there is almost entire absence of intelligent effort. This does not mean an absence of desire. There is on the contrary a general recognition of its importance. One teacher writes, "This, more than any other work is sorely and sadly neglected, and something along this line is of greater value than any subject which is taught." A superintendent says, "It seems that something is wrong, somewhere; perhaps the schools are not entirely to blame; in fact I know they are not; but the exposing of graft in high places as well as the low; and in every line; in the school and in the CHURCH as well, indicates that this field should certainly be taken hold of some way. You and your association should have the hearty endorsement of every one who is interested in the welfare of the nation and its people. You may depend upon our co-operation, and if we can be of further service to you please let us know."

II. In studying out the quality of what is being done in the state from the communications I have received it has seemed that the kinds of effort fall into certain types, somewhat as follows:

1. Externalism. Many teachers are applying mechanically some "method" of moral instruction. Others, although recognizing the importance of it, are doing nothing while waiting for a method to be developed. "If I knew some thoroughly vital method I believe I could get them (the pupils) alive to it. I have no program but would

like to have one." Many are enforcing the moral law from without instead of calling it out as a phase of personal attitude and conduct. A superintendent remarks, "I have experienced no particular difficulties. I have so far been able to overcome indifference to moral suasion by accompanying it with a warning that if mild means won't do severer means will be resorted to. (I rather suspect that in most cases the warning counts for more than the moral suasion.)"

2. Partial methods, usually of a hit-and-miss kind, sometimes with tricks and devices. It is usually the case that a teacher or superintendent makes a specialty of a single device, is satisfied with it, and tries nothing beyond it. This fact is well described by the superintendent of the Decorah schools. "A number of courses of study state that the work is being done, etc., perhaps in all of the courses of study—but from a practical working point of view, we will find upon investigation that very little definite work is being done in these schools. Much of it depends upon the individual teacher, and it is only emphasized in a hit-and-miss manner as opportunity may present in connection with reading, history and the like. The trend of the line of thought depends upon the view of the teacher; if she is strong in temperance sentiment, she emphasizes these things; if in the matter of truthfulness, she emphasizes these things, and so it goes. I know such is the case in our own school, and I feel that we are doing about as much as the average school. I trust I am not pessimistic, and that I am giving you a fair idea of the situation."

The special devices are usually good and suggestive as far as they go. Among those mentioned are writing proverbs and verses on the blackboard, placing printed quotations on pupils' desks on timely occasions, watching for an opportunity to moralize on situations which arise in school life, keeping pupils busy in order to use up their superfluous energy, commenting upon current events, encouraging pupils to keep savings-bank accounts, instilling honor and courage and a sense of fair play through athletics, cleaning up outbuildings, beautifying premises and school grounds, the selection of good songs and lessons in politeness. These do not exhaust the list, but are typical instances.

If these specialties could be massed together into the procedure of a single teacher or school system they might constitute a well nigh ideal program of moral training. One superintendent who makes no additional effort, reports the following device: "A little thing worth while doing is this: On the high school bulletin board we have placed forms of inquiries sent out by bonding companies and large employers, showing pupils what questions as to character and habits will be asked

about them when they go to apply for a position worth while. I think this appeals to pupils."

These two groups, together with those who attempt nothing, constitute, I suspect, practically the mass of teachers of the state of Iowa.

3. Formal instruction. Of this there is apparently very little. Only one-sixth of those reporting have periods set aside for definite ethical teaching. One town has a daily period during the first three years. A few have periods once or twice a week. A number report the use of the opening exercises for this purpose.

Among the helps mentioned are Dewey's *Lessons on Morals* and *Lessons on Manners*, the Lessons furnished by the Character Development League, Miss Cabot's book on ethics, Everett's *Primer of Ethics*, Hall's volume on *Physical and Sexual Science*, Dr. Stall's series, and the lines suggested by W. T. Harris in the Report of the Commissioner of Education.

The danger of formal instruction is commented upon freely. "Many of our pupils are either now taking a course 'with the minister' or have taken such a course. After the catechism has been passed upon, the danger point seems to have been passed and life is serene. This whole tone is reflected often in a community."

4. The vitalizing use of literature and other studies like history, biography and civics, that touch intimately the springs of conduct. The use of stories for children is most frequently mentioned and often with enthusiasm over the wholesome results. Superintendent Van Houten of Winfield writes, "In the primary grades (1 and 2) we have a splendid teacher who has met with remarkable success in training the children in habits of honesty and uprightness. A large part of this has been accomplished through the careful choosing of stories which shall have more in them than merely to entertain. Bible stories are very effective. Several incidents have come to my notice which have proved that the moral training which these pupils have received has become a part of their lives."

The stories are sometimes from current fiction. Mrs. Waugh of Shenandoah says, "Any interesting, well-written book with a noble purpose in view, can be made useful. This year I have read in my schools 'The Widow O'Callaghan's Boys' and 'The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come.' Their language exercises, sentences given in the spelling classes, and even their conversation have teemed with quotations from Chad, and applications of his experiences. Some of the boys have taken Pat, Mike, or Andy O'Callaghan as their model of manly youths, and have improved greatly in manners and morals."

The superintendents, both women, of Cherokee and Page counties have been so fertile in the selection of the best literature appropriate to the life of the school, the personal and social interest of pupils, arbor day and bird day, agricultural and domestic science work, the beautifying of grounds and buildings, that practically all of the teachers of these two counties have caught the spirit and are filling the pupils' minds with this literature, much of which they commit to memory. The selections are supplied to the teachers by frequent printed correspondence from the superintendents.

This vitalizing use of the materials of the curriculum includes, though less frequently, nearly all of the subjects. Mrs. Huftalen of Norwich writes, "In physiology—cleanliness and morals; chastity and manner, healthy bodies and healthy souls are correlated to good effect. I deem it of vastly more importance to see to it that a child uses a tooth brush; obtains desires to dress for comfort, beauty and protection; eats to live; abstains from appetites and passions because it is a practical and beneficial use of knowledge that his life may be more useful and prolonged and also that of his progeny,—rather than to merit 95% on a memoriter technical examination."

5. Personalism. Many teachers and superintendents trust largely the uplift and saving power of personality to solve the moral problem.

This becomes an important factor in the selection of teachers. One superintendent who is himself in close personal touch with the pupils of his town says, "Not enough care is bestowed on the selection of teachers in regard to their morals. I demand Christian character. I never present candidates to the board unless I can be assured of their clean character and high ideals."

This feeling leads some teachers to treat pupils as persons instead of objects. Mrs. Cooley of Hawarden whose discussion emphasizes throughout the quality of the individuality of the teacher and the friendly relation between teacher and pupil writes, "I am a strong believer in the 'honor system.' The teacher who watches her pupils and pretends to be able to catch them at their tricks makes a mistake. It was my custom to admit, frankly, the truth: 'Of course you can do many things every day that I won't see. Why couldn't you? You are fifty pairs of eyes against one. But I see nothing in that, as this is *your* place of business, and when you fail to attend to it you cheat yourselves, etc., etc.' The false bottom thus drops out."

It is a noteworthy fact in this connection that only two teachers make any point of utilizing as a preparation for citizenship and morality in general the social life of the school. This point, which has

been so central during recent years in educational theory, does not seem to have gotten over into the common practice of the schools.

Here and there through the correspondence are nuggets, and rubies, and pearls of character like the following, "I have no outline for moral instruction, other than *firstly* to live so near to:—what shall I say? the stars? to nature and nature's God, to heaven which to me means the state and condition of harmony and peace; to purity, to all things in our daily walks 'that worketh together for good'? I guess this is what it means; and *secondly*—to teach the boys and girls by precept and example that service and good manners come from the heart in just the same way that the fragrance and beauty come from the rose; and *thirdly*—by the aid of books, circulars, pictures, music, talks, etc., to put the spittle on the clay and bathe their eyes that they may see, and know, and understand—and *live*."

6. A philosophy of morality together with a philosophy of education. There are a few—very few I think—who regard morality as an organic part of the entire life of pupils and so are trying to utilize *all* of the curriculum and the entire set of activities in school life as material for moral instruction. Principal Horne of Grinnell says, "I regard all our regular school exercises when faithfully carried out as distinctly moral in their general effect." In like manner Superintendent Haddock of Sioux City, after outlining many ways of improving the moral health of the schools, writes, "It is our opinion that through all the activities of the school we are deepening in the minds of the boys and girls the essential principles which characterize those who live moral and upright lives. It has been my experience in dealing with boys and girls that we accomplish more in the long run when we go about this matter *indirectly*. . . . But to the best of my knowledge and belief, most school men have felt as Dr. Harris evidently did, that through all the work of the school we contribute very largely to the development of good moral standards, etc. I am of the opinion that those who have been most active in developing playground facilities throughout the country, and such men as Mr. George of the 'George Jr. Republic' at Freeville, N. Y., are doing more for the moral uplift of the boys and girls than any of the rest of us and far more than we could hope to accomplish through any school room instruction in 'Morals and Manners' *per se*."

8. A philosophy plus a program. These instances are fewer still. There are superintendents who object to systematic moral instruction because "under these conditions the pupils become indifferent." There is an honest effort here and there, however, to build a curriculum

which shall avoid the objections and at the same time call out in a positive way a lively set of wholesome, refining and elevating impulses. The most complete attempt in this direction is that of Superintendent Bostwick of Clinton. He first outlines the principles underlying moral instruction from which these sentences are an excerpt.

"More attention should be given in the schools to the development of the moral life of the child. The formation of character involves a fourfold training—physical, industrial, intellectual and moral."

"Moral culture demands two lines of education—the establishing of right habits and the formation of right ideals. The personality of the teacher is the most important factor in the moral training of the child. From the first the teacher should inculcate in the child the love of truth. The habits of self control, honesty, obedience, kindness and courtesy should be enforced in all the duties of the school.

"The formation of ideals comes largely from reading and instruction, and hence calls for a course of study that will enrich the child's mind with right ideals and become guides to his will in determining conduct.

"A course in ethics should be something more than formal instruction in the abstract principles of ethics. It should be a systematic course of instruction drawing concrete material from the humanity studies—history, literature, art and music. For these studies have a distinct ethical content, and furnish not only examples, but also ideals and principles for the development of moral judgment and for guidance in action. A larger place must be given in the daily program to these humanity studies for concrete material which is the necessary basis for lessons in practical ethics. It has been said—'To know mankind and to know one's self are the great shaping forces which mold character.'

"After presenting stories from history for examples, literature, music and art for ideals, and selections from Scripture for moral principles, we have laid the necessary foundation for formal lessons in ethics, which may include the child's duties in school-life and in the home; social and civic duties; his duties to himself and his duties to God."

Superintendent Bostwick then outlines grade by grade three kinds of well selected material. (a) a course in history, literature, civics and ethics; (b) poems for study and memory; and (c) passages from the Bible selected because of literary and ethical feeling to be taught in connection with the course in English.

III. Classification of the difficulties met by the teachers and superintendents in promoting the moral life of the schools. These are given about in the order of the frequency with which they are mentioned and the urgency with which they are discussed. The catalogue of these difficulties indicates roughly, apparently, the lines along which the teachers are trying to improve.

1. The supervision of playgrounds. The most frequent source of temptation and of evil habits seems to be the intermingling of mixed groups on the playgrounds and on the way to and from school. One superintendent writes, "Personally, I believe that while it is undesirable for children to come to school at too early an hour, arrangements should be made for admitting them to the school building and to work as soon as they find it convenient to arrive on the premises. The time spent in loitering about on the corner or in the alley back of the school house until the time has come for 'lines to be formed' is to my mind, time not simply wasted, but given over to the 'Evil One' in which he may work his will among the boys and girls of the neighborhood. Likewise I would arrange, if possible, so that (while the pupils of each school room would devote not less—but probably more—time to free play, games and other activities) all should remain under the direct control of the teachers from the time they come upon the school premises until they leave for their homes. Moreover, I should arrange so that the younger children might use the playground or play room at a time when the older children were reciting, so that those of each department might play the games adapted to their physical strength and skill. I would not turn four or five or six hundred children out upon a vacant lot, covered with cinders from the boiler room and lacking all the appliances of a playground and then expect them to get along without quarreling, fighting and using profane and vulgar language and otherwise violating those principles of morality which we attempt to teach in the school room."

2. The improvement of school grounds and buildings. There has come a decided awakening in the state of Iowa on this point as the outgrowth not simply of the developing aesthetic sense, but also out of the conviction that this is the most effective means of lifting the moral tone of the school. The most serious problem in this connection is that of the proper placing and care of outbuildings in rural communities. A county superintendent writes, "Another thing that I have found that seems to lead to immorality is the indifference the school officials take towards the school grounds and buildings, especially and in almost every case the closets. What can a teacher do when

she goes to school the first day, the school house just in fair condition and the closets with obscene pictures and language all over the inside, a door off the hinges, and the buidings tipped ready to fall over? If this isn't a thing that leads to immorality I don't know what will." Another county superintendent says, "When I find a toilet in unusually bad condition I put it in order myself and then tell the teacher that I shall expect her to keep it in good order. I require her to sweep each closet at least once a week. I hold that less vulgar language will appear upon the walls when the pupils know the building will be visited by the teacher."

3. Lifting the public sentiment of the community. Several teachers confess the impossibility of materially improving the moral sentiment of the school while parents remain indifferent and the moral atmosphere of the home holds the children upon a low level. In several communities the teachers have undertaken the task of arousing an interest among parents through mothers' clubs, through school entertainments, through the common interest of parents and teachers in corn growing and other contests in which the school is made the center, and the like.

4. Improvement in the preparation of teachers. Many of those who recognize the importance of moral instruction acknowledge freely their inability to handle so difficult a problem. There is clearly a lack of preparation and training for the work. A general condition is set forth vividly in the following incident. "Better results are not obtained, because the teachers themselves do not understand the subject. Not long ago, in a large audience containing many teachers, the minister asked all who had studied moral science to stand. Two preachers and myself were all that arose. How can they teach what they do not know?"

5. The matter of emancipation from the stereotyped routine of the school and from the artificial procedure in regard to examinations and promotions. Five teachers mentioned the impossibility of the elimination of cheating and other evils of a sharply competitive system of promotions under the present conditions. They do not lay the blame for such evils on the moral life of children but upon our methods of education. "The chief difficulty encountered is that the child subordinates the truths presented to what he believes to be his immediate interests. I have witnessed the effect on my own child—seven years of age. It is the brisk competitive system which sets a premium on lying and cheating. We try to disgrace a pupil who is

not up to standard, and as a result he is willing to do anything to escape this."

The most serious difficulty in this connection is that the routine and mechanism of school life keeps the students' minds fixed upon false values and makes the ripening and mellowing of character which comes from the normal expression of warm impulses next to impossible. "Many students seem to see no connection between dishonesty in examinations and dishonesty in business. Stealing answers often seems to be considered much different from stealing money. Pupils have told me this honestly. When I would talk to them and show them their error, if they were honest in intention, in nearly every case honest work would follow. The wrong value placed by the pupil upon his work in school is responsible for this. Some pupils are after grades only and not after knowledge, and in order to pass or be promoted will be dishonest. More should be done, it seems to me, to impress upon the pupil the value of performing the tasks presented faithfully without regard to grades."

6. The correlation of all the activities of school life into a system of character-developing material. It is a simple truism to the minds of most teachers that the one great aim of education is the formation of right moral habits and attitudes. There is clearly an honest and earnest feeling after the thing that can be done. There is, however, no aspect of education in which there is so complete haziness and uncertainty. There is not an educational problem that can be worked out at the present time that will be so gratefully received by the teachers of the country as that which is undertaken by this conference.

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## MISSOURI

### MORAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

GEORGE PLATT KNOX,

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The statements that follow are based upon (1) personal observation, (2) personal conferences, (3) correspondence, and (4) examination of printed courses of study.

#### STATE UNIVERSITY.

In the University of Missouri at Columbia courses are offered bearing more or less directly on moral training. In the College of Arts