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MORAL INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF MASSACHUSETTS

Ella Lyman Cabot ^a

^a Member State Board of Education , Massachusetts

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"5. Can Biography be made a greater aid to moral and civic training, and, if so, in what form?

"6. What practical recommendations can be made in order that the ethical values in the several traditional branches of the curriculum may be better realized?

"7. Is self-government desirable and feasible in the schools, and, if so, what form shall it take?

"8. Is it possible for the schools to co-operate with religious organizations, public playgrounds, boys' clubs, the Boy Scouts of America, and similar voluntary organizations in the furtherance of moral and civic training?

"9. What inter-relations, if any, exist between health and development work in the schools, and moral and civic training?

"10. What practicable methods are to be recommended for the co-operation of the school and the home?

"11. What causes, if any, are there in the present organization of the public schools working against moral and civic training, and how can they be eradicated?

"12. How can the discipline of the schools be made to serve the purposes of civic and moral training?

"13. What are the advantages and disadvantages to moral education of the so-called "Group Method" of instruction?

"14. To what extent shall the school, the high school especially, make use of athletics and social activities in the moral training of students?"

MASSACHUSETTS

MORAL INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF MASSACHUSETTS

ELLA LYMAN CABOT,

Member State Board of Education, Massachusetts.

In Massachusetts there is careful State Supervision but no State *control of education*. Every town is free to plan its own courses of study and to use whatever text-books seem to it best. A few studies, including the three R's, hygiene and drawing, are required by State legislation, but even in these cases each town can use what methods of teaching, books, hours it pleases. In contrast, therefore, with many other States, the experiments in Moral Training in our Massachusetts

schools have sprung up spontaneously, sporadically, flourishing or dying down according to their own vitality and the cultural devotion of a nurturing teacher. This fact of legal independence makes the Massachusetts experiments incomplete; it also gives to a few of them a character surprisingly original and ingenious.

To describe a few of these promising experiments seems my most useful contribution. I therefore say in a single breath what you all realize, that every school in the State is in the truest sense giving moral training, for no direct lessons in Ethics can begin to compare with the influence of highminded teachers and work sturdily mastered. With this in mind, we can go straight to the specific subject of definitely planned moral training.

In preparation for the Conference of the Religious Education Association I sent a note to each Superintendent of Schools in Massachusetts asking the following questions:

Do you have ethical lessons regularly in your school? If so, what is the method used?

How often are the classes held? In what grades?

What books, if any, are used?

Do your teachers have definite times for reading to the class the stories of noble lives?

Are any of the teachers interested in bringing out in detail the moral bearing of incidents in history or literature?

Do you have Junior Citizens' Clubs or School Cities?

Please describe in detail any successful or promising experiment in Moral Training that you are carrying on in your schools.

There are 184 superintendents of schools in Massachusetts. Of these, 71 answered my inquiries. The majority reported, as I had expected, that no ethical lessons were given regularly in schools.

An extract from one or two letters will give the characteristic attitude of these superintendents in relation to moral training.

"We do not set apart any definite time for formal ethical lessons. Teachers are directed to use their best efforts to improve the many opportunities that occur in connection with regular work in other lines. Most of our Readers contain material of great value. Bands of Mercy and the paper "Our Dumb Animals" have a strong influence for good. In the study of history and geography the dependence of the individual upon his fellows is kept constantly before the pupil. He is led to see that injustice, dishonesty, oppression, have always, soon or late, brought their punishment."

"I feel that the schools, more definitely and systematically than any other institution at the present time are enforcing the practice of Ethics. The discipline is on a high plane, and in the schools better than in any other place, the children are learning obedience, respect for authority and proper conduct toward each other."

"The teacher herself is the greatest moral force, and the ethical bearings of history and literature, supplemented by the daily incidents of the school, furnish the best material for ethical training."

In addition to such answers as these, asserting the general ethical influence of the school, I find six types of moral training different from one another and suggestive of excellent work that may be applicable in other states.

1. *Morning and Birthday Exercises*: The most frequent form of ethical teaching is related directly to the morning exercises or to historical anniversaries and the birthdays of great men.

It is common to find February noted as a Hero Month and the birthdays of Lincoln, Washington, Lowell and Longfellow made occasions for bringing to the fore their character and service. "At these times," writes the superintendent of Hudson, "we emphasize strongly the moral side of the lesson, picturing the good and strong points in character in such a way as to make the children wish to imitate such men." In Somerville there are twelve birthday commemorations. In Boston, sixty minutes a week in the first three grades and thirty minutes a week in the remaining grades are given to opening exercises. The teachers are directed to give instruction in good manners and good morals, but to keep strictly free from any allusion to or discussion of sectarian subjects. In Georgetown much is made of memorizing poems and sayings. The superintendent gives the teachers a suggestive list of poems and tells them that an amount equal to at least a line a day for the lower grades and two lines a day for the grammar grades should be memorized. These poems on the ethical side bring out kindness to animals, as in Lydia M. Child's "Who Stole the Bird's Nest"; Patriotism, as in Longfellow's "Arnold von Winkelried"; Discipline, as in Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade"; Self-control, as in Emerson's "Voluntaries." Mr. Frost also uses short sayings in the opening exercises, such as Burke's: "The nerve that never relaxes, the eye that never blenches, the thought that never wavers, these are the masters of victory."

Another form of morning talk is found in story-telling. In Rockport every teacher is given a copy of "Guide Right," by Emma L. Ballou; and, using the stories of noble deeds in this book, she talks

to the class each morning. Other teachers use "Old Stories of the East," by Baldwin.

"Children love stories," writes one superintendent, "and I am fond of telling them, so I frequently tell the children a good story, throwing my whole life into the narration. I leave the story to carry its own moral and find that it always does. The children remember and live and act these stories. Years after the stories are told the children talk about them."

2. *Literature Lessons*: Closely associated with the ethical teaching through morning talks, is the practice in a number of towns of giving moral lessons through literature. A carefully planned course of this type is found in Brookline. Every grade, from the first to the ninth has what is called an Ethical Centre. No child is told the secret of the Ethical Centre of his grade, but round it the expert teachers group the poetry and literature of the year. The Ethical Centres for the nine grades are as follows:

Grade I. The Love of Home.

Grade II. Love of Animals and Responsibility for the Care of Pets.

Grade III. Love of One Another.

Grade IV. The Duty of Self-control.

Grade V. Courage.

Grade VI. Obedience.

Grade VII. Wisdom.

Grade VIII. Patriotism.

Grade IX. Service through Character.

As illustrations of the use of poetry to bring out the ethical motive of each grade, I will give a few examples. In Grade IV the verse from Emerson's *Voluntaries*:

"So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When duty whispers low, 'Thou must,'
The youth replies, 'I can.'"

is made the keynote of the year. With it are associated the poems of "Casabianca" by Mrs. Hemans, "Jaffar" by Leigh Hunt, "Excelsior" by Longfellow, "Fidelity" by Wordsworth, "Forbearance" by Emerson. Gradually, without direct words, the impression of the need and the strength of self-control sinks in.

One day a building next to the school was being torn down and the absorbing process was visible from the Fourth Grade windows. But the children were reminded that

"When Duty whispers low, 'Thou must,'
The youth replies, 'I can.'"

and they turned their eyes back steadfastly to their books.

In the Ninth Grade, epics of chivalry are the staff for reading. A special interest is awakened in studying Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" in connection with the Abbey pictures of Sir Galahad in the Boston Public Library. One day when I visited the school the class was eagerly discussing the character of Marmion. "Was he a good or a bad man?"

"The children always *feel* the Ethical Centre which we are studying," said the principal of the school, "though I never speak of it directly."

3. *School Incidents*: In the primary grades at Lynn and Everett, and in all the grades at Whitman and Adams, definite lessons in moral training are associated with school incidents. In Lynn these lessons are given for fifteen or twenty minutes daily in Grades I and II in Everett, Whitman and Adams thirty minutes a week. . . . Kindness to one another, and to animals, Truthfulness, Good Work, Generosity, Politeness, Keeping one's Promises—are among the subjects taken up. The lessons are largely conversational and meant to draw out the child and to guide him. The Assistant Superintendent of Schools in Lynn writes that she feels a danger that prescribed lessons may appeal to a child's intellect rather than to his conscience, and she is planning to connect these ethical lessons more and more directly with incidents of everyday school life. In Seekonk district a somewhat different practice is followed. At least one ethical subject a week is taken up and is used as a language lesson. There is first a talk on the subject, then a written paper about what has been said. The subjects are often suggested by something that has happened in school. The superintendent writes: "I have found this a very satisfactory way of dealing with ethical instruction."

In Lowell, twenty-five minutes a week directly after the devotional exercises, are devoted to ethical instruction.

In a number of other towns plans for ethical instruction through story-telling and language lessons are under way.

4. *School Citizenship*: What I have called broadly School Citizenship is the focus of moral training in a number of Massachusetts towns. The form of such school civics varies largely. Several towns have adopted, in one or more schools or grades, the School City in the form devised by Mr. Wilson Gill. With one or two exceptions it is reported as successful. A Boy Scout movement has just been started

in Adams. In Hyde Park each grammar school has in connection with it a Civic League. This League devotes itself to keeping the grounds of the School clean, to beautifying them with flower beds, to making home gardens, and to developing loyalty to the school and community. Last year over 600 children had such gardens in their homes, and the playgrounds of five grammar schools were made attractive with shrubs and flowers.

In Belmont the High School students have a Study Room League and control their own conduct in the Study Room during school hours. This plan of self-government has been in operation successfully for ten years. In Lowell and in Brookline Junior Citizen Leagues have devoted themselves to the care of cleanliness of the school rooms and the school grounds. In Brookline the children of one Grammar School have kept the grounds free from litter and papers, and they report each week on the thousands of bits of paper that they have picked up with their spiked sticks. In Lowell the children of the Bartlett School have formed a Club which takes the following pledge:

"I will not injure any tree or shrub.

I promise not to spit upon the floor of the schoolhouse nor on the sidewalk.

I pledge myself not to deface any fence, neither will I scatter paper or throw rubbish in public places.

I will always protect birds and animals.

I will protect the property of others as I would my own.

I will promise to be a true loyal citizen."

5. *The Centre of Peace.* The Massachusetts Branch of the American School Peace League has begun to put together an ethical outline for the grammar grades, the central motive of which is the subject of International Peace. Thirty-six public school teachers from Chelsea and Malden have prepared an outline appropriate to each of the nine grades. The Committee in charge of this subject is one composed of School experts from Massachusetts towns. A few suggestions from this outline will show the character of the plan.

Grade I. We feel that this subject should include respect to elders, obedience to parents and teachers, kindness to playmates and animals, and respect for property. The idea of the brotherhood of man may be developed by stories of children in other lands. We suggest that the children often repeat the Band of Mercy pledge.

Grade IV. Care of School rooms, homes, streets. Tell about William Penn, Roger Williams, Clara Barton. Accent the nearness of nations as brought about by steamboats, railroads and telegraph.

Grade V. Tell as simply as possible the story of the Hague Conference. Show how the settling of trouble by referring it to a third party is like having an umpire at a ball game to settle disputes, instead of stopping the game when a question arises and fighting it out.

6. *The Progress System.* An original and interesting device for ethical teaching has lately been devised by Miss Marian K. Brown and is at present being tried in one of the Boston schools. It is called the Progress System. The letters of the word 'Progress' are used in an acrostic to represent a virtue which the children can win.

Purpose,
Right thinking,
Originality,
Good judgment,
Resoluteness,
Energy,
Self-control,
Self-confidence.

The teacher opens the series of lessons by telling her class that there are three kinds of boats in the world and three kinds of people. One is the ferry or wharf boat that has to be tugged by another boat, just as some people have to be pulled ahead by others. Another is the sail boat that goes well only when the wind is favorable. This boat is like people who depend on praise; but the third boat goes of its own inward power. It is the steamboat, which like strong and efficient people can make steady progress in spite of rough seas and unfavorable winds.

The class then decides to be like the steamboat, adopts the Progress system and chooses one of the qualities named above for that of the day. Resoluteness, for example, is chosen and written on the blackboard. The children are encouraged to show this quality, and from time to time they write the name of some historical or present-day example of this quality next the word resoluteness. For one lesson the teacher writes a list of adjectives like the following: Agreeable, jealous, happy, mean, discontented, generous, ill-tempered, cheerful. The pupils copy this list, putting those qualities which they like in one column and those they dislike in another. The undesirable qualities are written in pencil so that they may be rubbed out when the pupil is free from that particular fault.

Another day the pupil will print the acrostic in colors for a drawing lesson and add his favorite quotation.

With children of Grade I to IV a simpler acrostic is used.

Patience,
Right thinking,
Orderliness,
Good behavior,
Readiness,
Effort,
Self-control,
Self-dependence.

Each child's name is written on the board, and they are given stars when they habitually show any one of the qualities in the acrostic. For one lesson the teacher shows the children a prism and teaches them they must put it in the sun before the spectrum colors will appear. She then places a dark cloth over the prism and the disappointed children notice that the light cannot shine through. The teacher then tells them by winning the qualities in the Progress acrostic they will let the light shine through their lives as the sun lights up the colors on the prism.

To sum up. Interest in more direct ethical teaching is certainly on the increase in Massachusetts. In addition to schools which already give ethical teaching, several superintendents report the need of such teaching, though they are not yet clear what form it should take. Several Normal Schools and a number of High Schools are giving definite courses in ethics. The line of advance in public school ethical teaching in Massachusetts is closely linked to the strong and increasing interest in public health, city planning and house-keeping, vocational education, preparation for citizenship. The State is awake to these needs; they cannot be realized without ethical teaching which is vivid, unsentimental and associated with responsibility on the part of the pupils.