

Moral Education of the Adolescent

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V-Indirect or Direct Method

So far as this moral education problem is concerned there are two schools among our educators-the supporters of the indirect method and those of direct method. The first believe that there is no necessity for regular moral instruction. The only moral teaching they would give is incidental instructions as special occasion arises. They claim that morality is not based on knowledge, but on habits. These teachers feel that if we have our pupils "work true to the line every stroke," forming habits of promptness, regularity, neatness, honesty, industry, etc., that the school will provide the moral culture needed. Dr. John Dewey of Columbia University, and Prof. Palmer of Harvard are two of the most pronounced advocates of this method Dr. Dewey lays great stress upon the danger of our schools divorcing action from knowledge; he also decries the tendency to emphasize artificial school rules and regulations rather than the fundamental virtues of boyhood and girlhood in the social life of the world. He claims that there may be and often is a great difference between moral ideas and ideas about morality, defining a moral idea as any idea whatsoever that moves one to useful action. Continuing, the doctor points out that ideas about morality may or may not be moral. He stresses stronger perhaps than any other educator today the need of socializing our school subjects, habits, and associations.

Prof. George H. Palmer urges that our business is not to teach the children about goodness, but to lead them to practice goodness. The teaching of morality, he says, "is theory, ethics; not morality, practice." And he feels that it is a dangerous business to teach children morals. Quoting him further, "Nevertheless, he (the child) becomes dulled and hardened if he listens long to sacred words untouched." And, "by exposition of holy laws they are not nourished but enfeebled." Yet he thinks the schools may be a mighty power for righteousness. Note these sayings: "Many matters do not take their rise in knowledge at all. Morality does not. * * * This is the only power teaching professes: It critically inquires, it awakens, interests, it discovers laws. And this process applied in the field of character yields ethics, systematized knowledge of human conduct. It does not primarily yield morals, improved performance." ¹

"Carlyle tells of a carpenter who broke all the Ten Commandments with every stroke of his hammer. A scholar breaks or keeps them with every lesson learned. So conditioned on morality is the process of knowing, so inwrought is it in the very structure of the school, that a school might well be called an ethical instrument and its daily sessions hours for the manufacture of character."

"A teacher, who has entered deeply into his subject and is not afraid of allowing enthusiasm to appear, will make the densest subject and the densest pupil glow. * * *

¹ George Herbert Palmer, *Ethical and Moral Instruction*.

That school where neatness, courtesy, simplicity, obtain; where enthusiasm goes with mental exactitude, thoroughness of work with interest, and absence of artificiality with refinement; where sneaks, liars, loafers, pretenders, rough persons are despised, while teachers who refuse to be mechanical hold sway-that school is engaged in moral training all day long." ²

There are many educators who agree with most of what these men contend. They go all the way with Dr. Dewey in his insistence on the necessity of knowledge carrying over into action. They follow him in his distinction between moral ideas and ideas about morality. But, I am sure we are right when we insist that ideas about righteousness if they are fitting and fittingly presented may be the strongest of all moral ideas. We support the doctor, too, in his fight for making educational activities function in social service.

We agree with Prof. Palmer that all teaching rightly done is moral training. But we propose that the child shall be touched by the sacred words he hears in our periods consecrated for moral training and that his soul shall be quickened to do the good. Among those who advocate that to all that can be done by the indirect method must be added the advantage and force (which may be great) of direct and regular moral instruction we shall give the testimony of Prof. Gould of England, and of Frank Cramer of Palo Alto, California: Mr. Cramer says: "Instruction founded carefully on general principles, given by the living voice, in an atmosphere free from the spirit of recitation and examination, in a period consecrated to the contemplation of life and its meaning, could not fail to affect personal life to some extent; and even if it did not, it would give a form of intellectual stimulus that it alone can provide." ³

Prof. Gould says: "And no valid reason can be assigned for denying to moral instruction those advantages of method and logical connection which are associated with all other kinds of teaching. This does not mean that moral codes and abstract articles will be delivered to the child in neat parcels. The abstract scheme will be formed by the teacher, and will be clothed by the teacher with concrete interest; and the young learner will feel the presence of method, and both heart and imagination will take delight in the orderly development of an ethical theme." ⁴

"I venture to say that to let moral teaching remain within such narrow limits as this incidental method implies is a distinct meanness and disrespect towards the children. * * * "I most energetically protest against this error in school management. Moral instruction, in the true sense of the term, is not a formal exercise; it is not a sitting in judgment on persons present; it is not a corrective discipline. It is a hygiene; it is a training in 'admiration, hope and love,' it is, to borrow a phrase from Bergson, an 'aspect of creative evolution.'" ⁵

² George Herbert Palmer, *Ethical and Moral Instruction*.

³ Frank Cramer, *Moral Training in Public Schools*, page 160.

⁴ Gould, *Moral Instruction*, pages 33, 34.

⁵ Gould, *Moral Instruction*, page 20.

We cannot refrain from giving a few ringing words on this point from an address given at our N. E. A., 1915, by Buisson, the great veteran educator and statesman from France: "Is it enough to provide a child with what you ironically have called the three R's? You have answered 'No.' We answer the same with renewed emphasis. But besides the various new subjects which have been added to the elementary school program, there is one, and the most important of all, we think-the teaching of universal morality. There is in our opinion an A, B, C of the conscience just as there is an A, B, C of science. And the early teaching of those primordial elements of morality have been considered by us not less indispensable than those of language and calculation for all children. The state in France does not believe that it may abandon this function of teaching morality, this duty of moralizing childhood, so to speak, to the parents, to the families, to the churches, or to other private institutions. Our state considers that it is a national duty to transmit pure, intact, and complete these first notions which are at the basis of all moral and social order." ⁶

I am sure that you all agree with me that it is neither sound (I had almost said sane) nor safe to leave the most important element of our school work alone to incidental attention or instruction. But, rather, as responsible parents, with the insight that sees, and hearts that feel the needs of the hour and the rights of the future generations, we demand that the best period of the day be consecrated to teaching for righteous living. And let us see to it that the teachers, into whose hands our children are committed, are qualified and worthy to teach morality as one "having authority." That is, that they are whole in their efforts to live the clean and upright life -- that they believe to the depths of their souls what they teach; and that they are breathing the breath of life into their work to a degree that impels our sons and daughters to noble living in school, at home, and everywhere. And this is the only true and competent test of a teacher's fitness to continue in his calling.

Moral Education of the Adolescent, Improvement Era, 1917, Vol. XX, April, No. 6.

⁶ Buisson, *N. E. A. Proceedings, 1915, page 74*