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ABSTRACT

The current status of the United States as an "immoral" society has a direct correlation to the lack of serious attention given to moral education in the classroom. Morality, and what constitutes morality education, is a topic of concern for parents as well as educators. Morality, as a term, incorporates the social, economic, and political biases of the society that defines it. Morality instruction tries to enlist training that will create a more "humane" human. Morality, as a serious subject of education, began in the early stages of civilization. In ancient cultures, morality education was an important part of the curriculum. In classical times, the educational systems of the Greeks and Romans showed an integration of morality, or morality-based instruction, in their programs of study. As Christianity became a way of life attractive to the "intellectuals and prosperous upper classes," the first known "catechetical" school of Christianity was founded in Alexandria. The curriculum expanded from "exclusively religious and doctrinal courses" to general subjects, one being "ethics." Moral education was a part of religious instruction in medieval higher education. The character education movement between 1880 and 1930 attempted to make schools more efficient transmitters of "appropriate moral values." In the 1960s, values clarification invited students to define their own moral values, "free of adult imposition," through a process of Socratic dialogue and creative resolution of ethical dilemmas. Now the hope is that society will bring the issue of morality back to the educators and the educators will give serious attention to moral instruction. Contains 17 references. (BT)

Morality In Education

Melvina Noel

Morality in Education

When a person goes into a bank and robs it, there is no question that that person is a thief. What does one call a person that pockets a ten dollar bill that was mistakenly dropped by another individual? When a person blatantly tells an untruth in front of twelve jurors there is no doubt that that person is a liar. What does one call a person who holds back some of the truth for a "good" reason? The responses to these questions and other value oriented questions have caused a never-ending debate among educators, parents, and other members of societies. The responses to these questions have their basis in the exposure given to the subject of "moral education" in the classroom.

The current status of the United States as an "immoral" society has a direct correlation with the lack of serious attention given to moral education in the classroom. Silber (1995) states that we live in a "deeply flawed" society. When the formal educational system stops contributing to the fund of shared moral knowledge, the informal attempts are put under tremendous strain (Kilpatrick ,1992). In fact, the lack of focusing on moral education as an integral segment of the educational process is contrary to the very foundation upon which formal education was built. "The transmission of moral values has been the dominant educational concern of most cultures throughout history. . . . The current policies in American education that give secondary priority to transmitting morality represent a sharp fracture with the great tradition" (Wynne, 1985-1986, p. 4). In

order for one to fully grasp the impact that moral instruction in the educational system has on society, "morality" must be defined. This definition must include not only its formal meaning but its meaning as understood by society. After a comprehensive definition of morality has been established, attention must be given to the teaching of morality in the educational system. The understanding of morality education begins with the history of education. A preponderance of morality education can be found throughout the history of all levels of education. The "great" tradition of education was "the deliberate transmission of moral values to students" (p. 4). An in-depth discussion on morality education in the history of education necessitates discussing morality education as it has been handled in the 1990's. Are the ills found in today's society a result of the way moral education has been pushed aside? Regarding the tradition of transmitting moral values, Wynne (1985-1986) notes that our break with the past can be seen in the increase of youth disorder such as suicide, homicide, out-of-wedlock births, and pupil discipline. Finally, no discourse on morality in education would be complete without discussing how and why moral education became practically non-existent in the history of United States education and what if any are the future plans of present-day educators to revive moral education?

Morality and what constitutes morality education is a topic of concern for parents as well as educators. Children are often confused by phrases such as, "Be good for daddy" or "Don't do that because that's bad" or "You have to do the right thing." These phrases are representative of the vagueness that has caused much debate in today's

educational circles concerning the issue of morality as a subject of instruction. One side of the debate focuses on the definition of the term, "moral." Random House Webster's College Dictionary defines the term "moral" as "capable of recognizing and conforming to the rules of right conduct; a moral being." Some synonyms that A Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms lists to describe moral are, "ethical, good, honest, righteous, upright, noble, just, scrupulous, virtuous, decent" (Devlin, 1961, p.189). Although the meaning of the term, moral, seems to suggest the best qualities of being humane, the irony is that the proponents for moral education struggle with formulating a formal instructional plan that can incorporate what is to be viewed as right and wrong. The underlying reason might follow Coombs' (1985) rationale that moral principles "are intimately tied to language—to the meaning of words and the concepts underlying them" (p. 255). In effect "words cannot transfer the meaning" (Angha, 1989, p.30).

Morality, as a term incorporates the social, economic and political biases of the same society that defines it. "As soon as someone starts talking about forming character at school, others claim that it just can't be done, that we won't find a consensus on what to teach or how to teach it." (Bennett, 1988, pp. 77-78). Former Education Secretary, William J. Bennett, agrees that there is not a consensus on everything but, "There is fairly general agreement as to what elements constitute good character in an individual"(p.78). H e adds that you will not find many people to argue that honesty is not a part of good character (pp. 77-78). But what if the individual is concerned with absolute honesty? This

is another part of the debate that society cannot agree upon. The meaning of morality becomes increasingly unreliable as definitions become more personalized.

Dewey (1966) lists discipline, natural development, culture, and social efficiency as moral traits. He believes that the "aims and values which are desirable in education are themselves moral" (p.358). Others describe moral education as "character education." The proponents of character education focus on core values such as ". . . respect, responsibility, compassion, trustworthiness and honesty. . . ." (Healy, 1996, p.A1). Good character as defined by Wynne and Walberg (1985-1986) requires obedience to "legitimate authority" (p.16). They state that the teachers are second only to families as the legitimate authority. Therefore, teachers should "ensure that pupils arrive on time, pay attention in class, apply themselves to recitation, and display commitment" (p.16). However, the director of Harvard's Center for Moral Education, Kohlberg (1975) states that character education is a form of "indoctrinative moral education" that has its aim at teaching "universal values" and depends too much on the opinions of individual teachers. Still others approach moral education under "values clarification." Paulsen (1967) defines "values" as the principles of a culture even though there are usually differences between what is believed and what is said and done . Values clarification as an approach to moral education lets the child judge right or wrong instead of letting the instructor impose his opinions. It focuses on value awareness and stresses that values are different depending on the individual, therefore allowing for no specific right or wrong answer (Kohlberg, 1975).

Moral education according to Purpel and Ryan (1975) is "direct and indirect intervention of the school which affects both moral behavior and the capacity to think about issues of right and wrong" (p. 659). Therefore, it is the characteristics of the term, morality, that forms the instructional basis of moral education. In other words morality instruction tries to enlist training that will create a more "humane" human.

Although there are some proponents of moral education who see it as separate from religious education, it must be noted that the two topics are not totally unrelated entities. On the contrary, the underpinning of religion is morality in its purest form. How could one discuss any religious doctrine without mentioning morality? Moral values as noted by Wynne (1985-1986) are common beliefs that shape human interactions in the culture and "as in the Ten Commandments" have a religious base. Bennett (1988) quotes Thomas Jefferson as saying religion should be regarded as "a supplement to law in the government of men," and as "the alpha and omega of the moral law" (p. 169). He adds that all of the Founders intended religion to provide a moral anchor for our liberty in democracy. Lindsey (1973) responds to morality and religion with, "We are in the image of God in our immaterial being in the sense of having will, intellect, emotion, moral reason . . ." (p.161). Morality is very much interwoven with the very fabric of religion. That being the case, it can be reasoned, that when theology was taught in higher education, some facet of the subject matter had to include the topic of morality. Also, moral instruction was not neglected when religious instruction was given in the classrooms at the

elementary and secondary levels. With this understanding one can begin to focus on the history of education with its preponderance of moral teachings.

Morality, as a serious subject of education, goes as far back as the early stages of civilization. In the ancient cultures morality education was just as important to the curriculum as the three R's. In the Nile River Valley there were a number of temple schools that had priests for instructors and included such subjects as manners and "morals or practical ethics"(Frost & Bailey, 1973, p. 20). When the child reached the secondary level he was given copybooks to practice his writing and to copy moral precepts. The sentences he wrote were concerned with "correct behavior towards gods and men" (p.21). The literature was didactic and it emphasized piety toward the gods, honor to parents, and neighborliness among other principles (Frost & Bailey, 1973). By the time the child was ready for higher education he had been well-schooled in the codes of good moral behavior and yet, moral instruction was included in higher education (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). The students were also given incentives to act morally. "Moral action was motivated almost wholly by the law of reward and favor and aimed at happiness in a worldly existence" (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p.22).

Although the civilization of ancient Mesopotamia was less theocratic than Egypt, there was still an association between the temples and schools, and there was training in theology (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). The Hebrews who were influenced by Mesopotamia and Egypt "laid great emphasis on morality and the keeping of the law of

God" (p. 2). The Hebrew child began his early years learning how to recite prayers, psalms and other material from sacred writing. He attended elementary school in the synagogue and moved from there to the "house of the Midrash" where he studied the oral law, and later, he was trained under a scribe (Frost & Bailey, 1973). Higher education was restricted to legal studies since the scribes played a dominant role in religious aspects (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). The serious attention that the Hebrews gave to moral instruction "produced a tradition, a book, and a religion that have been able to hold them in bond of unity through centuries of dispersion everywhere in the world" (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p. 43).

Among the classical cultures the educational systems of the Greeks and Romans showed an integration of morality or morality-based instruction in their programs of study. In the Greek world a group of teachers who sold their knowledge was born. The Sophists, as they were called, were itinerant professional teachers who developed the subjects of ethics, politics, economics, logic, and rhetoric (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). The Sophists questioned such moral issues as right and wrong, good and evil, honesty, and loyalty (Frost & Bailey, 1973). Protagoras, a Sophist, taught good citizenship in addition to other subjects. Prodicus, another Sophist, promised to teach his students virtue and good character (Frost & Bailey, 1973). Ironically, Socrates felt the Sophists were "morally" wrong because they charged for their teaching. It was the first time money had been charged for teaching services and Socrates thought of teaching as a leisure activity

(Adler, 1988). The Sophists and Socrates were also in disagreement on the philosophy of morality. Wherein the Sophists felt that the individual had to determine "right or wrong for himself in his particular situation and act on it," Socrates was unable to "justify an individualism that left each one free to determine virtue for himself" (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p. 61). This debate draws a parallel to modern day proponents of morality. Who is to determine what is right and what is wrong? What might be considered morally right for one individual might be morally wrong for another. Can morality be justified in a relative way? The Sophists were attacked for teaching "moral relativism" (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). Is morality inherent in us or it is a cultural issue? Socrates concluded that clear thinking would allow an individual to discover virtue not only for himself but for all men under the same conditions (Frost & Bailey, 1973). More importantly, when Socrates thought of ethics he focused on the subject as a way of living effectively with others (Frost & Bailey, 1973). For him, morality was a real issue to be worked into the fabric of life and to be acted upon as a positive way for living. Shaping one's life in terms of a group ideal was the major concern in the Roman culture (Frost & Bailey, 1973). As a result the Roman institution dedicated itself to acculturating their children by "teaching them the ancient virtues and ideals; impressing upon them the importance of obedience to authority, manliness, reverence, and all the other character traits that time and experience had woven into the concept of the good man" (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p.85). The Romans must also be noted for being great borrowers of culture so much so that it led to Greek education in

the Roman state (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). Greek education would mean an incorporation of some morality-based instruction.

Education in the Medieval Age showed a definite focus on moral behavior. In the West, the Greco-Roman heritage was fused with Christianity (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). The Christians were willing to "participate in educational programs, providing that religious and moral issues were retained in the family"(Frost & Bailey, 1973, p. 101). However, as Christianity became a way of life attractive to the "intellectuals and prosperous upper classes" the first known "catechetical" school of Christianity was founded in Alexandria (Frost & Bailey, 1973). Catechetical is defined as "pertaining to teaching by question and answer" (Costello, 1996, p. 214). The curriculum expanded from "exclusively religious and doctrinal course" to general subjects among which was the study of "ethics" (Frost & Bailey, 1973).

Moral education was a part of the religious instruction, if not the instruction in and of itself, in medieval higher education. Monastic schools were prevalent; cathedral schools were founded; and universities formed that included theology as one of their areas of study (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). The University of Paris, noted as the greatest university of the Middle Ages, had a doctorate in theology that took as long as sixteen years to earn (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989). In the later medieval period, universities took over a past role of the Church, "to attest to one's orthodoxy and fitness to teach" (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p. 150). This serious change of roles caused the beginning of

secularization because not only was the church unable to influence the curriculum, but the universities began to develop standards of their own. "The scholar moved out from the world of orthodoxy and into one of freedom, controversy, and science" (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p. 150).

The secular theme carried itself into the period of Enlightenment where "the baneful effects of sectarianism still haunted institutions of higher education" (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989, p.15). By the nineteenth century "education became more secularized, as the churches continued to lose control over institutions of learning" (Goodchild & Wechsler, 1989, p.16). The educational ladder was constructed from the varied schools the settlers brought from their homeland and education began to be focused on trying to serve all the people (Frost & Bailey, 1973). This century did come with an advocate for morality education in the beliefs of Horace Mann. He "resigned from the presidency of the Massachusetts senate in 1837 to accept the post of secretary of the newly established State Board of Education" (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p. 415). Mann advocated moral education over intellectual education. His adamancy about his belief can be illustrated when he said, "Law may punish immorality, but it will never produce morality. Only education can accomplish this end" (Frost & Bailey, 1973, p. 417).

In the period between 1880 and about 1930 the "character education" movement attempted to make schools more efficient transmitters of "appropriate moral values"(Wynne, 1985-1986). The character education movement which assumed schools

had to operate from a purely secular basis, focused on the traditional moral aims of promptness, truthfulness, courtesy, and obedience (Wynne, 1985-1986). Kilpatrick (1992) states that character education is "based on the idea that there are traits of character children ought to know, that they learn these by example, and that once they know them, they need to practice them until they become second nature" (p. 15). Character education is heavy-handed and has been criticized as being indoctrinative (Kilpatrick, 1992). Kohlberg (1975) states that character education is indoctrinative moral education that preaches and imposes the rules and values of the teachers and their cultures on the students. Although elaborate character education plans were designed and often adopted through the mandate of state legislatures, research in the mid-1920's concluded that the relationship between "pupil good conduct" and "formal character education" was slight (Kilpatrick, 1992). Character education was never formally abandoned but by the 1930's the prevailing intellectual climate among researchers and academics was indifferent or hostile (Kilpatrick, 1992).

From the 1930's to the 1950's, there was little intellectual concern with moral education although some schools engaged in formal or informal instruction. The combined effect of industrialization and immigration neutralized the school's overt role as moral educator (Purpel and Ryan, 1975). "Cultural relativism and a supposed scientific objectivity replaced Protestant moral theology" and "an explicit, systematic moral code was not taught" (p. 659). The main sentiment which was widely shared by educators was

that the culture was something to be ashamed of instead of something to be transmitted (Kilpatrick, 1992). This was the atmosphere into which "values clarification" was developed in the 1960's. It was identified with Louis L. Raths and Sidney B. Simon (Wynne, 1985-1986). In 1972 a values clarification handbook was published and with the sale of 600,000 copies, it was placed in nearly every school in the country (Glazer, 1996). Values clarification invited students to define their own moral values "free of adult imposition, through a process of Socratic dialogue and creative resolution of ethical dilemmas" (Healy, 1996, p. A1). The moral dilemmas used in some of the values clarification exercises were aimed at eliciting feelings from students rather than practicing right conduct immediately (Wynne, 1985-1986). Kilpatrick (1992) says that values clarification puts such a heavy emphasis on feelings that it "virtually equates values with feelings." He notes that a value is something you like or love to do as opposed to something you ought to do. Regarding values clarification, Lindsey (1976) says that it is no wonder there are "appalling outbreaks of violence" at most schools, a drug problem, and discipline and disorder problems on campuses. Nevertheless, values clarification declined in the 1970's when researchers determined that it wasn't having the hoped for effect on students (Glazer, 1996).

Kohlberg had his own approach to teaching morality in the educational system. His "cognitive-developmental" approach was similar to values clarification in the way it focused on Socratic peer discussion of value dilemmas. The difference between his

approach and the values clarification approach was the aim of the discussion. It focused on "stimulation of movement to the next stage of reasoning" and it restricted value education to "that which is moral or more specifically, to justice " (p. 673-674). The students are encouraged to articulate a position which seems most adequate to them and to judge the adequacy of the reasoning of others (Kohlberg, 1975). Kilpatrick (1992) notes the problem with Kohlberg's Socratic method is that it was not meant for children. Even more importantly, "not everyone using it has the wisdom, integrity, or maturity of a Socrates" (p. 89).

With the Supreme Court ruling that school prayer and devotional Bible reading violated the Constitution, schools are down to "moments of silence" in the classroom and an understanding that moral education is not a part of the curriculum. In 1986, the president of Yeshiva College in New York City, Norman Lamm, said at a convocation address that "until about fifty years ago, it was commonly accepted that the university was responsible for offering its students moral guidance" (Adler, 1988, p. 263). He added that now there is "moral skepticism" which is a view that value judgments do not have objective validity. "An educational system that is amoral in the name of 'scientific objectivity,' thus devours its own young. . . . Permitting a generation of students to grow up as ethical illiterates and moral idiots . . ." (p.264). In order for educators to give students all of the alternatives, students must also be introduced "to moral and religious ways of experiencing the world" (Bender & Leone, 1992, p. 195). "What is appropriate is

for schools to teach the application of critical thinking to moral problems in the appropriate context" (Paske, 10985-1986, p.13).

Are the advocators for returning moral education to the classroom justified in their stand? Many parents driven by fears of violence, drugs and teen pregnancy have agreed to give public schools a role in teaching "ethical" principles (Healy, 1996). It appears that the educational system is creating individuals who are lacking in moral behavior that befits "humane" humans. It would seem at the very least that "moral education" could do no harm. However, those against moral education in the classroom are concerned that morality cannot be discussed without involving controversial political or religious issues (Glazer, 1996). They would like to avoid such issues as abortion, gay rights, and sex education (Glazer, 1996). Parents against moral education being taught in the schools think the role of moral education belong exclusively to the church and home (Purpel & Ryan, 1975). A related argument is that the schools are currently failing in intellectual education; therefore, they do not need the new task of moral education (Purpel & Ryan, 1975). Nevertheless, whatever program of moral education the school adopts, it must respect the pluralistic traditions of America (Purpel & Ryan, 1975). This, of course, brings one back to the concern of getting a consensus of which values are to be taught. Will the values be taught according to their "absolute" state as opposed to their "relative" state? Will the instructors guide the students in defining their values or will they focus on the indoctrination of specific values? Will values be taught with a reward system to

influence moral action? There are more questions than either side can answer but while the issue is being debated, what does the future hold for society's youth?

It might be a scary proposition to some but in the face of rising crime, extensive drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and other signs of social decay, one has to realize that in a very real sense the future is now. The past had it's foundations in moral roots but somewhere between the major wars and the separation of church and state, morality became less and less of an issue to be considered as a part of the educational system. It is ironic that something so important as creating moral individuals became less important than creating intelligent individuals. Are intelligence and morality mutually exclusive? The hope is that society will bring the issue of morality back to the educators and the educators will give serious attention to moral instruction. If this does not happen there is a serious fear that we are now looking at "the terminal generation" (Lindsey, 1976).

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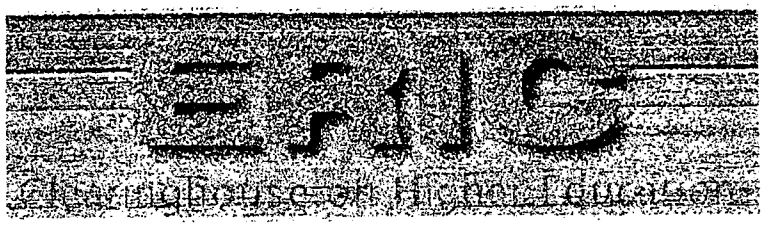

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