Moral education takes thorough preparation. Pre-packaged programs are no substitute for well-qualified teachers.

Public schools in America bear a responsibility for a portion of the education of the public. They do not bear the total responsibility for its education because their resources in money and personnel are limited and their influence on the young is only one influence among many. Accordingly, public schools must decide, in light of relevant circumstances in each case, which portion of the education of the young is within their power.

Many educators and critics of education argue that schools should include moral education in the curriculum. Visions of what moral education should be vary immensely; some programs emphasize critical thinking and decision making, while some intend only to show students a way to find out what they want and like. Still others seek to focus explicitly on affective matters, the emotions and feelings of students. Proponents have offered many reasons for public school moral education, ranging from the claim that parents and the wider community neglect the moral education of the young to the idea that intellectual and moral development are inseparable.

In keeping with these views, John K. Burton, Thomas C. Hunt, and Terry M. Wildman conclude their essay, "Who Transmits Values? The Public Schools," by rehearsing their main theme:

The point we make here is that no matter what alternatives are provided, and no matter who decides what the affective curricula should be . . . there always has been, and will continue to be, a need for affective education in the public schools.

One might claim with equal force that there is always a need in the schools for education in history, literature, skills of inquiry, communication, and study; the arts; the sciences; and other disciplines. Education in all these areas is surely part of what each generation of humanity owes to the next, both in school and out.

But the debt is greater than this. The obligation of the public schools is not simply to teach history or the arts or ethics. It is plainly to teach them well, to teach them knowledgeably and conscientiously, with an eye to the entire program of study offered in the school and with an appreciation of individual students. In the area of ethics and moral education, as elsewhere, specific forms of intellectual preparation and study are necessary conditions of knowledgeable and conscientious teaching. Teachers and administrators should commit themselves to such study prior to the implementation of any program in moral education.
That there is a need for moral education in the schools does not suggest that anything whatsoever done in the name of moral education or affective education will satisfy the need. It is not always true that anything is better than nothing. The history of excesses in American education—and this is far from the whole story, much of which is a record of admirable performance—is the history of hasty curriculum design and a desire to keep up with fashion. When fashions are as mutable as those in education—this year career education, now “values” education, then suddenly “back to basics”—the attempt to stay fashionable is fated to yield ill-conceived courses and pedagogical techniques that are laced with gimmickry. Fashion demands of teachers that they be instantly ready to move in any direction. This no conscientious teacher can possibly do. Conscientious teachers, by definition, must insist on achieving a substantial grasp of subject matter before they agree to teach.

**Schools Must Be Sensitive**

In the case of moral education, for example, it is widely argued that the schools must be sensitive to cultural pluralism and to the status of the First Amendment for the schools. The argument ought to be that teachers and administrators should understand cultural pluralism, should study Israel Zangwill and what follows, should read the decisions in cases such as Engel v. Vitale that disallow prayer in the public schools, should examine syllabi in comparative religions to see their intent and to see what is prohibited by law and what is not.

If moral education is to include practice in deliberation and judgment, then teachers need to know at least the main fallacies of informal logic; what a reasonable person of good will is; what it means to achieve objectivity in moral judgment; what can be said reasonably about absolutism and relativism, about psychological and ethical egoism, about tolerance and limits to the tolerable; what qualifies as moral justification; and how rights and obligations can be accurately discussed. They need to study facets of moral life other than quandaries and dilemmas. They need to know how courses throughout the curriculum can be made to invite discussion of moral questions, and they need to study some of what is known about the place of thought and feeling in human judgment and conduct. Beyond this, they need to practice dialogue and to learn how to inquire with students in shared pursuit of understanding. In this, they may be able to help their students avoid the kinds of commonplace conversations about moral issues that deteriorate into closed-minded axe grinding.

In short, if teachers and administrators are persuaded that moral education ought to be an active concern in their school, then they should either be ready or make themselves ready to do the work in a sound way. In practice, this readiness can be achieved best through a combination of inservice study and personal homework in history, legal cases, logic, ethics, comparative religions, and psychology. Where the program is intended to include discussion of contemporary social issues such as ecology, energy and nuclear power, arms limitation agreements, and the like, the school staff will need to survey relevant literature on these topics.

The daily demands made on teachers, and the limited money available for inservice programs, may militate in favor of dividing the labor—having teachers and administrators do research in different areas and then teach each other. Inservice work of this depth and intensity can be instructive and even inspiring as colleagues come to work together and know each other better than ever before. At the same time, such work usually requires a commitment of time and energy beyond classroom and administrative activity; for this reason, administrators must do all they can to encourage and support their teachers through regular inservice opportunities.

**Temptation is Powerful**

The temptation to proceed in moral or affective education without such demanding preparation is very powerful. It promotes the attractiveness of prepackaged moral education programs such as values clarification and cognitive moral development materials. These are no substitutes for well-prepared and knowledgeable teachers. Some public schools clearly cannot devote themselves to substantial and ongoing inservice study; they must decide how far they can become qualified to go in moral education and what limits they should observe. Still, in education as elsewhere, the truism expressed by Immanuel Kant, that “whosoever wills an end, wills the means to it,” always applies. If our end is knowledgeable and informed teaching, then we must become knowledgeable and informed teachers. This is among the highest of educational ideals, and it is folly to ignore it, especially for the sake of an undefined, vague sense of moral or affective education.