

The case for moral education in public schools is based on democracy and knowledge of human development.

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It is a pleasure to respond to your questions, because they are basic and well framed. I shall try to answer them, not only from my own perspective, but from the shared experience of civic and moral education projects in Cambridge, Brookline, Pittsburgh, Tacoma, Scarsdale, and other communities. This experience has been especially shaped and led by Ted Fenton, Ralph Mosher, Paul Sullivan, Anne DiStefano, Elsa Wasserman, and Judy Coddling. The projects have been undertaken through the support over six years of the Danforth Foundation. Our perspective is elaborated at an introductory level by two books, *Promoting Moral Growth* (Hersh, Paolitto, and Reimer, 1979), and *Readings in Moral Education* (Scharf, 1977). It is elaborated at a more advanced level in *Moral Education: A First Generation of Research* (Mosher, 1980), and in *Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice* (Kohlberg, in press).

You start, in my opinion correctly, by saying that the issue is not whether we should engage in moral education but what kind. Every great philosopher of education from Plato to Dewey has said that the two basic aims of education are those of intellectual development and of moral development. Furthermore, each has claimed that the two great aims of education are integrally related to one another. Plato's *Republic* is a complete treatise on moral education. It

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MORAL EDUCATION:

A Response to Thomas Sobol

starts by asking "What is justice or a just society?" and goes on to answer in terms which include an account of the intellectual and moral education of the educators or guardians of the society. Here is how Dewey (1964) stated it:

The aim of education is growth or development, both intellectual and moral. Ethical and psychological principles can aid the school in the greatest of all constructions—the building of a free and powerful character. Only knowledge of the order and connection of the stages in psychological development can insure this. Education is the work of supplying the conditions which will enable the psychological functions to mature in the freest and fullest manner.

Morality is a troublesome word to many Americans who equate morality with sexual norms and ethics or with professional fee setting and collusion therein. We are more comfortable talking about civic education, because, since the foundation of the Republic, we have recognized that a basic aim of public education is to enable youth to become citizens of a free society. Thomas Jefferson and the other founders of our country recognized that civic education was moral education. In terms of my own theory, we might say that a minimal civic literacy for graduates of our

public schools should ideally be the capacity to sign the social contract, represented for instance by the Constitution and the Declaration, with informed consent. Such civic literacy, however, presupposes mastery of a fourth stage of moral reasoning and some awareness of a fifth stage represented by the thinking of the founders, and of the idea of a social contract establishing government to preserve basic human liberties.

If the study of educational philosophy supports your statement of the necessity of moral education, so does the sociological study of schooling as it goes on in America. As you point out, if one drives out explicit moral education in the schools, it comes back in as the "hidden curriculum," the unspoken values transmitted through the authority of teachers and administrators necessarily expressing values through acts of modeling, praising, blaming, and exhorting. In a society in which families have often lost much of their moral authority the values represented by the school often become critical. Without an explicit concern for the "moral atmosphere" or "hidden curriculum" of the school what emerges? We asked a group of students in one of the best high schools in America, your Scarsdale high school, how they saw its "moral atmosphere," the going rules

and norms of the school and the peer group. A fairly typical respondent reported the following about norms for use of drugs and alcohol on a school outing:

Our class wouldn't obey the rule. They do make agreements but nobody ever keeps them. People bring liquor in shampoo bottles; it's just the ordinary; it doesn't phase me.

In response to a dilemma as to whether to help another student to get to a college interview on a Saturday morning, she said:

Absolutely not. Most students are very apathetic to anybody else's needs unless they're in the same clique. If you're not in a clique, forget it.

Scarsdale high school is not unjust, authoritarian, or callous by student accounts. It just is perceived as not caring about what I have called its moral atmosphere. It does an excellent job at doing what it does care about, academic preparation for attendance at a good college. Many of its teachers and administrators do care deeply, as you do, about these matters, but as you say, there is little reward for this concern. In the inner city, the concern for moral atmosphere is negative rather than positive; it becomes concern about violence, vandalism, and discipline. In the suburbs, it is manifested as apathy and lack of concern.

Instead of further documenting your statement of the need for moral education, I should turn to answering your questions.

1 You ask first, what should our goal be? Should it be to make students more aware of their values, à la values clarification? Yes, it should, but values clarification is not enough. Once a teacher has helped a student to clarify that his values are those of an American Nazi, what then? Or as one teacher we interviewed expressed it "My class deals with morality quite a bit. I don't expect all of them to agree with me. They have to satisfy themselves according to their own convictions, as long as they are sincere and think they're pursuing what's right. I often discuss cheating this way but I always get defeated because they still argue cheating is all right. After you accept the position that children have the right to build

a position, you have to accept what they come out with, even though you drive at it ten times a year and they still come out with the same conclusion."

If all values are not relative and accepting cheating is not as moral as being against it, what do you do? The usual alternative, you suggest, is indoctrination with the values the teacher and his or her community accept. But perhaps the teacher's and the community's values are not and should not be the child's. In Scarsdale, the community is largely upper middle class and disproportionately Jewish in religion and ethnicity. Should middle-class Jewish values be taught to students in the schools? The answer usually given by the advocates of direct moral teaching is that there is a "bag of virtues" on which we can all agree: honesty, respect for life, love of one's neighbor. You point out the inadequacy of the "bag of virtues" answers. We may all agree on virtue words but this conceals real disagreement in moral choices. Does respect for life mean being against abortion? Does love for your neighbor mean helping the P.L.O.?

You ask what kind of indoctrination, if any, is appropriate for the schools in a pluralistic society? My answer is "none."

You ask, then, how do we avoid it without falling into the relativism of sheer values clarification? My answer rests on a scientifically grounded faith in two processes, the process of development and the process of democracy. Our basic approach to moral discussion is one in which the teacher Socratically elicits conflicting student views on a moral issue or dilemma. Research demonstrates that in this conflict of views and of reasons, higher stages of reasoning influence lower stages, and all students tend to move upward in moral reasoning in comparison to students who do not engage in such moral discussion. We do not advocate that teachers themselves be blank screens; when students have had their say, teachers may add their views—views that will hopefully, though not necessarily, be at a higher stage than those of most of the students. If teachers take positions, in addition to acting as Carl Rogers to clarify values and as Socrates to challenge conflict and growth, they avoid indoctrination. Advocacy becomes indoctrination

only if it is based on simple authority or if it may not be questioned; only, that is, if it is not democratic.

Insofar as our society is democratic it is based on conflicting advocacies, each of which has a right to be heard and each a right to challenge. In the case of real life school issues like cheating or drugs on outings, teachers must advocate as well as be Socratic elicitors of dialog. They can do this without indoctrination if their classrooms and their schools are democratic. Our research experience with democratic high school classrooms and schools indicates that democracy almost never leads to decisions representing license or mob rule and that the teacher's voice or advocacy usually counts for a great deal in the final decision. But the influence rests on the rationality of the teacher's position and reasoning, not on simple authority. In matters of academic knowledge and curriculum, the teacher should be an authority though not an unquestionable one. In matters of justice, the teacher is not "the expert," he or she is at best a more mature or wiser voice among many.

My answer to your first question stresses moral reasoning. You ask first of moral reasoning, "What if students 'reason' their way toward conclusions which violate society's norms?" My first answer is so much the better if they are developing to a higher stage and toward principles of justice and if society's norms, for instance, are racist as they are in many communities in America. As I have said, the teacher should advocate, but within a democratic process. Second, you ask if moral reasoning really matters in action or if it is simply glibness. Blasi's (in press) recent review of a large number of research studies indicates a relation between stage of reasoning and various forms of moral action.

Even though moral reasoning is important for action, classroom focus on moral reasoning is not enough. As you suggest (though I would use other terms), moral behavior consists, in part, of unconscious patterns of behavior learned through modeling and osmotic interaction with the culture. That is why we both agree in stressing the importance of the hidden curriculum, the moral atmosphere of the school. This atmosphere becomes a positive force for moral behavior when those in the classroom

or the school make decisions around issues of justice through reasoning and a democratic process. We quoted a student from your own school voicing the moral apathy of the regular high school. Responses were quite different in Scarsdale's alternative school which stresses discussions of fairness in a democratic community.

In contrast to the regular high school student quoted, a student from the alternative school responded as follows to the dilemma about drugs and alcohol: "I think the rule of not smoking pot is not in itself very important. But the community agreed upon the rule; they felt tremendous obligation to uphold the rule. One of the people said, 'It was wrong because I got caught.'" After he reflected on the process, he had more of an understanding of fairness in a community and breaking its laws.

On a dilemma as to whether to help another student get to a college interview, he said, "The alternative school has an unwritten law or agreement for people to work together and help each other out. People try to help many times." This student is at the same stage of moral reasoning as the students in the regular high school. His behavior, however, is quite different with regard to drugs or alcohol, or an outing, or helping another student. This difference is not due to variations in a preconscious superego; it is due to the students' very conscious modeling and osmosis of what we call the school's moral atmosphere.

2 Your second question asks whether the morality we are concerned with is an individual matter or a morality of social groups. On the philosophic level, Dewey pointed to the fallacy behind such an opposition. Plato, too, stressed that the same principles of justice defined both the virtuous person and the virtuous society. Social morality is the morality guiding the decisions of groups in relation to group members, to other groups, and to the environment. In courses in history, civics, and problems of democracy, students study and discuss decisions made by groups and nations on moral dilemmas they faced. Perhaps of more importance, in democratic self-governance units, students debate and decide matters of group

decision and policy. While democratic self-government stresses majority rule and a concern for the public welfare, it also develops an understanding of the rights of the minority. As a Scarsdale alternative school student said, "If you're into being in the school, you give up certain rights or freedoms for the chance of belonging. But there are definite limits. There is no way the community should decide everything; many things should be left to individual decision. Some rights of decision you have placed in the hands of the group, but not totally."

3 Your third question asks whether moral education should be a separate study or activity taking time from other studies.

For high school juniors and seniors, an elective course in ethics combining moral dilemma discussions with a beginning approach to issues of moral philosophy has been found to interest students and stimulate development. Basically, however, the projects mentioned at the beginning of this response have integrated discussion of moral dilemmas with the subjects of regular study, especially social studies and English. Indeed, moral and civic education is a key to integrating experiences in social studies with English.

You ask whether integrating moral discussion with academic subjects takes time away from them and risks subverting their purpose. We answer that a large part of the understandings which academic subjects strive to foster are moral understandings. I cited earlier the civic education need to understand and agree to the social contract with informed consent. Part of this understanding depends upon moral reasoning about government as a contract to protect liberties. Part is historical as well. This does not mean making literature "a springboard for abstract discussion of moral issues." It means that in order for students to understand or enter imaginatively into Huck Finn's viewpoint and actions, they must understand the choices he had to make as conflictual moral decisions. A doctoral dissertation by Andrew Garrod at Harvard documents the way moral discussion of literature not only promotes stage growth but leads to greater understanding and appreciation of the

novels, stories, and dramas themselves.

In Brookline, students role-play the making of the Constitution, debating the moral issues involved at the time. The result is both stimulation of growth of moral reasoning and a deeper understanding of American history and the perspectives of those who shaped it. In literature, the example of *Huckleberry Finn* is raised. Huck Finn is faced with a dilemma: whether to lie and to break the law in order to protect his friend Jim. Good teaching, from our point of view, includes having students debate the rightness or wrongness of turning Jim in.

4 Your fourth question asks about democratic governance as an agency of moral education. This is not an alternative to classroom moral discussion but rather a highly desirable addition. It assumes, as we do, that such experience is desirable but asks practical questions about how to do it and about its limits. We are still accumulating experience on these questions in Cambridge, Brookline, Scarsdale, and Pittsburgh and do not have any single or final answers or recommendations. Most of our work has been in alternative schools with 60 to 100 students. In these schools, an issue is first discussed in small advisory groups with one teacher and a dozen or more students. In this small group forum, moral discussion can take place fully and solutions can be proposed. After these small group meetings have occurred, there is a weekly meeting of the total student-faculty community. In this context there is room for adult guidance and advocacy even if the faculty is a minority in the actual voting process. Students chair the community meetings, sometimes appealing for guidance to their advisors. In these contexts there has been no need to limit students' authority in any formal way.

Certain rules about attendance, drugs, and so on could simply be accepted as required by the school administration. It has not, however, been difficult to arrive at rules consistent with these schoolwide regulations through the democratic process. On some occasions, students in alternative schools have gone to the principal to advocate a change in

schoolwide rules and have been successful in convincing the principal to modify the policy. You raise the need of an institution to assert its own authority as a need that seems urgent at this moment in history, a moment described by the German sociologist Habermas as a *Legitimation Crisis*. In our opinion, the current crisis arises less from a decline in the exercise of institutional authority than from a declining sense of participation in society by youth. Youth, and their elders as well, are in a privatistic mood in which Ringer's *Looking Out for #1* is a personal best seller and Proposition 13 is a political best seller. The answer to growing privatism in youth is not the exercise of institutional authority but the exercise of democratic participation in institutions like the school before cynical apathy and privatism get worse. The two Scarsdale students quoted earlier, one from the alternative and one from the regular school, illustrate the difference between attitudes of participation and of privatism in the institutional world of the school.

We are still in the phase of trial experimentation in democratic participation in high schools which do not have alternative schools or special programs of civic education where 50 to 100 students can engage in community meetings based on participatory democracy. The most obvious possibility, being experimented with in the Cambridge high school, is a division of the high school into houses. These houses can govern themselves through direct democracy and elect representatives to a student-faculty government. It is too early to talk about the effectiveness of such programs.



You ask how teachers become prepared and licensed to engage in moral education. This question is discussed in

Plato's *Protagoras* as the claim of *Protagoras* to be an expert in the teaching of virtues is demolished. *Protagoras* equates the teaching of virtues with making people good citizens. *Socrates* points out that in a democratic society, the claim of anyone to be an expert in making political and moral decisions is rejected. These are no "moral experts" whose advice will be accepted as there are

experts on mechanical or technical matters. In a democratic school there are no moral "experts" whose advice on moral issues should be taken by students as authoritative.

While I believe we cannot and should not train or license moral experts, I also believe all teachers should think about issues of moral education and be aware of some of the answers which have been given about these issues by educational philosophers and psychologists. At this time, few new teachers are entering the schools, so attention must be especially directed at inservice or summer courses, not only about Kohlberg's theory but about the core issues of moral education as they have been thought about through history.

It is important that skills in leading discussions be taught, but it is more important that basic philosophic and psychological issues are wrestled with. As *Socrates* pointed out, we cannot begin to discuss the issues of how and whether virtue can be taught until we face the question, "What is virtue?" For these reasons, it is worthwhile to have, as Harvard, Boston University, Carnegie-Mellon, and the University of Minnesota do, specialties in moral education within the fields of human development, counseling, and social studies curriculum. In these programs, doctoral students not only learn to do research about moral education but gain experience in teaching moral education in the schools and in conducting workshops for teachers on the subject. The graduates of these programs are not licensable as specially virtuous, or as experts in the teaching of virtue, but they have grappled with the hard issues of moral education.



You ask where the money is to come from. Up to now the money has come primarily from the Danforth Foundation or from

Title IV federal funds. This money has been used to start new experimental programs and research these programs, develop curriculum materials, and help doctoral students get the experience needed to teach about moral education. It does not, however, require much money for a school to think about, and do, deliberate moral education. Rather it requires a few administrators and

teachers who feel, as you do, that it is a basic and important area of schooling. If two or three such persons voluntarily attend a summer course at Carnegie-Mellon or Harvard and receive some administrative support, we find that they are often able to return to their schools and interest others in working with them on the subject. This is a large part of the story of what happened in your own high school, an initiative that has not taken money or energy from other existing programs in Scarsdale.



The current state of the art in evaluation of a program in moral education is well represented by the two-year evaluation

of your Title IV program in Scarsdale. The program called for classroom moral discussion of ethical issues in both the alternative school and in the regular high school. It also called for the development of a "just community" experiment in direct democracy in the alternative school. The major focus of evaluation was on developmental change in moral reasoning. Two measures were used. The first was Harvard moral judgment open-ended interviews, scored using an elaborated and refined scoring manual. The interview and manual have been validated through a 20-year longitudinal study of stage growth in a Chicago sample. One finding of the study was that while there is continued growth in moral reasoning in high school, the developmental stage at the end of high school is highly predictive ($r=.78$) of the level in adulthood (the 30s). Presumably then, upward change in high school has lasting consequences after high school is over.

The second measure is the Rest Defining Issues Test (D.I.T.), a multiple-choice measure of the development of moral reasoning based on the same stage theory as the Harvard interview. On both measures, students enrolled in the ethical issues course gained more in one semester than did students in control classes. The gains through the ethical issues course were an average movement of about one-fourth of a step (or that one-fourth of the students moved a stage). The control students gained less than half as much in the semester. The gains in the Scarsdale Ethical Issues course were similar to

those in other well-designed programs of developmental moral discussion (Lockwood, 1978).

The Scarsdale evaluation also asked, "What is the effect of democratic self-government on moral reasoning apart from classroom moral discussion?" This comparison first examined growth of students in the alternative school who did not take the ethical issues course compared to students in the regular high school who also did not take the course. There was statistically significant growth as measured by the Harvard moral judgment interview and the D.I.T. on the part of the alternative school students compared to the regular high school students. Could this have been due to the greater amount and informality of interaction that is part of any alternative school?

To determine this we compared change in the Scarsdale alternative school, with its "just community" governance process, with change in a Mamaroneck alternative school without democratic self-governance. There was significantly more growth on both the Harvard stage measure and the D.I.T. in the Scarsdale alternative school than in the Mamaroneck school.

What about evaluating effects on moral conduct, as distinct from moral reasoning? To examine this issue, we have focused on the "moral atmosphere" interview discussed earlier, comparing alternative school students with regular high school controls. The qualitative differences we have noted by quotation. Quantitatively, this evaluation scheme is still in its infancy. The notion is that we examine these interviews in terms of two scales. The first is a scale of "phase" of shared moral norms. In the alternative school there is a higher phase or "stage" sense of shared moral norms on such issues as drugs and helping. The second is a scale of stage of shared norms, on which the alternative school is also somewhat higher. If there is a norm of helping is it Stage 2 (I'll help you out if you'll help me out), is it Stage 3 (People like each other in this school and are usually nice to each other), or is it Stage 4 (As a cooperating community we all have certain responsibilities to help other members and even those outside our borders)?



Your last set of questions raises issues which cannot be answered "scientifically," as your seventh question could be. You say morality has come to mean something separate from knowledge and wisdom, that for now it may have to be pursued separately, but in the long run it should not. Your comments are somewhat different from mine, but not incompatible with them. Let me first answer in terms of scientific psychology.

Piaget has spent his lifetime studying the growth of logical and scientific knowing in the child and adolescent. We have found that the growth in the stages of cognition he has defined is parallel to the growth of moral judgment. The parallelism is such that attainment of a given logical stage is necessary but not sufficient for attainment of the parallel stage of moral reasoning. Moral "knowing" presupposes, or partly rests upon, logical and scientific forms of knowing; moral "truth" presupposes standards of truth in general. But moral sensitivity and judgment demand more than sheer logic and scientific reasoning. Following the lead of my psychologist-theologian colleague, James Fowler, we have also studied the development of persons' answers to the ultimate question you raise, "What is the nature of humanity and the world in which we live?" Fowler and I have found something like stages in a person's answers to these questions, stages which I call "stages of ethical and religious philosophy" (Kohlberg, in press). These stages parallel the stages of moral reasoning. We find that attainment of a given moral stage is necessary but not sufficient for attainment of a parallel stage of "wisdom," of ethical and religious philosophy.

This is a psychologist's answer to your question, similar to your own. There is, perhaps, a more ultimate form of knowing and experiencing in terms of which both scientific and moral knowing provide only partial answers or solutions. By calling these forms "ethical and religious thinking," I point also to the limits of their cultivation in the schools. We are a pluralistic society, not a society with a single shared religion or view of the ultimate. Therefore we cannot or should not teach a single vision of

the ultimate, not even the vision of "secular humanism" or American civil religion, "the American Dream." We can and should, however, teach about these visions in the school, though few of us have much experience or knowledge in how best to do it. In this sense, moral and civic education must remain a separate dimension of education clearly distinct from religion. We may teach justice, not merely teach about it, as we must do for religion.

In your future school, as in mine or Dewey's, there would be no "moral education programs"; there would only be a consideration of knowledge which includes a consideration of values, of their meaning and use. Literature would be taught as a form of knowing about human experience, not as a springboard for something else. In my future school, however, education cannot be truly synthetic and whole until it is first analyzed into parts or dimensions. Human or personal development is ultimately a whole. Dewey's dream school, or my own, is a school whose aim is personal or human development (often called ego development in today's psychological jargon). To move to attainment of this dream we need to be clearly aware of the strand of human development called "the moral" or it will become lost in the teachers' personal visions of life and art, their "religion."

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