

**ETHICAL AND MORAL
INSTRUCTION
IN SCHOOLS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649353187

Ethical and Moral Instruction in Schools by George Herbert Palmer

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GEORGE HERBERT PALMER

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INSTRUCTION
IN SCHOOLS**

PUBLISHERS' WEEKLY.

Not in A

Riverside Educational Monographs

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BY

GEORGE HERBERT PALMER

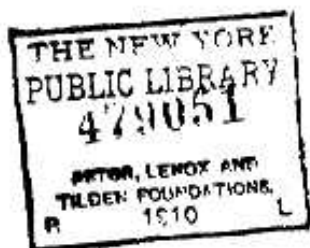
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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON, NEW YORK AND CHICAGO

The Riverside Press, Cambridge



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INTRODUCTION

The problem of moral education

THE problem of moral education is an old one, — older indeed than schools. The obligation for its solution has therefore rested upon the shoulders of others besides schoolmasters; every responsible class in the community has borne a share of the burden. That our present discussion should emphasize schools and school-teaching merely indicates the special form which the problem takes in our time. In no way does it denote that moral education is wholly the business of the school, or that it is the school's whole business. It simply suggests that there is an increasing conscious dependence upon the school as a moulder of character.

Social change in moral training

The conditions of our American life have changed marvelously during the past century, and we are now feeling the full momentum of the consequences of these changes. The moral weak-

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ness of men before the pressure of temptations arising from our modern life has become painfully apparent. Something needs to be done to make men better able to meet the powerful attacks upon their moral natures which seem to be a part of modern social conditions. Life moves swiftly and complexly now. The old day's work in the field and the old neighborhood life, with its exacting standards of conduct, are for the most part gone. Even the home and the church are feebler at their tasks than in years gone by. We must wait — perhaps long and patiently — for these conservative institutions to grow responsive and strong in the new ministries which our day demands. Where, then, but to the school can society turn for release from its threatened moral degradation? It has, in fact, already turned to the public school as the most potent factor in the solution of the great problem.

*The effect of the school's increased moral
responsibility*

It has made a large difference in the teacher's view of the moral nature of school-teaching to

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have his responsibilities thus increased. School education has always had a moral end in view even while it specifically pursued culture, knowledge, or discipline. But in times past it was no more conscious of the particular agencies and processes that achieved this end than were other less intellectual institutions. The bringing to consciousness of the need of moral training in the schools has focused the attention of teachers upon the work of estimating the instruments of school life through which the instincts and impulses of growth are made into the rounded characters of full-statured men.

Three recent policies in moral education

In the earnest but somewhat feverish attempts of teachers to strengthen the moral power of the school, they have not altogether agreed upon the worth of the means at hand in school life. There may be said to be three distinct positions on the question that have been taken by various groups of educational thinkers. (1) Those who believe that in direct and systematic ethical teaching in the classroom lies the best means for enlarging

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the moral influence of the school. This belief expresses itself in the provision of regular courses in "morals and manners," "ethics," "behavior," "civics," and the like, — facts about morality being taught in much the same way that facts about land forms are taught in geography.

(2) Another group, with a much larger constituency, hold that all true moral training must be indirect, and that it will be best secured by maintaining a high moral tone in all the work of the school. This indirect method of moral education expresses itself in the extension and supervision of the social activities of school life, and in such a reform of classroom methods as will lead to more nearly normal modes of doing work. The new importance in our recent educational literature of playgrounds, school athletics, and sociable organizations on the one hand, and of the doctrine of interest and coöperation in class instruction on the other hand are evidences of the progress of this point of view.

(3) The third point of view is that of the eclectics. These hold that the policy for the public schools to pursue is to extend the opportunities