

The Linacre Quarterly

Volume 7 | Number 2

Article 3

April 1939

Why Sex Education in Schools Should be Rejected

Catholic Physicians' Guild

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

Recommended Citation

Catholic Physicians' Guild (1939) "Why Sex Education in Schools Should be Rejected," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 7 : No. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol7/iss2/3>

WHY SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS SHOULD BE REJECTED

NOTE: Commissioner Ellsworth B. Buck, Vice-President of the Board of Education of New York City, has recommended some form of sex-education in the teaching curriculum of the high schools. The Teachers Alliance of New York City, Inc., has evaluated the suggestions of Mr. Buck in a pamphlet, part of which is herewith presented. The committee's conclusions are substantially in agreement with the Catholic position on this matter.

1. Probably the most serious argument against crusades for sex education in the schools is that these very sexual uplifters have lost their sense of humor. The poor souls in their gullible reaction to pressure from vested interests are blissfully unconscious that sex-hygiene books circulate in second-hand book shops as masterpieces of pornography. "Sex Facts for Everybody" rests on the same shelves as the erotic outpourings of Boccaccio, Petronius Arbiter, and James Joyce.

2. Any scheme to discuss in the classroom all the problems raised by sex is endorsed, at the most, by not more than one per cent of parents. Such a plan, in the words of Superintendent Tildsley, "is both immoral and impracticable," for "the public holds on to its ancient right to determine its own ends, speak its own thoughts, go its own way, community by community, on a home rule basis." There is no excuse for imposing the sexual whimsicalities of a high-pressure clique upon the ultimate masters of the schools, the people themselves. "The present system, under which the local citizens ultimately determine what is to be taught and how and by whom, the public desires to retain."

3. Sex is like Grover Whalen's

World's Fair. Each has been deliberately promoted; each has been glaringly advertised by a horde of a hundred self-seekers for every single idealist. The tell-all-about-sex boys are unblushingly championed by interested publishers who jump with alacrity at the opportunity to compete with the "girlie" shows.

4. The country's most eminent scholars in the field of education have just completed a three-year survey on education throughout New York State. The investigators spent over half a million dollars. They have published twelve volumes in the final report. Nowhere in this report is there a single word to substantiate the organized minority who would sell the schools an elaborate program of sex instruction. "Above all else," states Dr. Luther Gulick, Director of the Regents' Inquiry, "New York wants its schools to build character."

5. Sexual crimes are part of the larger problem of delinquency. We respectfully urge that any campaign against adolescent sexual crimes should find its springboard not in the assertions of amateur sexologists but in the excellent *Report and Recommendations of the Joint Committee on Maladjustment and Delinquency* repre-

senting the sound judgment of Supt. Campbell, Commissioner Marshall, Commissioner Turner and Asst. Supt. McCooey. Among the recommendations made by the Committee the sex-in-the-classroom propagandists will not find a single word of support.

6. The proposed course is pre-occupied with hygienic standards. These are, of course, good in themselves, but do they achieve the end in view? Do we want strong character, or mere prophylaxis? Do we want better sanitation or better citizenship? The answer is a plain one: hygiene is a barrier of straw before the onrush of the primal passion. Dr. Richard C. Cabot, erudite professor of medicine, testifies that knowledge of sex facts does not make either doctors or nurses more chaste.

7. A great deal of space is devoted in Mr. Canudo's paper to the alleged fact that students themselves want sex instruction in the schools. While it is perhaps true that such expressions of student desires point to a well-founded need for sex instruction in its proper milieu, it may well be asked what functions remain to the professional educator, if problems of curriculum, methodology and educational aims are to be solved by a consensus of student opinion. As Fitzpatrick has well shown, student interests are at best a crude and fallible norm of what the school should teach.

8. Since as the Canudo report puts it, "the school is the only agency which reaches all the children, regardless of color, creed or

background under similar circumstances" and since "its policies are uniformly determinable," it is not equipped to handle problems which require the greatest diversity of treatment from the point of view of the individual differences of the child which involve fundamentally differing views of morality, religion and social background.

9. Any attempt at group sex guidance in the schools is reactionary and doomed to failure because it violates the findings of modern educators on the psychology of individual differences. Mass education prevents individuation of instruction, however much an intelligent teacher may desire it. Disastrous as the failure to recognize individual differences is in all fields of learning, how incomparably greater must it be in the most explosive and most individualistic of spheres—sex.

10. Dishing out sexual pish-posh in the classroom will not reduce sexual delinquency; for the course of misbehavior, in the last analysis, is found in deficiency of character—not of the so-called "facts of life." Such an opinion is corroborated by Dr. George H. Chatfield, experienced for twenty years in the handling of maladjusted youth. It is an undisputed fact that "influences which surround the delinquent, surround also the non-delinquent. In the same families and in the same neighborhood, both are to be found side by side and of the two the non-delinquents are the most numerous." Frequently, of two brothers with the same sexual

background and information, one may commit rape and incest while the other remains a model citizen. That sex instruction does not solve the problem is a conviction harbored by the father of individual psychology, Dr. Alfred Adler.

11. Commissioner Buck's plan is imbued with the spirit not of sound logic but of wishful thinking. Elaborate statistics concerning fornication and rape reveal deficiency in self-control, a fact neglected by the Canudo report in its attribution of all vice to lack of sex information.

Elemental character training is the first step towards sex normality. Sex instruction will not give character—if for no other reason than that it is not deep and comprehensive enough.

12. A child has by nature moral tendencies. Even the new experiences of the age of puberty are accompanied by strong moral impulses. As a consequence, the task of directing the formation of character is not supremely difficult. Failure in this matter does not come from the difficulty of the task but from the neglect of it.

13. The proposed course, if adopted, will appeal primarily to the factual side of learning and will make demands primarily on the instructional function of teaching. Its main effect will be knowledge, not manliness. The course is incapable of awakening strong moral forces. The emphasis is put on the wrong place. Hence motivation for right conduct will be weak and ineffective. The best proof of this is that the strongest

motivation presented in the report of Mr. Canudo is "fair-play, not only in sport or business, but between the sexes."

14. The proposed plan is reactionary in that it confuses mere information with character. Such misplaced emphasis would revive the old-fashioned and discredited psychologies of the Victorian Age. It ignores the recommendation of the Regents' Inquiry that the development of attitudes take precedence over the imparting of mere information.

15. Natural and wholesome is it to consider sex as one of the many aspects of human life. If sex education were to be handled by the school, it would produce the very result it wished to avoid, an excessive and distorted stress on sex. The parent alone can integrate sex with the child's whole life. To detach the sex life from its essential relations with the rest of society is to separate it from its consequences and make it merely a matter of personal concern. This is the root of most sexual aberrations.

16. The bulk of the statistical sources quoted in the Canudo Report provide material for establishing the prevalence of illegitimacy, venereal diseases, rape, etc. Significant is it that the report completely neglects all studies of the prevalence of clandestine sexual intercourse and auto-erotic habits among school and college populations.

17. The report of Mr. Canudo begins from the unsubstantiated premise that "the school system

does nothing to help thousands of young people who, suddenly aware of sex urges and sex curiosities, have neither the education nor the understanding to adjust themselves properly." On the contrary, if the school does nothing more than to provide recreation in the form of athletics, it is doing a great deal to help our young people adjust themselves properly. If beyond this, it gives students ethical ideals, interests for leisure time, preparation for a vocational status, it is doing a great deal more to provide them with the psychological security and the social integration which are bulwarks of sexual normality. To compare the importance of instruction in the clinical details of sex with such services is to lose breadth of vision completely.

18. The scheme of the philanthropists is another instance in the present deplorable tendency to infringe upon the professional rights of the teaching corps. Some members of the lay Board of Education lose face when they dare to pose as professional experts. As real estate operators, bankers and lawyers, they know no more about sex education in the schools than they know about the Einstein theory or quantum mechanics.

19. With the stand of the Teachers Alliance that "the problem of sex education demands a progressive program of adult education for the purpose of instructing parents in their responsibilities in sex education, the best techniques for enlightening their children," a large number of dis-

tinguished authorities in the field of sex education are in complete agreement. The only person consulted who refused to comment on this single statement in defense of the rights of parents and the responsibilities of adult education was Mr. Clarence Hathaway, editor of the *Daily Worker*, who also answered negatively the statement that "Sex instruction is primarily a function of the home."

20. In answer to a questionnaire on sex education, Rudolph Allers, M.D., distinguished Viennese psychiatrist, author of "Sex Psychology in Education, Practical Psychology" and numerous other works on guidance, a scholar who is now a refugee from Nazi terrorism, gives four reasons for rejecting the sophomoric suggestions of those who worship at the shrine of sex-in-the-schools. We believe they adequately and effectively expose the fallacies of quasi-pedagogical experimentation in this field.

(1) "I have always felt that sex education is but one part of a general instruction on ethics. This is one of the reasons I hold a course given in class to be a mistake. We have not any more today a generally accepted code of morals. It would be practically impossible to find a common platform which would be acceptable for all the different shades of moral conceptions which have been implanted in the minds of children and young people by the influences of home and environment. Sex education cannot be divorced from moral instruction and it would accordingly

become a meaningless and pale and insufficient thing if it were made so neutral as to fit with every type of moral code.

(2) "Another reason pointing the same way is that sexuality is not a uniform thing. It depends, and the attitudes against it depend very much on personality, on the degree of mental and physical development and on ideas which have been developed previously. A classroom instruction may cause eventually more harm than it will do good.

(3) "Speaking of the courses offered in high schools not one of the school courses listed there is really concerned with morals. Sexual life, however, is not just one biological fact among others. Nor does it mean simply a side of healthy life. It is essentially linked with duties. The only course where something like duty comes in is the one on social studies—providing it is more than a mere theory of society.

(4) "Neither biology, nor general science, nor home economics nor economics and physical education, offer, so far as I can see, any opportunity for discussing the problems of sexuality in an adequate manner. Dealing with this matter in connection with biology implies the danger that the instruction will become one on the physical side; biology does not know about duty. And the same has to be said of the other courses, too. If the course in English is understood as being more than teaching the language and the lit-

erature, it might be possible to introduce the question of sexuality, for instance, when reading some author who describes family life or marriage, but this seems feasible only if this course is in fact one on general culture and not only on language."

21. Sexual guidance cannot wait for the late adolescent years in the senior high school. It must begin at the earliest feasible juncture in the home itself. Such an early inculcation of wholesome sexual habits is demanded by the celebrated axioms of habit formation laid down by Harvard's renowned psychologist, William James:

(1) "In order to make your nervous system your ally instead of your enemy, make habitual as early as possible as many useful actions as you can . . .

(2) "Seize the very first opportunity to act on every resolution you make. . . .

(3) "Finally keep the faculty of effort alive in you by a little gratuitous exercise every day."

22. Hon. Frank E. Johnston, Justice of the Municipal Court of New York City, after many years of handling sex problems among juvenile delinquents, writes to the *Brooklyn Eagle*, February 5th, 1939, in reference to Commissioner Buck's program:

"I question whether the evil that was found can be even partly cured by introducing into the curriculum any of the so-called 'facts of life' because it was not shown that this is the field in which there is sex ignorance. It is generally

believed that our adolescent generation needs no instruction upon nature's law of cause and effect. Even if they need that knowledge I doubt that it would have the slightest effect upon their conduct."

23. Propagandists for sex education in our schools would encourage prudery among parents by fastening upon them a despicable conspiracy of silence. The typical parent of today is not a relic from Victorian days but so wide awake and alert that they make the present proposals of Commissioner Buck reactionary in contrast. They realize, for example, that genuine sex education comprises all the relations between the sexes: physiological, psychological, social, emotional, aesthetic and ethical.

24. There are two reasons why votaries of sex-in-the-schools cannot give the child a true picture: (1) In their zeal they isolate sex from the rest of life. (2) Many of them are so busy writing and talking about sex that they know nothing about it.

25. It is sometimes alleged, as in the case of the Buck Report, that parents are unable to remain "unembarrassed" in talks with their children on the facts of life. If this is true in the case of parents, how much truer it would be in the case of the teacher who is first of all unacquainted with the child's present needs and, secondly, if unmarried, as is the almost typical case, has not even the advantage of the experience which parenthood provides.

26. A fundamental objection to the whole plan of sex-in-the-schools is the obvious fact that such a scheme would do severe violence to the religious convictions of parents. The three major religious divisions—Judaism, Protestantism, and the Catholic Church—each have definite viewpoints with regard to sex instruction. To give sex instruction in a context other than religious and outside the family would be to millions of parents a clear infringement of the religious rights of students and parents.

27. In speaking of the totalitarian trends in public schools, that noted Protestant scholar, Dr. William Adams Brown, opines that "This is a situation never contemplated in the early days of the republic and it is producing a generation that so far as its philosophy of life is concerned is largely pagan." "Far too common," said the late Pope Pius XI, head of the Catholic Church, "is the error of those who with dangerous assurance and under an ugly term propagate a so-called sex education and falsely imagine they can forearm youths against the dangers of sensuality by means purely natural, such as a foolhardy initiation and precautionary instruction for all indiscriminately, even in public, and worse still, by exposing them at an early age to the occasions."

28. Such persons grievously err in ignoring the experience of facts, from which it is clear that, particularly in young people, evil practices are the effects, not so

much of ignorance of intellect as of weakness of a will exposed to dangerous occasions. . . .

29. The usurpation of essential family rights by outside agencies such as the school is attacked by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ which has declared that there is "nothing more essential for religion, for morality and for the social welfare than the undergirding of the home with the strongest spiritual influences" and the "emphasis upon the spiritual values of the Christian family."

30. Resolution Twelve of the Anglican Lambeth Conference argues against group sex instruction in the schools when it states "It is important before the child's emotional reaction to sex is awakened that definite information should be given in an atmosphere

of peace and beauty. The persons duly responsible for this are the parents who in the exercise of this responsibility will need the best guidance the church can supply."

31. The case against introducing, under the term "sex education," a course in sex mechanics is ably summarized by the distinguished physician and teacher, Dr. F. W. Foerster, Professor of Psychology at the Protestant University of Zurich:

"Our modern enthusiasts for sexual education are greatly deceiving themselves if they think it would be possible with safety suddenly to introduce into the modern school a quantity of information about subjects connected with dangerous passions known to human nature."

FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC PHYSICIANS' GUILDS

President

JOSEPH A. DILLON, M.D.
1065 Lexington Avenue
New York City

Moderator

REV. IGNATIUS W. COX, S.J.
Fordham University
New York City

Secretary

WM. F. C. STEINBUGLER, M.D.
515 Ocean Avenue
Brooklyn, N. Y.