

MENTAL HEALTH ·  
*through* EDUCATION

W. CARSON RYAN

# MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH EDUCATION

BY W. CARSON RYAN

1938

NEW YORK · THE COMMONWEALTH FUND

London · Humphrey Milford · Oxford University Press

COPYRIGHT, 1938, BY  
THE COMMONWEALTH FUND

PUBLISHED MAY 1938  
SECOND PRINTING SEPTEMBER 1938  
THIRD PRINTING MAY 1939

THE COMMONWEALTH FUND, 41 EAST 57TH STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.  
PRINTED BY E. L. HILDRETH & CO., INC., BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT, U.S.A.

## PREFACE

**D**URING 1935-1936 the Commonwealth Fund of New York made it possible for me to travel widely and visit schools and clinics of various kinds in an effort to learn at first hand what is going on in education at every level in respect to what has been called, for want of a better name, "mental hygiene."

If the visitor who goes from school to school at the present time is at all sympathetic with the aims of American education, his impressions are bound to be, on the whole, reassuring, especially if he has in mind the conditions prevailing fifteen or twenty years ago. In at least two important fields—the nursery school and parent education—mental hygiene principles have definitely taken hold; and in work with younger children generally there is an encouraging trend toward conditions and practices that make for mental good health. In many schools of today one finds an atmosphere of friendliness and happy activity. Much of the traditional formality, the forced silence, the tension, the marching, is gone. Children's voices are heard in the halls and "classrooms." The younger children come gaily down the stairways (if stairways there are), natural and relatively unrestrained; the older boys and girls throng the corridors or outside walks, making their way to schoolrooms, shops, studios, libraries, laboratories, and playing fields—to tasks that mean something to them, that make demands upon their energies and their imagination, that often involve hard, difficult work, but work that they recognize as creative. Beauty of surroundings is considered a first requirement in these

schools—there are flowers about, brightly colored murals painted by the children, attractive, informal workrooms for the various groups. In many of these schools art and music have begun to play the role that belongs to them as fundamentals in education and in life.

There are, moreover, an increasing number of schools, particularly for young children, where teachers are not only friendly but understanding, especially with regard to what are ordinarily known as “the emotions”; where care is taken to find out for every child his needs and possibilities and to try to meet these needs—quite as much for the so-called “normal” children as for the more noticeably “subnormal” or “difficult.” In a small but growing number of school organizations, special aid is also available from child guidance clinics, visiting teacher staff, or similar services, to assist the school in applying to its clientèle—children, adolescents, adults—some of the knowledge derived from modern sciences with respect to human behavior.

Of course, not all schools are like this. A considerable number, as one sees them the country over, whether in urban or rural setting, are depressingly bad. Some of the worst are in cities long reputed to have had good schools. A very large proportion of the schools have been but little touched as yet by recent scientific knowledge of human behavior. Only a few communities actually have the special aids in child guidance and mental hygiene that all should have for the successful operation of an adequate educational program. Teacher preparation, whether in specific teacher-training institutions or in colleges and universities of the more general type, is with a few exceptions seriously deficient in all that has to do with human relationships.

Yet some schools are making a genuine contribution to mental health, and many more could, in just the matters that have been mentioned—in attractiveness of environment, in friendliness of the school atmosphere, in educational programs designed to meet fundamental human needs rather than mere academic traditions, in services directed to a more intelligent study of the problem of personality in terms of family and community life, in concern for the physical, mental, emotional, and social needs of the whole child.

The present book attempts to give some account of this contribution, immediate and potential; to describe some of the interesting and significant changes now going on in education that appear to be in the direction of better mental health and more wholesome living—by whatever name these may be called. It seeks to answer the question: *How does educational practice today, at every level and for every type of education, square with what is known of mental hygiene, and what further advances can be made?* It gives some attention to certain special agencies that have proved their value in recent years—school psychiatric staff, child guidance clinics, visiting teacher service, institutes for child development—and various agencies outside the schools that typify community concern for the “happiness and well-being” of children and youth. It emphasizes more particularly, however, the possibilities for mental health in the everyday work of the schools—in program, method, attitude of teachers, administration.

A positive rather than a negative emphasis has been sought throughout. This seems especially necessary in the case of an activity that concerned itself at the start, as mental hygiene did, with the study and treatment of abnormality and disease. It is the function of education, as Thorndike long ago made

clear, to work out the means whereby desirable changes can be made in human beings. In respect to mental health this means that education has to do not only with what will bring about in human beings a greater degree of "cheerfulness, courage, robustness, serenity, poise," but with creative understanding and skill in providing a setting that will enable children and young people to get a good start in effective and wholesome living.

No claim for scientific profundity is made in these pages. A sincere attempt has been made to achieve such accuracy as present knowledge will permit, and to indicate what appears to be the consensus of sound judgment in a field where there is a lack of the objective data familiar to the physical scientist and where there are wide divergencies in point of view among persons of recognized authority.

Field work carried on in connection with the study included visits to hospitals, clinics, and schools in all parts of the United States; attendance at meetings of educational and other workers in this country and abroad; and interviews with people engaged in health, education, social work, and other professions. The available literature has been scanned so far as time allowed; and in an effort to enhance the likelihood of accuracy and obtain as much pooling of opinion as possible, preliminary versions of various sections of the book were sent to workers in psychiatry, mental hygiene, and education. Grateful acknowledgment is made to these friends and to many others who have put their published and unpublished material so generously at my disposal and have helped so patiently in personal interviews and through correspondence.

W.C.R.

## CONTENTS

I. MODERN KNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR . . .	I
II. THE TEACHER'S PERSONALITY . . . . .	II
III. THE CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOL . . . . .	28
IV. SCHOOL HANDICAPS TO MENTAL HEALTH . . . .	49
V. PRESENT LACKS IN TEACHER EDUCATION . . . .	70
VI. TOWARD BETTER EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS . . .	86
VII. THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM . . . . .	127
VIII. SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION . . . . .	167
IX. SPECIAL SERVICES FOR THE SCHOOL CHILD . . .	190
X. FAMILY AND SCHOOL . . . . .	222
XI. COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL . . . . .	243
XII. NEXT STEPS . . . . .	280
INDEX . . . . .	305



## I. MODERN KNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

*Man, as he exists today, is not capable of survival. He must change or perish. If he does not, if he cannot, adapt himself and his institutions to the new world, he will yield his place to a species more sensitive and less gross in its nature. If man cannot do the work demanded of him, another creature who can will arrive.*—Sir S. Radhakrishnan

WHAT is mental health? What would we have if we could have it? To what extent and in what way is it within the province of education and schools?

Unquestionably the present tendency, quite as marked with medical men of specialized psychiatric training as with laymen, is to emphasize mental health as a goal for all society; to think of mental hygiene as a philosophy, a way of life; to set up as its objective a wholesome, happy, well-balanced human existence, with the hope of forestalling as many as possible of the difficulties that develop over the years.

This positive conception of mental health is increasingly understood and accepted. But mental hygiene involves also a thoroughly scientific approach to negative conditions which represent a deviation from wholesome living. Many of the positively good things in modern life owe their origin to a scientific study of the grosser disabilities and abnormalities. This is certainly true in the whole field of what is usually termed "physical health" (though modern scientists are particularly careful to insist that there is no sharp dividing line between the "physical" and the "mental"—between "body" and "mind"); and in

education it is noteworthy that some of the most valuable of present-day principles and methods have developed as the result of experience with the most difficult cases, where the deviation from the norm seemed so conspicuous and the need so obvious that only new ways could be employed with any hope of improvement.

It was with these more obvious abnormalities and difficulties—especially “insanity”—that mental hygiene first concerned itself and still does to a large extent. Some four hundred thousand patients are reported in mental hospitals in the United States; it requires more hospital beds, we are told, to care for mental cases than for all the cases in general hospitals, and if the present rate of breakdown continues, approximately a million or a million and a half of the children now in school will at some time in their lives become inmates of institutions for mental disease or defect.<sup>1</sup>

There is still a tendency in many quarters, both lay and professional, to think of mental health and mental hygiene as having to do primarily with so-called subnormal, psychopathic, delinquent, or markedly peculiar individuals, and to build a program in the community and in the schools chiefly from the standpoint of medical service. Important as this is, modern psychiatrists and mental hygienists are agreed that it is not by any means the most significant element in mental hygiene.

Positive mental health is recognized as the real goal by most workers in mental hygiene today.<sup>2</sup> Thus the late Dr. William

<sup>1</sup> Or, as it is sometimes stated, more of the boys and girls now in secondary schools will eventually find their way into hospitals for mental disease than into college. For statistics, see *How the National Committee for Mental Hygiene is Saving Minds* (circular), New York, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Probably also in former times to a greater extent than is usually recognized. William M. Connell's book, published in 1860, had for its title *How to Enjoy Life, or Physical and Mental Hygiene*.

A. White, of St. Elizabeth's Hospital at Washington, said in his Salmon Memorial lectures recently published:

The mental hygiene movement is essentially, as it exists today, a public health movement which has as its major objective the prevention of the disabilities and wastage of mental disease. It has as its goal what I think can best be defined as the good life, perhaps qualified by the additional words *well lived*. Its realm is what I would call the psycho-social level of development, and its methods must be evolved from the basic facts that are contributed by the various sciences which make for the understanding of human behavior.<sup>3</sup>

Modern mental hygiene must necessarily stress the positive, rather than the negative, Dr. W. E. Blatz, of St. George's School for Child Study, Toronto, insists,<sup>4</sup> because its aim is to increase the efficiency of man to run himself; it looks forward, "not to the day when there will be no problem of adjustment, but rather to the day when these problems will be confined to the early years of development, leaving the later years for creative and satisfying endeavor."

The positive aim of mental hygiene is clearly indicated in the statement prepared for the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection:

For practical purposes one may conclude that mental hygiene is a way of life that shall enable us to attain the optimum of mental health or personality development. This may be considered from the standpoint of the individual in his striving to get along happily and effectively in his work or with his family; or from the general standpoint of the study and prevention of the various forms of mental maladjustment. The aim in either case—*mental health*—may be defined as "the adjustment of individuals to themselves

<sup>3</sup> William A. White, *Twentieth Century Psychiatry*, New York, Norton, 1936, p. 51-52.

<sup>4</sup> In his address before the Illinois Society for Mental Hygiene, December 1935, to be incorporated in a forthcoming book on mental hygiene.

and the world at large with a maximum of effectiveness, satisfaction, cheerfulness, and socially considerate behavior, and the ability to face and accept the realities."<sup>5</sup>

Even those whose concern hitherto has been with the physical sciences are beginning to pay attention to the needs and possibilities of man as a human being. "Man's real problem is himself," Dr. Max Mason said in addressing his fellow scientists. Only today, he said, are human beings gaining faith in the applicability of the scientific spirit and method to

the distortions and difficulties that cripple the human intellect and the human spirit, retard the progress of the race in social organization and control, handicap man in his human contacts and in his individual performance, and violate the greatest of human rights—the right to be formed as a personality to the highest degree of intellectual and emotional power which is consistent with his inherited organism. . . .

Through steady, patient accumulation of exact knowledge man has reached so far that he can at least perceive the course to be followed in his struggle for self-control. He has learned that control comes through understanding, and that understanding derives from the patient and objective search for truth which is known as the scientific method.<sup>6</sup>

There have always been some in the world's history, including both physicians and philosophers, who have given attention to human personalities, even when their first concern was with "physical" frailties. "Nineteen centuries ago Plato said: 'If the head and body are to be well, you must begin by curing the soul.' The Hebrew of old observed that 'a merry heart causeth good healing, but a broken spirit drieth up the bones.'

<sup>5</sup> National Committee for Mental Hygiene, *Mental Hygiene Bulletin*, January–February 1931, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Science and the Rational Animal, *Science*, 84:71, July 24, 1936 (Address at the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Sigma Xi, Cornell University, June 19, 1936).

And Confucius laid stress on the mind as the reconciler between the body and the spirit, with health life as the result of the reconciliation."<sup>7</sup>

Disturbances of human behavior, Bentley and Cowdry point out in their recent report for the National Research Council, "now present to civilized states and peoples one of the gravest, most persistent, and most baffling of all the urgent problems involved in self-government and self-direction," and they inquire whether our fundamental knowledge of nature and of man cannot be used in a broader and more effective way to improve our understanding of the disorders and presently to lead us to a more effective control.<sup>8</sup>

Among the four great fields of conquest for the science of the future, the director of Science Service lists: "Understanding of mental disease and the make-up of human personality to the extent that peace and fair-dealing may dominate the conduct of individuals, communities, and nations."<sup>9</sup> Significant of the present scientific interest in this problem of control of human behavior is the fact that it was one of the major themes of the conferences held as part of the Harvard University Tercentenary celebration of 1936 and was there discussed by psychologists, anthropologists, and social scientists from many parts of the world.

Progress in the sciences underlying mastery of the principles of human behavior necessarily suffers in comparison with the advance made in the sciences of inert matter. Instead of being the measure of all things, man, Dr. Alexis Carrel says, "is a stranger in the world that he has created."

<sup>7</sup> Winfred Rhoades, Cure by Faith, *The Forum*, 97:11, January 1937.

<sup>8</sup> Madison Bentley and E. V. Cowdry, *The Problem of Mental Disorder*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1934, p. v, vii.

<sup>9</sup> Watson Davis, Science and the Press, *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 2:365, March 9, 1936.

He has been incapable of organizing this world for himself, because he did not possess a practical knowledge of his own nature. Thus, the enormous advance gained by the sciences of inanimate matter over those of living things is one of the greatest catastrophes ever suffered by humanity. The environment born of our intelligence and our inventions is adjusted neither to our stature nor to our shape. We are unhappy. We degenerate morally and mentally. . . . We are the victims of the backwardness of the sciences of life over those of matter.<sup>10</sup>

As a partial offset to the excessive attention given to technological achievements in the modern world, social scientists and psychologists are now stressing the need for study of human beings as something quite as important as anything that has been done or might be done in material resources.

Childhood may not be the "golden age of mental hygiene" in quite as simple and sure a fashion as some of the early enthusiasts believed, but to most of those in the field of mental health today the general principle that the childhood period offers the best opportunity for constructive mental hygiene effort is sound—as sound, on the whole, as when it was first promulgated so vigorously a score of years ago. Stated in terms of the improvability of human beings and their better adjustment to society, mental hygiene and education have much in common. Indeed, some psychiatrists and mental hygiene workers are convinced that education and mental hygiene are, in a very real sense, one and the same thing. Dr. George S. Stevenson, director of the division on community clinics of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, pointing out that education is a process of growth in which members of many professions have a part—the physician, the dentist, the teacher, the judge, the priest, the nurse and social worker, the recreational leader  
7 —maintains that "education is a process of developing the po-

<sup>10</sup> *Man the Unknown*, New York, Harpers, 1935, p. 28.

tentialities of the individual for meeting life's situations satisfactorily, and this is the common ultimate objective of all these groups"—even though each has its own special objective.

Dr. Caroline Zachry particularizes the general aim of education in terms which show its closeness to mental hygiene: "Each group wishes to provide the child with freedom to grow. Each wishes to give him guidance and direction which will provide him with that security which is essential to his growth. Each recognizes the value of purpose in integrating his powers and his personality. Each values that self-expression which gives him opportunity to bring out his powers, desires, conflicts, and anxieties." Moreover, each wants him to be able to face reality within himself, his immediate family, his school environment, and the broader community and social situations. Each wants him to make a constantly growing social adjustment and to develop emotional maturity that is not only essential to intellectual maturity but to the individual's total adjustment.<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Stevenson carries the comparison one step further by suggesting that in both fields workers stress the same method of attaining their goal and in both the same factors make for success or failure:

The two professions are striving for the same objectives with the same children, and it is inescapable that identities be found in their methods as well. The psychiatrist speaks of maturity and fixations, the educator, of growth and flexibility; the psychiatrist of the rapport and relationship therapy, the educator, of modern education as centering about the dynamics of pupil-teacher relationships. The psychiatrist and the teacher both sense the part played by their own personal problems in their professional jobs.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Coordinating Forces for Mental Health, *Progressive Education*, 11:464, December 1934.

<sup>12</sup> George S. Stevenson, Psychiatric Implications of the High School, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 92:845, January 1936.

Obviously, these mental hygienists and educational leaders are talking about education as something far more basic than what society has known heretofore. Education as ordinarily practiced in the schools does not achieve any too much for mental health; it can hardly be conceived of as likely to make the tremendous changes in human behavior envisioned earlier in this chapter. If something is to be accomplished that is of consequence in mental health, it will have to come through a new kind of education and a new kind of school. Formal education has never really come to grips with the task of meeting the needs of developing personalities, the American Council on Education points out,<sup>13</sup> and S. A. Courtis reminds us that to write "education is life" into an educational creed is a simple matter compared with the difficult task of making the transformation in curriculum and methods which such a slogan implies.<sup>14</sup>

Reassuring changes have come in recent years in American education, changes that are unquestionably in the direction of better mental health. In the attitude of friendliness and sociability of the nursery-school workers and those in charge of the education of young children generally; in the attractive schools and schoolrooms that have in so many communities replaced the drab and formal places of school-keeping of the past;<sup>15</sup> in the efforts to build an educational program out of worthwhile

<sup>13</sup> Daniel A. Prescott, *Emotion and the Educative Process*, Washington, D.C., American Council on Education, 1938.

<sup>14</sup> What Price Hypocrisy? University of Michigan, *School of Education Bulletin*, 5:20, November 1933.

<sup>15</sup> And yet we find many schoolrooms that are still prim and dull; with lined-up desks, walled in by blackboards; some of them still decorated, if decorated at all, with occasional pictures or sculptures of Greece or Rome or other reproductions only a little less conventional—the whole unreal and artificial in the extreme.



experiences rather than academic "subjects"; in the opportunities afforded in some schools for creative expression in the arts; in the tendency toward a natural, normal situation in the classroom; in the awareness by teachers of children as individual personalities in a given family and community setting—in these and other respects a considerable number of schools, especially those for younger children, have been veritably transformed.

There will have to be many more of these changes, however, and they will have to affect a much larger proportion of our schools, if progress on any large scale is to be made. The sounder philosophy and practice of modern schools for young children will need to be pushed further up into the educational scheme; at present it is the common experience to find a thoroughly good educational provision for young children accompanied (not infrequently in the same building) by the formal, routinized "high school" education still characteristic of education for youth. There is need for a more general knowledge on the part of school administrators, teachers, and the general public of what education really is and how it goes on; wider acceptance of a philosophy of education that recognizes the principle of growth and development in human beings; that pays less attention to "school subjects" on the time-allotment basis and concerns itself constantly with varying the program to meet actual needs of the individual and the social group; that has little regard for the artificial school grades and classes that have fastened themselves so persistently upon school organization. There will have to be greater interest than most school systems show in individual children, their needs and possibilities; a willingness to arrange educational programs to meet individual requirements regardless of administrative convenience; and a determination to enrich the lives of children