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SYLLABUS FOR NON-RELIGIOUS ETHICS

PRIMARY SECTION

(approved by the Board of Governors  
during its meeting on 9 and 10 May 1978)

TO BE INSERTED IN THE BROCHURE  
"TIMETABLES AND HARMONIZED PROGRAMMES"  
(1977 edition)

replaces pages 181 to 184

Syllabus for non-religious ethics, primary section

"I do not share your opinion, but  
I would give my life to defend  
your right to express it"

Voltaire

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The course in ethics is designed in accordance with parents' wishes. It is based on an ethical view of man free from any religious or any doctrine which might inhibit the development of the personality. The training given in the course must emerge in the individual's own thought, judgment and behaviour and must rest on universal values of right and wrong. It is important here that the individual finds a balance between on the one hand his own needs on his own search for self fulfilment, and on the other the realization that every one of us is an active member of the community.

These considerations lead us to two important conclusions :

- (a) It is the parents, or the legal guardian of the child - that is to say a third party -- who decides to enrol the pupil on a course of non-religious ethics. This implies that anything which could constitute a source of indoctrination or of dogma must be avoided.
- (b) The course of non-religious ethics can be given with all the safeguards desired by the parents, only by a teacher, who, from the point of view of his philosophical convictions, is pledged to the spirit and the content defined in the program. It is the task of the teacher himself to decide in all freedom and honesty whether his philosophical concepts correspond to this basic principle.

In investigating moral conduct two important psychological aspects emerge at once, which will affect the teacher's approach to the lessons :

- (a) The child does not and cannot wait for the development of moral insights and patterns of behaviour before reacting to the concrete situations in which it finds itself.

The child acts spontaneously.

- (b) The social background of the child is not always in keeping with the stages of his psychological development.

In practice we can say that in the development of moral and social behaviour the following stages must be passed through for every concept and every norm :

- (a) In particular situations the individual becomes aware of concepts of right and wrong and behaviour norms, which are not at all evident to the child. Approval or disapproval by those around him are the points of reference here;
- (b) With personal experience and the acquisition of new information, insight is gained which allows the individual to reform concepts for himself;
- (c) In the final stage, behaviour based on these concepts is worked out in practice, and situations assessed from the individual's own standpoint. This means that some of the child's reactions will still be spontaneous even when he is able to express an opinion as to what the proper reaction to some other problem should be.

The teacher must never overlook the fact that even at the second and third stages attention must still be paid to the first aspect.

As regards psychological development, we know that until 7 or 8 years of age the child is fundamentally egocentric; after that he begins to be interested in other people's views and in cooperation with them, but he is not able to reason in a more abstract way until the age of 11 or 12 onwards. This knowledge must determine the choice of material to be covered.

It is for the school in general and the ethics teacher in particular to act in accordance with these fundamental principles.

GENERAL REMARKS ON METHOD

With regard to this subject school activities cannot be considered in isolation from daily life. An ethic consisting of a few theoretical precepts, which has not grown out of critical investigation, and where conduct has not been tested against real possibilities, will bear little fruit. What must be sought therefore is an ethic for living, an ethic devised from everyday life.

A program can only summarize the possibilities. It can be neither a maximum nor a minimum : reality governs.

It is therefore of essential importance that the teacher pay attention to every aspect of the child's environment.

Three main aspects should be distinguished :

- the child's own world :  
how is the child to sort out his own problems and desires ?
- relationships with others :  
how does the child communicate with others, asserting his own personality whilst respecting theirs ?
- the child in the community :  
what contribution must the child make to organized society so that society can provide a decent standard of living for everyone ?

Although these areas would seem to run parallel with the psychological development mentioned above, the reality of daily life means that we must pay attention to them at all times. For example, one theme presented in the first years of school is "I am careful", but in the fifth year the question "what can I become ?" is also covered. In the fifth year we can speak of "how we are protected", but in the second the subject might be " doing something with friends from my class".



### THE TEACHER'S APPROACH

The point of departure is always a situation in which the child can recognize itself or in which it feels involved.

Analysis of the situation gives an insight into the difficulties which a human being - the child - must solve. A direct answer to the questions raised can help to give an approximate solution. By comparing similar situations, and by proceeding then towards more general aspects, a view-point is established which can act as a guide for subsequent actions. It is important here that the child acquire confidence in his own abilities; the whole approach followed in teaching should be directed towards this end.

In treating these themes use has to be made of such teaching practices as dramatization, creative expression, play, audio-visual aids, reading, etc ..., which assist integration. The teacher leads the activities and acts as a catalyst, rather than simply laying down rules of ethics. Raising fresh problems, asking questions about motivation and judgment, the teacher stimulates active thought on the part of his pupils. This is not confined to the intellectual plane : a great deal of attention is also paid to the emotional aspect, both positive and negative aspects being printed out.

The outcome of the discussion is a statement of how the solution was arrived at rather than a list of prescribed rules. The pupils work should show which facets of the problem have arisen, what information has been acquired, what individual opinions were expressed in class. Drawings and illustrations are first and foremost a record of the individual contribution, the individual vision and the individual emotional attitude.

PLAN OF WORK

FIRST YEAR

I. THE CHILD'S OWN WORLD

We develop a sense of self-respect

Cleanliness : personal, clothes, possessions.

We are not touchy.

We are careful.

We are good-tempered.

We pay attention.

We learn to control ourselves.

We are not indiscreet.

We are fair-minded.

We do not flatter people.

We do not tell tales.

We know when we have done wrong.

We keep our promises.

We do not copy other people's work.

We do not make fun of other people.

We try hard

We work carefully and tidily.

We try hard : play - good deeds - work.

We are careful

At home, playing, at school, on the street.

We look ahead; we are thrifty

We know the consequences of what we do.

Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves.

Waste not, want not.

We are thrifty, not mean.

We respect truth

We admit the truth.

We are not afraid to speak the truth.

We respect other people's possessions

When we find things we try to turn them to their owners.

We do not take what is not ours.

If someone lends us something, we give it back in good conditions.

We are careful of everything around us.

II. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

We show respect for others

We do not tease.

We are tolerant.

We do not hurt people.

We are good-mannered and straightforward.

We do not waste time.

Animals are our friends; we do not annoy them, we protect them.

We do not damage plants; we look after them.

We follow the rules of the road

What is involved here is not so much knowing the traffic signs and rules of the road themselves as obeying them without having to be told.

We behave properly in company

By setting up situations in the form of play and dramatics of one sort or another, and also from actual experience (school parties, going in and out of the classrooms, seeing their friends in the playground and so on), the children learn to behave properly and treat each other with courtesy. The main thing here is to allow the children to act freely and to acquire a cooperative attitude.

### III. THE CHILD IN THE COMMUNITY

We love our parents and our family

We are friendly and good-mannered.

We obey when we have to, but not blindly.

We offer help where we can.

We look after things entrusted to us.

We are courteous, friendly and cooperative

We are able to carry out a given task.

We are tolerant.

We try to do good

We are charitable.

We share with our friends.

We comfort people where necessary.



SECOND YEAR

I. THE CHILD'S OWN WORLD

We develop a sense of self-respect

Further development of the first year's work.

Cleanliness on the street, in the classroom, in the school and elsewhere.

We are patient.

We are not moody.

We are not jealous.

We do not tell lies.

We try hard

Further development of the first year's work.

We are careful

Development of the first year's work.

Practical jokes can be dangerous.

We are careful in the playground, by the water, when swimming, in the lift, with electrical machines, on the road.

We look ahead; we are thrifty

Development of the first year's work.

We respect truth

Development of the first year's work.

We respect the rules of games.

We accept decisions taken by the majority.

We respect other people's possessions

Development of the first year's work.

## II. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

### We respect others

Development of the first year's work.

We accept responsibility : practical examples.

### We follow the rules of the road

See remarks under first year.

### We behave properly

Development of the first year's work.

Situations from the child's day-to-day life; in the company of older people and people of the same age; at private or public gatherings.

## III. THE CHILD IN THE COMMUNITY

### We love our parents and our family

Development of the first year's work.

### We help one another

Development of the first year's work.

Visiting sick people; relatives, friends ...

We are on holiday and write to ...

All children are our friends; the life of children in faraway countries.

### We try to do good

Development of the first year's work.

Good deeds.

### THIRD AND FOURTH YEARS

#### I. The child's own world

##### We develop a sense of self-respect

##### - We respect and look after our body :

We take part in healthy recreation, games and sports.

We pay attention to personal hygiene.

We follow the instructions of doctors and nurses.

We are careful of our posture.

We eat healthy food.

- We learn to control ourselves and not to give way to small discomforts, thirst and so on.
- We accept the consequences of our own words and actions.
- We try to recognize our own faults and to fight against them.
- We are generous.
- We look for beauty.
- We look after our clothes and work carefully.
- We do our best to learn new skills and to increase our knowledge.
- We have confidence in our own abilities.

##### We try hard

Development of the first and second years' work.

- Once we have taken a responsible decision we shall not easily be dissuaded from it.

##### We are careful

- with unknown objects we find somewhere,
- with unknown animals, plants, fruits,
- in unknown water, on building sites, near machines, etc ...
- in sports and games,
- with machines, electricity, medicines.

We see observe warning notices and danger signs.

We are thrifty

Continuation of the first and second years' work.

- Waste not, want not.

We respect truth

- We have the courage to tell the truth even if a good friend or ourself suffers by it.
- We have the courage to speak up for our own opinions, but not so as to hurt anyone or belittle them.

We respect other people's possessions

Continuation of the first and second years' work.

- Problems in connection with :
  - returning things we find,
  - dirtying things,
  - damaging things,
  - making good damage we do,
  - keeping things that do not belong to us.

II. THE I-YOU RELATIONSHIP (others and myself)

We respect others, we respect life

- Problems in connection with suspicion or causing it, thoughtless judgments, slander, lies, bullying, false witness, revenge, accusations, punishments, etc ...
- Trust and promises, verbal or written; rules that we have freely accepted.
- Keeping secrets, confidential information; gossip.
- Animal protection; bird protection day.
- First insights into the mutual dependence of living things; the usefulness of seemingly dangerous or nasty animals.

We know the rules of the road and follow them

Development of the first and second years' work.

- Problems showing that traffic signs are necessary to protect us and others.
- Examination of dangerous behaviour on the road : nervousness, the wish to be in time, not to be overtaken, recklessness, etc ... - remedies.
- We help others who have difficulty in traffic (old people, handicapped people, young children).

We behave properly

Problems from which it will become clear that we have to behave according to a pattern which applies to everybody, out of respect for others and for the sake of our ordered community life :

- Conduct in different situations the child knows; on the street, in the park, in the playground, in the swimming-pool; on public transport; in a hospital, in a museum, at an exhibition; in a theatre; at a sports event, at tram or bus stops; in queues.
- Conduct of girls and boys towards one another.
- Congratulations, invitations or thanks.
- Conduct at table, at home and elsewhere.
- How to run errands on our own.

How children and adults live in other countries

Comparisons : what they eat, how they live, what clothes they wear, their customs.

Appreciation of other people's customs.

### III. THE CHILD IN THE COMMUNITY

#### Love, friendship, mutual cooperation, devotion and tolerance in organized society

- Towards the family, the school, members of a club we belong to, etc ... : see first and second years.
- How we can best discharge our obligations, carrying out our tasks in school, at home, in a club, ...
- What we can do to make other people's work easier. How we can save them trouble.
- Our contacts with people at work. Knowledge of and respect for their occupations.
- The necessity of work.
- Cooperation and mutual dependence.
- Fair-play.
- Our own area; local service; local organization and information offices.

#### The Red Cross and its youth branch

- Origin, work, growth, organization.

#### The example of great people

- Using current events as material.



## FIFTH YEAR

### I. THE CHILD'S OWN WORLD

#### Development of a sense of self-respect

- We do good for its own sake.
- We obey the voice of conscience and avoid (cavesdropping, boasting, slander, gossip; excessive modesty, flattery, revenge ...)
- We know our own talents and make full use of them.

#### Development of self-control

- We are careful :   the medicine cupboard,  
                          cleaning products,  
                          smoking,  
                          alcohol, ...
- We are cautious in our judgments : appearance and reality, impartiality, tolerance, ...
- We look ahead : thrift, avarice, waste, instinctive thrift among animals.
- We have courage : bravery and bravado,  
                          conceit,  
                          real and false heroes, ...
- We are honest : property, theft, sincerity, straightforwardness, fairness, ...

#### Love of beauty

- We love nature,
- We look for beauty.

Search for knowledge

- We seek more knowledge.
- We read books.
- Pioneers of science.

II. THE I-YOU RELATIONSHIP (others and myself)

Respect for our fellow-men

- Equality between boys and girls.
- Respect for foreigners; racism.
- Tolerance towards philosophical, religious and political opinions.
- Respect for work.
- Respect for the achievements and attitude of our fellow-man.

Respect for life

- Animals and plants (nature reserves, zoos, botanical gardens).
- Balance in nature (ecology).

The rules of the road

Development of the work of previous years.

- The main rules of the road.
- Courtesy on the road.
- Children and the elderly in heavy traffic.

Politeness

- Forms of politeness (local conventions).
- Greeting (here and elsewhere).

Friendship

- Rights and duties of friends towards one another.
- Partnership and team spirit.

### III. THE CHILD IN THE COMMUNITY

#### Goodness

- Love of our fellow-man, as opposed to selfishness.
- Helpfulness and patience towards the handicapped, the sick, the elderly.

#### Partnership on a national and international level

- Our own district, our country/province, our state; the European community, the world.
- Our own country.
- Chauvinism.
- The Red Cross.
- UNESCO, UNICEF, UN.

#### The influence and example of national and international figures

- Helpers of suffering mankind.
- Fighters for peace.
- Scientific investigators, inventors, explorers.
- Idealists.

#### Work and use of leisure time

- The joy of work, creativity.
- Labour Day.
- Free choice of employment.
- Pay, taxes, insurance contributions.
- Children and women at work : a look into the past.
- Holidays.
- Games, hobbies.

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### CONCLUSIONS

In order to sum up the program, we will highlight the following points :

1. As far as the choice of topic is concerned the teacher shall be guided by the direct situation with which his pupils are confronted.
2. It follows that he may mention or discuss some problems with a different year group than the one specified in the program. He may also discuss other questions, which may not even be mentioned in the program.
3. The list of items does not give any hint as to the order in which they are to be dealt with or as to the limitations to be set for them.
4. The aim of these lessons is not only to give pupils facts and rules of conduct. What is important is that the child should learn to take up a standpoint without referring to any denomination whatsoever.
5. The child lives in a pluralistic society. It would be wrong to leave him in ignorance of the impact of other philosophical conceptions. Easter, New Year, Christmas may be a good opportunity for explaining that these festivities have a specific meaning in the various religions. This helps the child slowly to realize that different cultural backgrounds and historical facts help to build an image of society. However, one must be careful not to impart this information as some kind of concealed religious instruction. Consequently, examples should be taken from different epochs and different countries.
6. Birth, death, sexuality should be tackled too. The opportunity may be provided by the birth of a little sister, the death of a father, a medical examination ... Children must realize that they cannot escape such realities and that they can be explained without reference to

transcendency, that they bring people closer together.

7. The teacher will have to acquire the knack of integrating these problems into the program and of inventing situations, in which the child is confronted with them, in such a way as to stimulate him into recognizing the moral aspects and finally into searching for his own solutions.

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