

Advantages of Co-education

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References

- Addresses and Proceedings of National Education Association 1904,
1903, 1874.
- Report of Commissioners of Education 1891-92, 1900-7, 1903
- Bureau of Education 1883-4
- Scribners Monthly Vol.2
- Forum Vol.3
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Co-education, or the instruction of both sexes in the same schools and classes, is a characteristic feature of the public education in the United States. The same policy is being rapidly carried forth in other countries where it is advisable, but nowhere does it present so unique a feature as in our own country.

The idea of co-education of the sexes is no new "fanged-doctrine" It has passed the stage of being simply an experiment and is to-day giving to the world ample satisfaction. It has been found that woman is capable of contending with man in the higher paths of literature and science and that education refines and strengthens the mind of the woman as well as that of the man.

The co-education of sexes is the natural, normal mode of education. One of the strongest arguments for the continuation together of the boys and girls in the whole course of education is the very fact that they are placed together in that first and best of all schools, the family, 'they grow up in the same nursery, by the same fireside, praying together at the same mother's knee, and are blessed by the benediction of a common father'. The children of a neighborhood go to church together, to Sunday school together, on the streets they walk together, they play together. If the Divine Providence had desired the sexes to be trained separately, why has he not ordered all the children in one family girls and all those in another to be boys ?

President Fairchild of Oberlin College thus gives his testimony in favor of the co-education of the sexes in college life, after an observation of its results for thirty four years. " The ease with

which the discipline of so large a school is conducted has not ceased to be a matter of wonder to ourselves. One thousand students are gathered from every class in society of every grade of culture the great mass of them indeed bent on improvement, but numbers sent by anxious friends, with the hope that they may be saved or recovered from wayward tendencies; yet the disorders, incident to such gatherings are essentially unknown among us. Our streets are as quiet by day and by night as in any other country-town. There are individual cases of misdemeanor, especially among the new-comers, and now and then one is informed that his probation has been unsatisfactory, but in the regularly organized classes of college and ladies' departments numbering from two to four hundred in constant attendance, the exclusions have not on the average exceeded one in five years-- and in one instance a period of more than ten years elapsed without a single exclusion from these classes." And further he goes on and states that things which would seem trivial in a separate community change their aspect when the female element is added to the community. He also attributes the good scholarship and conduct found in the college to the associating together of young men and women, in closing he says, "The student feels that his standing and character are of grave importance and consequence to him, and he is predisposed to take a manly attitude in reference to the government and regulations of the school."

Co-education of the sexes began at about the beginning of the nineteenth century and then it arose through convenience and for reasons of economy, rather than because of any feeling on the part

of those in charge, that it was the best plan. There had been provisions made for the education of boys nearly two centuries of our history previous to that for girls. When the need arose for giving girls an education the only practicable plan was to admit them into the boys' school. This plan, except in some of the eastern States, has been followed ever since; at first, because the expense of separate establishments was out of the question, and second, after the plan had been tried it proved so satisfactory that they did not wish to change it. Where economic conditions allowed, separate schools were maintained, but in every case the girls were the sufferers so far as the character of the work was concerned, for it was not of so high a standard in the girls' schools as in the boys'. This is amply shown by the fact that the girls' high schools of Boston, which up to 1878 did not provide sufficiently advanced courses to prepare its students for entrance to college, although the boys' schools had done so for more than twenty five years. Even as late as 1900 the girls' high schools of Baltimore did not come up to the standard of the boys' high schools. When there is co-education of sexes they all have equal advantages. Through the stress of circumstances the East had to admit women to their higher institutions of learning and this was made the working plan throughout the West, as settlements were made, through preference.

One of the greatest measures that has promoted the co-education of sexes, especially in the West, was the land-grant act of 1862 which appropriated 10,000,000 acres of land for the endowment of colleges. " To teach such branches of learning as are related to

agriculture and the mechanic arts in such manner as the legislature of the States may, respectfully, prescribe in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life."

But it was not until 1858 that co-education of sexes was practiced in our grammar school. Only in the primary schools and in the high schools, then recently established had the experiment of co-education been made. In that year the Franklin Grammar School was opened as a "mixed" school and after it, one by one, the other Grammar schools were organized until all, except the Eliot school, were "mixed" schools, receiving into the same rooms and classes both sexes.

Statistics show that of the enrollment in the public schools of the United States reached in 1900 a total of 15, 341, 220. (7, 734, 739 boys 7, 606, 481 girls) 91 percent of all pupils enrolled in elementary and secondary schools. The great body of these young people are instructed together without distinction of sex. In the elementary grades of our public schools - that is the grades below the high school - co-education is practically universal. Exceptions only are found in a few of our Eastern states. These results leave no doubt as to the position of our public schools with respect to the co-education of the sexes.

It is the policy generally pursued, heartily indorsed by supervising officers and strongly supported by the people especially in the Central and Western part of the Country.

As to the policy of co-education in the colleges and universities.

It is very closely related to the history of the general movement for the higher education of women. Oberlin College, Ohio founded in 1833, was the first to try this policy and in 1837 four women were admitted to the freshman class of the college. In the East Cornell was the pioneer co-educational Institution. This university was at first open to men students only, but at the inaugural ceremony both Mr. Cornell, and Mr. White, expressed the hope that the university might speedily offer every advantage necessary for the higher education of young women equally with young men.

" Speaking entirely for myself," said Mr. White, " I would say that I am perfectly willing to undertake the experiment as soon as it shall be possible to do so." And in 1872 women were admitted to all the privileges of the university. In the year 1870 the University of Michigan opened its doors to women. Since that time all but a very few of our colleges and universities have either become, or began with the co-education of the sexes. Of all the state universities only three those of Virginia, Georgia and Louisiana are closed to women.

The work done in and by these co-educational colleges and universities in this country is not to be surpassed. I will admit that there are a few colleges and universities where sexes are taught separately, that are of the very best to be found in the country, such as, John Hopkins, Vassar, Bryn Mawr, and a few others, but they are exceptions rather than a rule.

The most impressive fact in the history of the general movement for the higher education of women is the increase in the number of

co-educational colleges and universities. In 1880 that is forty seven years from the founding of Oberlin more than half the colleges 51.3% (technical schools not included) had adopted the policy. In the decade 1880 to 1890 the proportion increased to 65.5%. In 1900 it had risen to 71.6%.

The co-education of the sexes in foreign countries is not so universal as yet as in our own country. "The following statement taken from the first volume of special reports issued by the English education departments, summarizes in a convenient form with respect to the admission of women to foreign universities."

| | Number of universities to which inquiries were addressed. | Number of universities about which information has been received. | Number of universities which no (or unimportant) distinctions are made between men and women students. | Number of universities at which women students are admitted by courtesy or special permission to some lectures and examinations. | Number of universities at which women students are admitted by courtesy or special permission to some lectures only. | Number of universities to which women students are not admitted at all. |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| England | 5 | 5 | 3 | 2 | --- | --- |
| Wales | 1 | 1 | 1 | --- | --- | --- |
| Scotland | 4 | 4 | 4 | --- | --- | --- |
| Ireland | 3 | 3 | 1 | 4 | --- | --- |
| Canada | 2 | 5 | 5 | --- | --- | 1 |
| Australia | 5 | 5 | 5 | --- | --- | --- |
| India | 5 | 5 | 5 | --- | --- | --- |
| France | 16 | 16 | 16 | --- | --- | --- |
| Belgium | 5 | 5 | 4 | --- | --- | --- |
| Holland | 4 | 4 | 4 | --- | --- | 1 |
| Denmark | 1 | 1 | 1 | --- | --- | --- |
| Norway | 1 | 1 | 1 | --- | --- | --- |
| Sweden | 2 | 2 | 2 | --- | --- | --- |
| Germany | 20 | 20 | --- | 2 | 14 | 5 |
| Austria | 7 | 6 | --- | --- | 6 | --- |
| Switzerland | 6 | 5 | 4 | 1 | --- | --- |
| Italy | 20 | 13 | 13 | --- | --- | --- |
| Spain | 9 | 3 | 3 | --- | --- | --- |
| Portugal | 1 | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Greece | 1 | 1 | 1 | --- | --- | --- |
| Romania | 2 | 2 | 2 | --- | --- | 3 |
| Russia with Finland | 9 | 4 | 1 | --- | --- | --- |
| Japan | 1 | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Total | 130 | 111 | 76 | 6 | 20 | 10 |

If the scheme of co-education had not proved favorable and if the young men and women going out from these schools had and are not well equipped for the duties of life the plan would long before this have been abolished, but instead it is growing and during the last twenty-five years the trend of public opinion has been toward co-education, the current of the best thought is still flowing in that direction, notwithstanding the fact that some still see faults in the system and minimize its advantages. Notable among these is the discussion entitled "Sex in Education" by Dr. E. Clarke; the points which he tried to bring out, were that women are not physically able to stand the strain of college life in co-educational colleges and that owing or due partially to this there is a reduction in the marriage rate. Dr. Clarke's discussion does not seem to prove true as I find that after observing and inquiring into the health of both our boys and girls, students in our own college that the health of the of the girls is equally as good as that of the boys, and that they are capable of taking the same work as the boys without the least injury to themselves.

If it could be proven that co-education had even a little influence in making men and women less hasty before entering that most sacred of all human ties, I believe that both they and the world would be better off. Far better fewer marriages than many that we hear about in this age. Better a greater diminution than the present congested condition of the divorce market. If the association together of boys and girls in our schools would ~~ca~~use them to look into and understand better the character of the opposite sex, causing them to exercise the greatest care in the choice of husband or wife, right-

eous men and women all over this country would rise up and insist that this system of education be extended until it included every institution of learning in the land, and other countries too would join in the effort to more fully extend the system of co-education. Prof. Angell humorously puts it, that " the audacious young female who attempted to follow the same collegiate course as her brother generally insisted on the retention of oppressively good health, and she has done even worse things to discredit the general calling of prophet by discovering members of educated men who were willing and eager to attempt matrimony with her assistance. Worst of all, when she has married she has had a normal number of vigorous children."

Another of the points that those opposed to co-education try to bring out, is that the young women lose something of their maidenly delicacy in the daily contact with young men, that they become boisterous and coarse, also that sentiment and romance occupy all of their thought, but this fear can be completely dispelled with as experience has shown. Are not girls and young women who attend separate schools far more sentimental and romantic than those attending co-educational schools? If reports prove true this seems to be the case. And then too it was feared that this system would soften the manners of the boys, but instead it makes them more manly and courteous to their sister friends.

Frank Sheldon Fosdick says, " As the result of observation and of a practical experience extending over more than a quarter of a century I affirm that the greatest power in softening the asperities

of the average boy's manners, in teaching the observance of those courtesies that mark the true gentleman, in implanting in his very soul pure and lofty thought; the most efficient means of effacing from the mind of the average girl the tendency to fictitious romance that grows apace, when she associates with those of her own sex of instilling into her life a virility that enobles while it takes nothing from the sweetness that is a natural element of the female character, of creating the ability to form correct judgements - is found in co-education, in the coming together of our boys and girls in frank open comradeship. I have to see the first intimation of "feminization of the school spirit" or a tendency toward masculinity. The charm of tenderness that is inborn in the girls balancing the strength of true manliness that is imminent in the boys, conduces to the production of a complete perfect manhood and womanhood."

This system of co-education also raises the standard of both the school and the men and women attending the same. Where there is but one school for both sexes, it can have the best of apparatus and teachers, thereby the students securing the best will be able to produce the best work; whereas if there are separate schools each could not be so well equipped - unless the community had plenty of money - as in the former case, therefore the students not receiving the best, could not be expected to produce the best work.

In summarizing ; co-education was first started as an experiment, has grown until it is almost the prevailing method of education in our country, coming into use in other countries and is still growing. That it is the normal way of educating and has given abundant satis-

faction where ever tried. Co-education tends to give our boys and girls the correct insight into life; furnishes to them a well rounded intellectual development and adds much to the normal tone of the school, gives it an uplift that it cannot get when there is but one sex represented. Co-education also raises the tone of scholarship in that the young men and women will be better equipped for life ; and again besides " vocation" and " destiny" there is an " absolute state of man," " as Pestalozzians tell us, for which every human being has a right to educate himself and be educated. The culture of rational soul, the intellect, the will, and the affections, is the privilege of every human being whether male or female."