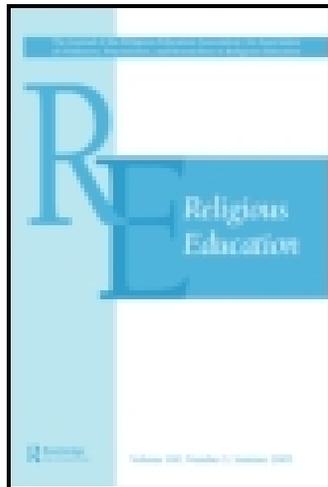


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Commission on Religions Development ^a

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CO-OPERATIVE STUDY OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF CHILDREN

AN INVITATION TO PARENTS, TEACHERS AND LEADERS

Prepared by the Commission on Religious Development

Lester Bradner, Chairman

How much do we really know concerning the religious life and the religious capacities of children? Convinced that existing publications on child study give little specific information on these points, and that such information is essential to the wise organization of religious education, the Department of Sunday Schools of the Religious Education Association at its New Haven meeting in 1914 appointed a commission to devise a plan for the co-operative study of the religious life of children. The action then taken was confirmed and made more specific at the Buffalo Convention in 1915. The general meaning and point of view of the enterprise here proposed may be gathered from Dr. Hartshorne's paper on "Securing First Hand Data as to the Religious Development of Children," RELIGIOUS EDUCATION for October, 1915, Vol. X, No. 5, page 481.

In accordance with this action, the Commission of the Religious Education Association on the Religious Life of Children now invites the co-operation of all persons who are in a position to make first-hand observations of children's religious and moral reactions. Directors of religious education, pastors, and superintendents are requested to co-operate by stimulating parents and teachers to respond to this invitation.

METHOD OF OBSERVATION

The history of child-study shows that such observations, if they are to be fruitful, must be guided by certain simple principles:

1. All items of hearsay are to be excluded. We must have eye-and ear-witnesses.
2. In most cases one's unsupported memories of events beyond the immediate past lack necessary details and also assurance of sufficient accuracy.

NOTE: This article has been reprinted as a circular, which may be secured from the office of the Religious Education Association, Chicago, Ill. The commission will be glad to receive the names of any parents, teachers, or leaders of children, who are known to be willing and able to co-operate, and will send the circulars to them upon the request of pastors, directors, or others acquainted with their work.

3. Careful and constant distinction must be made between what we observe and what we infer. We can not observe emotions, ideas, motives, or choices in others. What we can observe are the movements of a child's body or of parts of it and the immediate consequences of such movements. We can know where a child goes; how fast he goes; what route he takes; what his hands do; what things he touches, and what he does with them; whether he laughs, smiles, scowls, pouts, cries; what he says, orally or in writing; what drawings he makes; what songs he sings; how often he does this or that; how he spends his time; what he does with his possessions, and much more. In short, the observer is to set down as fact only what he can state in terms of *his own sense perceptions*. We must be able to reduce all our data to forms like this: "I saw this; I heard that." This simple rule will exclude much: "One day, when Oliver had been naughty"—this means nothing definite, and it includes an opinion. It must be excluded. If the fact that Oliver had snatched his year old brother's rubber ball and then screamed and stamped when it was taken from him and returned to his brother, say so; and tell also just how the ball was taken from Oliver. "Willie was selfish" or "unselfish," "obedient," "a timid child," "conscientious," "reverent," "attentive," "thoughtful," "imitative," "affectionate," "sensitive," "thoughtless," "generous," "quarrelsome," "inquisitive"—every such statement should be avoided unless specific acts or words are adduced to show what is meant, and even then great caution should be used lest the statement be more general than the observed fact clearly justifies. Generally, every such expression should be excluded because it is a matter of opinion or of individual judgment.

4. With the record of the act should go also a careful statement of the situation in which it occurred. By "situation" is meant anything—such as where the child was, who was present, what was going on, what the child had been doing immediately before, what had been said in his hearing, what previous experience he had had of such situations—that throws light upon what he desired, attempted, enjoyed or disliked, thought about, meant by his words, and why he made just this reaction rather than some other. Here we approach interpretation, and there is danger that we shall make hasty inferences as to the child's attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. The way to avoid such error is to make a copious statement of the situation, even at the risk of including irrelevant matter. The material, it should be remembered, will go before a central committee which will compare it with other similar material before

making interpretations. Thus it may well happen that what appears to be insignificant will turn out thru comparison with similar items to be really important.

5. In practically every case the home life of a child is a determining factor in his moral and religious reactions. Therefore, in your first report upon any child, tell how religion is treated in his home, and what the general conditions are: The religious attitudes and habits of each parent. Is religion talked about in the home, and if so, what is said? Is there family worship? If so, describe it. Give a list of members of the household, including each child (with age and sex) and the number of employed helpers. What type of religion is characteristic of those employed to attend the child? What is the method of family government and discipline? Is it a family of culture and refinement? What about books, music, pictures, intellectual interests in the home? What is the occupation of each parent? About how much is the family income?

6. Ordinary as well as extraordinary reactions should be recorded. We want to know what any ordinary child may be expected to do and say under ordinary circumstances.

7. A child should be observed in as many different situations as possible. In this way one reaction will throw light upon another. Records of the same child's reactions thru a series of years are the most valuable of all.

8. Wherever practicable, collections should be made of diaries and journals, letters, stories written, drawings, and any other documentary material that throws light upon the moral and religious growth of the child or youth. Any such documents sent to the commission will be treated as private and sacred, and they will be returned if the senders so desire. Photographs showing children doing any spontaneous act will be gladly received.

9. The commission desires to have on record the sex and date of birth of every child observed. Include these items in your first report upon any child. If you cannot give the date of birth, tell how old the child is in years and months. In subsequent reports upon this child his initials will be sufficient to indentify him.

10. In *every* report give the child's initials, the date of the reaction that you describe, and your own name and address.

11. Study the following records (of actual children as specimens (description of family life being presupposed) :

A. R. (boy, born May 5, 1908). Date of this reaction, Dec. 20, 1911. At dinner he was discarding from his plate several crusts

of bread that were perfectly good. Marie, the maid, thinking to persuade him to eat them, said, "There are lots of hungry little boys in the world who would be glad to get those nice crusts." The father added that some little boys were so hungry that they would be glad to pick the crusts out of the ash box and eat them. A. R.'s eyes were wide open. After a moment, in a half tearful, half impatient voice, he said, "O dear! Why doesn't our Heavenly Father give those little boys something to eat?"

W. B. (boy, born Aug. 25, 1910). Date of this reaction, June 30, 1913. The physician had advised against allowing W. B. to eat strawberries. At dinner strawberries were served, and a small cousin who was present was allowed to eat them. W. B. wanted to know why he too might not eat strawberries. The mother carefully explained that the physician had said that they would make W. B. sick. He protested somewhat. After dinner all left the room save W. B. Soon he came running into the other room to his mother holding up in his hand a large, beautiful berry, and saying: "See, Mama, I found this on the floor under the table, and I didn't eat it, I didn't eat it, I didn't eat it," with increasing emphasis at each repetition.

The following case illustrates the imperfection of a record that does not give date of birth and of the reaction. C. H., a boy of about ten, after listening in his Sunday-school class to the story of David and Goliath, said, "I don't believe that story. There never was a man ten feet tall." At what age does such questioning arise? The case described here would help us much farther toward an answer if we knew C. H.'s exact age.

WHAT TO DO WITH REPORTS OF OBSERVATIONS

1. Send your name and address to Hugh Hartshorne, Secretary, 3041 Broadway, New York. If your observations concern any children who are being observed by others also, give also their names and addresses so that all information about each child can be brought together.

2. In case you expect to report only incidental observations, write up each one separately and send them to the secretary together with all the necessary facts about each child observed, as described under points 5 and 9 above. If the same child is reported on twice, these general facts need not be repeated, but the child should always be identified by the use of his initials.

3. In case you expect to observe one or more children for a period of months or years, give the initials of each child under

observation, state your relation to the child, and give such general facts as are mentioned under points 5 and 9 above. Then send in from time to time the results of your observations, following the directions set forth in the other preceding paragraphs, and making use of the "Guide to Observations" which follows. Other sets of questions and problems will be sent out later to those especially interested. Frequent reports from observers are essential for the wise direction of the investigation.

GUIDE TO OBSERVATIONS OF RELIGIOUS AND MORAL REACTIONS TYPICAL PROBLEMS

SET NO. I

This list is suggestive only, and not exhaustive. Some of the questions can be answered by parents, some by teachers, some by others. Some concern children of one age, some, children of other ages. In general, the questions begin with children of three and work toward older children, but most of the questions will be found helpful with all ages. Select the questions you can answer, and supplement the observations with similar ones, on similar matters.

1. If a story is told, give it, or else refer to it by publication and page, and record spontaneous comments and questions of each child under observation.
2. If a picture is used in class, or at home, record spontaneous comments, etc., giving name and publisher of picture, and circumstances attending its use. Send the picture itself if practicable.
3. If pictures are drawn by the child, send samples, describing the occasion, such as the story told, the exact method by which the child was asked to draw, or the way in which the child set about it and the child's comments on his own work.
4. Keep the following records for a year, concerning a child in the beginners' or primary department:
 - a. Give the words of, or references to, all the songs used during the year in this Sunday-school department, or in the home.
 - b. If the child asks to have songs sung, either in Sunday school or at home, keep a list of those asked for, giving the date of each request.
5. What questions does the child ask, or what remarks does he make about God? Describe the situation which lies behind each quotation you make and describe any action which accompanied or followed his comments.
6. Record with date any changes which may occur in the child's language or action in reference to God.
7. What does the child do or say when instances of need (human, animal or plant life) come to his attention? Describe fully both the situation and the child's response.
8. What does the child say spontaneously about his own past, near or remote?
9. What moral or religious standards does he express for his own conduct? What plans does he make for his own conduct in the immediate future? Does he carry them out?
10. What does he say about his more remote future? Record fully the circumstances and dates of changes in, or additions to, his plans for his own life.

11. Give as many instances as possible in which the child has made a choice or selection between two or more things or acts. State as fully as possible the circumstances leading up to the choice, giving preliminary comments, etc.

12. Describe the child's companions in play.

13. If the child has imaginary companions, tell what he says about them.

14. What games does he play most? (Keep a record if possible.)

15. Does the child undertake of his own accord to get up or lead religious services at home? If so, describe with accuracy the plan and arrangement, quoting words used, especially if sermon is given.

16. Give instances in which he says or knows that he or some one else has been cheated or wronged or annoyed or disappointed. What does the child do or say about it?

17. What comments does he make on right or wrong acts of his own or others'?

18. What remarks or acts show any connection which the child makes between his ideas of right or wrong and his ideas of God?

19. What acts or sayings seem to reveal a sense of guilt or self-blame? Give attendant circumstances.

20. How much money does he have to spend? How does he get it? What does he spend or save it for, or what does he do with it?

21. What remarks does the child make in connection with the money he gives for religious purposes?

22. What comments or questions does he offer with regard to public worship, whether in church or Sunday school?

23. What comments does he make and what questions does he ask on matters related to religious instruction, Sunday-school attendance, Sunday-school lessons, the Bible, certain persons such as the minister or Sunday-school teacher or leader, the religious life of the home, and so on?

24. What does he do in church?

25. What is the child especially curious about in religion? Give the evidence.

26. Give comments and questions or actions as to natural phenomena, such as storms, sunsets, seasonal changes; the night sky, trees, flowers, streams, the ocean, animals, etc.

27. State what memory work has been done during the preceding year and point out which of the items the child now says he likes best. Give also what he says when asked why he likes these best.

28. What preference does he mention, or what comments does he make with reference to specific Biblical personages, or to certain kinds of Biblical material?

29. What stories does he tell with most enthusiasm and readiness?

30. What questions does he ask about conduct, about people, and about himself?

31. What definite forms of service has he undertaken, either by himself or in active co-operation with his class mates? Give the attendant circumstances.

32. What possibilities of service has he ignored or neglected or forgotten, after choosing or agreeing to the service? What has he refused to do? What reasons has he given?

33. What contributions has he made to a class prayer? (See full list of questions on prayer.)

34. What special moral problems does he have to face? Does he comment on them? If so, how? If not, describe ways in which he meets them.

35. What books does he read? What does he say about them? (He should be encouraged to keep a list of each book read and the date of reading.)
36. What characters studied does he say he likes best? What reasons does he give?
37. If he is making a collection, what is it, and how does he get the specimens? If by barter, what does he give in exchange for specimens?
38. If debates are held, give the subjects if the debates are voluntary, and the side, if the side is chosen by him. What does he say about it afterwards?
39. What does he say or do when confronted with a beautiful picture, or scene, or piece of music, or poem, or heroic deed? Give details.
40. What stories, poems, etc., has he written? Give circumstances.
41. Does he keep a diary? (Suggest a diary.)
42. Describe the persons he says he likes or admires, or dislikes or despises, whether young or old.
43. Give instances of self-sacrifice and the reverse, noting carefully the objects which call out or fail to call out the effort.
44. What remarks or acts show whether efforts of self-sacrifice are connected closely with ideas or customs ordinarily called religious?
45. Cite instances to show what kinds of things arouse a spirit of special generosity, or of special selfishness.
46. How does he spend his spare time?
47. What is the nature of confidential talks with you? If you are not his confidant, who is? About what matters is confidence given?
48. What does he expect to become? How does this purpose affect his conduct?
49. Give instances of impulsive remarks or acts.
50. Give instances of reflection, thoughtful comment, reasoned judgments about conduct leading to choices. Are these choices carried out?
51. What evidence have you as to purpose and ideals?
52. Describe the circumstances attending his joining the church.
53. What are his school marks? These should be collected and given complete.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS, RELATING MORE PARTICULARLY TO LATER CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

54. What duties in the family has the boy or girl taken up of his own accord? Record the circumstances, and any comments made or reasons given by the child.
55. Make a similar record of duties or tasks evaded, or dropped.
56. Record comments indicating moral judgments on the actions or words of others, describing the actions or words commented upon.
57. Record similarly comments on books or sermons.
58. Give instances of refusal to do as companions were doing, with reasons or comments given. Give details of the circumstances, and exact wording of comments.
59. Describe enterprises initiated or carried out, alone or with other children. Give fully the circumstances of starting the project, its purpose, number of children co-operating, length of time continued, how much and what advice and help from older persons, and result.

60. What does he do or say when annoyed, irritated, disappointed, gratified, disturbed, or elated?

61. Make a record as to comments and actions in reference to pictures, architecture, etc.

62. For what hymns and "sacred songs" is preference shown? Record comments and actions as new acquaintances or preferences are made in this line.

63. Record each new comment or action in regard to prayer, as *practised* by himself or others, individuals or groups.

64. If the older child or youth tells of his own childish ideas, record:

- (a) His statement of what the idea was.
- (b) His statement of the situation and date with which he associates the idea.
- (c) The situation as it actually was, and its actual date, as checked by others' memory of it and, if possible, by records, (letters, etc).
- (d) The circumstances which reminded him of the idea; or the situation in which the reminiscence arose, and his further comments.

SPECIAL SUGGESTIONS IN REGARD TO OBSERVANCE OF PRAYER LIFE
MORE PARTICULARLY FOR TEACHERS BUT ALSO USABLE BY PARENT OBSERVERS.

Two lines of evidence are sought: (1) On change in capacity for prayer; and (2) On effects of praying which extend beyond the moment of prayer. It is therefore essential to record observations both *now* and at the *end of definite periods*.

I. CAPACITY FOR PRAYER

A. The children's ideas of prayer.

- (1) What do the children think about prayer? (e.g., ask: "Why do we pray?" "What is it to pray?")
- (2) What instruction in the meaning of prayer has been given since your first observations?

B. The children's practice of prayer.

1. *Spontaneous or informal prayer.*

- (3) Under what conditions does the child pray spontaneously?
- (4) Illustrate how you control the conditions of prayer in class.
- (5) What are some of the pupils' prayers?
- (6) What do they pray about?
- (7) What is the usual length of their prayers?
- (8) What influences the subject-matter?
- (9) Describe the class "atmosphere" in prayer.

2. *Formal prayer.*

- (10) Describe how forms are made or selected.
- (11) Give the forms used of late.
- (12) Describe how they were used.

3. *Silent prayer.*

- (13) Describe how you have used silent prayer in class.

4. *Private prayer.*

- (14) Which children pray daily? (Names.)
- (15) Which children use forms? (Names and forms.)
- (16) If forms are not used, what do they pray about?
- (17) How do the mothers or fathers help each one?
- (18) To which children did you suggest forms or topics? (Keep names, and forms or topics in each case.)

C. *The children's appreciation of prayer.*

- (19) Describe such external matters as posture, tone of voice, facial expression, unsolicited comments, etc.

II. THE EXTENDED EFFECTS OF PRAYER

A. *Spontaneous or informal prayer.*

- (20) What are the observed effects of prayer: a. On the one who prays? e.g., manner, work, conduct mentioned in the prayer or associated with prayer in the pupil's mind. Is there any evidence of change due to the fact of prayer? b. On the rest of the group?

B. *Formal prayer.*

- (21) Compare the social effects of forms:
 - a. Made by the children: b. Selected by the children: c. Provided for the children.
- (22) Compare the social effects of formal and spontaneous prayer.
- (23) Can you trace any changes in conduct or attitude to the prayer life of the pupil as participated in when alone, in the class, or in the service of worship?

ESPECIALLY FOR PARENTS

- 1. Does he say his prayers every day? Morning? Night? Does he use a form? If so, please quote.
- 2. Is the mother present at prayer time? The father? Does either assist?
- 3. Do you explain prayer to him? If so, what do you tell him?
- 4. Is the moment of prayer prepared for? By questions? By conversation? By private reflection? By reading? Give details.
- 5. Are topics for prayer suggested? If so, what topics?
- 6. Do you know what the child says in his prayers? If so, give details.
- 7. What questions has he asked about prayer?
- 8. What remarks has he made about it?
- 9. What has he wanted to do, or not to do, in respect to his prayers?
- 10. Does he take part in family prayers? If so, how? In saying grace at table? If so how? What comments does he make about the details of family worship, or at the time of family worship?
- 11. What effects in conduct or attitude do you know to have resulted from the child's prayers?