

Moral Education of the Child: Whose Responsibility?

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the moral education of the child with a critical attention paid to the allocation of responsibility. The paper tried to answer the question: 'Who gives the child his moral education, is it a collective responsibility or the sole responsibility of an institution'? After the examination of some theories of moral development, attempt was made to examine the various institutions that interact with the child as regards his moral education. Suggestions were made on how these institutions should interact in order to give the child moral education and a conclusion was drawn that; the moral education of the child is not the sole responsibility of just an institution, rather, different social institutions must co-operate and effectively interact in order to give the child a meaningful moral education.

INTRODUCTION

Concerted review of literature has revealed that Moral education is becoming an increasingly popular topic in the fields of psychology and education. Media reports of increased violent juvenile crime, teen pregnancy, embezzlements, human rights violation, numerous abuses and suicide have caused many people both within and outside the country to declare a moral crisis in Nigeria. Though not all of these social concerns are moral in nature, and most have complex origins, there is a growing trend towards linking the solutions to these and related social problems to the teaching of moral and social values in both public and private schools in Nigeria. However, considerations of the role schools can and should play in the moral development of youths are themselves the subject of controversy. All too often debate on this topic is reduced to posturing reflecting personal views rather than informed opinion. Fortunately, systematic research and scholarship on moral development has been going on for most of this century.

OVERVIEW OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

What is Moral?

For the purpose of this paper, moral is defined as right conduct, not only in our immediate social relations, but also in our dealings with our fellow-citizens and with the whole of human race. It is based upon the possession of clear ideals as to

what actions are right and what are wrong and the determination of our conduct by a constant reference to those ideals. It is worthy of note that the definition of what is right conduct is relative, it is taken for granted for the purpose of this paper that right or wrong conduct is defined by the society. In other word, each society defines for itself what is right or wrong. Therefore, moral is defined as right conducts as guided by or defined by the respective society.

What is Morality?

Morality is viewed as the "system of rules that regulate the social interactions and social relationships of individuals within societies and is based on concepts of welfare (harm), trust, justice (comparative treatment and distribution) and rights" (Smetana 1999). this is how humans determine their actions based on their cognitive abilities to interpret a social situation. Issues of reasoning, problem solving skills, self-control and adaptability are components in exhibiting key components of the moral process. For some individuals, issues of values, personal feelings and social norms are constructs for discussion and therefore can be seen as being influenced by the way in which morality is taught or experienced in schools, churches and other social institution settings. In order to fully understand the development of morals, one has to consider the various domains that exist within the morality framework. For many, it is seen as a part of nature; others contend that it is a process of behavior

development. From the naturalistic point of view, one sees moral development stemming from a developmental perspective in that morality is conceived through how children think, behave and feel about rules and regulations set forth within their world as a result of natural consequences (Campbell-Bishop 2003).

The moral thought theorists perceive moral development through a set of stages that build skills and then translate into global perspective of the child. The moral behavioral approach contends that reinforcement, punishment, imitation and situational presentation are factors that contribute to the moral development of human being. Issues of self-control and cognitive capabilities play a key role in the moral behavioral school of thought. All of these approaches connect to one assumption: that certain factors influence moral development of the individual. It is the focus of this paper to explore these factors that are responsible for the moral development of the individual.

Theoretical Background

For a better understanding of the evolution of moral development, a consideration of the plethora of major theorists that have developed perspectives and approaches to how the human beings develop such a complex idea of morality is a necessity. When viewing the moral thought approach, one must consider the psychoanalytical works of Piaget in that he postulated that the characteristics of moral development as something that is “distinguished between heteronymous morality of younger children and the autonomous morality of older children” (Santrock 1996). Piaget’s formation of moral development is viewed through stages of life that begin with the most basic needs and continues into a formal operational thought process that extends into adolescent years (Santrock 1996).

Another psychoanalytical approach presented by Freud investigates the development of self through the Id, Ego and Superego and the various conflicts that arise during early stages of a child’s development. The key within Freud’s theory is how the child identifies with the parental figures and the way in which conflicts during those developmental years are solved by the child through the various aspects of the development of the self.

The most noted theorists in moral develop-

ment is Kohlberg with his work pertaining to levels of moral convention with influences from peers, cognitive development and conflict, as well as perspectives or the phenomenological approach of the child. His social cognitive approach to moral development combines the approach by Bandura in that moral development is best understood through the context of social situations, judgments and cognitive factors that pertain to self control and perception of self within the social setting. In the very recent times, there has been an approach developed by Gilligan that refutes the works of Kohlberg by indicating the under represented aspect of a feminine approach to morality (Berk 1999). The feminine approach by Gilligan states that “research on moral development has been limited by too much attention to rights and justice (a ‘masculine’ ideal) and too little attention to care and responsiveness (a ‘feminine’ ideal) and the females tend to “stress care and empathic perspective taking, whereas males either stress justice or use justice and care equality.” This approach brings forth the ideology that real life is the arena in which moral development occurs and there differences in perceptions throughout gender groups.

Elements of Moral Development

It is expedient to combine how each theory comes into play in the real world of the emerging child after having considered the influence of moral development theorist. Morality is part of a complicated reciprocal process that manifest within a social setting through interaction while conserving self-identity (Smetena 1999). Social interaction can be difficult to understand because within every society, there are rules, but these rules may not have been written hence conceptualization of rules, uniformities and behavior can be conventions that are difficult for a child to interpret without some type of assistance. Social influence and its connection to moral development can stem from interaction that occurs naturally such as through conflict where there is a victim and observer of certain actions within a social context. This can lead to the understanding of fairness and how it plays into the social realm. Killen and Nucci (1995) believe that this type of interaction within a peer group can positively influence moral development.

In young children, parents/caregiver play an important role in their moral development. The

approach used by the caregiver has the greatest impact on how the child will internalize the moral lessons being taught. Therefore the level of bonding between child and caregiver yields a more productive environment to receive information pertaining to the moral issue. This yielding to moral teaching is based primarily on the reactionary process of the caregiver through the level of affect presented by the adult. This in turn brings the moral and social message to the child in a more concrete fashion. As with anything in the developmental life span, too much or not enough of something can create adverse or opposite effects which may or may not be the intention of the caregiver. Therefore the level of moral development within the adult contributes to the internalization of the moral concept.

When venturing beyond the affective process to moral development, the consideration of cognitive process becomes another element to the equation. As with most basic foundations of learning, experience within the social setting will lead to comprehension of concepts. Through modeling, observation and role playing, children are able to make the connection between parental and peer interactions and how they fit into moral schema. The loop role begins however, when the social rules and those set by law are not explained in a developmentally appropriate manner. Social learning theorists have asserted that a "great deal of human learning and behavior is a function of observing and imitating the behavior of models and that this learning can be explained largely through operant conditioning principles" (LeFrancois 1999). Therefore the justice to be served to the child stems from "taking on the complex task of developing adult's maturity and ethical capacities" (Weissbourd 2003). "These qualities and beliefs emerge and continually evolve in the wide array of relationships that every child has with both adults and peers starting nearly at birth..., therefore relationships play a key role in the development of the moral aspect of empathy (Weissbourd 2003). This is where schools, family and community merge together to create the moral development climate that ultimately becomes the moral development classroom for children. This becomes their phenomenological approach to learning morals based on how they perceived their world and the messages that are transmitted daily by those with whom they interact with consistently.

Another aspect of moral development is

empathy which is commonly learned through social interaction. In order for a child to understand empathy, the surroundings of the child must model and recognize when empathy occurs within a social context. Empathy is expressed by reacting to another's feeling with an emotional response or statement that reflects the other feelings. This begins as a way of understanding that someone may have a different point of view which evolves into the development of various perspectives when faced with interactions with those who experienced unfortunate situations. This in turn leads to an open mind and understanding of the complexity of the array of human emotions.

The influence of those within the context of the child's life moves beyond the emotional aspect to the cognitive development and its correlation to moral development. Through the explanations made by the caregiver, caution and care must be taken to explain consequences of actions. Kohlberg's theory of development takes on the assumption that fear and authority, satisfying personal needs, affection, and contracts and universal ethics are key steps that one must navigate through in life in order to become a moralized person and this means that the intrinsic value of the learning experience must be emphasized in order that the experience becomes a part of the cognitive and social process of moral development.

Who is Responsible for the Child's Moral Education?

Although socialization theorists have viewed moral internalization as stemming primarily from parents' influence on their children through their parenting practices, structural-developmental theorists generally have proposed that hierarchical nature of parent-child relationships constraint children's moral development. This has led to the predominant focus on the formative role of peers and social institutions such as schools in moral reasoning development and a relative neglect of the role of the family (Smetana 2004).

Talking about who is responsible for the moral education of the child, Pakarsky (1998) "The Role of Culture in Moral Development in Journal of Parenthood in America) recognized the role of culture above other variables in the moral education of the child. He opines that a dogmatic

conviction that schools are adequate to the challenge of making moral sensibilities and disposition into the child is inappropriate. Tigay, H.Z. quoted in Smetana (2004) on the other hand in addition to the roles of schools and parents in the moral development of the child has also emphasized the role of religious institutions. Tigay in fact is of the opinion that the religious bodies have a major part to play in the moral education of the child than any of the other agents. With these divergent views as expressed by authors, an attempt is made from hence, to begin to look at the roles of each of these agents in the moral development of the child.

The Role of parents in the Moral Education of the Child

Most children ages 5 or 6 have developed basic components of conscience, a sense of guilt, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong and the capability to be empathic. But none of these elements of a child's moral development will become fully functional for years (Danielson 1998). This in-between period is the ideal time for laying a solid moral foundation in the child and the group of adults that are best suited for this jobs are the parents (who are being referred to as the first moral teachers and role models that young children have). "At this early age, parents have the opportunity of teaching respect for life and for others to the child... this teaching usually occurs as parents explain and reason with their children." (Danielson 1998).

Parents provide the most constant and visible models of behaviors associated with character development, they also help by identifying other models of the character traits they want their children to develop and by raising appropriate character-related issues in discussions of daily events. Parents also assist by exposure to examples of behaviors that negate their own views of positive values and virtues. The approach used by parents has the greatest impact on how the child and parents yields a more productive environment to receive information pertaining to the moral issues. The yielding to moral teaching is based primarily on the reactionary process of the care given through the level of affect presented by the adult. This in turn brings the moral and social message to the child in a more concrete fashion. As with anything in the developmental life span, too much or not enough

of something can create adverse or opposite effects which may not be the intervention of the caregiver. Therefore, the level of moral development within the adult contributes to the internalization of the moral concept.

A great deal of research suggests that the quality of the parent-child bond and the degree of warmth in the parent-child relationship affect many facets of children's development (Bretherton and Waters 1985). Indeed, one of the most consistent findings from research examining the family interactions that facilitate Kohlbergian moral reasoning stages is that the affective components or those interaction, such as parental warmth, involvement and support are related to moral reasoning development (Hart 1988; Powers 1988; Walker and Taylor 1991). Therefore, a warm, supportive bond between parents and children may enhance the likelihood that children are motivated to listen to and respond to parental messages.

In furtherance, parental affective reactions in conjunction with reasoning may facilitate moral and social rules. Research by Arsenio reviewed by Arsenio and Lover (1995) has shown that children may employ affective response to transgression, understand differentiate and renumber moral and social reverb. Indeed, previous research indicates that material responses to moral transgressions accompanied by intense feelings lead to greater reparation among children than when cognitive messages are not so embellished (Grusec et al. 1982; Zalun-Waxler et al. 1979). Parents are more likely to employ negative effect, including dramatizations of distress. Zahu-Waxler and Chapman (1982) and greater anger Grusec et al. (1982) in response to moral than other transgressions. Such affective responses used in conjunction with explanations that focus on the welfare of others will increase effective reasoning because it will help the children to focus on the harm or injustice they have caused and make amends or desire to make amends. One must not hesitate to mention here however, that research also indicates that there are optional levels or affective arousal, too much anger may be negatively arousing and therefore may inhibit children's focus on other feelings.

There is also an important cognitive component to parents' interaction with their children that may facilitate children's moral development. Parents' communication with their children is one aspect of children's social

experiences that may be used in the construction of moral knowledge. By explaining the reasons for rules and responding appropriately to moral violation, parents can facilitate moral development by stimulating children to think reflectively about their actions. This assertion implies that the more explicit parents are about the nature of the event and why a behavior is expected or a misdeed is wrong, the more effective such messages might be, particularly for young children. (Though there are situations where and when more indirect approaches may be more effective (Grusec and Goodness 1994).

This suggests, in turn, that reasoning, explanation and rationale will be more effective than other types of disciplinary strategies in facilitating children's moral development as well as development in other domains. More specifically, to effectively facilitate moral development, parents have to explain moral rules as well as responses to moral violation by weighting the consequences of the acts for other's rights and welfare support for this assertion has been found in previous research, which indicates that parental reasoning and in particular, other-oriented reasoning (Holfman 1970) is associated with greater moral internalization and the development of concern for others.

Summarily, parents are vital in the moral development of the child because they are the first moral teachers and role models that young people have (Danielson, 1998). This they do by providing the necessary affective relationship and extensive interactions that facilitates moral development. Parents' responses to children's transgressions and moral dispute and their explanations of the reasons for rules and expectations may facilitate children's moral development.

Role of Teachers in the Moral Education of the Child

The school has been identified as a vehicle of "direct instruction" (Pekausky 1998), it is a social institution in which is embedded a rich of norms, customs and ways of thinking of which the teacher is a conveyor.

Apart from parents who have been referred to as the moral teachers, school teachers are also very influential and significant adults in the lives of children starting from the pre-school years. Teachers help children to understand character

traits and values, they also model desirable character traits in the students both within the school setting and in the larger society. Young children often idealize their teachers, watch them closely and also try to emulate their behaviors. In other words, teachers are models to the students. Young people may view their teachers as authorities on subjects and seek their advice on many issues related to character and values. Teachers can help by maintaining long-term relationship with students and using children's literature in the classrooms that emphasizes positive values and heroic action. Teachers also reference the moral lessons that the children must have been taught at home.

The inclusion of moral lesson in the curriculum and ensuring its full implementation/delivery is yet another way in which teachers have contributed to the moral development of the child.

Teachers are directly involved in teaching behaviors that are right and correct those that are wrong to students in school. They also function as role models to student. This does not imply that all teachers are good role models to students and that all teachers teach good morals, yet the fact remains that teachers have very important roles to play in the moral development of the child.

Teachers teach children to respect the right of others; they also promote the acceptance of responsibility for one's actions. Teachers are responsible for the teaching of the importance of honesty, dedication and right behavior. Success or failure in the achievement of the building of a society that is made up of morally upright citizens depend more upon the adoption of education methods calculated to effect the change than upon anything else. These methods formulated, executed and evaluated by the teachers, hence the relevance of the teachers in the moral development of the child.

The Role of Religious Institutions in the Moral Development of the Child

The role of religious institutions in the moral education of the child cannot be overemphasized. Historically, moral teachings have been central to all religions. For instance, historically speaking, since the time of the Bible, moral teachings have been central to Judaism. The Bible is, at its core, a book of ethical teachings. Talmudic sages are seen as moral exemplars, and medieval writers such

as Bahya ibn Pakudah and Maimonides, Moses Haylm Luzzatto in the 18th century and the Musar Movement of the 19th century developed a systematic approach to the ethical teachings of the Bible and Talmud in order to teach morals. The same goes for the Islamic religion. Religious institutions have a way of imparting moral lessons in their adherents and this is no more news to many in our country today. In fact, the present in focus of both national and international organization to the exploration of involving and using religious leaders in the campaign against the hydra-headed monster called HIV/AIDS because it is believed that the religious leaders exercise a significant level of control/influence on many people's thought process and decision making further confirms the importance and relevance of the religious organization in the moral development of the child.

Where do We Go from Here?

From the above, it is impossible to say that the moral development of the child is a sole responsibility of only one socialization agent, and non of the agents can be discarded. It is on this premise that this paper is suggesting an eclectic approach. A situation where there is a combination of and cooperation of the different agents of moral development to achieve the moral development of the child. For this to be realized, this paper has deemed it expedient to suggest some strategies to be employed by every institution that has an input in the development of the child.

Educators, religious leaders, and parents must see themselves as moral models for children and they must behave accordingly. Children are quick to pick up the values that adults hold dear. It is therefore important that they behave in a way, which reflects moral values, or the child will quickly conclude that they are hypocritical. It therefore follows that adults in the society should live above board by living as good examples for the younger generation to follow. The teacher should not just teach morals, he should live it and be a role model for the students he is teaching. The same thing goes for the parents and religious leaders.

Educators, religious and parents must create a moral community in the classroom, home and religious centers, one in which children are involved in decision-making and the rights and responsibilities of all are upheld. In such an

environment, moral discipline fosters fairness and opportunities for moral reasoning and self-control. Each child is respected and is never the object of ridicule.

The teacher, (and other significant adults in a child's life) according to Thomas Lickona, author of *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, (New York: Bantam Books 1992), must try to discover, affirm, and develop each child's special talents and strengths, building the child's self-respect and self-esteem. Only when a child values himself is he ever likely to show respect and empathy for another.

The moral dilemma - a critical thinking approach - acknowledges that preaching and lecturing won't work. In the early 1920's, John Dewey developed a theory of moral education, which emphasized reflective and critical thinking rather than didactic moral lessons. Dewey's theory has been developed in recent years by Laurence Kohlberg in the area of moral education. The theory holds that youngsters need training and directed practice in resolving moral dilemmas and that with the skills learned, young people will become more capable of applying these skills to real-life situations and choosing the appropriate path of behavior. The underlying expectation is that such reflection will create morally mature citizens and therefore, a moral community. Children will be challenged to move to higher and higher levels of moral development. Children involved in such an approach to moral development would become as adept at using critical thinking skills in the realm of Jewish ethics as in the sciences.

Stories are a potent conveyor of moral values and children of every age love to hear a good story. According to Lickona, Stories teach by attraction rather than compulsion; they invite rather than impose. Stories talk to the heart and have the potential to make a child identify with the values portrayed. Story books with stories of characters who through simple righteous acts, become heroes worthy of emulation are good for the moral education of the child. Like the Musar Movement of the 19th century, we should be creating small, informal discussion groups for adolescents to talk about moral issues together. Such groups would be most appropriate in youth group and camp settings.

We should create and utilize music for the teaching of moral lessons. Some religious and non-religious groups alike have produced

excellent recordings, which employ catchy tunes, and repetitive lyrics that keep moral values on the tips of children's tongues. This should be further explored and employed to teach moral education to the younger generation.

We must provide opportunities for service learning and opportunities to meet important people who have exemplified themselves as those who uphold moral values. Our schools, religious groups and families must provide opportunities for social action, sensitizing children to moral issues. Such an approach will teach the people, especially our adolescents, that moral behavior and social action are humanistic.

Educators, Religious leaders and parents must help children develop the coping skills of self-control, so they can just say no to resist temptation or use methods of conflict resolution. Rather than think out or devise an unethical or immoral way of handling the situation.

Summarily therefore, these strategies for teaching moral education to the child is stressing the importance of (a) knowing the good, a cognitive approach). (b) Doing the good, a behavioral approach) (c) Feeling or internalizing the good, which is an emotional and spiritual approach. Moral education has the best chance of succeeding only if all three approaches - the cognitive, the behavioral and the emotional-spiritual are used.

CONCLUSION

Moral Education as the Duty of All

Someone has said that the role of moral education in schools is to reinforce values gained at home. Each child from birth, by virtue of his environment, belongs to a significant group. Family members, friends, relatives, teachers and administrators play a major role in the formation of the character of each child. To expect the teachers solely to shoulder this important task is appalling. Although teachers traditionally have been expected to be "moral giants" in the communities in which we live, the extent of their appropriate social status in the community has been questioned. One need only glance at newspapers to realize the manner in which teachers are viewed in this country by certain quarters. We need the right mandate and acknowledgement from society to allow teachers to mould its citizens.

To teach Moral Education in today's schools is no easy task. We are being challenged by society itself in upholding the values. When the society at large is not really committed to leading a good and moralistic life, what can we expect our youngsters to follow? We teach responsibility, the joy of sharing and a moral code of conduct when dealing with the poor and helpless. We also strive to teach that there is dignity in one's labor and the like. However, the child is growing amidst unfairness, vulgarity, cheating, lying, deviant behavior, arrogance, torture and tension. The children who are taught these values in school cannot see the relevance of this subject in their lives. Thus, they reject it by saying it is boring, not logical and irrelevant to them. Every child comes to us with a different world of varied experiences behind him that affect his learning. Many come with anxieties that overwhelm adults. When we impart the values to these students, some actually sneer or laugh at us. They even say how ignorant we are over what's happening in the society we live in.

Our children will not accept platitudes and lip service statements anymore. They are intelligent due to their exposure to various areas in life. They can see and read for themselves the discrepancies between the actions and dictums of many adults. Moral leadership at home and school can only be offered by moral persons. The children have failed to see such values being practiced in family life and in society. We must be mindful that each generation sets its own background, creates its own values, decides upon a plan of action and makes a contribution to society accordingly. The family unit plays a vital role in molding such a generation. But, truthfully, how many parents (educators included) practice the right values with their children? We have students telling teachers the vulgar words exchanged at home, types of VCD being watched in their living room, lies told among them and getting away with it and demands and tantrums by adults. The crimes committed by adults are mind-boggling to our youngsters. They are watching silently and, soon enough, if they are not careful, they will join the bandwagon.

A clash of values has emerged lately. If left unchecked our younger generation will act without much conscience and fear for their fellow men. Superficial and trivial ways of living deny our human dignity and undermine integrity and truthfulness. We need to be an example to our children (irrespective of color, creed or religion)

that life is not dependent on petty pride and contentment with illusions, buttressed by self-esteem. Instead, one should examine the deepest desires of one's heart and face up to reality and be able to complement emotions with good thoughts and sincere intentions. My personal philosophy is center on the fact that every young person is a living person with tremendous potential to love and to hate, to succeed and to fail, to live or merely to exist. He has within him a spark of talent, accomplishments, of creativity and of love for his fellow man. Our job, as parents and educators, is to find that spark and nurture it to its fullest. In doing so, the adults in their lives, need to speak the same "language". Parents must not give contradictory messages to their wards as they begin to form principles, values and ethics in life.

Teaching Moral Education basically is reinforcing the values practiced at home and in society. It is high time all the different agents of moral development worked as a team rather than push it to one party and expect any magic overnight. The observation is that everybody wants his children to grow up with high moral standard, but failure to provide an enabling environment for the achievement of this goal will lead to inability to realize this goal. Therefore, the moral development agents should work together and provide an environment where the young personality thrives and emerges winner in every aspect of life.

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