

INSTILLING MORAL FEELING IN CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Moral feeling is quite important for children. It helps in their personality enhancement as well educational attainments. Experience as a child as well as a teacher is highly significant for an individual. This article is based on my experience as a child in a school. A teacher, psychologist and a pedagogue always need such kind of inputs to work on in order to build his researches on for educational contributions.

Keywords. *moral feeling, young children, childhood experiences, pedagogues.*

1. BACKGROUND

Attending school as a young child was my first experience interacting with children and people that I had never met before. As the eldest female child of the family, I was used to getting my way most of the time and playing with my own toys and choosing the things that I wanted to do. School was a big change. Sharing, set play times and meal times, waiting my turn, and seeing other children be the center of attention were all very new, exciting, and sometimes frustrating discoveries. According to Piaget (1932), one of the greatest contributors to child development theory, this is known as a *sociomoral environment*. Now I realize that this was my first experience following social rules or morals as explained in the text, *Moral Classrooms, Moral Children* (Devries & Zan, 1994). The sociomoral environment is something that children often experience for the first time in the classroom. This could be because they come from single child households where they have never had to share their toys or the attention of their caregivers. Or it could be that they spend a lot of time with close family and a few friends but not interacting much with children that they have not known since before they could remember. Other children may not have had access yet to play groups or sports groups at this age. Sometimes children are also very attached to their mothers, fathers and/or other caregivers and are not used to interacting with other “strangers” during meal times or other important times of their day. Because of these varied backgrounds and experiences, it is vital for children to learn sociomoral skills from the classroom.

Teachers strive to create an environment that promotes children’s social and intellectual growth. Rheta Devries and Betty Zan (1994) offer a clear guide on how to create sociomoral classrooms that is informed and grounded by the work of Piaget. This discussion briefly summarizes the history of Piaget and some of his contributions to the field before exploring how Devries and Zan facilitate a moral environment in four situations. These situations include meal times, clean up time, group games and story games. It should be noted that there are various ways to create this environment in the classroom. However, through my experience teaching in Saudi Arabia, I have observed that meal times and clean up times are not utilized in sociomoral facilitation. In regards to group games, usually games are played for academic purposes rather than sociomoral and it would be particularly useful to apply these games in more areas of development. Moreover, many researches has suggested that social skills are among the most important skills for learners in the 21st century (Sharkins, Newton, Causey, & Ernest, 2017).

With this goal of instilling morals in children during class, especially group work, in mind, this discussion will begin with a brief overview of the history and research of Jean Piaget and compare it to other notable theorists such as Kohlberg before discussing the practical applications of a sociomoral environment.

2. HISTORY AND RESEARCH OF PIAGET

Jean Piaget was born in Neuchatel, Switzerland in 1896. In 1920, Piaget created a clinical method where he studied different aspects of children's thought processes through language, reasoning, conceptions, theories of **causality**, and moral judgment. In his first five books over a period of ten years, he studied these aspects of child development. He began to conduct studies on his own children born in 1925, 1927, and 1931. Through these studies and observations, Piaget drew links between biological, psychological, and epistemological theories. Piaget's cognitive development theory is based on the research of the way children's thought processes are developed. His theories are different than other psychologists' theories because they focus not only on the learning process, but rather on the process from the developmental perspective. Piaget found that the answers of children were important to analyze, not to determine whether they were right or wrong, rather to discover how those children think. Over the course of seventy years, Piaget's work extended from psychology to include sociology. His focus centered on how a child thinks, the way his or her thoughts develop, and the stages of development.

In an ideal moral classroom, "the sociomoral atmosphere supports and promotes children's development" (DeVries & Zan, 1994). This means that an environment in which a child feels secure is the underlying foundation of a moral structure. Furthermore, Piaget (1948) stressed the social context in which children's social lives occurred was important to the development of intelligence, morality and personality (Devries & Zan, 1994). In this paper, Piaget's theory will be applied to four specific examples in the development of a sociomoral classroom environment.

According to Piaget, children who are in the preoperational stage do not consider intentions and focus more on the result of the action to determine whether or not it is right or wrong (Wadsworth, 2004, p. 126). According to Piaget's framework, children in the preoperational stage have not yet reached the age where they can use logical skills (Wordsworth, 2004, p. 88). They are prelogical. The further along this stage, the child will begin to consider the points of views of other people and understand that sometimes others' viewpoints are different than their own. They will become more receptive at age seven to different opinions and will begin to consider ways to understand others. Affective experiences like feelings will change the way they view others in future interactions because now the child has the capacity to maintain morality through experiences.

The second stage of Piaget's framework talks about children in the concrete operational stage. This stage is after the preoperational stage and before the logical thinking stage. In this stage, the child begins to use logical operations to apply to problems or dilemmas (Wordsworth, 2004, p. 88). According to Piaget, a child should be instructed with learning experiences that match his or her cognitive readiness (Saltz, 1979).

Saltz (1979) supports Piaget's position on matching learning experiences with the child's cognitive readiness. Saltz applies this theory specifically to the use of proverbs and fables as teaching tools for moral concepts. Saltz's commentary on children's development of moral concepts is that proverbs and fables are a good tool for teaching children to explore these concepts. However, they are not as useful a tool for early grades such as preschool to fifth grade because children at this stage are preoperational. She concludes that fables and proverbs are a great means for teachers to learn about a student's cognitive level. Nevertheless, Saltz affirms the fact that children of the same age and grade level can be at different stages of cognitive readiness and "cannot be pushed in their use of and understanding of language beyond their cognitive stage of development (Saltz, 1979, p. 514). While Saltz (1979) encourages the use of morals in proverbs, Kohlberg (1963) focused on moral development.

3. HISTORY AND RESEARCH OF KOHLBERG

Lawrence Kohlberg was born in New York City, USA in 1927. He was a Harvard University researcher and professor. In 1963, Kohlberg categorized the moral judgment of children in six stages. These categories provide a useful baseline to judge where a child is in his or her moral judgment development as well as determining which teaching strategies are most appropriate for each stage. Researchers focus on three things, which are behavior, guilt, and a decision for right or wrong. Guilt refers to the feeling of doing something bad (Thomas, 2005). According to Kohlberg (1963), the child displays signs of being in stage one of moral judgment, meaning he determines what is right or wrong based on rules, authority, and avoiding punishment. This stage is characterized by a strong egocentric emphasis on authority, rules and punishment when rules are broken. Children in stage two begin to realize that what is right and wrong depends on one's own immediate interests and the interests of others. Concern for others and others' feelings is developed further, particularly in stage three when children are focused on interpersonal relationships and conformity to social expectations. This sentiment fits squarely in Kohlberg's (1963) theory where

a person views what is right and wrong through the lens of mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships, and conformity. Saltz (1979) also agrees that fables are more useful for children at this stage because they are able to think more abstractly and conceptualize the depth of meaning the story conveys. Fables are best used at this stage of development. However, it should be noted that the moral of the story is not fully grasped at this stage and follow up questions and discussion should be utilized.

Stage four is recognized by a commitment to social order and maintenance of the social group. Children at this stage ponder the chaotic consequences of “What if everyone did it?” At stage five, people are concerned with upholding basic rights, values, and legal contracts in society, even in the face of a variety of opinions and interests. Stage six, the final stage, is characterized by a commitment to universal ideals and ethical principles, which are considered guidelines for human behavior (Thomas, 2005).

4. CRITICISM OF PIAGET AND KOHLBERG’S THEORIES

Many theories of Western psychologists, including Kohlberg and Piaget, do not consider divine and spiritual aspects of humanity in the discussion of morality. This is because of the focus on moral and ethical development as influenced by other factors such as social, parents, and the connection with other humans, which does not include a personal or spiritual existence of a higher level. According to Kohlberg(1958), children first develop moral behavior out of simple obedience. In the next stage, they relate morality to the concept of reward and punishment based on the importance of their relationship with someone. For example, children will want to get a compliment or acknowledgement from a teacher because the relationship is important, therefore they will show good behavior. The third and final stage is when a child at around the age of 12 will develop oral behavior for self-satisfaction and no reward (Moheghi, 2020).

Kohlberg's studies were only focused on Western cultures and therefore may not apply to subjects outside of the societies he tested due to vast differences between cultures. The tests that Kohlberg developed and used to study morality psychology cannot be applied as a whole to Eastern cultures because they do not factor in spiritual elements. Another disadvantage to Kohlberg's theory is the lack of focus on parenting and its role on children's moral development (Ngam & Jick, 2016).

4.1. Applications of Morality in the Classroom

In the previous section, the paper discussed Piaget’s theory and compared it to other renowned theorists such as Kohlberg. In this section, we will look at the application Piaget’s theory of morality in the classroom from four aspects: meal times, cleanup time, group games, and storytelling.

Meal times

Piaget’s theory of cognitive development in children can be applied to observations made at lunchtime. During this time, lunch is more than just a way to feed the child. It is actually a process in which a child shares and communicates choices and humor with other children (Devries & Zan, 1994). This helps establish social ties between peers and gives the child the opportunity to sit and talk with the person or people of their choosing. During lunchtime, a teacher should not interfere with the child’s eating habits except to make suggestions. This gives the child the opportunity to voice his or her opinion on what they want to eat (Devries & Zan, 1994). This will help give the child a sense of independence and will help provide tools for future choices.

Social interactions for children are paramount in their discovery of self. According to Mead (1934), our sense of self is shaped by the experiences and reactions we have from others. Additionally, we determine what is good or bad, right or wrong, from the reactions and cues we receive from those around us. Thus, lunch time and the social interactions children participate in have a major impact on their construction of self as well as the formation of values, especially moral values.

Cleanup Time

Another example of the development of sociomoral environments in classrooms is displayed in the process of cleanup time after meals or play. The concept of cleanup, when children are instructed to help keep their space clean after they have played or eaten a meal has important moral ideas behind it. The moral ideas behind this are that

children learn to self-regulate (Devries & Zan, 1994). A teacher provides a scenario in which a toy of some kind will be broken if it is left on the floor. The child then chooses to pick it up because they do not want to play with a broken toy. This is a way to make sure that the children understand why they are cleaning up instead of just telling them. This idea comes from Piaget's theory of reciprocity sanctions, one of them being "natural consequences" (DeVries & Zan, 1994, p. 181-182). According to DeVries and Zan (1994) "natural consequences result directly from actions" (p. 182). In other words, children need to understand that their actions have social consequences. For example, the consequence of not cleaning up after a meal or a game is that they will have no room for anyone on the table to work on art projects. The concept of social responsibility is an important one to cultivate in a student.

However, there are problems involved in cleanup time. Children who do not wish to participate often feel forced to clean even if they are not willing. This creates a feeling of anger and invalidation (Devries & Zan, 1994). This is where the use of positive reinforcement can come in. Praising those children who are willing to clean up after themselves and perhaps singling out the fastest or neatest child will encourage to rest of the children to do better next time and show the children who did not clean up that there are rewards for following the rules or morals of the classroom. Piaget alludes to this in his discussion of reciprocity sanctions, or "exclusion." "Exclusion from the group is a logical consequence of violating the rights of others," (DeVries & Zan, 1994, p.183). So, if after clean up time everyone is rewarded with a small prize or the opportunity to choose the next game or activity, then the child that refused to clean would be excluded from the process, thus prompting his or her desire to rejoin the group by complying.

Group Games

Another classroom activity that can develop a sociomoral classroom and is assessed by Piaget's cognitive development theory is games. According to Devries and Kamii (1980), a good game satisfies three main criteria. Firstly, it should be interesting and challenging for the participants. Secondly, it should also give children the ability to judge how well they do. Lastly, a good game should also include participation from all children in the classroom. Devries and Zan (1994) explained that "rule making, democratic decision making, and discussion" of any problems that arise are the benefits of group games and playtime (p. 124).

Another advantage for group games is when they do not work out or the children become uninterested, the group can come together and "discover their own needs for group time" (Devries & Zan, p. 124). Allowing the children, when age-appropriate, to suggest their own group time games gives them the chance to practice many sociomoral skills.

Examples of good games are guessing games. Children are given rules that they are expected to follow. In one type of guessing game, children are blindfolded and given objects to feel and asked to guess what the object is (Kamii & Devries, 1980). All children are expected to participate, and it is relatively challenging, therefore keeping the game interesting. The children also have the ability to judge how they do because they can readily assess how closely their guess was to the actual object. Piaget's commentary on games like this is that activities like this facilitate a child's mental construction of the object by exploring it kinesthetically (Kamii & Devries, 1980).

Storytelling

Group storytelling in the classroom is another way for teachers of young learners to instill morals, especially during circle time, nap time, and library sessions. Stories have strong morals that can have a big positive impact on children. On the other hand, some fairy tales and children's stories do not have morals but have other lessons, such as Cinderella for winning social approval, which lines up with Kohlberg's third stage paradigm. Children's imagination that is rich with stories with morals will help them develop their own morality, sense of justice, and charity. This is because children's literature is full of moral stories like this. Different cultures have different stories, based on folklore and oral stories, but they all have a common moral element to engage children's imagination and develop their moral behavior and judgment (Gilead & Henry, 2016).

Children can develop their own morals through stories in groups and support within the community. support from teachers and peers within the community (Sharkins, Newton, Causey, & Ernest, 2017). Also, parents can select to highlight the morals in stories that might be otherwise scary to strengthen their moral content.

The philosophy of psychologists believe in the importance of teacher reflection and engagement of children to develop their own morals and support. The morals from multi-cultural backgrounds and religion and respect for culture and beliefs will be reflected back in the community when children show their moral behaviour. Children can develop their own morals through stories in groups and support within the community. support from teachers and peers within the community. The philosophy of psychologists believe in the importance of teacher reflection and engagement of children to develop their own morals and support. The morals from multi-cultural backgrounds and religion and respect for culture and beliefs will be reflected back in the community when children show their moral behaviour.

Teacher's these days should construct the classroom not just to give knowledge but use strategy to develop children's moral judgment (Sharkins, Newton, Causey, & Ernest, 2017). Strategies through social activities. It is important to have dialogue between teachers and children because it helps teachers solve classroom problems and improve the environment

5. CONCLUSION

There are many ways to apply Piaget's and Kohlberg's moral development. For example, for children who are in the concrete operational stage, teachers can engage them to resolve issues all the time. This is because the teacher must respect children if they want children to respect them. Kohlberg calls this stage three of moral judgment, where a person is concerned with playing the role of "being good."

Furthermore, punishment children at this stage can be based on reciprocity rather than expiation. Teachers can foster social interaction in their classroom and encourage questioning and examining almost any issue children raise. Just as there is intellectual value in dealing with children's spontaneous interests, there it is equal value to their moral development to deal with spontaneous moral questions.

From the texts, the term "sociomoral" is used to describe both the social conventions and moral issues that children face in the classroom each day. As a teacher, I believe it is important to incorporate sociomoral teaching because the classroom is often where children practice or act out these issues for the first time in a larger society, outside their immediate family. Learning to incorporate sociomoral teachings into everyday classroom activities, while not contradicting each child's distinct cultural and or religious background, is an important part of each teacher's day.

Teachers and parents can engage students, even at the preschool level, in discussions of moral issues through the use of proverbs and folktales, as recommended by Saltz (1979). As children listen to their peers' views, they can experience cognitive conflict as necessary for the restructuring of reasoning to proceed.

According to Saltz' (1979) argument, moral stories should not be used with young children. The argument was that young children lack the capacity for abstraction and thus moral stories, proverbs, and folktales would be taken too literally to be of much use. The children do not understand the moral without adult and/or teacher support. Also, children were nevertheless able to grasp the concepts and morals when prompted by questions. Nevertheless, the proper story must be chosen depending on the child's age and cognitive readiness stage. So morals can be taught to children, even at a preoperational stage. However, teachers and parents must take into consideration choosing the most appropriate book for each child. While children can be to conclusions about the moral of the story through thought-provoking questions, the choice of the story must be accessible enough for them grasp.

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