

Extended Abstract

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Process theory of Moral Development WADG
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1. Abstract

Moral development is a cognition based mechanism, measured in the dimension of individuals' positive behaviour change, and based on universal interpretation of right and wrong. It is widely believed that, to most social problems, improvement of moral judgment standards is the only answer. This concept, as a tool for shaping human behaviour and inducing good values among individuals, has been in practice among societies for thousands of years. Presently this idea has been institutionalised, and parents expect teachers to contribute to children's moral development.

Many intellectuals agree that moral development is a requirement to guide the society. However, despite moral development initiatives of many centuries, we cannot see a decline of peoples' suffering due to immoral behaviour of people. Some reports state that maladaptive social behaviour such as aggression, bullying, and school violence, have increased in schools in recent years. Unfortunately, the world cannot find a universal formula to control or modify human behaviour; thus, the human suffering continues.

During the 20th century, scholars looked into this matter from a psychological perspective and contributed to the understanding of moral development and its components. Many academics have searched reasons for deteriorating moral values and identified development strategies. However, no practicable solution is available to this problem. It seems the conceptual development of the discipline "moral development" has stagnated in comparison with other disciplines, and socially undesired behaviour has been amplified. For this reason, finding a universal mechanism for controlling or modifying human behaviour is a critical requirement. It is observed that the absence of a process theory of moral development retards the development of moral concept, which hinders the value of this concept as a guiding

tool of the society. My studies embracing many disciplines suggest that a collective approach incorporating a number of disciplines such as learning, psychology, and sociology, could yield a practicable process theory of moral development. This conceptual paper perhaps will fill this gap.

Keywords: Character building, Just society, Moral development process theory

2. Introduction and research problem/issue

Research Problem

Besides maturity of many disciplines, we cannot see a reduction of peoples' suffering due to conflicts and socially undesired behaviour. SSOCS (2005) reports that in recent years, maladaptive social behaviour such as aggression, bullying, and school violence, have increased in schools.

Introduction

Development of morality (or its constituents) was a priority in societies throughout the history. Most character education approaches today consists ancient curriculum of discipline and habits of self-control (e.g. Hunter, 2000; Lickona, 1997). Arthur (2005, p.20) states, The main objective of education in the history was character development. Damon (1990) suggests authoritative parenting during early childhood to build up character. Some scholars propose introduction of social-emotional learning theory in schools as a strategy (Elias, Parker, Kash, & Dunkeblau, 2007), but could produce negative results (Elias, 2009). Silverstein and Trombetti (2013) suggest 'habituation', which involves training of moral perception, ethical decision making, and cooperative communal life. As a general rule, these attempts to improve moral reasoning are associated with the concept of moral education, suggesting a cognitive development approach.

However, the cognitive development approach to improve moral reasoning, which is widely practiced as teaching of moral values in schools, has not produced the desired results. This is evident in the awareness of moral values by some educated people who nevertheless behave immorally. If people with a sound knowledge of moral standards behave immorally, the approach of cognition development becomes invalid. Therefore, it is evident that this is not a generally accepted and guaranteed solution to

improve moral standards. Hypothetically, there are two main reasons for this situation; incomplete understanding of the moral development process and unavailability of a process theory. This conceptual paper attempts to identify the moral development process and a relevant theory.

3. Research Methodology

For centuries, teaching of moral values has being in practice as a positive behaviour changing mechanism. That clearly justify that the moral development process has been hypothesised as a character development process. However, the methodology, i.e. teaching of moral values to impart moral values, has not produced the expected results.

If the moral development is not a cognition development process, an alternate hypothesis needs to be introduced.

Therefore, in this conceptual paper, related psychological theories, learning theories, and sociological theories, are critically assessed to filter out a process, which could be used as a process theory of moral development.

4. Results and findings

Behaviour change is the process of converting accumulated information into predictable behaviour patterns, which are either positive or negative changes, based on the measuring instrument, and positive behaviour change can be viewed as moral development. It revealed that the process of moral behaviour could be better explained as a combination of two processes; *differential conditioning* and *cognitive development*. Naturally, and/or by social interaction, children are aware of moral values to a certain extent. If there is a hypothetical situation where the child is unaware of good values, then a cognitive development process should be a preceding process, and the differential conditioning will be a succeeding process. The external events that play a role in differential conditioning are referred to as stimuli, which include any event that leads to a response.

As Logan (1965) exemplified, in one example of differential conditioning in the laboratory, a rat might be rewarded for running down a white alley and not rewarded for running down a grey alley. This reinforcement/non-reinforcement phenomenon could be applied in the moral development process. It should be noted that differential

conditioning concept is the most relevant process that can explain the moral conditioning process.

Reading stories, listening to stories, watching drama/films, or engaging in social activities, can be moral development activities. However, these activities consist both positive and negative moral standards. Therefore, the expected results cannot be achieved by applying the said activities in the conventional manner. Here the conventional arithmetic concept of plus and minus phenomenon will apply and produce a zero result. Therefore, these standards should be identified at the beginning and reinforce positive values while discriminating negative values. If we apply differential conditioning for these situations to improve moral standards, the innate satisfaction or social appreciation works as positive reinforce. Conversely, negligence and denunciation works as negative reinforce and helps the extinction process. This is a successful application of differential conditioning process for imparting moral values.

Accordingly, moral development could be achieved by the combination of two processes: cognitive development process and differential conditioning process.

5. Conclusions, implications, and significance

“How to develop moral standards?” is an age-old question the civilizations faced. Modern researchers have also identified the value of moral education and published their findings. However, it is difficult to find success stories, and it seems that moral education projects have been abandoned deliberately. My studies related to this discipline revealed that incomplete conceptualisation of morality and unavailability of a moral development process theory have retarded the growth of this discipline. Hence, the proposed conceptualisation and the proposed process theory provide a universal solution to modify and control human behaviour, which is pragmatic and conducive to a just society.

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