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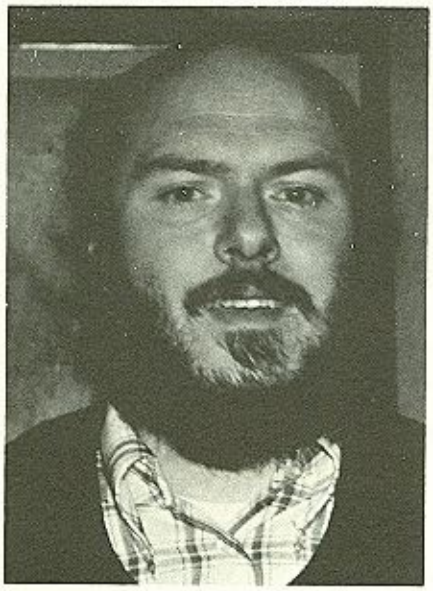
As a condition of moral education, each member of a school — including every student — has "responsibility for involvement in the decision-making process. Decisions are to be made by consensus and not by majority," this author suggests. Given current school and power realities, his points are provocative.

moral growth: some educational implications

by **Robert P. Craig**



Dr. Craig is on the faculty in the College of Education at Wayne State University, where he specializes in the philosophy of education. He has taught philosophy and educational philosophy courses on the college level at both Wayne State University and Madonna College, Livonia, Michigan. At Wayne State he was involved with the integration of educational history and philosophy with the Vocational Arts Intern Seminar. This is a competency-based program; Dr. Craig was responsible for developing the competencies in the areas of history and philosophy of education. He admits some philosophical objections to the competency-based program, but agrees that the experience was invaluable.

The philosopher John Dewey once remarked that the aim of education is growth. When asked what the purpose of growth was, he stated that growth leads to more education. Although some of Dewey's critics accused him of using circular arguments, his point is an important one: the aim of education is not as specific as some of the behaviorists would have us believe; the broad aim of education is necessarily vague and ambiguous. This is in the nature of the beast.

What, then, is growth? Dewey did not want to separate the congitive aspects of the educational process from the affective. In order to grow, the student must progress both in skills and in emotional maturity. The development of the affective side of man does not occur apart from the development of the cognitive. This point is also recognized by Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. I believe that Kohlberg's research on moral development gets at the meaning of growth, and I feel that his views have vast implications for the art of teaching.

I will not define "growth." To do so would be absurd, since growth is a process. I will, though, utilize Kohlberg's research in discussing growth; at some time during the process the teacher has hints and evidence that the student is growing.

I am presupposing that moral growth cannot occur without congnitive growth, and I am likewise presupposing that both types of growth can and do occur in every classroom which is at least a bit democratic. Two important questions need to be answered: (1) How does the student learn morality, and (2) how can the classroom teacher facilitate moral growth?

It is evident that education is a moral activity. Teachers prescribe behavior for students. There are rules of the classroom and other school procedures each student must follow. Since teachers prescribe student behavior, and many of these prescriptions are of the "thou shalt not" sort, teaching is a moral activity.

By morality I do not mean the uncritical compliance with institutional or classroom rules and procedure, though. Morality involves principles, and the principles, as the philosopher Kant saw, involve universality. By a moral principle I mean "treat each man as an end in himself, and not as a means to secure profit or pleasure," for example. This moral principle is a version of Kant's categorical imperative. A moral principle, then, is a method of dealing with incompatible claims. Most men have moral principles, but some principles are better than others because the consequence of holding some principles is better than others. It is better to treat an individual as a person, than to treat him

as a thing. How can I prove this? I can't. This is philosophical presupposition. I can only appeal to your personal intuition. Are there moral principles which are better than others?

At any rate, since education is basically a moral enterprise, shouldn't teachers have a working knowledge of the nature of moral development? Teachers are often available to discuss problems in math or history, but what about discussing moral problems, either the student's moral problems or moral problems as they occur within the subject matter? I have heard many teachers say that they must be objective; they must not deal with either morality or religion. The community would be up in arms; this is worse than discussing evolution in a science class.

It seems that some parents and teachers entertain a rather negative philosophical presupposition concerning the nature of children: they believe that children are basically lazy and need to be rigidly controlled. Without copious rules and regulations children would only do what is pleasurable, and not consider the consequences. Thus the adult needs to impose proper and correct standards upon children. Jean Piaget disagrees with this view. He writes:

> It is . . . absurd and even immoral to wish to impose upon the child a fully worked-out system of discipline when the social life of children among themselves is so sufficiently developed to give rise to a discipline infinitely nearer to that inner submission which is the mark of adult morality. It is idle, again, to try and transform the child's mind from the outside, when his own taste for active research and his desire for cooperation suffice to ensure a normal intellectual development. The adult must therefore be a collaborator and not a master, from this point of view, moral and rational.[1]

It is true that in our contemporary society many are asking normative kinds of questions—"What ought I to do?" "Why ought I to obey authority?" These questions cannot be answered from without. An external answer is another's answer. Piaget continues:

> Let us therefore try to create in the school a place of individual experimentation and reflection carried out in common; where they come to each other's aid and balance one another.[2]

The psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg agrees with Piaget, and Kohlberg has empirical evidence that moral development can be retarded if rules are rigidly imposed from the outside. Kohlberg investigated a number of cultures, and came to the conclusion that moral development follows universal sequences of stages. The stages are:

I. Premoral level.

Stage 1: Obedience and punishment orientation. Egocentric deference to superior power or prestige.

Stage 2: Naively egotistic orientation. The child conforms in order to obtain rewards.

II. Conventional moral level.

Stage 3: Good-boy orientation. The child conforms to avoid disapproval.

Stage 4: Authority and social order orientation. Orientation to doing one's duty and to showing respect for authority and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.

III. Post-conventional moral level.

Stage 5: Contractual, legalistic orientation. Duty defined in terms of contract, general avoidance of violation of the will and rights of others, and majority will or welfare.

Stage 6: Conscience or principle oreintation. Orientation to principles of choice involving appeal to logical universality and consistency, and not merely a consideration of actually ordained social rules.[3]

Kohlberg believes that many psychologists have incorrectly divided man's personality into specific traits and behaviors. This is evidenced by the current appeal of behaviorism in psychology and competency based educational programs in education. In each of these examples proper behavior is specified in measurable terms. Psychologists who deal with moral character likewise divide man into a series of behaviors or habits. Kohlberg calls this "the bag of virtues and vices" psychology. Moral virtues are listed, and since each virtue, like honesty, is a behavior, practice of that behavior makes perfect.

Kohlberg disagrees with this behaviorist mentality. He writes:

> If we define our moral aims in terms of virtues and vices, we are defining them in terms of the praise and blame of others and are caught in the pull of being all things to all men and end up being wishy-washy.[4]

One's morality ought to be based upon a personal decision and commitment; it must not be merely a matter of learning and practice. Likewise, simply pleasing others is not the only rationale for acting: what happens in situations where there is a conflict of interests? Which party do we please?

It is obvious that moral education is a difficult process both for students and teachers. Morality is not accomplished when the student is able to recite a list of correct behaviors, nor is it accomplished when the student practices the various virtues. Yet, moral education can occur in most classrooms.

For Kohlberg, the basic form of moral education is the teaching of justice. Since the most fundamental values of our society are values of justice, the school ought to be concerned with such values. The school cannot be neutral in regard to the teaching of values, and justice is a primary value.

Justice is concerned with basic and universal human rights; it implies the consideration of the rights of others and the treating of each man with respect. For Kohlberg, justice is a principle and not merely a rule. Rules have exceptions and

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can be violated; justice cannot. "Treat everyone impartially regardless of the man," is Kohlberg's definition of justice.[5]

Kohlberg claims that the teaching of justice is initiated by the process of drawing out of the child his innate preferences and opinions about various moral problems. Moral education is the drawing out of that which is within. Thus, if the child is permitted to progress through the stages of moral development, he will do so.

This Platonic conception of moral education is accomplished through moral problem solving, dialogue and discussion. Kohlberg found that classroom discussions of moral problems can aid in the student's progress through the stages of moral development. He found that presenting and discussing issues in civics, racism and sexuality can initiate an increase in the individual's stage of moral development.[6]

It is necessary, then, for the peer group to have more control over classroom management and discipline. Peer group interaction is necessary in moral development. Kohlberg writes:

> The Russian educational system demonstrates the power of allocating disciplinary responsibility to the classroom peer group in maintaining conforming behavior. Without suggesting use of this system, it demonstrates the need to systematically explore alternative approaches to the peer group.[7]

In reality, moral education needs to encompass the activities of the school and the neighborhood. If moral education is restricted to the school, it is obvious that the neighborhood could have a negative effect upon the child. If the school tries to encourage principles of justice, and the home or neighborhood encourages principles of racism, it is evident that the child will be caught in confusing circumstances.

The problem of moral education is not exclusively an educational one; it involves the family and the larger society. The attempt by the school to change values will be extremely difficult if the values derived from the child's school experiences contradict those derived from his social experiences.

The school, though, can aid the student's process of moral development. Of course moral development would be more profound if the society were a place where justice is a living reality. Moral education follows a number of steps: (1) The teacher must cause dissatisfaction in the student concerning his personal knowledge of the good. (2) This is done by exposing the student to moral conflicts for which his moral principles have no easy solution. (3) The student is exposed to disagreement and argument about these moral conflicts with his peers. (4) Moral growth occurs to the extent in which this is done.[8]

A specific example of the above. Students at one level, stage three, for example, should be exposed to the arguments of students at stage four. The teacher would develop and clarify the various arguments. Then a new dilemma would be presented to each group. Kohlberg writes:

> Initial results with this method with a junior high school group indicates that fifty per cent of the students moved up one stage and ten per cent moved up two stages.[9]

For Kohlberg, then, this notion of moral problem solving is the beginning of the process of moral education. It is only a beginning, though. The entire school needs to be an example of justice, of respect for the considerations and opinions of all involved. It means that each member of the school has the responsibility for involvement in the decision-making process. Decisions are to be made by consensus and not by majority. This implies that the student would need to be aware of the needs of others in the school and the needs of the community. Students would be allowed a degree of involvement to which they are not presently accustomed.

This theory of moral development has a number of implications for education. Contemporary education has been influenced by the behaviorist psychology of reward and punishment. Some behaviorists claim that man performs pleasurable behavior and avoids painful behavior. Thus, the educator ought to use positive reinforcement in securing his educational goals. But, as Kohlberg's research demonstrates, this emphasis on positive reinforcement emphasizes a Stage-1 or, at best, a Stage-3 orientation of obedience based on reward or punishment.

This psychology of positive or negative reinforcement places moral responsibility outside the individual. If the reward does not follow, neither does the behavior. The technique of using positive reinforcement is successful, it is claimed, in developing habitual response and behavior. Thus, teachers who utilize this method are viewing morality as the training of good habits. This approach is subject to Kohlberg's "bag of virtues" criticism.

Also, many educators and administrators believe that correct behavior is that which conforms to the rules and regulations of the school. Thus the idea of maintaining the existing institutional order for its own sake is emphasized. This is, at best, Stage-4 morality. Mere adjustment to or acceptance of the group norm is not the only meaning of morality.

Thus, teachers ought to distinguish between disobeying a procedural principle and disobeying a moral issue. Although procedure is necessary, its violation need not constitute a moral offense. If heading a paper properly is an instance of correct procedure, it does not follow that failure to do this is an instance of immorality.

It also seems to follow that if the administration believes that telling a lie is a real moral offense, but the child has not yet developed to the stage where he has the ability to make this judgment, it is unfair (even immoral) to treat this behavior as genuine moral behavior.

The teacher must understand the moral development of students. Imposition of adult moral standards is improper and harmful. Facilitating moral development is not easy, but it is possible. The teacher can aid in the moral development of students if he knows the aspects of moral development he should facilitate, and he knows the methods for achieving

this. Although American society is not at Stage-6, a better society can be the result of all our aiding each other toward the development of moral principles—principles of respect for the worth and dignity of all men and the principle of justice.

FOOTNOTES

1. Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgement of the Child.* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1932), p. 411.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 412.
3. Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Development of Children's Orientations Towards a Moral Order: 1. Sequence in the Development of Moral Thought," *Vita Humana*, Vol. VI (1963).
4. L. Kohlberg, "Education for Justice: A Modern Statement of the Platonic View," in T. Sizer (ed.), *Moral Education* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970) p. 64.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
6. L. Kohlberg, *Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education* (publisher: Beck, Crittenden, and Sullivan, 1971), p. 16.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
8. Kohlberg, "Education for Justice: . . . ," *op. cit.*
9. *Ibid*, p. 82.

CLASSROOM BATTLE OF WITS
by Wes Smith

Toes tap to unheard music,
Fingers play with hair.
Nineteen unique expressions
That say they are not there.
Instead each mind is wandering
A million miles through space,
Leaving a fidgeting body
And a slightly puzzled face.

There they are, slowly reclining, declining, inclining
    Towards their fantasies.
Here we are, gradually refining, entwining, spit-shining
    Their mental capacities.

Funny Thing, though —

They make me want to tap my toes
To that same tune they hear,
And loosen up my necktie
Because it seems so near
Confining me, if you know what I mean —
If I know what I mean, because
I just can't seem to concentrate anymore.
My mind's not what it once was.

There they are, supposedly learning, discerning, earning
    Their way into our grown-up world.
Here we are, secretly burning, yearning, returning
    To the youth from which we've been hurled.

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