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The Role of Moral Intelligence in Education for Moral Values

KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to describe moral intelligence, showing the importance of creating conditions for children to develop this type of intelligence and moral values in the home and school environment. The article is theoretical in nature and includes an explanation of the issue of intelligence, including moral intelligence, and its acquisition through upbringing, teaching and modelling. An important part of the article is to outline the importance of shaping universal principles for the moral development of young children and protecting them from increasing behavioural difficulties.

Contemporary children function in the time of scientific and technological influences. In a way, such a situation contributes to disturbing the balance between preferred and professed values. It also causes a number of challenging behaviours to occur. The considerations undertaken indicate the important role of upbringing carried out in the family and school environment for the formation of children's ability to distinguish between right and wrong, and the development of the system of universal moral principles. Education undertaken on the level of family and school can help develop the child's responsibility, honesty, empathy and ability to forgive. The moral effort undertaken by the child's important environments can contribute to unleashing their potential and motivation for actions that lead to the sense of happiness and justice.

Introduction

The signs of increasing moral crisis are an increasingly worrying phenomenon of the 21st century (Astono 2012). Children are increasingly influenced by the consumption culture and technological development. The new habits that are being shaped contribute to limited interaction with parents, peers and the closest environment (Janttaka, Juniarta 2020: 139–140). Children are less likely to show empathy, compassion or help towards others. Spending time in the virtual world significantly limits pro-social functioning of the youngest. On the one hand, the increasing technological development contributes to easier access to information and its faster transmission (Hilir 2021). On the other hand, alarming effects of such development contribute to a noticeable decrease in morality and change in certain features of children such as showing respect to parents and other people (Tabroni et al. 2022: 29). The research by McQuillen (2003) showed that the increased use of electronic media reduces the development of empathy in young people. Lobel et al. (2017) showed that frequent use of video games can contribute to the decrease in pro-social behaviors.

The persistent high level of aggression present in computer games may lead to indifference to violence and attempts by the children to justify it (Bjelajac, Merdović 2019: 54). Research shows that there is a noticeable link between playing video games and aggression among children (Bilić, Gjukić, Kirinić 2010: 202). Studies indicate that children who often play violent games are significantly more involved in verbal and physical aggression towards their peers, parents and teachers (Bjelajac, 2017: 538). Analysing the functioning of children and the threats that surround them, it seems extremely important to nurture the development of moral intelligence and values in them. According to Gardner, an important goal in the new millennium will not simply include "perfecting our various intelligences and using them appropriately, but rather considering how intelligence and morality could cooperate in order to create a world where a great variety of people will want to live" (Gardner 1999: 4).

Shaping moral intelligence starts with the child's knowledge of good, then develops through feeling it and ends with taking action for it. Children's nature is good. Research shows that even one-year-olds are capable of showing compassion towards those who suffer. They also participate in helping adults by pointing to or bringing desired objects. (Liszkowski et al. 2006: 181–182; Rheingold 1982: 117–118; Warneken, Tomasello 2006: 1301–1302; Zahn-Waxler et al. 1992: 130–131). Developmental research emphasizes that helping, comforting or sharing occurs among children of various ages. However, the cognitive and motivational mechanisms underlying these activities are different in individual developmental periods (Dunfield 2014; Paulus 2014, 2018). The contemporary research on child development increasingly negates children's involvement in moral and pro-social activities as a result of obedience to

parents, fear of punishment or willingness to receive rewards. Children's spontaneity in actions for the benefit of others is being underlined. Young people voluntarily participate in pro-social and moral activities towards others. The research conducted in the group of 20-month-old children showed that tangible rewards received for helping others weakened the children's pro-social attitudes. However, when given an oral praise and no material rewards, they still expressed willingness to perform pro-social activities (Warneken, Thomasello 2008: 1786–1787). Another research concluded that the presence of parents or their absence did not influence the frequency of support offered by the children (Warneken, Tomasello 2013).

Supporting children's moral intelligence is crucial for their development. The environment in which the child is brought up and in which he/she functions greatly influences their morality. The same is true for the activities in which he/she participates, as well as for their relationships with others. Moral intelligence can become an important foundation for teaching children how to distinguish what is good and what can cause suffering to others (Azhar, Putri 2009: 97–106). A person equipped with moral intelligence does not think only about themselves, but knows how to determine right and wrong actions, social activities and relations, tries to understand other people's feelings, and takes responsibility for his/her actions (Farhadinejad, Khani 2019: 52–53). Upbringing and education are crucial for developing this kind of intelligence and strengthening a person's important features such as patience, resistance to temptation or tolerance (Borba 2002). The goal of this article is to show the characteristics of moral intelligence, as well as the importance of creating conditions for children to develop this type of intelligence and moral values by the family and school environment.

Determinants of moral development in childhood

Childhood is often characterized as the time of development of one's intellectual, social and moral potential. It is also a period of testing, exploring the world, asking questions, and expressing numerous doubts (Szczepska-Pustkowska 2009: 555). Childhood is a period when the concept of good and bad is being shaped (Omer, Hassan, Jabeen, 2015: 258). The literature on the subject covers many different views showing various sources of moral development: from the egocentric attitude of children and their excessive dependence on others, through interactions with parents and peers, up to the children's tendency to develop their natural potential.

Psychoanalytic theories (Freud 1958) portrayed young children, emphasizing their egocentric nature and excessive dependence on the environment. Over time, however, the idea of dependence and passivity of children in undertaking moral activities was rejected. Intensive cognitive development (knowledge of norms, rules and results of

their violation) and social development (relationships with others) during childhood create favorable conditions for the development of morality and greater moral activity of children. The role of cognitive processes, including moral assessment, understanding morality and creating moral judgment, were described in Piaget's theory (1965). Piaget overemphasized that parents may have a negative influence on their children because they impose their own moral judgement on them. The meaning of cognitive operations and the role of environment in teaching moral rules and norms in children were noticed by Kohlberg (1984). Fear, authority, fulfillment of needs, attachment, social and universal standards are important stages in shaping one's moral development (Kohlberg 1984). Moral development was seen as a two-stage process: during the first stage, the child develops moral knowledge (making judgments, moral reasoning), and during the second stage motivation is developed because of emerging moral emotions (Nunner-Winkler 2007: 410–411). Socialization theories have long emphasized the awareness of moral norms and consequences of their violation in the family environment (Kochanska et al. 2005: 19–20). It was also believed that child's morality is being shaped early in life and it is the parents who are obliged to teach moral principles to their children. Parents' reactions to children's negative behaviour are crucial in the process of internalizing values (Grusec, Goodnow 1994: 6–7) and moral reasoning (Malti et al. 2013: 774–775). According to the research on the parental scaffolding (Vygotsky 1978: 79–91), children learn to notice the moral meaning of an act when the parents consistently react to their violations of moral norms and explain why a given violation is wrong (Dahl, Campos 2013: 823–824). At first, socialization theorists recognized the role of parents in internalizing moral principles. With time, however, it was observed that the hierarchical parent-child relationship may limit the moral development of a young person. Thus, researchers focused on the role of peers and social institutions, including school, in shaping morality in children. The child, when interacting with peers and teachers, starts to notice that opinions on moral issues may vary. Peer relationships facilitate moral development due to the similar level of knowledge and understanding of particular situations (Tomasello 2019). According to Piaget (1965), contact with other children creates a "safe haven" for exploring moral norms. In order to solve conflicts, children refer to the principles of justice, ownership and equal opportunities (Ingram, Bering 2010: 952–953). Observation of children behaviours in kindergarten showed that they are able to create rules and react when they are violated. In one study, children reacted very differently to norm violations that involved harm compared to norm violations that were merely conventional (Nucci, Turiel 1978: 403–404). The research by Rakoczy, Warneken and Tomasello (2008) indicated that 3-year-olds clearly protested when the rules of a game were being violated. In the past recent years research has also shown that preschool children create and require the observance of social norms in their interactions with peers

(Göckeritz, Schmidt, Tomasello 2014: 81; Köymen et al. 2015: 97–98). Mammen, Köymen, and Tomasello (2019) showed that preschoolers can talk to their peers about the moral misconduct of others, explaining the transgressions of others in relation to their knowledge of social and moral values.

Kohlberg (1978) believed that children learn moral principles through moral dilemmas. They make it possible for children to look at the affairs of others from their own perspective. Kohlberg acknowledged the role of teachers in the process of moral education (patterns of morality and creativity). Educators, by using problem-based learning strategy, enhance children's self-esteem, social and cognitive skills (Belland, Ertmer, Simons 2006). Activities undertaken by teachers teach the youngest responsibility, honesty, commitment and respect for the rights of others (Oladipo 2009: 153). Socialization theories emphasized the role of examples from people important to the child who enriched his/her behavior and everyday functioning (Teo, Crawford 2000). They also acknowledged the importance of the processes of imitation and modeling.

With time, however, a natural developmental potential of children towards spontaneous pro-social behaviors has been noticed. Researchers noticed that children start to grasp the concept of morality in the second year of life. It is reflected in the development of shame and empathy (Campos et al. 1983; Kagan, Lamb 1987; Izard 1977). Hoffman (1975) noticed that even infants express biological readiness towards empathy (they react to the cry of another child). Children in the period of early childhood show the inclination towards empathizing with the suffering of others and prefer positive social behaviours (Hamlin, Van de Vondervoort 2018: 216–217). Recent psychological studies support the belief which is getting more and more popular in psychology, and which acknowledges the occurrence of spontaneous pro-social behaviours of children and their reaction to violation of moral values (Liszkowski et al. 2006: 181–182; Rheingold 1982: 117–118; Warneken, Tomasello 2006: 1301–1302; Zahn-Waxler et al. 1992: 130–131; Dunfield 2014; Paulus 2014, 2018).

Moral intelligence and its meaning for child development

The term intelligence is perceived as one of the most important concepts in psychology. In the field of pedagogy it is most often used with regard to assessing students' success. According to Sternberg (1990), intelligence helps a person adapt to the environment and its changes. It facilitates understanding and describing skills regarding learning, memory and decision making (Clarken 2009). There are many types of intelligence including emotional, cognitive and spiritual one (Yousefi, Heshmati 2015: 65). According to the research conducted so far, intelligence is a multidimensional construct which includes its various types such as social, practical and analytical

intelligence (Ayoub, Aljughaiman 2016; González-Treviño et al. 2020). A child living in a society needs not only cognitive and emotional intelligence, but also intelligence that lets him/her understand moral norms (Pranoto 2017: 1–2).

In the common understanding, moral intelligence is often defined as the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, as well as to follow certain rules and standards of conduct. It is considered as an acquired skill which is subject to constant development (Bahrami et al. 2012: 82–83). The leading definition in this article is specified by Lennick and Kiel who describe moral intelligence as "the mental capacity to determine how universal human principles should be applied to our personal values, goals and actions" (2005: 7). In the literature on the subject many elements and components of moral intelligence have been identified (Sigelman 1999; Eysenck 2004). Lennick and Kiel (2005) identified four components of moral intelligence: honesty, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness. Honesty refers to acting in accordance with one's own rules, values and beliefs. It is strongly linked to telling the truth, keeping promises and defending important values. Responsibility is often described as admitting mistakes and failures, and taking responsibility for oneself and others. Forgiveness includes tolerance towards one's own mistakes and those of others. Compassion is related to caring about other people. Lennick and Kiel (2005), in their model of moral intelligence, emphasize the role of those moral values which can be defined as "what a given person perceives as good or bad conduct". (Wikström et al. 2012: 14). Moral values are often treated as a guide that encourages children to act, and as a source of their motivation. It helps to distinguish what is right and wrong without changing feelings, abilities or actions of a given person (Beigi, Tabaeian 2014).

Moral intelligence positively correlates with self-acceptance (Khalil 2015), sense of one's own efficacy (Hassani, Shohoudi, Mirghasem 2016), self-esteem (Borba 2002) and pro-social behavior at school (Abu Awad 2011). It also depends on the styles of upbringing implemented towards children (Daniel et al. 2014). Constructive parenting styles lead to a high level of this type of intelligence (Kiser, Black 2005).

Moral intelligence is essential in the process of raising children. The youngest who have this kind of intelligence are able to distinguish right from wrong and behave in accordance with socially accepted rules. According to Borba (2002), moral intelligence can be cultivated very early on, so that the child knows how to follow certain rules and norms and oppose the unfavorable influences of the environment. Raising the youngest in the spirit of moral values shapes moral intelligence. This process takes place through teaching empathy, demonstrating sensitivity towards the needs of others, and noticing the value of another person (Coles 1997). The first place in which a child encounters norms and rules is family. Parents are important role models of moral conduct who transfer knowledge, feelings and moral behaviours to their children (Notosrijoedono 2015: 132–134).

Raising children for moral values

In a way, education is a moral process. It refers to a human being seen as a spiritual, psychological and bodily being. According to Redlińska (1961: 325), "education is about cultivating development, teaching the art of searching and choosing the existing values, and converting them into the tools of one's own effort. It is about gaining knowledge, developing efficiency in self-management and work". Undoubtedly, the fulfilment of values is the basis for one's axiological experience, the core of moral intelligence, and one of the basic conditions for its development. "Adults, such as teachers, family, people important in the environment where the young person lives and functions, play an essential role in supporting young people in the fulfilment of values" (Chałas 2019: 63). In the process of education and upbringing, moral values are manifested in the content, methods and goals of educational activities (Kozubska, Molesztak 1998: 53). The main objective of the upbringing process is to shape a young person in such a way that, in difficult and crisis situations, he/she is able to act in accordance with the acquired moral values. In a survey conducted by CBOS (2009), the respondents were to answer one question: what features would they want to see in their children in the future? The majority of people (64%) answered that they wanted their children to act morally when they grow up.

A young person, in his/her childhood, looks for some guidance on how to behave. He/ she receives such advice when parents and teachers, based on their own choices and actions, show him/her their principles and values. The example of people significant to the child gives them many tips on proper conduct and functioning (Teo, Crawford 2000: 43). The youngest learn through verbalization, modelling and imitation. According to Noddings (2010), modelling has a significant impact on shaping and developing moral intelligence. Caregivers and parents become role models for children, serving as an example of appropriate behaviour. The youngest are not only susceptible to impressions, but they also imitate people they admire. The same was believed by Montessori (1965: 133): "Knowing the whole time how strong is their instinct to imitate and how touching is their faith and admiration towards us. They're going to imitate us in every case. Let us, therefore, treat them with all the kindness that we would like to develop in them".

In every developmental period, the basis for education for moral values should include "creating moral atmosphere" in the family and school environment. Supportive, kind relationships at home and at school enable children to develop readiness to accept and follow moral norms and principles. Upbringing and education can help develop values that are precious to the youngest: honesty, responsibility, forgiveness and compassion. In addition, they help strengthen children's resistance to temptations and teach them to act right (Beheshtifar, Esmaeli, Nekoie-Moghadam 2011; Borba 2002).

Family and its role in shaping moral intelligence and moral values

Parents are the main adults in children's lives and "their child's first and most important moral instructors" (Borba 2002: 6). Internalizing values and adopting moral social behaviour is an integrative developmental process that begins at birth (Knei-Paz, Cohen 2021). The parents are the first ones who are responsible for developing personality of their children and introducing them into the world of rules and values (Goleman 1995). The research by Augustine and Stifter (2015: 295–296) shows that positive and warm parenting is of great importance in developing conscience and teaching a child to respect moral principles and norms. The example of people significant to children shows them how to behave (Teo, Crawford 2000: 43).

Early noticeable signs of pro-social qualities appear in infants when they, e. g. "help their parents with chores". From a very early age, children express interest in social interactions, which can be an important element of intentional pro-sociality (Dahl, Paulus 2019: 11). From about 12 months of age they notice inequalities in the distribution of things manifested through prolonged looking at uneven distribution of available resources (Ziv, Sommerville 2017). In the second and third year of life, thanks to developed empathy and communication skills, children become more active in pro-social activities (intentional support of others begins to appear). In the post-infancy period children start helping others out of empathy (Svetlova, Nichols, Brownell 2010) and sharing things with others (Ulber, Hamann, Tomasello 2015). Pro-social behaviours occurring during childhood seem to be based on normative, empathic rules and norms of social functioning (Dunfield 2014).

In the process of upbringing and education, it is essential to sensitize the youngest to accept the truth and help them accept the choices they make (Coles 1997). Interactions between children and caregivers contribute to gradual development of causative morality and adjusting behaviour to applicable rules and values (Paulus, Essler 2020). Safe attachment that evolves in the parent-child relationship increases empathy, social problem-solving skills, and promotes pro-social involvement (Thompson 2019). Parents' reactions to their child violating certain rules is also quite important in the process of shaping moral intelligence. They should motivate the child to undertake deeper attempts to fathom and understand the situation (defining values, norms, needs, opportunities) (Dahl, Killen 2018).

School and its importance in shaping moral intelligence and moral values

Upbringing in kindergarten and school is a continuous process. It takes place here and now, in a specific environment. It includes the acquisition of values that are "assumed, declared as goals, acknowledged, and lived through methods used and principles raised in discussions with the students and through the way of argumentation used in conflict situations" (Olbrycht 2006: 91).

Preschool children start to understand the idea of justice and equality when sharing various things (Rizzo et al. 2016). This principle is being experienced when a child encounters unfair treatment and then refers it to his/her knowledge (Straughan 1982). In kindergarten children learn moral values through playtime activities with their peers, for example by "role playing." Through thematic games, children learn the meaning of certain concepts, such as compassion, respect, honesty, and responsibility.

According to Coles (1997), one of the main tasks for schools is to shape values and character of the students. Durkheim believed that "school's role in child's moral development should be the most important"(Durkheim 1961: 18–19). Education is a moral endeavor that involves teaching certain virtues and shaping proper habits (Khampa 2019: 658). Nowadays, school is expected to provide holistic education which, in addition to caring for a person's academic development, will also affect his/her moral attitude (Rosenberg 2015). This concept is the result of caring for the development of children's intellect, emotions, physical health, morality, and spirituality (Teo, Crawford 2000).

Moral education is often classified in two ways: as moral teaching and teaching morality. Teachers teach morally when they become role models for their students. Teaching morality is related to didactic activities that allow students develop their moral character (Rissanen et al. 2018: 63–67).

Thus, the main task of moral education is stimulating student's natural development and developing the right outlook on life, value system and universal social principles. The main goal of this form of education is to teach students proper values and skills. The UNESCO report (2006) emphasized that contemporary societies gradually loose traditional ethics and values. Therefore, currently prepared educational scenarios should put special emphasis on shaping moral values and education for peace.

Education should help students recognize and understand moral problems and dilemmas (Damon 1988). Schools should put emphasis on teaching critical thinking and strengthening reasoning skills (Lipman, Sharp, Oscanyan 1980). In order to achieve it, discussions on various problematic issues should be held. Such an approach towards moral education refers to teaching through modelling. The teacher, together with the students, analyses behaviours worth imitating while considering various

moral dilemmas. Problems discussed in the classroom could become an important motivator to promote values such as good, truth and justice (Lennick, Kiel 2005). A meta-analysis of over 55 different studies, which included discussions on moral dilemmas in moral education programs, indicated progress in moral development of the participants (Schlaefli, Rest, Thoma 1985). According to Higgins (1980), the best results for stimulating moral reasoning come from discussions about real home or school dilemmas.

Teaching undoubtedly requires personal involvement of the teacher and balanced principles (Demirel, Ozmat, Elgun 2016). Educators become important role models of moral behaviours, as well as an inspiration for students to undertake appropriate action. They play the role of guardians and mentors, encouraging discussion and moral reflection. The primary task of the teacher, when developing values and rules in a student, is creating a caring and fair environment (Tom 1984). Students see teachers as authorities in the fields taught by them and reach out to them for advice on many issues, particularly in late childhood (Oladipo 2009: 153). A discussion over a text under the teacher's supervision enables the child to learn about the causes and consequences of a given behaviour and to evaluate the actions of the protagonist of a given story.

Another way to carry out moral education is to refer to the student's own actions. Teachers can also encourage children to participate in pro-social activities by creating volunteer circles. According to scientific theories, the student's own activity may become a source of development of his/her personality, but also morality. Kohlberg (1984) noticed that making students involved in altruistic activities increases their level of moral development.

Nowadays, one can notice a crisis in building moral values of schoolchildren. The reason behind it is the inconsistent curriculum and teachers' narrow perception of moral doctrines (Asif et al. 2020). Contemporary education should help students develop skills that would allow them to be smart, diligent and conscious creators of themselves and the society. Education that does not put emphasis on morality and values, fails to support an individual, the society and the environment (Mustakavoa-Possardt 2004).

Conclusion

Nowadays, our society increasingly often experiences the degradation of moral values and expansion of immoral behaviours, including the escalation of aggression. Developing moral intelligence and shaping values becomes an important challenge for the contemporary process of education and upbringing carried out within the

family as well as at educational institutions. People are not born moral or immoral, but they can learn how to be good. Moral intelligence is about turning moral values into action, developing pro-social skills and specific attitudes. An important role in shaping moral intelligence is played by the environment in which the child spends time, the actions undertaken by the child and his/her developmental potential. Moral intelligence should already be shaped from the very early stages of the child's life. The youngest should have an instinct shaped to distinguish right from wrong so that it protects them from negative influences of the environment. Acquiring values from an early age shapes the way children think, talk and act in the future. Moral intelligence should be developed in the environments familiar to the child because it has a direct impact on what adolescent citizens will be like and how future societies will function. Personality of the parents, the way they function and behave, have an enormous impact on how moral intelligence is shaped in children. Parental care, love and attention become essential elements in shaping morality and values among the youngest. During the time of formal education, the school, through teachers, influences the formation of moral intelligence and standards of social functioning of students.

The main goal of moral upbringing and education should be helping the child to shape moral intelligence and develop moral values, so that they are beneficial for him/her and for the functioning of the whole society. The way of shaping such values should be in line with children's psychological, cognitive and social development. Therefore, the formation of moral intelligence requires specific skills that allow for independent choices based on consciously acquired moral norms and principles.

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