

# **Concept of Morality and Moral Development in Neo-humanist Education : Theory to Practice**

**Ms Sunandita Bhowmik. Research Scholar. Regional Institute of Education (RIE),  
NCERT, Bhubaneswar.India**

## **Abstract**

This paper suggests that early intervention in primary school enhances moral development. This is due to mature moral orientation in childhood which initiates the development of moral structure. The moral structure guides children to take mature moral decision. Two theoretical perspectives are distinguished and are used to organize early intervention for moral development. In case of moral structure, cognitive perspective of moral development is emphasized. The interactional approach in resolving conflict and improving interpersonal relationships are highlighted in this study. Some empirical evidences are also included here to support this study. Only moral issues as a content in the curriculum are not enough to develop moral domain. The primary curriculum must incorporate moral issues as a practice to develop moral structure.

**[Keywords:** Moral orientation, moral structure, moral content, interactional approach, cognitive approach, qualitative transformation]

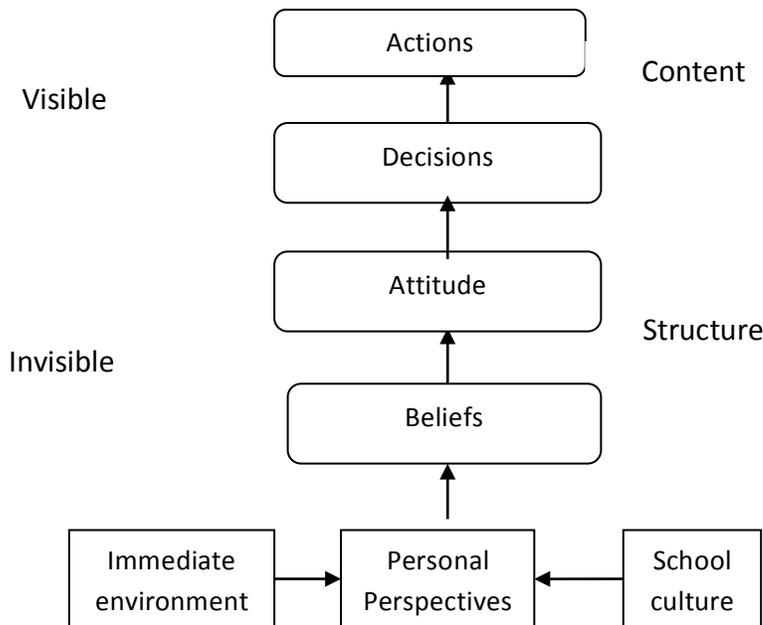
Hidden curriculum with its emphasis on ‘Obedience to authority’ is common mode of moral development in many schools. They apply many underlying moral assumptions and values which are quite different from actual conscious system of morality. In most of the current trends of moral education both the content and the process are inadequate for moral development in primary children. True morality is not only to conform to social standards but also is carried out voluntarily. It comes with the transition from external to internal authority and consists of conduct regulated from within. True morality is guided by conscience which is possible to be developed from early childhood. In learning to be moral, the first thing Neohumanist Education (NHE) supports is developing conscience. Children develop a desire to do what is right, to act for the common good and to avoid wrong which can be considered as the foundations for the development of conscience. Conscience guides the children when they make a moral decision. It is to act as an internal control over individual’s behaviour.

True morality is rarely found in children, but it should appear during the adolescent years (Hurlock, 1978). This statement has been criticized in Neohumanist theory. Neohumanist Education suggests that the spirit of morality should be instilled in children from the moment they start learning social interaction. The mind of a child is the best receptacle for morality (Sarkar, P.R.1959). Developing moral structure is one of the important aspects of NHE curriculum. But in its early stage, moral development starts through interactional approach. Moral issues abound not only in the content but in the total teaching learning process. Practice of morality throughout life, from infancy to old age should be the most important subject in moral development. The following discussion will make it clear that educational interventions within

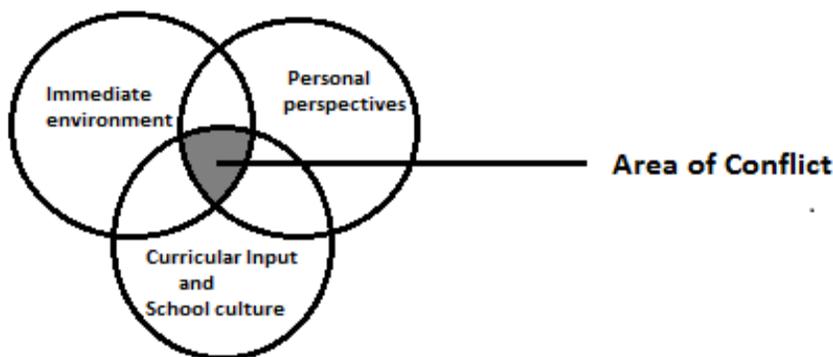
the moral domain are necessarily shaped by a set of theoretical assumptions about the functions and nature of morality and the empirical evidences will show how it develops.

**Dimensions of Morality**

Morality has two dimensions : Forms or Structure and Content. The structure of morality represents the reasons underlying children’s decision, how children should reason about the moral dilemmas. The reasons are embedded in the beliefs and attitudes of a child. The content of morality is what child should think. What judgment child should make (Chazan, B. 1985). The two dimensions can be illustrated in the following figure :



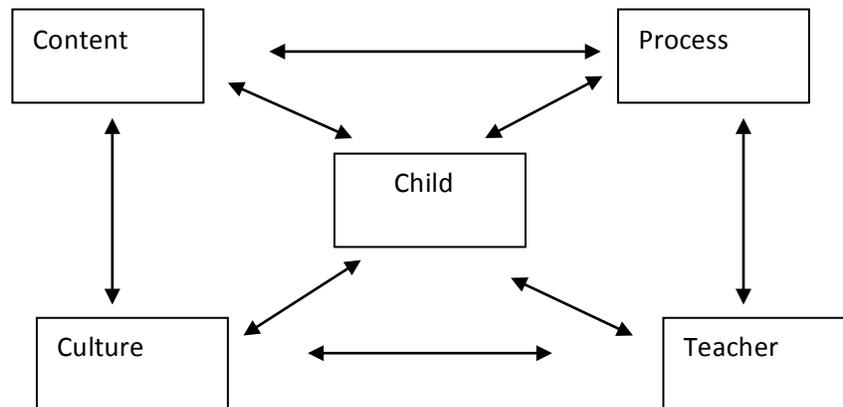
**Fig1: Structure and content of morality**



**Fig-2 Area of Conflict**

### **Mature Moral Orientation : Theoretical assumption**

Moral orientation in NHE School starts with interactional approach that helps in resolving conflict. Finally, the individualistic approach (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1981) is followed. The interactional approach attempts to integrate the affective and cognitive sides of moral functioning. The theoretical assumption of this approach is the maintenance of good relationships (Keller & Reuss, 1985) and enhancement of social living. The children carry culture from immediate environment (mostly home culture) and they have their personal qualities which we may call the bio-psychological profile. But in school, they get a different atmosphere based on certain ideologies. Then in certain situations, conflict starts among them (Fig 2), they face many moral dilemmas which they need to resolve. The moral orientations with interactional approach guide them internally to take the decisions for maintaining good relationships. Children experience a network of morality in the entire teaching-learning process (Fig 3). Children do not work only to fulfill the individual needs, but also learn to work for collective needs. Children conceptualize moral conflicts in terms of social disequilibrium and moral resolutions in terms of balancing or equalizing relationships (Haan, Aerts, & Cooper, 1985).



**Fig 3: Interactional Approach (Moral Network)**

Finally, the moral development is viewed from a cognitive-developmental framework (Kohlberg and Mayer, 1981); it is related to the children's capacity for moral judgment. Moral judgment in turn is defined as intellectual functioning which focuses on a child's ability to reason about moral questions. This can be also called moral structure. As children encounter more mature, adequate forms of justice reasoning, they become dissatisfied or confused; that is, their structure or stage of moral thinking is no longer balanced or equilibrated. This realization that their current reasoning is inadequate provides the motivation to construct the structure of the next higher stage in Kohlberg's sequence (Swarthout, 1988). In Neohumanist education, this cognitive approach is emphasized through developing awakened conscience. The first step in this process is development of logical mind which is followed by rationalistic mentality. Children learn to judge everything in the light of truth and take logical decision which is conducive to human welfare. Neohumanist curriculum is framed in such a way that higher layers of mind can be developed.

Regular spiritual practice is another important aspect of cognitive development in NHE. Children can make meaning out of life and can construct personal value system.

### **Empirical evidences of moral development**

In order to get an idea about the structure of morality that exists in NHE School children, following three aspects were explored : (i) How a child interacts with his social environment, (ii) How a child goes about solving problems related to his/her social world ( Kohlberg and Hersh,1977) and (iii) How a child reasons about a moral dilemma.

Some of the empirical evidences reported in NHE Schools are given below :

1. A 6 yrs old child believes that rules about conduct and rules about how to play a game are not absolute and can be changed. His reasons underlying actions are based on benevolence and welfare. The behavior which is not for common good can be changed. Regular moral orientation can change a child's view of what Piaget (1965) called moral realism.
2. Children feel guilty when they commit any mistake. This is not always for the fear of punishment rather they feel guilty because their behavior does not come up to the standard set by their conscience.
3. Grade four (IV) children identify that causing damage / harm intentionally is worse than unintentional offense. A child accidentally breaking his friend's three colour pencils will get no punishment but breaking intentionally a single colour pencil must be punished.
4. English teacher is very popular as he listens to the children's needs and demands even though he scolds. A 8 yrs old child says, "...he scolds because we badly run over the stairs".
5. Children are encountered with some of the conventional social concepts which are considered to be unholy. Almost all the children answer that they never support such ideas because there is no logic. For example : staying back on the road while crossing cat over the road, not to start travelling if anybody sneezes / calls from behind.
6. Children of 5 yrs were allowed for storytelling. The gists of almost all stories were ; they remember the Omnipotent while facing any danger and get courage and energy and fight against the devils.

### **Reasons about moral dilemma:**

Children of grade IV were given some moral dilemmas focusing on hypothetical moral questions and were allowed to resolve situations according to their own personal perspectives, philosophies, and values.

A person breaks the shop and steals medicine which is essential for saving his wife's life. Has he committed mistake? Grade IV children identifies the person as criminal because it causes harm

and damage to the shopkeeper and stealing is also crime. "... He could have arranged medicine in a different manner..." they answered.

It has been noticed that children's reasons underlying decisions are mainly based on three broad concepts : not to harm anybody with thought or actions, always do good as many ways as possible and most importantly, the sense of Omnipotent's presence everywhere who perceives everything. The integration of morality with spirituality is the unique feature of Neohumanist education. Children learn this integrated concept through regular spiritual practice and constant dialogue and interactions with teachers and peers. It has also been reflected in adult supervised recreational activities and self choice activities of children.

### **Early intervention in NHE curriculum**

The NHE curriculum provides guidelines for formulating appropriate educational aims as well as specifying the processes and mechanisms which help students acquire more mature moral orientations. It consists of the integration of affective and cognitive sides of moral functioning. Cognitive objectives include logical, rational evaluation and critical, analytical thinking .Affective objectives include empathy, openness and trust as well as tolerance or acceptance (Vare, 1979).Character building is one of the important aspects of NHE. So the development of good values and ethics constitute a major part in NHE curriculum. NHE School has a particular culture and the culture has its own rules, customs, laws etc which we can call the "Hidden Curriculum". This hidden curriculum is influenced by the ideology and philosophy of Neohumanism. Morality and spirituality are embedded in the hidden curriculum. The ultimate goal of morality in Neohumanist education is : to increase the radius of "Circle of love" and to decrease the distance from Central Nave. In order to achieve this ultimate goal of morality, three main aspects of moral teachings are emphasized in primary curriculum : (i) enhancing one's social living and interpersonal relationships through interactional approach, for which NHE identifies five fundamental moral codes or Yama. (ii) Personal integration and strength of character which is also called Niyama and (iii) concept of Omnipotent.

The teachers and adults of school play a great role in enhancing moral development in children. Children constantly engage in dialogue and interactions with teachers and learn to cope with interpersonal conflicts rather than to deal with them defensively. Teachers stimulate children's thinking while discussing many moral issues and while participating in different recreational activities.

### **REFERENCES**

- Blatt, M., & Kohlberg, L. (1975). The effects of classroom discussion upon children's level of moral judgment. *Journal of Moral Education*, 4, 129-161.
- Chazan, B. (1985). *Contemporary approaches to moral education: Analyzing alternative theories*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Dorothy,A.Sisk(1982). Caring and Sharing: Moral Development of Gifted Students The Elementary School Journal, Vol. 82, No. 3, pp. 221-229. The University of Chicago Press

Elizabeth B. Hurlock,E.B(1978).Child Development, New York: McGraw Hill.

Haan, N., Aerts, E., & Cooper, B. (1985). On moral grounds: The search for practical morality. New York: New York University Press.

Keller, M., & Reuss, S. (1985). The process of moral decision making: Normative and empirical conditions of participation in moral discourse. In M. Berkowitz & F. Oser (Eds.), Moral education: Theory and application. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum

Kohlberg, L and Hersh, R.H(1977). Moral Development: A Review of the Theory.Vol.16,No. 2, pp. 53-59, Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Kohlberg, L., & Mayer, R. (1981 ). Development as the aim of education. In L. Kohlberg (Ed.), Essays on moral development: Vol. I.The philosophy of moral development. San Francisco: Harper&Row.

Sarkar,P.R(1959). Human Society Part-1. AMPS Publication : Kolkata

Sarkar,P.R.(1982).Liberation of Intellect: Neo-Humanism, Kolkata: Ananda Marga Publications.

Sarkar,P.R(1959).Human Society part 1. Kolkata.

Swarthout, D. (1987). The classroom as a context for moral development. (Available from D. Swarthout, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Smith Junior High School, 1600 Tyvola Road, Charlotte, NC 28210)

Swarthout,D.W(1988). Enhancing the Moral Development of Behaviorally/Emotionally Handicapped Students. Behavioral Disorders, Vol. 14, No. 1. pp. 57-68

Vare,J. "Moral Education for the Gifted:A Confluent Model."Gifted Child Quarterly 23, no.3 .487-99.

Woolfolk,A(2013). Educational Psychology(12<sup>TH</sup> edn.) Pearson Education Ltd.