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## **Citizenship education and the moral person: towards the educational congruence between the cognitive and affective, the clinical and the neurophysiological dimension of morality**

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### **What is citizenship education?**

Citizenship education in a democracy can be defined as “any form of intentional education aimed at instilling the skills and knowledge necessary to function effectively in, and thereby contribute to, democratic process” (Berkowitz, 1998: p. 1). Specifically, citizenship education aims at the following (Alleman & Rosaen, 1991; Berkowitz, 1998):

- a. developing student’s cognition, including, knowledge about laws, rules, public affairs, constitutional rights and political processes. This embodies the development of
  - conceptual knowledge; an understanding of basic political concepts like power, force, representation and individuality (see Crick, 1977);
  - reasoning and problem solving skills; ability to conceptualise a socio-political problem, discern the socio-political concepts involved, realise the way they are interconnected and propose solutions;
  - meta-cognitive awareness and skills; the ability to reflect on knowing and thinking.
- b. developing student’s social-emotional characteristics, including self-esteem, self concept, interpersonal relationships, the ability to clearly communicate ideas, to actively listen to and work collaboratively with others, as well as acting independently within the context of the community
- c. developing student’s moral characteristics, including beliefs and attitudes, values, sense of justice, caring for the other and pro-social behavior.

This paper explores the contribution of pupil’s moral development to their development of citizenship and proposes a three-dimensional model for conceptualising the various teaching approaches designed to foster morality. Citizenship education is closely related to moral education as far as long term aims are concerned: citizenship education aims at the development of political literacy in children which must and will affect their morality, and moral education aims at the development of moral literacy which must and will affect citizenship practice. This interconnectedness is evident in most European national curricula generally and specifically in citizenship education curricula, where direct references to children’s moral education can frequently be found<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Among the countries that have direct references on moral education in their national curricula and/or in citizenship education curricula are Norway, Finland, Portugal, Liechtenstein, France, UK, Greece, Estonia and Spain (see EURYDICE units on European curricula <http://www.eurydice.com> and CiCe’s Livelink database on national curricula (<http://livelink.unl.ac.uk/livelink>))

## **Dimensions of morality and teaching approaches**

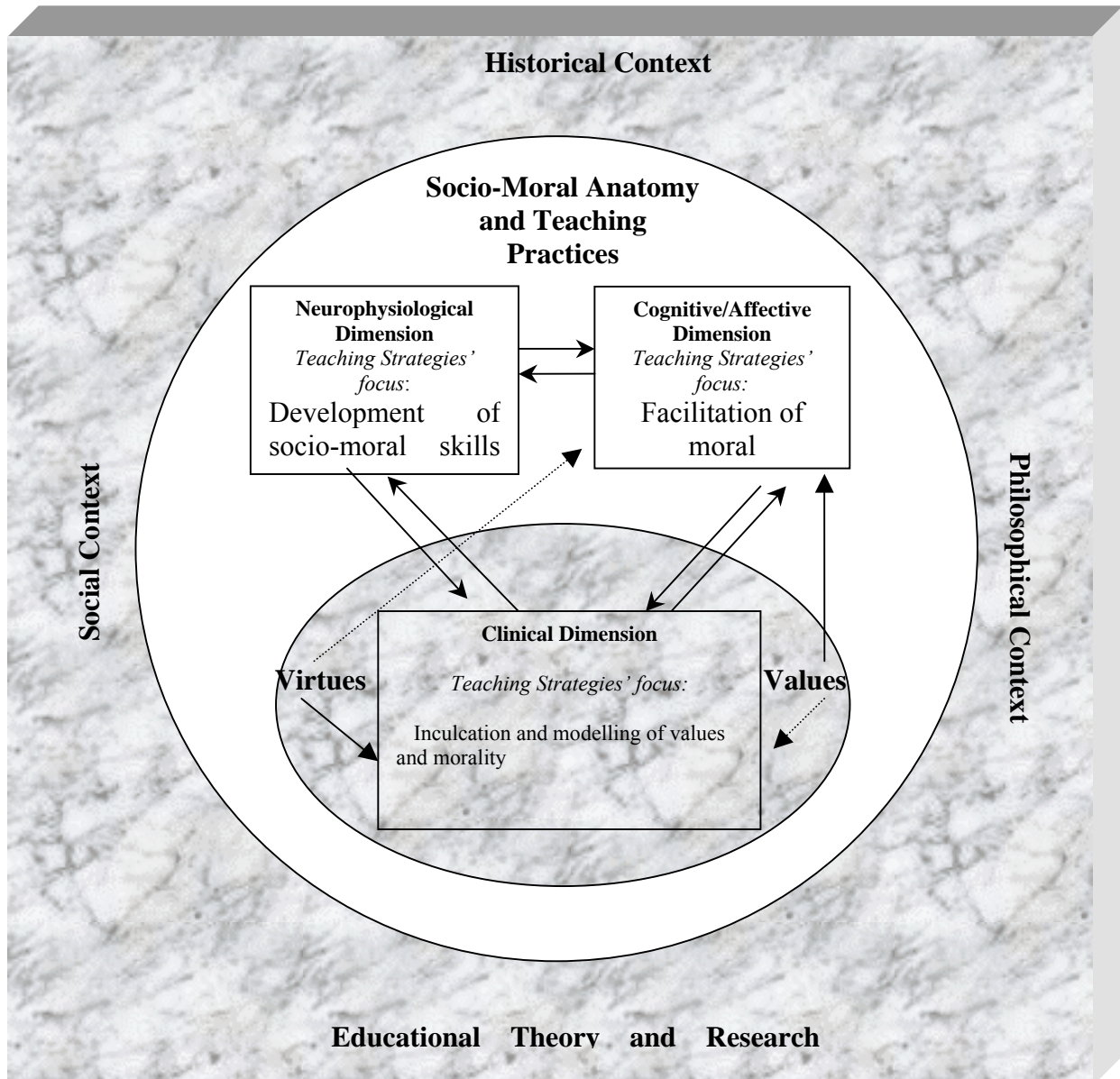
Like citizenship education, moral education is a complex pursuit with behavioral, cognitive and emotional dimensions. Moral education approaches these dimensions incorporate either directly or indirectly, but their emphasis differs according to philosophical and psychological orientations. Examining the respective literature reveals three major views of moral education which are grounded in different historical, societal, philosophical and educational contexts (see Figure 1):

### *1. The 'clinical' dimension*

This deals with the child's overt moral behavior. Moral educators affiliated with this view stress the development of specific character traits by the pupils. The so-called character education approach aspires to teach directly the virtues that the community favors; in this approach pupils' behavior is taken as evidence of their moral development. Proponents base their thinking on the philosophical trends of essentialism and communitarianism, which attack what they consider to be the deterioration of values in contemporary society and the negative influence of mass media on youth (Bertrand, 1994: 169; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988: 30). For them the process of moral development entails the acquisition of general qualities of character and habits which are in accord with cultural traditions (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). Contrary to moral education theories that focus on reasoning, problem solving and critical thinking, character education focuses on the development of virtues, which it considers to be the ultimate good: the possession of virtues will lead to happiness and a prosperous life. Certain virtues conceptualised by ancient Greeks (e.g. prudence, a sense of justice, courage, and courtesy) are considered fundamentally valuable human qualities that not only promote self-fulfilment but also contribute to the welfare of humanity.

Direct teaching strategies aim at inculcating values and modeling behavior (Kirschenbaum, 1995) and draw upon the learning theory of behaviourism and on theories of social learning.

Figure 1 The moral education orientations within contexts



Teaching approaches for nurturing a virtuous character rest on Plato's and Aristotle thinking:

Virtue has two forms, cognitive and ethical, cognitive develops and increases through teaching, because it needs experience and time, while ethical develops through habit (*Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics II, 1, 1103a 14-15*),

Teaching approaches align with Aristotle's view that people learn good by practicing good:

... In the same way by doing good we become good, by acting prudently we become prudent, by acting courageously we become courageous (*Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics II, 1, 1103b 38-40*).

## 2. *The cognitive/affective dimension*

This seeks to affect children's moral behavior by indirectly fostering their cognitive and emotional capacities. Community values seem to directly affect children's cognitive/emotional system - the way the child thinks and feels - and thus are taken into consideration by proponents of this orientation. Their views are largely influenced by the philosophy of liberalism and the psychology of cognitivism. Piaget and Kohlberg, who are the leading figures of this orientation, assume that people's morality develops in stages, with each stage qualitatively advanced compared to the previous one.

Piaget and Kohlberg, shifted their interest from the study of values and virtues to the way a person organises his understanding of virtues, rules and norms and integrates these into moral choices. According to Kohlberg higher levels of morality mean higher levels of moral reasoning and

...since moral reasoning clearly is reasoning, advanced moral reasoning depends upon advanced logical reasoning. There is a parallelism between an individual's logical stage and his moral stage... [No individual is] at higher moral stage than [his/her] logical stage (*Kohlberg, 1976: 32*).

Moral education methods are mainly based on Kohlberg's theory, which is considered more elaborate than Piaget's. They aim at helping children advance to the more advanced levels of morality by exposing them to moral conflict and moral reasoning which is based on what the children themselves use, but a little more developed. On these grounds, Hersh et al (1979) propose a teaching model which includes the following:

- i. recognising different moral conflict for different age groups
- ii. creating cognitive conflict
- iii. taking the perspective of students and stimulating their perspective-taking ability
- iv. using a variety of moral dilemmas, hypothetical or real
- v. introducing open-ended discussion and in-depth strategies to facilitate moral growth
- vi. creating a facilitative classroom atmosphere.

One of the widely acknowledged drawbacks of Kohlberg's theory is its inability to wholly foresee moral behavior, in the sense that higher moral reasoning does not always lead to higher moral behaviour (Leming, 1997; Nucci, 2000). Moral education theorists now view morality not just a function of reasoning but as a combination of both cognitive and emotional characteristics such as empathy, sensitivity to situations, personal identity, understanding of self, and consistency. Nevertheless, cognitive trends are still influential and educational interventions are constrained to the *external moral domain* (Zigler, 1998), which is characterised by didactic instruction, so that children understand the moral standards expected of them in the classroom, school and society.

## 3. *The neurophysiological dimension*

This addresses the *internal moral domain* (Zigler, 1998), which is characterised by self-regulatory practices which promote a state of harmony between mind and body, by controlling impulses and regulating mood. The neurophysiological orientation resembles the cognitive/affective in attempting to foster morality indirectly and in prioritising

community values, but differs in that it uses neurophysiological research on the brain to explain morality and proposes brain-based teaching methods for fostering it.

An important point made by neurophysiologists and psychologists is that brain neurons have to be detoxified by neurotransmitter molecules and other substances in order that emotional and physical stability is maintained: this leads to healthy relations with other people. This stability can be achieved through techniques of expressing emotions of anger and also through relaxation therapies. Thus some teachers, after a long period of intense work with their pupils, allow them an outburst of emotional expression. Paradoxically the same detoxification effect can be achieved by practicing 'moments of silence' during which teachers employ relaxation techniques like deep breathing, listening to music, reading literature or the students' choice of self-regulatory discipline (Zigler, 1998; Winkle, 2000).

Expressed emotions have to be regulated and directed to the correct channels. The recently popularised triune brain theory offers educators a useful way of conceptualising the brain mechanisms which regulate emotions and of designing ways of enhancing children's 'emotional literacy'.

Education for emotional literacy includes (Boscchino, 1999):

- i. *Communication and Intervention Skills*. These address reflective listening, overcoming reactive responses, developing sensory acuity and effective non-verbal communication, sending "I" messages instead of apportioning blame, and being a good listener. Teaching activities include mock debates (each pupil supports the other person's position), conscious use of non-verbal feedback during dialogue, and assertiveness training.
- ii. *Developing an Internal Coach*. This addresses the skills of learning from experience, clarity of outcomes, visioning, problem-solving and efficacy. These skills are attained through information-processing models of teaching such as science inquiry (Joyce & Weil, 1986) and through activities where pupils create a picture or vision of their desired performance.
- iii. *Understanding and Managing Emotional States*. These skills address the building of a vocabulary for feelings, knowing the relationship between thoughts, feelings and reactions, and knowing whether thought or feeling is ruling an action. Anchoring, reframing, positive intentionality and accessing resource states are among the techniques used. Teaching activities include the monitoring of emotional responses and current physiological characteristics through simple methods such as keeping a diary.

Other approaches which foster emotional literacy skills include teaching of general critical thinking, creative thinking, techniques of resisting peer pressure and methods of conflict resolution.

However, the neurophysiological dimension of moral education does not answer the question of what is morally good and morally bad within a specific cultural context, since it lacks a clear philosophy on which to base an educational intervention. By focusing on the psychological level, it proposes a methodology of teaching but does not address the question of why teachers should cultivate the various skills advocated. In other words, it

does not propose the endpoint of educational effort, which is necessary to design a comprehensive curriculum for fostering morality in pupils.

### **Moral education: approaches revisited**

Despite the differences between these three dimensions of moral education, the boundaries tend to collapse in practice. Not only do they use similar teaching methods, but they also 'borrow' the methods traditionally belonging to the others.

This blending of approaches is evident in comprehensive moral education or character education programmes that are initiated in schools. The cognitive/affective and clinical orientations tend to become integrated, by changing their characters, with the neurophysiological orientation acting not as a different moral educational dimension per se, but as a catalyst to that change. Indeed, the neurophysiology of the brain indicates that the human mind is shaped by physical perceptions but also acts autonomously by constructing its own reality. This reality is neither personal, stemming from human effort to give meaning to experiences (endogenic epistemology), nor a reliable copy of external reality in human consciousness (exogenic epistemology). It is rather a social construction that develops through communal practices and has as a basis a set of shared meanings (social constructionism) (Botella, 1995).

Rapid changes in contemporary life, signaled by the rise of globalisation and the emergence of postmodern philosophy and constructivist psychology, indicate the inadequacy of the traditional liberal and communitarian bases of the cognitive/affective and clinical dimensions respectively.

From a postmodern perspective liberalism, even though it takes into account personal and social pluralism, does not give credit to the personal and social construction of reality; it focuses on the search of patterns transcending social boundaries. Liberalist communal practices, which accept pluralism but propose scientifically 'objective' rules of conduct valid for every human being across contexts, usually underestimate the role of personal constructs - the personal view of the world, the personal 'reality' - which can be as true as the 'scientific' one. Communitarianism, even though it seeks to reinforce community bonding and to satisfy the human need for belonging, may not offer a means of developing extended, pluralistic community bonding, since it sets its cultural lens in perceiving reality. Communitarian practices that stress territory and identity, as in the case of traditional character education programs, are likely to result in students acting in a 'primitive way characterised by an adherence to received codes of behavior, dependency on role models and on extrinsic motivation (Cain & Cain, 1994).

As a response to the emerging postmodern context and to the new insights about human learning that are offered by brain neurophysiology and constructivism, the clinical orientation has reacted by gradually changing its focus from the inculcation of personal virtues such as courage, honesty and industry to nurturing relational virtues such as trust, good cheer, equality, peace and compatibility (see Noddings, 1997). Many education programs have been developed which aim at constituting the school as a community of care for the 'other', with emphasis on the cultivation of emotional literacy. The cognitive/affective orientation has re-examined its premises, rejected strict cognitivism and proposed Vygotskian, neo-Piagetian and neo-Kohlbergian approaches for moral research and education. Among the general characteristics of these approaches are the examination of the role that personal constructs play in eliciting of socio-moral meanings,

the examination of the role of language and culture within this process, and the fostering of emotional and cognitive perspective-taking as a means of moral reasoning development.

## Conclusion

The integration of the various approaches of moral education within a program of citizenship education is not always an easy task. Knowledge of the dimensions discussed above offer the teacher many tools for achieving his/her aims, but they do not offer solutions to the numerous dilemmas inherent in teaching practice. Whether or not a teacher employs the clinical dimension or the cognitive/affective dimension on a specific occasion, with a certain age group of children or within a specific classroom context, remains a matter of personal choice since the teacher is the only one who has a comprehensive picture of the needs and capabilities of his/her pupils, and the constraints on them. Nevertheless, teachers should not base their choice of methods on the whim of the moment but should be aware that their decisions are always a product of the historical, societal, philosophical and teaching theory context. This awareness helps teachers towards forming a clearer vision of the kind of citizen they choose to nurture and may help them to be more effective in implementing their goals.

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