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Moral Intelligence and its Role in Formulating Children Characters

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Abstract

With the recent shift in trends from the traditional setup, where people inclined themselves to values and morals, to the modern care free lifestyles, morality has been discarded causing fatal impacts on society. However, taking into account that the world cannot function harmoniously; studies have been made on the issue which propagated the concept of moral intelligence. As a study, moral intelligence is driven by understanding and then improvement of behavior, and aimed at presenting its position alongside the other universally accepted intelligences. It refers to the capacity to embrace an ethically oriented approach when dealing with values and actions. There are four identified competencies that make up moral intelligence, markedly; integrity, responsibility, forgiveness and compassion. The aforementioned principles when merged with the seven values as identified by Michelle Borba, have the role of moral intelligence in the formulation of children characters. In other words, the argument seeks to illustrate how integrating of the frameworks of moral intelligence can be beneficial to guardians, parents and educators alike in their quest to model a morally adept children. This paper will explore the fundamental pillars upon which moral intelligence is grounded, how its capacity can be tapped to facilitate nurturing of children's character as well as the contention that existed on whether moral intelligence is and can be considered independently as a form of intelligence. The arguments are systematically developed as presented herein.

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Introduction

Moral intelligence is the ability to harness and practice ethical fundamentals to values, where judgment and analysis of possible consequences precede actions. According to Lennick and Kiel (2011) moral intelligence can be defined as the mental capacity of an individual to conceive and determine the application of universal human principles to goals, values and everyday actions. This is to say, one gets to understand and embrace the key tenets behind actions and behavior, which elicit responsibility. Correspondingly, Borba (2001) emphasizes that moral intelligence is the pendulum that accords one with the capacity to distinguish right from wrong. Looking at the morality linked issues that are playing a major role in tearing society apart in the name of modernism, it has become critical to re-evaluate the concept of moral intelligence and come up with strategies that can ensure upholding of the same (Lennick & Kiel, 2011). In the quest to achieve these milestones, stakeholders have identified the importance of focusing on children, as they are in their formative ages, where values adopted are embraced all the way to old age. Importantly also, by following this approach, stakeholders have a better chance of fixing morality related issues, instead of bandaging them (Beheshtifar, Esmaeli & Moghadam, 2011). This paper hereby seeks to explore moral intelligence in detail, providing its role in the formulation of children's characters.

Gardener on Morality Intelligence

In the study of intelligence, the Gardener theory most refers to the multi intelligences that can be manifested in humans. The research was eventual and involved a number of adjustments which occurred in two phases. On the onset, Gardener noted seven intelligences including; verbal, musical, visual, mathematical, bodily, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Upon further research, the theory was adjusted to include other intelligences to the first mentioned; analysis, markedly; emotional, social, spiritual and moral (Gardner, Kornhaber, & Wake, 1996). It is important to note that the Gardener theory did not regard moral intelligence as an intelligence for

a long period of time, in which the proponent maintained that, in order to remain objective and unbiased, a non-moral and value free approach was necessary(Gardner, 2000).

Gardener further opines that in analyzing the concept of intelligence, scholars should be careful not to be clouded by own perceptions of character, personality and other spectrums human beings are likely to take. Most importantly, the proponent maintains, the challenge of merging morality with intelligence, considering the fact that, cultural specificity and diversity constrictions may emerge creating irrational judgments with no substantial basis (Gardner, 2000). Furthermore as much as the moral principles may constitute to form the intelligence, it does not holistically add up as an intelligence, emphasizing if it existed then people with it may exhibit a number of characteristics. They range from; diversified comprehension of issues, immersion of self in sacred issues, commitment to the two aforementioned, to the capacity to go beyond normal approaches. However recent research has linked to Gardener's research, presents clearly the existence and importance of moral intelligence independently (Gardner, 2000; Salma, 2018). Looking beyond Gardener's issues, presents immense capacities that this paper uses to express the role of moral intelligence of children.

Models in Moral Intelligence

In the recent years, scholars have explored moral intelligence presenting key pillars, features and practices that ensure that the same is attained. Two models have been embraced in this essay, which have provided great insight on the essence of aligning children with the concept of moral intelligence. Initially, Lennick and Kiel (2011) four competencies of moral intelligence will be identified which this paper has referred to as "principles." Similarly, the seven essential virtues necessary in modeling morally intelligent children will be analyzed.

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Principles of moral intelligence

1. Integrity

Integrity is a major tenet behind moral intelligence. According to the Merriam- Webster dictionary, the word "integrity" is defined as a firm inclination to a code governing moral values (Daly & Caputi, 1987). This is to say, parents and guardians aiming to cultivate morally intelligent children should seek to demonstrate uncompromised beliefs and series of actions (Coles, 1998). Grounded on this framework, children are taught to embrace the truth as the best option when confronted with choices. This is done not only through verbalization but also by modeling, where the adult chooses the truth at all times, thus creating a dynamo effect as children are imitators. What they see the adults they look up to embrace greatly influences their actions, like clockwork (Beheshtifar, Esmaeli & Moghadam, 2011). Importantly also, through reward schemes and having intense conversations with the children, educators uphold integrity by informing children the essence of admitting mistakes when wrongs have been committed.

According to Clark and Fujimoto (1999) integrity is determined by the kind of choices people make when confronted with a number of aspects. Children should be mentored to integrate integrity to their actions and learn to stand byvwhat is right all the time Informing the young ones more often that there are hatchbacks that accompany the same helps in preparing them for the real unforgiving world by preparing them of what to expect. This approach enhances development of a good character as the children learn to accept that it all tones down to what is on the inside(Clarken, 2009). Moreover, instead of pointing fingers, one can choose to work on self and create an impact in society. Essentially, integrity entails keeping promises. Parents and concerned stakeholders should note that in order to bring up virtuous children, they should also commit to keepvpromises they have made, evoking subconscious conception on the children that follow through with promissory commitments is what breeds trust (Narvaez, 2010).

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2. *Responsibility*

Responsibility, in this context, is being forthcoming and ready to acknowledge wrongs and show willingness to face the consequences for the committed wrongs. Verily, responsibility is the ultimate measure of integrity. Raising children to know that, despite having wide scopes of freedom and rights, it is critical that one follows through to the chosen actions (Clarken, 2009). In other words acknowledging that, yes, one has free will, but sticking with the implications of actions is the true measure of moral intelligence. As reflected by Gigerenzer (2007), true intelligence is accepting full responsibility for one's actions, bearing in mind that convictions precede actions. For kids, nurturing them to understand the principle of cause and effect will positively influence behavior as the children act in full knowledge that consequences are inevitable in the future. This is critical as it formulates better decision making and morally sound approaches to issues, which influences positive character (Sivanathan & Cynthia Fekken, 2002).

Significantly also, by learning to carry own cross, students receive guidance on the need to desist from blame games and fostering accountability. Responsibility in moral intelligence is best imparted to children through demonstration. This is whereby congruence is experienced in words as well as action (Coles, 1998). For instance; a teacher should appreciate students' correction of omissions, encouraging them to open up more. In so doing, children will learn to appreciate responsibility. Evidently also, by guiding children into volunteering, they will cultivate responsibility from the lens of doing something good to harness fulfillment. Coupling this with not expecting immediate results polishes patience and hence a good character.

3. *Compassion*

Compassion is of importance in moral intelligence as it presents two key perspectives. On the onset, it demonstrates humanity, where the needs to find out what others are going through further estranged morality revision. In addition, compassion involves expressing patience in

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reasoning and being ready to leave any time as nobody has ever guaranteed coming back. This approach of

life makes young people appreciate the little things that they would have otherwise taking them for guarantee, ensuring that even in their later ages they do not depart from the morals and values that were imparted to them(Beheshtifar, Esmaeli & Moghadam, 2011). The truth is compassion looks beyond the normal physical eye, where, instead of judging situations and people solely on the way they appear, one gets to learn that there is more than meets the eye thereby, shifting criticality to the distinctive features aside the physical ones that define individuals (Coles, 1998). Nurturing children following this perspective ensures that even in the coming years the society is assured of having individuals that understand why laws are important and not just abiding for the sake of it.

Looking at the other side of the coin, compassion is not only impactful on the less fortunate, but can equally play a major role in the children in question affairs. By comprehending that it is okay to seek help in a difficult situation, society has the opportunity of modeling morally upright citizens who believe in fellowship in times of crises and being there for each other, as opposed to the "am okay" culturally constricted dynamics today where people are suffering silently while surrounded by brothers and sisters(Clarken, 2009).

4. *Forgiveness*

Forgiveness entails letting one's own guard down and being able to look beyond other people's actions and mistakes. According to Enright (1998) forgiveness is the readiness to accept the shortcomings of other people and tolerating them despite the wrong that was committed. Lennick and Keil (2005), further point out that there are two forms of forgiveness one has to embrace in the quest to attain higher moral intelligence. The first one is forgiving the people who have treated us wrong many times, and the other one is, taking a more personal approach whereby one is able to forgive oneself despite self-evaluation and discovery of iniquities.

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Teaching children to forgive from their initial formative ages as maintained by Peaget (1972), hallmarks the whole life of them. Mentoring young people to embrace forgiveness is the best way of preparing them for the imperfect world that is characterized by disappointments. Instead of blindly walking into life thinking of it as a perfect cosmos, forgiveness is the key reminder that we are in constant learning because of our mistakes (Piaget, & Cook, 1952). They define us.

Furthermore, this enhances creativity and critical thinking for the young learners who are aware that their opinion is highly welcomed. That in fact, being wrong is an integral part of the learning process. People get comfortable with communication and get to learn that communication is what resolves the daily challenges encountered and as a result, the children grow to become open minded individuals very welcoming to criticism which in turn shapes their moral intelligence (Gigerenzer, 2007). Forgiveness allows one to learn to look beyond bitterness and hatred.

Essential Virtues in Raising Children as noted by Michele Borba

1. **Empathy**

According to Borba (2001) empathy is the capacity of an individual to identify with other people's issues. Empathy looks beyond pity, where other people's problems become part of an individual who feels the need to intervene. It is important not to confuse empathy with sympathy as sympathy entails looking at people suffering with pity and feeling sorry for them instead of making efforts to help (Borba, 2001). By teaching introducing children to the concept of empathy through demonstration, where they are taught to develop sensitivity towards other people's feelings. This in turn guarantees the raising of, not only morally upright children conversant with considering the feelings and attitudes of others, but also they get to appreciate whatever has been availed to them (Coles, 1998).

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2. Conscience

More often than not, people go around complaining and saying, "My conscious is not clear." In the moral intelligence approach it is of great essence to understand the weighty meaning the aforementioned words harbor. Conscience can be defined as identifying the right and correct way to do something and actually following through with the same (Narvaez, 2010).

It is the hub upon which moral growth develops looking at the role it assumes in behavior guidance. In a nutshell, children should be cultivated to embrace positive behavior as conscience frameworks that distinguish between right and wrong. Following this model, children learn to judge options before delving into them, which, when repeated, enhances buildup of positive character (Borba, 2001).

3. Self-Control

Self-control is the practice of training the mind to stay in control and regulate one from choosing pleasurable options at the moment that eventually may elicit dire consequences. Grounded on the fact that human beings are hedonistic by nature with the ability to weigh between pain and pleasure of an action, teaching children to suppress the immediate gratification (Sivanathan & Cynthia Fekken, 2002). Instead, the children are modeled to focus on self-control especially when confronted with exciting options and encouraging logical and critical thinking when making both small and large choices (Borba, 2011). This is achieved by training the child to know that every choice has a consequence, meaning they would weigh and re-weigh options as they know they are solely responsible (Beheshtifar, Esmaeli & Moghadam, 2011).

4. Respect

Respect is a very simple concept but at which humanity has had trouble hacking. More often than not, people let go of their calm demeanors and portray levels of disrespect that leave

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people in shock. At the heart of character lies respect, which goes deeper than verbalization as it entails conduct. Teaching children to abide by respectful behavior can be toned down to a number of stages, first one is making the child understand the concept of respect by not just teaching but also modeling the same(Coles, 1998). Secondly, upholding the child's respect for authority and firmly standing against impunity manifested through rudeness. By establishing the boundaries and having no interference from parents, guardian or educator succeeds in positive character development as the child grows up knowing that respect is not negotiable.

5. Kindness

Kindness revolves around being people centered. A kind person naturally demonstrates genuine interest in the welfare and well-being of others. From a young age, children should be taught the essence of being kind to other people. Through the implementation of reward mechanisms, where children are gifted upon demonstrating impeccable respect, the culture can be nurtured as continued repetition of the same creates habit (Clarken, 2009). Importantly also, embracing the concept of kindness means that the children will learn to accept and acknowledging that despite people's diverse origins and backgrounds, we are all the same(Borba, 2001). The modeling can be enhanced by buying books for instance that show good characters who have been rewarded with happy endings as well as videos that the child can be able to relate to.

6. Tolerance

This can be defined as remaining objective and upholding the dignity and rights of everyone despite differing beliefs on the same. The diversities are many ranging from political

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opinions, race and origin, religious beliefs just to name a few(Sivanathan & Cynthia Fekken, 2002). As opposed to stereotypic thinking that stands in the way of rationality, tolerance show cases of high level moral intelligence whereby one harnesses the concept of "live and let live." One chooses to judge the coherence of arguments and reason as opposed to traditional fallacies that advocated for intolerance and automatically considering, "the other" as automatically wrong, by the mere fact that their arguments and beliefs contradict with own. In modeling young people, educators and those in charge should employ non participant observation to assess how intolerant the kids are. This provides a good ground in formulating the appropriate measures, which if geared correctly can be used to cultivate moral intelligence (Borba, 2001).

7. Fairness

Borba outsets fairness as a virtue. Borba expresses fairness as opting for open-mindedness that instigates acting fairly and justly at all times. As a parent or educator, setting a good example for the children is beneficial as they grow up sticking to, what mom or my teacher does (Sivanathan & Cynthia Fekken, 2002). Through treating all the young people at one's disposal fairly, the children get to embrace the same values, moreover, teaching the children to behave with utmost fairness and calling out on them in times they derail helps significantly as they get to identify the gravity of their actions (Beheshtifar, Esmaeli & Moghadam, 2011). Looping these foundations over a long period of time become part of the children translating to them having great character worth emulation.

Conclusion

The concept of morality is complex, challenging and takes significantly long time to master. Similarly, moral intelligence as presented in the above presented argument is equally challenging. It is evident that society has reached a moral dilemma today, making people

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unwilling and reluctant to come forth when morality related issues are raised. This tendency has been attributed to ignorance with many assertions claiming that the subject is avoided as people are less concerned with moral intelligence. Looking at the education system, it is evident that the same seriousness as should, considering the peaking immorality (Coles, 1998). Focusing on the future, it has become evident to start with the children as they determine the future dynamics in the morality question. Following the right approaches is what will yield the desired results.

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