Approaches to the Development of Moral Structure among Students: A Case Study of Neo-Humanist Schools

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored the dimensions of morality in Neo-humanist Education. The research is designed to investigate how the philosophical perspectives of Neo-humanism are realized in practical field. The study focused on the approaches adopted in Neo-humanist Schools for enhancing morality among children. In order to validate data, both philosophical perspectives and empirical investigations are undertaken by the researcher. Three schools from North Bengal based on Neo-humanism principle and ideology are selected using purposive sampling techniques. Case study method is adopted to undertake this research with observation and semi-structured interview as tool. Data are collected from students, teachers and parents and analyzed qualitatively. The study found that the curriculum of Neo-humanist School is designed for early intervention of moral development among students. It is also found that the interactional approach in resolving conflict and improving interpersonal relationships are highlighted in school curriculum. Thus, the mature moral orientation in childhood initiates the development of moral structure or conscience. Some empirical evidences are also included here to support this study.

Keywords: Neo-humanist Education, moral orientation, moral structure, moral content, interactional approach

The present day education system is devoid of true moral education. It mainly focuses on intellectual development. The present education system is information and skill centric. But morality is one of the important qualities of human existence. Morality builds the foundation of human life and childhood is the best time to learn morality. Behavior disorder becomes a common factor nowadays among adolescents. Moral standards are deficient today in the society. Children's moral domain needs to be developed through regular practice of morality and it can be best taught through primary curriculum. The mature moral orientation in childhood initiates the development of moral structure. The moral structure guides children to take mature moral decision.

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. 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. Neo-humanism- a Physico- psycho-spiritual philosophy. Neo-humanism is a reinterpretation of Humanism. In Neo-humanism, P.R. Sarkar (1921-1990) integrates spiritual, psycho-social and environmental perspectives. The Neo-humanists schools are mainly based on the combination of Idealism and Pragmatism. That means let the child realizing the essence of Idealism through regular practice and experience. In learning to be moral,

the first thing Neo-humanist Education (NHE) supports is developing conscience. Neo-humanist education is based on the philosophy of Neo-humanism (P.R. Sarkar, 1921-1990). Liberation of intellect and awakened conscience are the major aspects of morality in Neo-humanist education. 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. Crowe (2008) suggested that conscience development is one of the important objectives of Neo-humanist education. 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 Neo-humanist theory. Neo-humanist 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. Morality leads to a sense of universalism and pervasive sense of love and compassion for all creation (Sarkar, P.R. 1981).

Need of the Study

Schooling is a moral enterprise. Values are embedded in both content and in the process of teaching. The interaction of adults and students with in a social context of school can be considered as a significant tool of moral development. The nature of the school is an important moral education institution. But the present-day schools lays emphasis on preaching "a bag of virtues" approach. Morality is not only teaching a particular set of values, neither is meant for "obedience to the authority". Morality does not simply represent an increasing knowledge of cultural values usually leading to ethical relativity. Rather, it represents the transformations that occur in a person's form or structure of thought. The content of values varies from culture to culture; hence the study of cultural values cannot tell us how a person interacts with his social environment or how a person goes about solving problems related to his/her social world. This requires the analysis of developing structures of moral judgment which P R Sarkar (1982) in his Neo-humanism said rationalistic mentality. Thus the schools based on Neo-humanism adopted right approach for moral development which are reported by researchers.

Swarthout (1988) found that early intervention among children enhances moral develop which guides them for taking wise decision. Gluecks, E.T. (1996) of Harvard University conducted a study to determine what is responsible for delinquent behavior among adolescent. He has found the relationship between delinquency and environment. The unsocial behavior has its root in early childhood. He has also revealed that the moral knowledge and moral behavior introduced at the early childhood minimizes the tendency of delinquent behavior.

James S. Leming (1997) has conducted a study on Cheating behavior, situational influence and moral development. A relationship was found between principle moral reasoning and non-cheating behavior. He argued that students introduced with mature moral orientations showed less tendency towards cheating or doing harm to others. Jacobson (2009) found that the foundational layer of NHE is inculcating consciousness which is the same in everyone and everything.

Neo-humanist Education (NHE) attempts to develop three aspects using specific guidelines in each area such as: yoga and diet in the physical, developing awakened conscience in the mental, and meditation in the spiritual. Shambhusivananda (2011) theoretically analyzed the roots of societal transformation and the role of inner ecology and outer ecology in total transformation of a child. He critically analyzed the ten moral principles of Neo-humanist Education and their role in inner transformation of students. Devajinana (2011) found that morality, if practiced through a conscious act of living then it creates a dynamic force where no

desire is left for theft; and all tendencies of falsehood disappear.

The above discussed research studies reveal that attempts have been made by researchers to examine the approach to and strategies of moral development in Neo-humanist schools. All studies have been conducted abroad. But no empirical research has been reported in India to examine role of NHE for moral development of primary children. In this context, the researcher has formulated the following research questions for investigation.

Research Question

1. To what extent the philosophical discourses of morality are realized in practical field?
2. What are the approaches adopted in NHE Schools for moral development?
3. To what extent students show matured moral behavior?

Objectives

1. To explore the dimensions of morality among students
2. To identify the approaches adopted for mature moral orientation
3. To analyze the reasons underlying the moral decisions of students
4. To study the early intervention of moral development in Neo-humanist curriculum

Methodology

The case study method is adopted to study the moral development of students. Three schools are selected through purposive sampling technique from three different districts of North Bengal of state West Bengal, India, which follow Neo-humanism principles in their curriculum. The Neo-humanist Schools are also known as Ananda Marga School. All schools are at primary level with the students of age group from 5 to 9. The schools are up to primary level and follow NHE principles in its curriculum, teaching learning, evaluation and other activities. The principal of the schools are saffron (Nun). Both boys and girls are studying in the age group of 5 to 9. All the teachers, students and other members of school are involved in this study as sample.

Tools and Techniques

In order to achieve the first and second objectives, semi structured interview and observation schedule were used.

Analysis of reasoning of moral dilemma and bibliotherapy were used to achieve the third objective. Content analysis and observation schedule were used for fourth objective. All the tools are validated by taking expert comments on relevance of items. The investigator also recorded qualitative data by observing, writing in diary, voice recording, taking photographs and notes on special behavior.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Dimensions of Neo-humanism Developed among the students

There are eight broad dimensions of morality reported in Neo-humanist schools. The important dimensions which have been also discussed in Neo-humanism philosophy are: (a) physical (b) emotional (c) harmony with others (d) harmony with self (e) rational (f) inter-personal (g) social and (h) spiritual. In NHE discourses, these are categorized into two broad concepts as Yama and Niyama.

The following dimensions of moral behavior have been reported which are common in almost all children. Scores of rating scales indicate presence of dimensions of morality of Neo-humanism in three different schools.
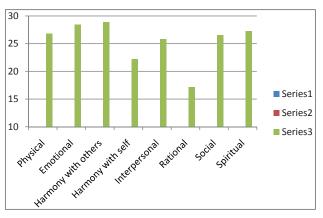
Table 1: Scores of rating scales in three schools

Dimensions	Average score	Percentage	Total Score on Scale
Physical	Sch1-25 Sch2-27.6 26.86 Sch3-28	89.53	30
Emotional	Sch1-28.5 Sch2-29 28.5 Sch3-27	95	30
Harmony with others	Sch1-28.8 Sch2-28 28.93 Sch3-30	96.43	30
Harmony with self	Sch1-23 Sch2-19.5 22.2 Sch3-24	74	30

Inter-personal	Sch1-26 Sch2- 27.5 25.8 Sch3-24	86	30
Rational	Sch1-14.5 Sch2- 18 17.2 Sch3-19	57.3	30
Social	Sch1-25 Sch2- 26.6 26.53 Sch3-28	88.43	30
Spiritual	Sch1-29 Sch2- 27 27.3 Sch3-26	91	30

Table 2: Average scores of eight dimensions prominent among the students

Dimensions	Average Scores in Three schools	Total
Physical	26.9	30
Emotional	28.5	30
Harmony with others	28.9	30
Harmony with self	22.2	30
Interpersonal	25.8	30
Rational	17.2	30
Social	26.5	30
Spiritual	27.3	30

Fig. 1: Graphical presentation showing comparison among the different Dimensions found among the students

The various dimensions emphasized in Neo-humanist Education are: Physical, emotional, moral, inter personal, rational, social and spiritual. Moral trait has two significant parts: harmony with others and harmony with self. The above graph shows that the two dimensions namely, emotional and harmony with others are very prominent in all the three schools. The trait of rationality is significantly less developed among the students. It has been noticed that the young children are emotionally more motivated than rationality. The spiritual aspect is also found prominent.

Mature Moral Orientation

Researcher has directly observed the moral classes where the teacher introduced some moral stories and the students are asked to identify the heroes of the stories. Students are also asked to give reason why they have chosen the characters. It has also been reported that teachers often use theme based classes like : "selfless service", "see the bright sides of everybody" etc. Students interact among themselves and make story based on these themes. In the beginning of school, students participate in "Morning Circle" and practice some good habits together with the teachers.

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.
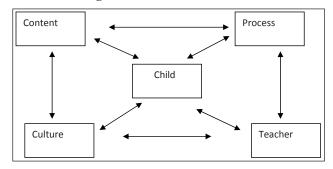

Fig. 2: Interactional Approach (Moral Network)

Students in schools mechanically start observing good habits and gradually start internalizing the meaning. 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 interest. Children conceptualize moral conflicts in terms of social disequilibrium and moral resolutions in terms of balancing or equalizing relationships (Haan, Aerts, & Cooper, 1985).

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 encounters 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 Neo-humanist 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. Neo-humanist 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 (Bhowmik and Mohalik, 2016):

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 gist 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

The researcher has introduced some hypothetical situations and observed the students' reaction to that particular situation.

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 Neo-humanist 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 Neo-humanism. Morality and spirituality are embedded in the hidden curriculum. The ultimate goal of morality in Neo-humanist 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, (ii) Personal integration and strength of character 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.

Moral Structure and Moral Content Reported among Students

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.

Two dimensions of morality are identified with the children of Neo-humanist School (Chazan, B. 1985):

1. Structure or forms of morality
2. Content of morality

Dimensions of Morality	Developmental Area
Structure	1. Reasons underlying children's decision, how children should reason about the moral dilemmas.
	2. The reasons are embedded in the beliefs and attitudes of a child.
Content	1. The content of morality is what child should think.
	2. What judgment child should make
	3. What action a child should perform

It has been found that 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 Fig 3.

It has been reported that students sent ¾ years in NHE Schools have some common beliefs and thoughts regarding certain moral decisions. These include: non harming, benevolent truthfulness, non stealing, universal love, simple living, cleanliness of body and mind, contentment, social service, inspirational study, self-knowledge and spiritual

pursuit. Morality leads to a sense of universalism and pervasive sense of love and compassion for all creation (Sarkar, P.R. 1981).
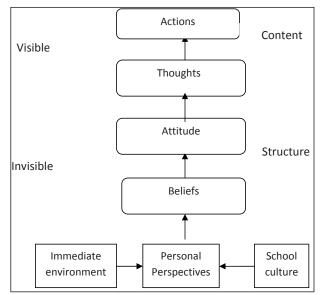

Fig. 3: Structure and content of morality

Major Findings

1. Structure and content of morality have been identified among the students. In both the cases the students are motivated by two aspects: i) maintaining harmony with self and ii) maintaining harmony with others.

2. Approaches followed in Neo-humanist school curriculum for moral development are: interactional approach through which rationalistic mentality is developed and cognitive approach helps to develop conscience.

3. The reasons underlying the decisions and actions of students are motivated by: (a) desire for collective good (b) avoiding doing harm to anybody with words, thoughts or actions. (c) avoiding the exploitation of others (d) not motivated always for selfish pleasure and most importantly, (e) realizing the sense of Omnipotent's presence everywhere.

4. Through regular practice of moral principles, students develop moral insight. Students are oriented morally while interacting with teachers and peers. The teacher's attitudes, ways of solving problems, moral standards and ideational flow help the students to build

certain beliefs and attitudes which in turn develop the moral structure.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The first objective is to explore the dimensions of morality among students of Neo-humanist Schools. The study found that mainly two broad dimensions are emphasized in Neo-humanist curriculum which are: (i) Maintaining harmony with others and (ii) Maintaining harmony with self. It was also supported by Rama and Brim (2010) in their study on principles of Neo-humanist Education. They have categorized these two dimensions as Yama and Niyama as discussed in Neo-humanism discourses by P.R. Sarkar (1982).

The second objective is to identify the approaches adopted in schools for mature moral orientation. The study revealed two approaches which are: (i) Interactional approach in resolving conflict and improving interpersonal relationships and (ii) Cognitive approach for developing moral structure or conscience. This result is supported by Bussey (2005) that morality has both an intellectual and an impulsive aspect. Through moral development children must learn what is right and what is wrong. It is also reported by E.B. Hurlock (1978) that children must develop a desire to do what is right, to act for the common good.

The third objective is to analyze the reasons underlying the moral decisions of students. The study found that there are few factors common with each student's behavior and attitude which was supported by Devajinana (2011) who reported that students are motivated by not to harm anybody and goaded by collective interests and these are common practice in Neo-humanist schools. Dorothy (1982) reported that there are some common reasons among students underlying in taking decisions which ultimately form the moral structure.

The fourth objective of the research is to study the early intervention of moral development in Neo-humanist curriculum. The study revealed that some unique activities carried out in Neo-humanist schools stimulate moral development. One such activity is adult supervised morning circle where students perform some good habits like collective meditation and chanting shloka with action. Students are constantly engaged in dialogue with teacher and peers in resolving conflict constructively.

It is supported by Jacobson (2014) who reported that service project, Stu-vol and Extending love to all creatures are the programme carried out in school to enhance psycho-social aspects of students. Teacher employing (a) rational self-analysis, (b) self-control techniques to strengthen moral structure.

Educational Implication

1. The primary education curriculum and curriculum need to be relooked and revised in the light of Ideology and principles of Neo-humanism which is based on universal love, harmony and awakened conscience. Different dimensions of Neo-humanism need to be incorporated for integrated personality development of students at primary level.

2. In our present day society, strength of character among students are not developed well, as a result, behavior disorder becomes a common factor in adolescents. Neo-humanist institutions carry out the early intervention for character building and moral practice. General Primary education should incorporate all these vital issues both as theory and as practice.

3. The present study has implication on pre-service and in-service teachers' education programme. Students learn moral behavior through interactional approach. Teachers should have well integrated strength of character and hence the primary teacher education programme needs to be reorganized to highlight moral lessons both as content and as practice.

CONCLUSION

In case of moral structure, cognitive perspective of moral development is emphasized. This paper deals with approaches to qualitative transformation and development of conscience. The interactional approach in resolving conflict and improving interpersonal relationships are highlighted in this study. Two theoretical perspectives are distinguished here and are used to organize early intervention for moral development. The moral structure guides children to take mature moral decision. The study also reveals how children develop their higher mind through activities and reflective practices. Moral structure and content have been identified

in this study. It is found that, while taking any decision, students are motivated by two aspects: maintaining harmony with self and maintaining harmony with others. Only moral issues as content in the curriculum are not enough to develop moral domain. In order to develop moral structure the primary curriculum must incorporate moral issues as a regular practice. Morality should be reflected as prominent as well as hidden curriculum at all level of education.

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