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Terje Halvorsen[1,*]

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*Correspondence: terje.j.halvorsen@nord.no
[1] University of Nordland, Norway

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Abstract

In many countries social pedagogues apply ART (Aggession Replacement Training), a multimodal programme designed to help juveniles with severe behaviour problems. In this programme Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development makes up an important element. The first part of this article offers a presentation of Kohlberg's theory and some of the critique made of it. The second part describes how the Kohlbergian tradition is implemented in ART. In the final part of the article a problem with the ART programme is pointed out and an alternative neo-Kohlbergian approach is described. This method may prove to be a viable approach in the field of social pedagogy and an adequate supplement to the ART programme.

Keywords

Kohlberg and His Critics

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development was launched in a post-war context. After the Second World War a large number of atrocities were reported. Some of these were committed by people claimed to be more or less ordinary human beings. Most famous in

this respect is Hannah Arendt's (1963) description of the war criminal Adolf Eichmann, the man who headed the transportation of Jews to concentration camps. Arendt described Eichmann as a dutiful man, a person who, under normal circumstances, wouldn't have stood out in a negative way. After the war, stories were also told about people who had acted altruistically under difficult conditions (Oliner & Oliner, 1988).

As a young Ph.D. student, Kohlberg set out to formulate a psycho-logical explanation of what makes some people act in a pro-social manner even in cases where they have no proven advantage from such behaviour, or when such behaviour exposes them to danger. Kohlberg also wanted to find ways to promote development towards a stable tendency to act in a pro-social manner. As a theoretical foundation, he chose the paradigm formulated by Jean Piaget a few decades earlier: logical constructivism.

Piaget (1953) describes the child as an active being who explores and formulates descriptions of the world that surrounds her; descriptions that may be incorrect, but still appear as logical to the child. According to Piaget, the child's cognitive development should be seen as a realisation of an inherent potential. Sensations primarily work as incitements that trigger dispositions the child possesses. This focus on genes and inborn potential is referred to as nativism in modern psychology. Piaget's nativism also appears in his description of universal stages of development. He argues that the child's capacity to perceive and to reason develops from a sensory-motor stage, to a pre-operational stage, further to a concrete-operational stage and then terminates at a formal-operational stage. Piaget gives an extensive account of the child's capacities and shortcomings at the different stages. When it comes to moral reasoning Piaget (1932) distinguishes between a pre-moral stage, a stage called moral realism and a stage called moral subjectivism. According to Piaget, the child has no clear understanding of rules concerning right and wrong until the age of 4. From 4 to 10 the child assesses actions based on the consequences of the action, and not the intention behind it. Piaget calls this moral realism. Children who master moral realism are able to learn rules. However, they have a rigid understanding of rules, and do not envision that rules may be changed. At this stage adults are considered indisputable authorities. Piaget argues that at the age of 10 the child usually masters what he calls moral subjectivism. At this stage the child assesses actions based on the underlying intention. According to Piaget, the child is now able to recognise rules as social conventions, in other words as agreements that can be changed through a discussion between the parties involved.

From the age of 10 the child will also show interest in social issues and philosophical questions concerning human welfare.

Kohlberg (1958, 1984) argues that moral reasoning is the central source of pro-social actions: the more mature reasoning the stronger the inclination to act in a pro-social manner. His theory of moral development is a stage theory. He describes a developmental movement through a universal, hierarchical series of stages which mark distinct changes in the underlying structure of moral reasoning. The three main stages in Kohlberg's model are named as the pre-conventional stage, the conventional stage and the post-conventional stage. In some texts the last is named the principled stage. Each of these main stages holds two sub-stages.

Pre-conventional reasoning is described as a kind of naïve hedonism oriented towards consequences affecting the person him-/herself. An act is perceived as morally wrong if the person who commits it gets punished. Acts that are rewarded are perceived as morally right. As the conventional designation expresses, the moral reasoning at the second main stage is oriented towards rules and expectations. Those who have reached this main stage have an in-group reference. At the first sub-stage there is an orientation towards current rules and social roles in one's family and one's peer group. Acts that imply living up to role expectations and result in approval from family members or friends are perceived as morally right. At the second sub-stage the focus is expanded from the local to the state and to formal legislation. Laws are perceived as necessities to maintain a functioning society. Therefore, to violate the law is morally wrong. Compared to the theories of normative ethics, the reasoning at the conventional stage holds elements of heteronymous duty ethics. Post-conventional reasoning has a universal reference with the profound realisation that each individual possesses inviolable rights. At the first sub-stage, moral reasoning is similar to rule utilitarianism. Laws are regarded as social contracts that should promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people. At the second sub-stage, moral reasoning is similar to that described in Kantian duty ethics.

According to Kohlberg, access to post-conventional reasoning implies moral autonomy. Those who have reached the highest stages are able to carry out critical reflection on existing rules. These persons will reason independently, and reach valid conclusions, also in difficult situations where they are exposed to pressure from others. Kohlberg claims that it is of the utmost importance to promote development towards autonomy because, even in democratic systems, immoral rules

may arise, and we may all come to experience extreme situations where there is no social contract of rules. When describing the possibility of moral autonomy Kohlberg draws heavily on the conceptual framework of Kant (1991, 1997). In his texts on ethics Kant argues that we ought to act in accordance with those moral rules we can will as universal laws. He portrays humans as rational beings with a capacity to formulate their own reasonable laws.

Kohlberg was trained as a psychologist and as an empirical researcher. However, he builds his theory not only on empirical findings, but also on philosophical deliberation. He especially emphasises questions of an epistemological and meta-ethical kind.

In a simplified description meta-ethics can be said to contain two major schisms: cognitivism versus non-cognitivism and naturalism versus non-naturalism. The disagreement between cognitivists and non-cognitivists is about whether normative statements can be true, and thus whether there is such thing as moral knowledge. While cognitivists argue that normative statements may be true and may hold knowledge, non-cognitivists reject this possibility. The schism between naturalists and non-naturalists deals with inferences from is to ought, that is from descriptive premises to normative conclusions. Naturalists argue that such inferences may be valid. Non-naturalists claim that such a chain of reasoning is a mistake, a mix-up of different spheres, the empirical and the moral. They name this alleged mistake a naturalistic fallacy (Moore, 2004). By ranking different kinds of moral reasoning in a hierarchical stage model, Kohlberg claims an isomorphism between mental maturity and philosophical validity. This makes him a cognitivist and a naturalist. Kohlberg (1981) explained his meta-ethical position in an article with the expressive title 'From is to ought: How to commit the naturalistic fallacy and get away with it in the study of moral development.'

According to Kohlberg, one can improve young people's ability to reflect on moral issues by letting them discuss hypothetical dilemma situations. He has formulated a number of dilemmas that can be used in group discussions. Also, he has given a detailed description of how to steer the discussion in the desired direction. After the dilemma situation is presented, the young people are asked how the main character in the story ought to handle the dilemma, and why this is the right decision. The young people then discuss their way to a unanimous conclusion. When the conclusion is reached Kohlberg advises the use of the so-called Socratic approach (see Brickhouse & Smith, 2009). According to Kohlberg, the social pedagogue should recognise the young people's efforts, but at the same time put forward a question that reveals the

limitations of their conclusion. The young people may have overlooked an important element or entangled themselves in a self-contradiction.

Kohlberg provides a scientific justification for this traditional method by relating it to Piaget's theory of cognitive development. In this theory the concepts 'assimilation' and 'accommodation' are central. Assimilation is the process where the child uses her acquired cognitive schemes to make sense of experiences. Accommodation is a complementary process which involves changing, or expanding, the structure of schemes as a result of new information acquired through assimilation. Through accommodation the child moves towards a more mature and realistic construction of reality. According to Piaget (1953), the child has an inborn need to experience coherence between the different parts of the schema structure, and between the schema structure and sensations.

Kohlberg explains that young people who are exposed to a story containing a moral dilemma will assimilate; they will perceive and assess the dilemma by applying their acquired cognitive structure. When the pedagogue asks a question that exposes the problems with the proposed conclusion, the young people experience a break up in their cognitive structure; the coherence is replaced with confusion. According to Kohlberg, this state of confusion will work as an incitement to rethink the problem and the proposed conclusion. Hopefully, this rethinking will lead to accommodation and thereby to a more mature and adequate moral reasoning.

Kohlberg is one of the most frequently cited scholars in the field of developmental psychology. However, during his lifetime Kohlberg experienced criticism from many quarters. One of the critics who has achieved most attention is Carol Gilligan (1982). She claims that Kohlberg overlooks the differences that exist between how boys and girls are raised. According to Gilligan, girls learn to take into account the impacts actions may have on others' feelings. They therefore develop a care-perspective. Boys, on the other hand, are raised so that they develop a more formal and detached reasoning, focusing on justice.

Elliot Turiel (2006) claims that Kohlberg underestimates children's capacities because he confuses domains with stages. According to Turiel, morality and social conventions belong to different domains. He argues that children at an early age separate moral rules and social conventions. To break a social convention is seen as discourtesy, while breaking moral rules is considered wrong in a more serious sense.

Dennis Krebs and Kathy Denton (2005) claim that Kohlberg's model is too simple and therefore only has relevance in pure test

situations. According to Krebs and Denton, people in real-life situations have a flexible and pragmatic approach to moral dilemmas. If we are in a business context and are about to make a contract, we reason in a way that differs from the one we apply when we meet vulnerable people and are in a caring situation. Also our relationship to the one included in the dilemma situation will determine how we reason.

Arnold Goldstein, Barry Glick and John Gibbs (1998) claim that Kohlberg has a one-sided emphasis on maturation and ignores the impact of peer influence. In some cases dysfunctional reasoning does not reflect immaturity but instead detrimental influence from other young people. According to Goldstein, Glick and Gibbs, the Kohlbergian perspective should be extended with information processing theory.

There exists an extensive corpus of evidence that the development from main stage one to main stage two is universal (Snarey, 1985). However, this is not the case for the further development described by Kohlberg. Several studies have revealed that post-conventional reasoning is more prevalent in urban middle-class communities than in rural areas, and more prevalent in Western countries than in non-Western countries. These findings have led to a claim that Kohlberg's theory is ethnocentric (Frye, 2000).

As described above, Kohlberg advocates a strong version of the stage perspective. Some critics argue that moral development is a continuous expansion of the cognitive structure and not qualitative leaps in capacity (Rest et al., 1999).

Like his predecessors in the rationalist tradition, Kohlberg has an optimistic belief that mature moral reasoning will bring about pro-social actions. Critics hold that the correlation between reasoning and action is not as high as claimed by Kohlberg (Blasi, 1980).

Kohlberg's sub-stage six as the ultimate way of reasoning has been challenged by philosophers. According to Don Locke (1986), moral reasoning cannot be measured and ranked like any other reasoning.

In addition to the objections mentioned above, Kohlberg's meta-ethical accounts have prompted serious controversies (Habermas, 1990; Locke, 1986).

Kohlberg and ART

At the end of the twentieth century, many professionals in the field of social pedagogy came to know the Kohlbergian approach through

a programme called Aggression Replacement Training (ART) (Glick & Gibbs, 2011; Goldstein et al., 1998). This is a multimodal programme designed to help young people with severe behaviour problems. Today the programme is implemented in residential care institutions throughout North America, South America, Europe and Australia. Endeavours are being made to introduce the programme in still more countries. A large number of social pedagogues are qualified as instructors within the ART-system and take part in these efforts.

The ART programme consists of three different courses that are run in parallel during the intervention period. Each participant is part of a fixed group, a set. Each set contains about ten young people, and is led by two social pedagogues. The purpose of the first course is to enable the participants to distinguish between different types of social situations and equip them with social skills that are adequate in each situation. Examples of social skills that young people may need to learn are to introduce themselves, to initiate a conversation, to introduce two people to each other, to thank, to make a compliment, to ask for help, to offer help, to describe feelings, to put forward criticism, to deal with criticism and to apologise.

Each gathering starts with an introduction of a social situation and a skill that is appropriate in this particular situation. The benefits one achieves by applying the actual behaviour are described and emphasised. Then the skill is described in detail, point by point, on a blackboard or a flip chart. After this the two social pedagogues demonstrate the skill in a role play. Finally the participants, in turn, carry out a role play where they practise the skill under supervision. The young people are encouraged to practise the skills they learn in real-life situations.

In the second course the participants learn how to control anger. This is an ability that requires multiple skills. First the participants are invited to reveal their own dysfunctional styles of thinking, for instance a tendency to attribute negative characteristics or intentions to other people. Then they learn to identify physical reactions such as trembling and increased heart frequency as precursors to an outburst. Through role play training these physical reactions are made to work as cues for a self-instruction to exercise an adequate social skill. The participants are also trained to positively evaluate their own managing of difficult situations, situations that before the training ended in an outburst and in violence.

The third course in ART is designed to develop young people's capacity for moral reasoning. During the course the group of young

people is invited to discuss together 10 different dilemma situations. One of the dilemmas is Sam's problem situation:

> Sam and his friend John are shopping in a music store. Sam has driven them to the store. John picks up a CD he really likes and slips it into his backpack. With a little sign for Sam to follow, John then walks out of the store. But Sam doesn't see John. Moments later, the security officer and the store owner come up to Sam. The store owner says to the officer, 'That's one of the boys who were stealing CDs!' The security officer checks Sam's backpack but doesn't find a CD. 'Ok, you're off the hook, but what's the name of the guy who was with you?' the officer asks Sam. 'I'm almost broke because of shoplifting,' the owner says. 'I can't let him get away with it.'
>
> What should Sam say or do? (Goldstein et al., 1998, p. 312).

The discussions are facilitated by the social pedagogues to maximise peer interaction and cognitive conflict, and thereby accommodation. When the young people have reached a conclusion which reflects their developmental level, the professional applies the Socratic method advocated by Kohlberg. The social pedagogue puts forward a question which elucidates the limitations of the young people's accustomed way of thinking. The programme manual contains a number of suggestions for such questions.

In addition to the use of thought-provoking questions, the pedagogues are advised to give a positive assessment of adequate statements formulated by the most mature participants, and to some extent to ignore inadequate statements. The Kohlbergian method is thus supplemented with behaviour modification strategies.

The rationale behind multimodal programmes is that such programmes address objections raised about single methods, and realise synergies. Methods that have limited impact when applied in isolation prove to be effective when they are used in parallel with other approaches. By combining several approaches the researchers that have developed ART take into consideration several of the objections that have been raised against the Kohlbergian tradition.

It is important to note that it is a modified version of Kohlberg's model that is applied in ART. Main stage three is excluded as a pedagogical aim. The ambition professionals seek to realise through the programme is development from pre-conventional to conventional reasoning. One argument for this modification is the lack of evidence

for post-conventional reasoning as a universal stage (Gibbs, 1995). The programme designers have considered it important to stay within an empirical-scientific paradigm. ART is supposed to be a neutral application of science, an approach to support development in a direction given by the child's inborn disposition.

An Alternative Neo-Kohlbergian Approach

A large number of empirical studies indicate that ART is an effective programme in reducing young people's behavioural problems and increasing the occurrence of pro-social behaviour (Goldstein, 2004; Gundersen & Svartdal 2006; Nugent et al., 1999). The research carried out and the reports from several social pedagogues and psychologists give reason to recommend further use of the programme.

However, it can be argued that the objectives formulated by the programme designers are not sufficient. When it comes to moral reasoning, there is a need to promote development beyond a level where prevailing expectations and rules make up the chief components. Reports from previous and contemporary conflict areas reveal the need to promote readiness for the most difficult situations. In addition, even well-functioning societies may hold conventions that should be challenged.

As described above, the developmental movement from main stage two to main stage three is not verified as universal, and philosophical arguments can be raised against Kohlberg's sub-stage six as an ultimate way of reasoning in every kind of dilemma situation. Together with a group of co-researchers, James Rest has introduced an alternative definition of post-conventional reasoning (Rest et al., 1999). This definition is not based on a ranking of normative theories as maturation stages. Instead, normative theories are seen more as alternative tools which have relevance in different kinds of problem situations. According to Rest and his colleagues, to reach the post-conventional stage implies a capacity to alternate between several different ways of reasoning.

Mark Tappan (1997, 1998, 2006) has developed the position of Rest and his colleagues further by proposing a synthesis between Kohlberg's theory and a socio-cultural perspective. Tappan is influenced by the pioneering work of Lev Vygotsky (1962) and the works of successors such as James Wertsch (1998). Vygotsky emphasises the role of language as a tool of thought. He claims that all kinds of higher psychological functioning must involve the use of language, and that

the child at an early age applies acquired words and syntactical forms in her reasoning. Vygotsky thus opposes Piaget's description of 'egocentric speech' which can be observed in early childhood as an epiphenomenon of the child's egocentric thinking. He claims that these monologues are verbal reasoning voiced out loud, and not utterances directed towards others. Later the child's thinking becomes soundless, but it continues to be formulated in words and sentences.

Vygotsky claims that to some extent the syntax of inner verbal reasoning differs from the syntax of external social speech. Compared to external speech, inner speech appears incomplete, holding several abbreviations and short-cuts. However, the words, concepts, syntactical forms and discourses of social language are prerequisites for inner verbal reasoning. According to Vygotsky, human mental functioning is shaped by how the physical and social reality is categorised in the particular language we learn. Therefore, followers of Vygotsky's theory claim that a path is a better metaphor for development than stairs or a ladder. Cognitive development implies following one of several possible paths to one of several possible terminal points (Rogoff, 1990).

As one of Kohlberg's former students, Tappan acknowledges the importance of maturation. However, he holds that the theories of normative ethics should be regarded as artefacts; descriptions formulated by human beings, and imparted from person to person. Such a perspective makes up a foundation for what is referred to as the ethical turn. In recent decades there has been an increasing interest in ethics. Many people apply normative ethics to handle dilemma situations, both in their everyday life and in their professional life. A large number of readers and academic textbooks presenting ethics have been published, and on several study programmes at universities students attend courses dealing with ethics. In addition to a presentation of descriptive ethics, meta-ethics and normative ethics, the students are given the opportunity to apply the theories of normative ethics to imagined cases in the field of professional practice. The inducement put forward for initiating students into the field of ethics is an optimistic belief that these insights will improve students' ability to deal with dilemmas (Beauchamp & Bowie, 2004; Davis et al., 1997; Howe & Miramontes, 1992). Normative theories are claimed to be a kind of linguistic and cognitive toolset that can be used to identify and clarify moral problems. In a book for the health professions Ruth Purtilo states that normative theories 'become the basic starting point for our ethical deliberation' (1993, p. 11).

In general, the presentations the students are exposed to in lectures and texts have an explicit form. The theories are presented

as distinct models and approaches that can be applied to concrete dilemmas. The students also learn who formulated the theories, and therefore can refer to relevant philosophers such as Aristotle, Bentham, Kant, MacIntyre and Rawls. This explicit imparting represents a contrast to the maturation-support approach proposed by Kohlberg.

According to Tappan, normative ethics can be imparted explicitly to young people in much the same way as ethics are taught to grown-up students. He claims that young people who acquire insight into normative ethics will recognise these theories as tools to use in resolving dilemmas they are confronted with in their everyday lives. As an example, he describes an interview with an 18-year-old student taking a moral philosophy course. When she is asked to describe and elaborate on a real-life dilemma she has experienced, she uses words and forms of discourses from the texts she has read. As an example, she puts forward what she refers to as her 'Kantian point of view' (Tappan, 2006, p. 1). According to Tappan, the student's response to moral dilemmas has become more complex and sophisticated, because she is able to apply normative ethics. By learning several ways of moral reasoning she has gradually appropriated a variety of cognitive tools to alternate between and has gained proficiency in dealing with different dilemma situations.

In developmental psychology there has been a schism between those scholars who emphasise children's shortcomings when it comes to cognitive capacity and those who claim that children are able to deal with complicated issues. The former position is to a large extent based on the early works of Piaget. He was the first to formulate an overall theory about cognitive development. In contemporary research reviews, central elements of the theory are still recognised as verified knowledge. However, there is also a consensus that Piaget underestimated children's capacities. Children seem to master abstract concepts and abstract reasoning earlier than described by the early Piaget (Deloache et al., 1998).

Another central schism in developmental psychology is indirectly described on the preceding pages. This is the schism between those scholars who describe development as first and foremost a maturation process, meaning realisation of inborn dispositions, and those who emphasise pedagogical efforts. This schism is often referred to as the nature versus nurture debate or as the nativism versus empiricism debate. Scholars from the former position often use a seed or a flower as a metaphor to portray the child. Some of those supporting the latter position use tabula rasa, a blank slate, as a metaphor.

Nature versus nurture should not be seen as a dichotomy, but should instead be seen as a continuous variable. Between the two extremes there are a number of positions. Several research reviews conclude that there is a lack of evidence for a radical version of nativism, so-called strong nativism (Aber et al., 2012; Deloache et al.,1998; Roberts et al., 2008; Rogoff, 1998). Genetic dispositions are of great importance, but development is also to a large extent an enculturation process.

These consensuses in contemporary research reviews give reason to further explore an explicit imparting of ethics as proposed by Tappan. This may turn out to be a viable approach in the field of social pedagogy, and an adequate supplement to ART.

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