

VALUES DEVELOPMENT IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE PROGRAM

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Abstract

Role-playing activities were employed by an elementary school counsellor in an attempt to influence moral development. While support was not found for the thesis that moral reasoning and social perspective-taking levels are influenced by role-playing, evidence in support of the age-related nature of these constructs and their parallel pattern of development was found. Further research would be enhanced by valid measurement devices.

Résumé

Des activités de dramatisation furent employées par un consultant des écoles élémentaires, afin d'essayer d'influencer le développement moral. Bien qu'on n'ait trouvé aucun argument pour la thèse voulant que le raisonnement moral et les niveaux de points de vue sociaux soient influencés par des activités de dramatisation, il y a des preuves appuyant la corrélation de ces concepts affectés par l'âge et le modèle parallèle de développement. Les futures recherches serviraient à améliorer l'emploi de moyens de mesure plus valables.

Increasingly a public consensus seems to be evolving concerning the need for human values education in the public system of education. As the human relations specialists in the schools, counsellors are being called upon to provide leadership in developing values programs (Graham, 1975; Mosher & Sullivan, 1974; Wilson, 1971). While many parents are concerned about attempts by school personnel to transmit specific values or morals different from their own, programs based on Kohlberg's (1969) cognitive-developmental theory of moral reasoning would probably be acceptable to most members of our pluralistic society.

Values education programs based on Kohlbergian theory tend to have their general aim stated in terms of movement toward more advanced levels of moral reasoning. The most common format of these programs involves the discussion of moral dilemmas by a teacher and a class. This approach has been attempted in elementary schools (Beck, 1971), secondary schools (Blatt, 1969; Blatt & Kohlberg, 1970), and at the college level (Boyd, 1976). In addition, a variant of this approach has been incorporated into the *Deliberate Psychological Education* program of Mosher and Sprinthall (1971). While the effectiveness of the "dilemma discussions method" has yet to be conclusively demonstrated, it would appear that other approaches might also deserve examination.

The foundations of good human relations are laid in the early school years. As the child moves from a predominantly egocentric position to a more sociocentric one, active involvement in the study of human relations will help sensitize her to the needs of others (Fleres & Benmoman, 1974). If such involvement is not encouraged, it becomes increasingly more difficult to understand the relationship between the individual and society. For, as the child begins to understand how his own feelings shape his behavior, he also comes to appreciate the relationships between and among the motives and actions of others.

Kohlberg's (1969) research has concentrated primarily on late childhood, adolescence, and adulthood; and, consequently, attempts to develop educational programs based on moral reasoning theory for young children were seldom made (Beck, 1971). The validity of Kohlbergian theory for children younger than ten years of age was questioned by Damon (1971, 1973) who defined the premoral and preconventional levels of moral reasoning. He considered positive justice — specifically, the justice of distribution, i.e., determining who in society should get what share of the available resources — to be the core structure of moral cognition in young children. Three major stages (each having two substages) of moral reasoning were identified through which children progress prior to reaching Kohlberg's conventional level of morality (Damon, 1974).

Selman and associates (Selman, 1971, 1975; Selman & Byrne, 1974; Selman, Gordon, & Damon, 1973) have focussed their research on the young child's ability to take another's perspective and the relation of this ability to the development of more advanced moral reasoning. Based on the analyses of role-taking done by Feffer (1959) and Flavell (1968) as well as Piaget's (1932) notions of differentiation (distinguishing perspectives) and integration (relating perspectives), Selman and Byrne (1974) derived a sequence of developmental, age-related, and logically related structures that a child displays in his understanding of another's point of view. One of the major conclusions of the study by Selman, Gordon, and Damon (1973) was that each social perspective-taking level is a necessary — albeit not sufficient — condition for development to the parallel level of moral reasoning.

As an alternative to the (dilemma discussions method) of promoting moral reasoning, the theory and methodology of role-playing (Shaftel & Shaftel, 1967) was considered to have potential application for human values development. In its simplest sense, role-playing may be viewed as the spontaneous practice of roles — assuming them in order to practice the behavior required in a variety of situations. It is not aimed at achieving therapy, but it is a set of procedures that employs all the techniques of critical evaluation implied in the terms "listening", "discussing", and "problem-solving". It uses a verbal, symbolic model and proceeds through problem-definition, delineation of alternatives, and decision-making.

In this study an attempt was made to determine the influence of guided, role-playing exercises on levels of moral reasoning and social perspective-taking of elementary school pupils. Also, evidence to support the developmental constructs outlined by Damon (1971, 1973) and Selman (1971, 1975) was sought.

METHOD

Subjects

The sample consisted of 97 children (51 girls and 46 boys) in an elementary public school in a predominantly middle-class, urban neighbourhood in southern Ontario. These students consituted two second-grade and two fourth-grade classes. The two second-grade classes contained 16 and 19 pupils; and the two fourth-grade classes, 32 and 30 pupils.

Pupils were assigned to one of four experimental conditons. Eight pupils from one of the second-grade classes together with 16 pupils from one of the fourth-grade classes were randomly selected from their respective class lists and assigned to the Experimental Group. The remaining pupils from these two classes (eight second-

graders and 16 fourth-graders) were assigned to Control Group 2. Ten pupils from the other second-grade class together with 15 pupils from the remaining fourth-grade class were selected at random from their respective class lists and assigned to Control Group 1. The remaining pupils in these two classes were assigned to Control Group 3.

Of the original 97 subjects, 10 (five boys and five girls) transferred out of the community during the intervention period and were lost from the study. In addition, the results of three subjects were excluded from the analysis in order to satisfy the requirement of proportional cell frequencies (Winer, 1971). The results reported are based on these final 84 children; each of the four groups contained seven second-grade and 14 fourth-grade pupils.

Materials

The theory and methodology for role-playing and discussion techniques developed by Shaftel and Shaftel (1967) has been augmented and elaborated by a filmstrip and recording package of instructional materials, *Values in action*, prepared by the same authors. The junior author, who applied the intervention, used these materials to guide the students in their exploration of problem situations through role-playing.

Measures of moral reasoning were obtained from the verbal responses of each subject to two socio-moral dilemmas developed by Damon (1974). The procedure involved a semi-structured interview in which the highest level of moral reasoning was determined according to established criteria. Social perspective-taking measures were determined from probe questions concerning the same two dilemma stories.

Procedure

Pupils assigned to the Experimental Group were pretested to determine a moral reasoning level and a social perspective-taking level. The elementary school counsellor conducted a series of fifteen, bi-weekly, role-playing exercises with these students and posttesting following with the same two measures. Control Group 1 pupils were similarly pretested and posttested in an effort to control for the effects of history and maturation (Campbell, 1957). Heeding Solomon's (1949) warning concerning the possible confounding effect of subject sensitization due to pretesting, pupils assigned to Control Group 2 received the role-playing intervention coincident with the Experimental Group. Following the intervention period, these pupils were posttested with the two research instruments.

To control for possible contemporaneous effects that might have occurred during the

intervention period, pupils assigned to Control Group 3 were posttested with both instruments.

In conducting the role-playing exercises the counsellor combined the fourth-grade pupils assigned to the Experimental Group with those fourth-graders of Control Group 2. Likewise, grade two pupils in the Experimental Group received the role-playing intervention with the second-graders of Control Group 2. The procedure assured the equivalence of the intervention for pupils at each grade level.

Because of unequal numbers of grade two and grade four pupils involved in the study, the usual analyses of variance and covariance procedures which require equal cells were not appropriate. However, since the data satisfied the conditions for proportional cell frequencies (Winer, 1971), the least squares analyses of variance and covariance procedures were employed. Independent, $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Intervention \times Pretest \times Grade) factorial analyses of variance were computed to determine the significance of posttest mean differences in moral reasoning levels and in social perspective-taking levels. In addition, independent, 2×2 (Role-play \times Grade) factorial analyses of covariance were computed to determine the significance of posttest mean differences with pretest scores as the covariable.

Finally, each subject's posttest scores of social perspective-taking and moral reasoning were compared to examine the validity of the assertion that social perspective-taking is a necessary condition for moral reasoning at the parallel level (Selman, Gordon, & Damon, 1973).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study tend not to support the proposition that role-playing exercises can influence the moral reasoning and social perspective-taking levels of elementary school pupils. However, some support was found for the view that social perspective-taking ability precedes the corresponding level of moral reasoning.

Analysis of variance indicated that fourth-grade pupils scored significantly higher than second-graders on the posttest measure of social perspective-taking, $F(1,76) = 13.40$, $p < .001$. Similarly, it was found that the mean posttest moral reasoning score of fourth-graders was significantly higher than that of second-grade pupils, $F(1,76) = 10.33$, $p < .01$. However, neither participation in the role-playing exercises nor having been pretested resulted in significant differences when posttest scores were analyzed.

Using pretest scores as covariates, a significant mean posttest difference was observed between grades only on the social perspective-taking measure, $F(1,37) = 4.26$, $p < .05$. No other significant differences were indicated by these

analyses of covariance. These consistently higher scores by fourth-grade pupils tend to add validity to the "age-related" nature of these two constructs — moral reasoning and social perspective-taking.

Concerning the relationship between social perspective-taking ability and moral reasoning, Selman (1974) had argued that children displaying moral reasoning at Damon's fourth (1-B) level must be capable of Selman's Level 1 (subjective) perspective-taking. Similarly, moral reasoning at Damon's sixth (2-B) level must be accompanied by at least Selman's Level 2 (self-reflective) perspective-taking. Posttest scores revealed that no student having a moral reasoning score of 150 (Substage 1-B) or higher had a corresponding social perspective-taking score of less than Level 1. Further, no student obtaining a moral reasoning score of 250 (Substage 2-B) had a social perspective-taking score below Level 2. These findings support the claim that development of social perspective-taking ability is a prerequisite for advanced moral reasoning.

Loevinger's (1974) assertion that the measuring instruments involved in many moral education projects are of unknown validity probably accounts, at least in part, for the apparent failure to influence moral reasoning and social perspective-taking by means of role-playing exercises. It is suggested that further research efforts in moral education might benefit from the development of instruments of known validity. Further, increased precision in assigning social perspective-taking levels and moral reasoning levels to students might be of assistance to the counsellor prior to the intervention. Although Shaftels' (Shaftel & Shaftel, 1967) methodology is potentially useful, in this context of moral development it might have been augmented by a knowledge of moral reasoning levels and social perspective-taking levels prior to intervention by the counsellor. Finally, the results of this study suggest that counsellors and others attempting to implement values education programs be aware of the difficulties involved in "stimulating" human development.

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