Considering Moral Intelligence as Part of a Holistic Education

Rodney H Clarken

Northern Michigan University

School of Education

Abstract:

Morality and moral intelligence are important in our society and schools. Moral intelligence is discussed in the context of Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences. Moral intelligence helps apply ethical principles to personal goals, values and actions. It consists of four competencies related to integrity, three to responsibility, two to forgiveness, and one to compassion. Developing greater moral intelligence will result in individuals, schools and other social systems that are more healthy and positive. Several conceptions of moral intelligence are considered along with ideas how education might look if it was to value and include morality more prominently.

"Character is more important than intellect."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

What makes up the ideal and whole person? The conception of what is valued differs from person to person, group to group and time to time. Across all cultures and throughout recorded human history, there seems to have been a sense of right and wrong. This sense of value and rational judgment seems to have emerged long ago in human history and evolved over the millennia. The Biblical story of the first man and woman may be about the dawning of the awareness of good and evil in the human species, marking a great evolutionary advance in the human journey from its previously more instinctual and animal nature. This myth, along with others, may be symbolic accounts about the dawning of human awareness of right and wrong, the first signs of new emanations of human consciousness that would increasingly distinguish humans from other primates. What we might call the birth of moral intelligence.

The guidance recorded in the Bible and the many other holy books of other traditions might be the first attempts at teaching this now morally conscious humanity how to best use and live with this new and developing moral consciousness. In these traditions, moral intelligence was often seen as a gift and reflection of the creator and a responsibility of humanity to use wisely. Developing morality and moral intelligence was seen as one of the primary purposes of life. In these societies, the moral person was held in high regard. The rewards of moral intelligence were to be experienced in both this world and in existence after death. In fact, one of the main

purposed of life was to develop this spiritual quality, as the condition of a person in the next world was dependent upon their use and development of their moral intelligence in this world.

In the modern world, these traditions and the role of morality and moral intelligence have been challenged. Many of the moral teachings of these faiths and religions seem out dated, unnecessary and even harmful to our consumer-driven and narcissistic culture. They are seen by many as culture- and time-bound strictures imposed upon a present-day culture that does not need or want them. Intelligence is generally highly valued in modern societies, but intelligences that get one ahead materialistically and individually are considered more valuable than a moral intelligence that promotes ethical ideals such as truth, love and justice. The lack of morality can be seen in the recent economic, ecological and political crisis in the world. As conditions worsen, the need to develop moral intelligence in the general population will become a growing concern.

Multiple Intelligences

Theories of intelligence abound and new ones are introduced regularly. With advances in neuroscience, genetics and technologies, new insights are uncovered on a weekly basis. New conceptions of intelligence and ways of measuring intelligence can also be expected as we search for better ways to find those that have more of it and predict future success at various endeavors.

Intelligence is considered a general unified concept, largely related to cognitive ability, general mental ability to reason, think, understand and remember that draws upon the powers of learning, memory, perception and deciding. It is generally viewed as the property of an individual; however, it has been argued as being distributed (Pea, 1993; Bowers, 1995). Plato, Kant, Leibnitz, Wundt, May and others believed that intelligence includes aspects of knowing and thinking (cognition), valuing and emotion (affection) and volition and ethics (conation) (Johnston, 1994). In the West, intelligence has become what IQ tests measured, which privileges mathematical and verbal ability (Sternberg, 1990). It is increasing being recognized as consisting of various related but semi-independent functions that vary according to innate, inherited and acquired characteristics.

One of the most influential theories of intelligence to emerge in the later part of the twentieth century is Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983). He originally identified seven distinct intelligences: verbal, visual, mathematical, musical, bodily, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. He has since added an eighth, naturalist, and considered other candidates such as social, emotional, existential, spiritual and moral intelligences (1998, 1999).

Of the new types of intelligences explored since the introduction of Gardener's theory, social and emotional intelligences have gained the most attention and are regarded by most as essential components of a holistic education. Social intelligence is the ability to relate to others effectively with friendliness, openness and supportiveness (Riggio, 1986). Emotional intelligence refers "to a feeling and its distinctive thoughts, psychological and biological states, and range of propensities to act" (Goleman, 1995, p. 289) and has five domains: 1) self-awareness, 2) managing emotions, 3) motivating oneself, 4) empathy and 5) handling relationships (Salovey and Mayer, 1990).

Gardener considers social and emotional intelligences as related to his intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences, but feels they go beyond in ways his theory would not support (1999). Gardener's interpersonal intelligence reflects the ability to recognize the intentions, feelings and motivations of others and his intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to understand oneself and use that information to regulate one's own life.

Spiritual intelligence, which addresses meaning, motivation, vision and value, places our actions and lives in meaning-giving contexts and assesses which paths are more meaningful (Emmons, 2000; Zohar, 2000; Zohar & Marshall, 2001). Zohar & Marshall identify twelve qualities or principles of spiritual intelligence: self-awareness, spontaneity, being vision and value led, holism, compassion, celebration of diversity, field independence, humility, tendency to ask why, ability to reframe, positive use of adversity and sense of vocation. Spiritual intelligence includes the capacity for transcendence, heightened consciousness, sanctification, spiritual problem-solving and virtuous behavior (Emmons, 2000).

Although Gardener does not believe spiritual intelligence meet his criteria, he feels an existential intelligence might be a possibility, and it has been referred to by him as a possible ninth intelligence (1999b). Existential intelligence is described as "capturing and pondering the fundamental questions of existence" (Gardener, 1999a, p. 22). Those with existential intelligence, such as the Dalai Lama, could be labeled as wondering, cosmic and metaphysical smart. They ask questions such as who are we and what is our purpose. Existential intelligence meets all but one of Gardener's basic criteria: neurological evidence of its existence. This desire to understand the basic questions of life has been an aspect of human nature throughout recorded history.

The social, emotional, spiritual and existential intelligences discussed above, all are distinct yet related to moral intelligence. Moral intelligence is also not one of Gardner's eight multiple intelligences, as he explains in a chapter entitled "Is there a moral intelligence?" (1999b). He did not seriously consider moral intelligence as a candidate when he developed his original list of intelligences. Gardener regarded his list as morally neutral and value free. Though he felt morality important, even more important than smartness, he did not feel it an intelligence.

However, in this later work, he states that on some criteria the moral domain may qualify as an intelligence, but concludes it does not, partly because its essence as an intelligence has not been established. If there were a moral intelligence, he states that people with it might display the following strengths:

- Ready recognition of issues related to the sanctity of life in its diverse facets

- Facility in mastering traditional symbolic rendering and codification that deal with sacred issues

- Enduring commitment to reflecting on such issues

- Potential for going beyond the conventional approaches to create new forms of processes that regulate the sacrosanct facets of human interactions. (p. 70-71, 1999b)

Gardener argues that the concept of intelligence must be limited and should not include important areas such as "personality, motivation, will, attention, character, creativity and other valued human capacities (2007, p.121). He feels stretching intelligence to include moral behaviors and attitudes creates several problems, one being the cultural specificity, complexity and diversity of good and bad (2007). Though the social, emotional, spiritual and moral domains can be measured with some degree of consistency on inventories and some genetic influence is evidenced as identical twins reared apart share similar traits, yet according to the present evidence and criteria Gardener established for his intelligences, these candidates do not qualify as a separate intelligence.

Moral Intelligence

Though moral intelligence does not qualify as an intelligence using Gardener's criteria, we will explore conceptualizations of it in this paper. As with the emotional, social, spiritual and existential intelligences discussed above, others have found moral intelligence to be a useful construct (Borba, 2001, Lennick and Kiel, 2005). Many believe it is an essential element to individual and collective well-being and progress and a necessary part of a holistic education. Many philosophers also view moral intelligence as a vital and important part of human nature (Boss, 1994). In our current society and educational systems, its importance and necessity grows.

The great majority of U.S. social institutions focusing on civic engagement and morality, such as political and service clubs, community and neighborhood groups and houses worship, have declined significantly, along with social capital, in recent decades (Putnam, 2000). Lack of connections with our spiritual natures and other people leads to superficial relationships, a poverty of feeling for others, limited emotional responses, deceitfulness, theft and inability to concentrate in school (Karen, 2002). Morality and spirituality affect the ability to effectively attach to others, regulate emotion and moods, cognitively process and act responsibly (Stillwell, 2002).

Self-reported anxiety and depression among U.S. youth increase as our connections to our inner selves and others have decreased (Twenge, 2000). Increasingly children and youth are influenced by an aggressive, alluring materialistic consumer culture that dampens moral intelligence. As parents and families increasingly abdicate their responsibility to develop moral character in their children, educators are expected develop their students' moral capacities.

Lennick and Kiel define moral intelligence as "the mental capacity to determine how universal human principles should be applied to our personal values, goals, and actions" (2005, p. 7). Their construct of moral intelligence consists of four competencies related to integrity, three to responsibility, two to forgiveness and one to compassion. The four competencies of integrity are 1) acting consistently with principles, values, and beliefs, 2) telling the truth, 3) standing up for what is right, and 4) keeping promises. Responsibility's three competencies are 1) taking personal responsibility, 2) admitting mistakes and failures, and 3) embracing responsibility for serving others. Forgiveness involves 1) letting go of one's own mistakes and 2) letting go of others' mistakes. Compassion is defined as actively caring about others.

Borba defines moral intelligence as the capacity to understand right from wrong, to have strong ethical convictions and to act on them to behave in the right and honorable way (2001). She

identifies seven virtues children need to develop related to moral intelligence—empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance and fairness.

The Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) Panel on Moral Education defines a moral person as one who respects human dignity, cares about the welfare of others, integrates individual interests and social responsibilities, demonstrates integrity, reflects on moral choices and seeks peaceful resolution of conflict (1988).

These three descriptions have similar items. Lennick and Kiel's four competencies of integrity responsibility compassion and forgiveness tolerance are similar to Borba's virtues of conscience and fairness, self-control and respect, empathy and kindness and tolerance and the ASCD definition of a moral person.

Moral Intelligence as a Part of a Holistic Education

Robert Coles, one of the world's most respect scholars on the inner workings of children, has explored the dimension of morality in several of his works (1986, 1997). His studies suggest that the moral lives of children are very rich and begin developing in infancy as they learn about good and bad, how to behave and be through interactions with others and observing behavior. Our morals are greatly affected by our social environments. In the important and influential early years, that environment is largely the parents and immediate family. As children become socialized and enter schools, more and more of their moral character is open to the influence of peers and society.

As in any aspect of holistic education, the early years with the parents and in the family can have a great impact on cognitive, social, emotional and moral development. Though aspects of each of these faculties are influenced by inherited qualities from genetic endowments, they are shaped, realized and developed through interaction with the environment. In our present society, it seems the moral aspects of child rearing and education are less emphasized than in the past, leaving children less well equipped to deal with the challenges of life and living. Because of its neglect in the early years, schools and educators are often left with the task of compensating for faulty, poor or missing early training. In the absence of moral education and modeling, young people are strongly influenced by the examples they see in the media and among their peers to form their moral frameworks and worldviews.

Education influences both individual and collective moral development. What takes place in the classroom can either encourage or discourage the ability and desire to seek truth and serve the greatest good. Education is a moral endeavor (Goodlad, 1990), as is life. The classroom is saturated with moral meaning (Hansen, 1995). Teachers are to create a moral environment in their classrooms where justice and caring prevail (Tom, 1984). Educational leaders, administrators and teachers are to be models of moral intelligence, exemplifying the virtues they seek to engender in others (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; Lennick & Kiel, 2005).

Though teaching about values and integrity are necessary, they are not sufficient in helping one develop a moral system. Research has shown that instruction alone is ineffective (Colby & Damon, 1992; Damon, 1988; Hartshorne & May, 1928, 1929, 1930; Lickona, 1983). Hartshorne

and May found that many children who knew the right kinds of behavior in hypothetical situations failed to practice this behavior in real-life and that children who went to Sunday school or belonged to the Boy and Girls Scouts were just as dishonest as children who were not exposed to similar ethical instruction (1928, 1929, 1930). A review of research since their landmark studies confirms their basic finding (Lickona, 1976).

Seeing moral lives and having moral values integrated into daily thoughts, feelings and actions is essential. Developing morality is a daily practice that extends throughout a lifetimDamon states,

> Children's morality, therefore, is a product of affective, cognitive, and social forces that converge to create a growing moral awareness. The child begins with some natural emotional reactions to social events; these are supported, refined, and enhanced through social experience. In the course of this social experience, the child actively participated in relations with peers and adults, always observing and interpreting the resulting interactions. From this web of participation, observation, and interpretation, the child develops enduring moral values. (1988, p. 119)

Based on his review of theory and research related to moral education, Damon has several recommendations related to moral education in schools. Moral education must help students reason autonomously about moral problems. The students' decision-making capacities must be fostered through respectful engagement that helps them develop clear and healthy values. Many issues in school offer opportunities to have teachers respectfully engage their students in moral discussions that help them develop moral intelligence. By exposing student to moral exemplars in their communities, moral models and values can be explored through real illustrations and mentors. These activities should inspire students, cause them to assume more responsibility and become more involved in service and moral activities (1988).

Borba offers several ideas that would help develop moral intelligence (2002). She suggests fostering awareness and an emotional vocabulary, enhancing sensitivity to the feelings of others and developing empathy for another's point of view. Teachers can create the context for moral growth, teach virtues to strengthen conscience and guide behavior and foster moral discipline to learn right from wrong. Teachers can model and prioritize self-control and encourage students to self-motivate, deal with temptations and think before acting. Educators show respect by modeling how they value others by treating them in a courteous and considerate way. They can teach respect, enhance respect for authority and emphasize good manners and courtesy in the classroom.

Borba suggests that kindness can be encouraged by demonstrating concern about the welfare and feelings of others through teaching its meaning and value, establishing a zero tolerance for meanness and encouraging and pointing out its positive effect. By teaching students to respect the dignity and rights of all persons, even those whose beliefs and behaviors we may disagree with, they learn tolerance and engender it by instilling an appreciation for diversity, countering stereotypes and not tolerating prejudice. We can teach fairness by treating others fairly, helping them learn to behave fairly and to stand up against unfairness and injustice (2002).

The ASCD recommended that moral education be a powerful unifying and energizing force in the curriculum. They encouraged educators to create social and cultural contexts to support the development of morally mature persons. Moral education needs to include socialization of appropriate conduct, critical thinking and decision-making and educators should ensure that school climate and policies contribute to moral growth. As schools establish and convey clear expectations about their roles as moral educators, educators can give more attention to moral education (1988).

As Mustakavoa-Possardt succinctly and powerfully states:

> Until education focuses on the cultivation of character and the development of a moral sense of identity and moral imperative, until it begins to purposefully emphasize models of authentic moral authority and to foster moral responsibility and agency, until it makes central the cultivation of expanding levels of empathy, progressively embracing the human race and until it is willing to entertain an explicit spiritual conversation about truth and meaning in life, it cannot really fulfil its responsibility to human potential. (2004, p. 266)

Conclusion

Education today is seen largely as an economic activity, not as a moral activity dedicated to enabling individuals and groups transform themselves and their environments in pursuit individual and collective well-being, security and welfare. Education should help develop the capacities that allow individuals to be capable, conscious and conscientious developers of themselves and their communities. Education that fails to address the moral aspects of life and develop moral intelligence to the fullest extent practical, has failed the individual, the society and the environment.

Moral intelligence can be defined as the ability to apply ethical principles to goals, values and actions. It is the ability to know right from wrong and behave ethically. It should be regarded as vital in holistic education along with the more generally accepted cognitive, social and emotional intelligences (Mayer and Salovey, 1993; Goleman, 1995; Bar-On and Parker, 2000; Riggio, 1986) that are essential parts of making a whole, healthy and balanced person.

Developing moral intelligence is a complex, difficult and lifelong process. Education can help foster the integrity, responsibility, forgiveness and compassion identified by Lennick and Kiel, as well as the Borba's virtues of empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance and fairness recommended and the ASCD's moral curriculum of respect, caring, responsibility, integrity, reflection and conflict resolution. A holistic education needs to attend to all of these aspects of moral intelligence, as it is through moral endeavor that human potential and motivation are released and happiness and honor realized.

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