

# School Management and Moral Literacy: A Conceptual Analysis of the Model\*

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze the moral literacy model developed by Tuana; discuss the superiorities and limitations, and constitute the theoretical conditions of a new model by utilizing previous researches and theories asserted about this subject. The model has stated that moral literacy is composed of three main components as ethics sensitivity, ethical reasoning skills and moral imagination, and these components involve at least three components, as well. In this study, it has been claimed that moral sensitivity includes both the cognitive and affective processes, and it has been suggested that a subcomponent about affect should be clearly included. It has been stated that Tuana's characterizing the moral intensity as a subcomponent of ethical sensitivity can be criticized; some researches asserted that moral intensity has relation with moral judgment and moral intention as much as it is related with moral sensitivity, and therefore; moral intensity can be regarded as a surrounding component effecting main components during ethical decision. In the model, it has been stated that handling virtue ethics, which is put forth as a criteria, within the moral judgment is open to criticism, as it is a concept more about behavior and fulfilling the action. It has been suggested that moral imagination, the third component of moral literacy, has a common quality effecting element of this process rather than effecting main components or subcomponents, like moral intensity. It has been determined that Tuana did not clearly state any component related to behavior, and so it has been suggested that moral intention, which is a component about action, can take place as a main component in this model.

## Key Words

Moral, Ethic, Moral Literacy, School Management, Educational Leadership.

Human relationships are of great importance at the schools. Moral actions are at the centre of the instruction of the students and the leadership relations of the school principals (Greenfield, 2004). Therefore, school management and teaching necessitate the highest rate of ethical responsibility, amongst the current professions. Modern views mostly point at the moral and cultural dimensions of school leadership (Çelik 1999; Şişman, 2004).

The school leaders need to have the competence of understanding and commenting on an issue taking

place in the ethical decision process, in order to play the ethical roles that are expected from them. School principals encounter many ethic dilemmas (Greenfield, 1986; Leonard, 2007; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011; Troy, 2009). Ethical dilemma is defined as a situation that requires making a choice between two equal alternatives or having two right answers (Fitch, 2009; Kaigler, 1997). The researches as to determining how the school principals decide in the face of ethical dilemmas are so limited (Troy, 2009). Dempster, Carter, Freakley and Parry (2004) suggested that ethical education is necessary for the school principals. Accordingly, it can be said that school principals' ability to give right decisions in the face of ethical dilemmas is strictly related with moral literacy levels (Walker, Haiyan, & Shuangye, 2007).

Tuana (2007) defined moral literacy as "the skills and knowledge specific to making ethical choices in life are learned capabilities requiring skills in which indi-

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viduals can be more or less competent” (p. 365). Moral literacy is not a naturally-gained process, but it is gained with the effort to develop the right skills (Zdenek & Schochor, 2007). Herman (2007) philosophically defined this concept as the capacity to react and read the main elements of the moral world. In terms of the leadership process, making decisions depended on moral frame in a very complicated environment and motivating these decisions are related with the conceptual and practical capacities of the school leaders (Walker et al., 2007). Based on these definitions, it can be said that moral literacy reflects the competencies to know, understand, comment and evaluate the main elements in the ethical decision process, in order to make right decisions. These competencies can be gained and developed via some programs (Bennett, 1986). To do this, the moral literacy concept, components and the relations of these components need to be known. Tuana (2007) has made the most systematic study about the moral literacy concept. The aim of this study is to analyze the model suggested by the author, to discuss its strengths and weaknesses, and to form the theoretical conditions of a new model by making use of the suggested theories and studies about the concept.

### Theoretical Framework

Tuana (2007) stated that moral literacy is consisted of three main components as ethics sensitivity, ethical reasoning skills and moral imagination, and these components include at least three subcomponents. According to Tuana, ethics sensitivity is a key component of moral literacy. Moral sensitivity is defined as the skill to recognize how moral issues and decisions under some circumstances affect the welfare of others (Lovett & Jordan, 2010; Mahmood & Ali, 2011). Jones (1991) defines a moral issue as actions that are freely carried out by someone and that can be beneficial or harmful for the others. Erwin (1997) defines moral sensitivity as the skill to interpret if a situation is ethical or not, to conceive the direction of the action and to determine how people get affected from these actions. In addition, most of the moral sensitivity studies have focused on the affective skills necessary for the awareness of dilemmas. Therefore, moral sensitivity includes both cognitive and affective processes (Ekşi, 2006; Morton, Worthley, Testerman, & Mahoney, 2006).

Tuana (2007) determined the second subcomponent of ethics sensitivity as the awareness of moral

intensity. Jones (1991) developed an issue-continuent model and determined that model affects the components in the ethical judgment process, via the research results (Barnett, 2001; May & Pauli, 2002; Mencl & May, 2009; Paolillo & Vitell, 2002). According to this information, it can be stated that moral intensity affects not only moral sensitivity but also the other components in the ethical judgment process; and therefore, defining moral intensity as a subcomponent is open to criticism.

Tuana (2007) claimed the three different abilities of ethical reasoning skills. The author stated that ethical theories are consisted of three frameworks as deontological or duty-based ethical thinking, utilitarian or consequentialist and virtue ethics; and a fourth ethical theory as caring ethics has been put forward in the last years. Deontological ethics focuses not only on the results of the action, but also on the kind of the action, and whether the moral principles and rules are followed or not. Teleological ethics focuses on the result of an issue or event. According to this approach, the right action is the action that provides the greatest happiness for most people. Caring ethics has regarded social responsibility as a central element of ethics and caused some concepts like relation orientation, respect, trust to be discussed. Virtue ethics focuses on a moral subject as a whole. Virtue ethics emphasizes on what kind of a person we should be. A virtuous person gains practical wisdom (Arslan, 1998; Aydın, 2006; Bhuyan, 2007; Cevizci, 2008; Haynes, 2002; Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007; Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2003).

Moral reasoning is defined as the evaluation process of what is right and what is wrong (Erwin, 1997; Jones, 1991). The prominent ethical judgment models in organizational literature have been developed based on the cognitive moral development model of Kohlberg (Seymen & Bolat, 2007). Kohlberg's model emphasized the cognitive side of moral judgment and dealt with how the individuals think in certain decision making processes, rather than their behavior (Trevino, 1986). Kohlberg claimed that people give moral decisions in accordance with their cognitive development levels and developed an instrument to measure this claim (Jones, 1991; Weber, 1991).

Four ethical approaches have been the ground in Tuana's model. Educational scientists have put forth four conceptual ethical frameworks as justice, critique, caring and profession, stemming from various views (Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2003). Ethical theories provide a basis for determining the morally right

preferences, however these theories are not enough to carry out the decisions; implementing the decisions necessitates another skill (Tuana, 2007). According to this, it can be stated that the author has included virtue ethics into the ethical theories, which provide a basis to the ethical reasoning skills, in terms of applying. However, virtue ethics is about an action or behavior as a self (Bakioğlu & Silay, 2011; Ekşi, 2003; Gaudine & Thorne, 2001).

The last component of moral literacy is moral imagination. Johnson (1993) defined moral imagination as “an ability to imaginatively discern various possibilities for acting within a given situation and to envision the potential help and harm that are likely to result from a given situation” (Johnson, p. 202 cited in Godwin, 2008; Moberg & Seabright, 2000). Moral imagination is the process of using imagination in order to give more effective moral decisions (Sommervold, 2010).

Many philosophers and psychologists have regarded moral imagination as an integrative part of the moral thought and action, claimed the limitedness of traditional approaches focused on rights and tasks, and stated that imagination will be helpful in the solution of many moral problems. They have emphasized that imagination has a moral side when it is used for someone else's benefit (Samuelson, 2007). Moral imagination integrates the creative thinking and ethical meticulousness of decision makers, beyond the ethical frames based on rules (McVea, 2009).

Moral imagination is the ability to discover and evaluate the possibilities, and it helps to avoid a certain situation and think about the moral possibilities more creatively. Without moral imagination, one gets stuck in a particular situation (Werhane, 2002). Moral imagination necessitates the sensitivity as to the moral side of the decisions, taking opinion and thinking the alternatives rather than traditions (Caldwell & Moberg, 2007).

The unethical behaviors at the organizations might be connected with the failure in the moral imagination (Godwin, 2008; Vidaver-Cohen, 1997). Moral imagination includes the ability to be aware of the moral results of one's actions in a situation and re-designing a situation and creating moral alternatives in accordance with the existing conditions. Therefore, moral imagination includes skills such as moral awareness, moral reasoning and creativity (Godwin, 2008). Moral judgment is closely rela-

ted with moral imagination. Moral imagination is simply a psychological competence which enables individuals to look into the various possibilities in their lives (Pardales, 2002). Moberg and Seabright (2000) claimed that the philosophical approach to the moral imagination is complicated and it doesn't allow measuring. They also attempted to integrate the moral imagination with Rest's model, which composes moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral intention and behavior. The authors stated that moral imagination is related with each element in Rest's model.

Greenfield (1986), who made one of the first studies about the moral imagination at educational environments, has regarded this concept as a cornerstone of effective school management. Maxcy and Caldas (1988) divided moral imagination into two categories as the imagination about remembering and imagination about inspiration, creativity, innovation and problem solving. They have claimed that the second one of these is more useful for creativity at workplaces via the development and change imaginations of future situations and conditions. Tuana (2007) described moral imagination as an independent component of the ethical decision process. In the studies made in the organizational environments, it has been emphasized that moral imagination has a relation with moral sensitivity, judgment and intention; and has an inclusive feature affecting the other components, rather than being an independent element.

## Conclusion

Tuana (2007) suggested a model stating that moral literacy is consisted of three main components and each main component is consisted of three sub-components. She determined the first component as ethics sensitivity. Rest's ethical decision model is the mostly used one in the models developed about ethical decision process in organizational environments and in the studies. Rest's ethical decision process model is consisted of moral sensitivity/awareness, moral judgment, moral intention and the fulfillment of the intention (character/behavior). Each component is conceptually different and the success in each grade doesn't necessitate the successes in the other grades (Ekşi, 2006; Gaudine & Thorne, 2001; Jones, 1991; May & Pauli, 2002; Mencl & May, 2009; Trevino, 1992). The first component in both Rest's model and Tuana's model is moral sensitivity. Rest (1984) defines moral sensi-

vity as the awareness of doing things which concern others' expectations, well-being and interests (cited in Erwin, 1997). However, When Tuana's model is taken into consideration, it can be stated that the emotion dimension lacks among subcomponents of ethics sensitivity. Erwin (1997) defines moral sensitivity as the skill to interpret whether a situation is ethical or not, to consider the direction of the action and to determine how people will get affected from these actions. Therefore moral sensitivity consists of both the cognitive and affective processes (Ekşi, 2006; Morton et al., 2006).

It's a questionable fact that Tuana (2007) has given place to moral intensity in ethical sensitivity component. Jones (1991) claimed a model stating that moral intensity is related with moral judgment and moral intention, as much as with sensitivity; and this model has been affirmed in the studies. So, it can be said that moral intensity is not a main or subcomponent in ethical decision process, but an inclusive component, affecting the main components.

In parallel with Rest's model, Tuana (2007) considered moral judgment as the second component of moral literacy. Also, she has suggested four ethical theories as assessment criteria in the ethical decision process. She stated that these four theories, which are deontology, teleology, caring and virtue ethics, have an integrated feature, supporting each other; and an instruction formed with suitable questions will help the decision. Educational scientists have proposed the similar opinions (Shapiro & Hassinger, 2007; Stefkovich & Shapiro, 2003). However, handling virtue ethics under moral judgment, which Tuana claimed as a criteria, is open to criticism, as virtue ethics is a concept mostly about behavior and fulfillment of the action (Bakioğlu & Sılay, 2011; Ekşi, 2003; Morton et al., 2006).

Moral imagination, the third main component in Tuana's model (2007), is an element which doesn't take place in organizational ethical decision making models in general and in Rest's model in particular. Tuana explained this model in a more applicable way and listed the imagination competencies. However, in the literature, it has been claimed that imagination is both a creative and evaluative process, and it is connected with moral sensitivity and moral judgment; and this relation is supported in the studies. Therefore, it can be said that, like moral intensity, moral imagination has a general feature which affects the components of the process, rather than the main or subcomponent of this process. Besides, more studies about the

role of moral imagination in ethical decision process are required in the organizations. Because as mentioned, this concept has risen from philosophy and there are difficulties in applying in practice and evaluating (Moberg & Seabright, 2000).

It's conspicuous that Tuana (2007) didn't clearly mention any component about action in her model. However, in Rest's model moral intention has a feature about action. Ethical intention is about deciding what to do when a moral judgment is made. According to this, depending on Rest's model, "the ability to determine the direction and content of the action" component, which is about moral intention, can be suggested as a main component for Tuana's model.

In this study, Tuana's (2007) conceptualization of moral literacy have been tried to be analyzed with the help of basic knowledge of the psychology related to the issue, the theories which are developed in accordance with the organizational environments, and the results of the studies. Still, the issue is open to development. For instance, the matters like which element should contain the role of the emotions and with which content it should be handled need more clearance. Emotion is the mutual concept of moral sensitivity, moral intensity, moral imagination and caring ethics as an ethical theory. In organizations, cognitive development is indicated as a critical element in ethical decision process; or the moral evaluation theories (deontology, teleology) are included instead of this. In addition, a model giving place to both elements has been suggested (Herndon, 1996; Jones, 1991).

This study has referred the individual competency domains about moral literacy. In the models that affect the ethical decision process, there have been studies as to the explanation of the individual and organizational variables and how these variables affect the ethical decision (Barnett, 2001; Erwin, 1997; Jones, 1991; Loe, Ferrell, & Mansfield, 2000; Trevino, 1986). It is suggested that, studies as to explaining the relation of moral literacy components with individual and organizational variables are required in the organizational environments.

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