

# LEVELS OF MORAL INTELLIGIBILITY

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## *Abstract*

*The present paper starts from the criticism of the intellectualist model of morality which we currently operate with in educational sciences. The author considers that five levels of moral intelligibility can be discriminated: logical understanding, ability, valuing, empathy, and intuition. What this model brings new is that, beside the cognitive, behavioural, and axiological assimilation of socially constituted norms, the care for the Other Human, the empathy, and moral creativity (as against the plurality of situations, the novelty of experiences and of human contexts) are considered performing and indicators of moral maturity.*

1. One of the engagements of the intellectualist paradigm which we have been attached to through our professional education is the sense and signification we attribute to the verb *to understand*. What it designates for us is the *logical* comprehension. That is why we have the conviction that, in moral education, we have to act according to the model of intellectual education.

As a rule, the starting point is represented by the two levels of morality – *consciousness and moral conduct*. According to logics analogous to intellectual education, the forming of moral consciousness would suppose: the forming of moral *representations*, based on the representations the moral *notions* are formed, the moral *rules* will then be learnt based on the notions, and on the basis of the rules the moral problems will be solved, i.e. the exercise of moral *judgement* will be encouraged.

Then, somehow separately, the delicate problem of moral *convictions and attitudes*, that is of those force ideas that motivate / trigger behaviour is approached and, finally, it is supposed that all these will coagulate at the level of the *traits of character*. *Moral conduct* founded on the judgements and convictions formed in this way and strengthened through practice (habits and skills) is – in this model – the indicator that moral education has reached its aim.

But morality presents the following paradox: the simple understanding of a rule does not imply moral conduct in the same way as conduct in accordance with the exigency of a moral rule is not always the indicator that the rule is actually comprehensively assimilated at the level of moral consciousness.

The crook, the hypocrite, the opportunist, the conformist offer the behavioural appearance of rule observance and, more, they have acquired the rule at the logical level. Let us also add the fact that an indoctrinated or manipulated individual acts based on the most powerful convictions of which one does not even think they might be ethically doubtful, or that they would not be really one's own.

Under these circumstances we have considered that there is enough reason to responsibly propose for discussion the model we currently operate with in moral education theory.

We have identified the following historical paradigms of moral education:

- ancient paradigm - that promoted *a pedagogy of wondering, of the secret (Socrates, Plato, Jesus)*;
- medieval paradigm and pre-Kant paradigm – that promoted *a pedagogy of fear (apud .J.Delumeau, 1997)*;
- illuminist paradigm, of Kantian inspiration – that promoted *a pedagogy of rule and rational order*;
- 20th century paradigm – that promoted *an intellectualist pedagogy (J.Piaget, L.Kohlberg, D.R.Krathwolh)*;

The pedagogical paradigm that we, 20<sup>th</sup> Century-trained teachers, are attached to includes not only the conviction that there exists an intrinsic value of childhood that needs to be discovered and protected, but at the same time the conviction that *the problems typical to the educational field are solved especially through the intellectual formation of the student*.

Born as “an art of teaching everything to everybody”, didactics - that is studied by the students training for a teaching career – is a technology of modeling the intellect. No wonder that school has declined any interest for infantile affectivity leaving caring for that to the extra-scholastic media, mainly to the family. In its turn, the family has also undergone mutations during the last century. It has become a place where its members meet sporadically, more in order to silently watch TV programs than to communicate. Under these circumstances, the education of affectivity has been taken over by the mass-media that is by the entertainment experts, while the school experts in forming the young generations have become merely experts in the single dimensional modeling of the intellect.

2. The model we propose starts from the following premises:

- “the golden rule” of any education, the moral one consequently included, is achieving the accession of the educated one to the meaning of the transmitted message, that is *comprehension*;

- the aim of education is to form *capabilities*; all the levels of intelligibility that we have described are capabilities;

- we preferred the term of *moral understanding* instead of the term of *conviction* – also applicable to the person who acts under the impact of indoctrination and manipulation;

- the essence of moral personality is to be found at the level of “*inner goods*”, which is why we preferred the term of “*skill*” which suggests a capability rooted in the aptitudes of the subject, fecundated by cognitive acquisitions and strengthened through practice, instead of the term *behavior* (actually void of axiological significance); moreover, the term chosen has an axiological significance in that it designates the capability of doing a certain thing *well*;

- we have kept in mind the fact that, if there are more types of intelligence which mediate specific performances, then the existence of more forms of intelligibility is logically coherent with the premises we have started from.

- adolescence is a period of “*psychosocial moratory*” during which, on the ground of *identity instability*, the adolescent easily adheres to models, is permeable to ideologies, and practices that adaptation ability which is devotion (according to Erikson, a maturing, thus liable to excesses, tendency). Because of that *the adolescent is exposed to the risk of manipulation and indoctrination* that comes from the non-formal and informal medium. Under these circumstances, *the moral education that school must give the adolescent needs to be focused on the forming of complex capabilities of moral understanding – able to support the adolescent in their development of a critical attitude towards the offer of values coming from the information society. Education must strengthen those filters or inner goods which could allow the young person to make their own informed choices, instead of allowing to be chosen.*

We have distinguished the following meanings of moral intelligibility: *logical understanding, skillfulness, valuing, empathy, intuition.*

In the table below we have illustrated the conclusions we have reached while decoding the five levels of moral comprehension. *Once formed, they should found moral maturity and the end of adolescence as an individual’s moral state.* We consider it stands to reason that different subjects can attain different performances and different levels of moral maturity according to their inclinations and the degree of turning them to account through education.

It is not by chance that the example chosen is the very one of learning the moral rules: the proposed illustration will show that neither the

logical understanding, nor the ability to act, or even the valuing, will exhaust the moral understanding of a rule.

*Table no.1 Levels of moral intelligibility*

No.	Levels of intelligibility	<i>Illustration of lack of performance / performance of the level in rule acquiring</i>		<i>Methods of formation (expl.)</i>
		How lack of performance shows oneself	Performance	
1.	<b>Logical understanding</b> :	- Subject does not know the rule - knows the rule statement but does not understand the significance of a term (e.g of the term expressing the value the rule refers to) - knows the rule but the sphere of the concepts one operates with is reduced to several facts in one's experience (operates with empirical concepts).	<i>Subject logically understands the rule</i>	Explanation, Lecturing Conversation Problem identification Debate Advice Stimulus (juridical education supports the formation of this type of intelligibility)
2.	<b>Skillfulness</b>	- Subject logically understands the rule but <i>does not know what to do</i> in a critical situation (is shy, does not dare act, does not know who to address, how to word their standpoint, a.s.o.)	<i>Subject has the social capability of acting according to the rule, of experimenting the value that the rule states.</i>	Exercise Example Role play Setting up novel situations Creating „Just Communities” in schools
3.	<b>Valuing</b>	- Subject logically understands the rule, has social ability to act, but is not <i>affectively attached</i> to it (under riskful circumstances prefers not to get involved; uses the rule for personal interests, demanding from others to observe it while oneself not doing that).	<i>Subject appreciates the value that the rule states and on this basis is aware of (understands) the importance of observing it.</i>	- reflective exercise; - case analysis; -problem identification; - psychodrama (use of feeling as instrument for knowledge ) - debate, - narration, (education through art and religion supports the formation of this type of intelligibility)

4.	<b>Empathy</b>	<b>Knows the rule, is affectively attached to it, has the ability to act but cannot understand the situation of a person having broken the rule in an extreme situation.</b>	<i>Is not fanatic in applying the rule, takes situations, contexts into consideration.</i>	reflective exercise; narrative approach of morality associated with the empathetic exercise; role play; psychodrama; ethical dilemma; exercise of sympathyetic interest; insight; active listening; practising of myself type communication; (education through art).
5.	<b>Intuition</b>	<b>Knows the moral rules, is affectively attached to them, has the ability to act, shows empathetic capabilities, but does not know how to act in extreme situations one gets into and where, "no rules given, they should probably be invented".</b>	<i>Shows moral creativity</i>	Socrates type strategies, setting up 'insight' type of learning situations, problem identification, discovery, exercise of analogical reasoning on narrative background; ethical dilemma (education through art).

### **Conclusions**

The scheme of the moral education process we are currently operating with and which supposes the forming of, particularly, the logical understanding (forming of representations, notions, acquiring of rules, practising of moral judgements), forming of convictions (meaning practising the ability of valuing within hierarchies *already established* by the society), forming of behaviour (in accordance with the *already existing* rules and values) is, in our opinion, no longer satisfactory.

Firstly, this scheme is not open to the axiological plurality of post-modern world. Secondly, in a dynamic world as ours, the generations we are currently educating will face situations that are unpredictable by the educating generation, situations for which neither the yesterday solutions, nor the today ones will probably be valid any longer. They will have to be literally ‘invented’. The role of tradition is not that of offering solutions for the future but of offering *the matrix through which the ‘invention’ becomes possible*.

Thirdly, the scheme we are currently operating with does not contain empathy and intuition. If the former allows the subject to find out about the plurality of human situations and to constantly preserve within one’s behaviour the essence of morals – *care for the Other Human* - the latter allows them to discover and *to create morality* in accordance with the novelty of experiences and contexts.

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