Journal of Computational Science &Engineering 37 (2018) 979-983

Available at http://www.asocse.org ISSN 1710-4068

The psychological aspect: a study of implementing moral theories into real life

Bella Dong

Beijing World Youth Academy, Beijing 100102, China

Abstract: **Moral development has been studied from various perspectives, and the fundamental structure is based on Piaget and Kohlberg's theories. The purpose of this research is to identify and classify different stages according to Kohlberg's theory, and moral is the sense of making the right choice or distinguishing right from wrong. The first phase of this project includes face-to-face interviews with 7th and 10th graders and their identity is anonymous. The final phase involves identifying and analyzing their stages regarding to their answers. By discovering their stages and contrasting results from 7th and 10th graders, I tend to focus on their differences in their interviews and answers. This will allow for more understanding towards moral developments in different stages, and may direct more and offer more experiences for further study on moral development for the researcher.**

Keywords: Moral development; Lawrence Kohlberg; Piaget, Real-life application; Interviews

Received 28 July 2018, Revised 2 September 2018, Accepted 5 September 2018

*Corresponding Author: Ralf Mayenberger, Email: 15801216332@163.com

1. Introduction

This project is essentially practicing theories in real life context, and there are three main purposes of this research project. Firstly, discover connectivity between real life context and theories. Theories are basically knowledge, and learning how to implement real life examples with theories will make the theories more practical and comprehensive. Secondly, providing examples for differences between different stages of moral development. Using and analyzing answers from the interviewees to prove the credibility of the fundamental theories and deepen the understanding of moral development beyond theories. Thirdly, show the differences in moral development between different graders. Such evidences offer an opportunity to contrast two grades in moral development and enable us to discover the key sentences of their thinking.

There are two most fundamental theories related to the moral developments and one is composed by Piaget and the other one is created based on Piaget's theory by Lawrence Kohlberg.

According to Piaget, there are two stages involved. The first stage, called heteronomous, is between age 5 to 10, and children in this age have the tendency to obey their superior and authority. They intend to see the orders and restrictions from their authority, such as parents, as god-power, and obey it in order to avoid negative consequences or punishments. At the end of middle childhood, which is between 10 or 11 years old, their moral is redefined and called as "morality of cooperation" . Morality of cooperation can be seen as maturity, and be refereed as able to see the whole context and understand others by considering the situation in others' shoes. People or teenagers will not see rules as unbreakable, but negotiable and socially agreed. Also, disciplines are meant to serve people's lives and making decisions shouldn't be purely base on negative consequences.

Furthermore, Lawrence Kohlberg's theories are constructed upon Piaget's theories as foundations. Regarding to Kohlberg's theories, there are three levels (pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional) and two stages included in each level. There are four criteria involved in each stage. 1) stages, "structured wholes", in other terms, a state of a person in a complete stage is obvious instead of ambiguous, 2) stages are "invariant sequence", which represents that the sequence has orders and can only be improved forwardly, and 3) stages are "hierarchical integrations", which means the next stage can only be reached under the accomplishment of passing the preceded stage [1]. Following is elaboration on information of Kohlberg's theories and stages. Pre-conventional level is the beginning of the moral development, and it represents that people make moral judgments according to the external rules made by their authority. Another feature is that people make determinations on right or wrong and good or bad regarding to their individual needs, and such consequence is caused by inadequacy of experience of different roles. There are two stages included: the punishment and obedience orientation (stage 1) and instrumental-relativist orientation (stage 2). Stage 1 represents that the goodness and badness is determined by avoiding the physical negative consequence, and the determination is not made according to the actual or deeper meanings. Stage 2 suggests that all actions exist upon the principle of satisfying one's needs and fairness created by exchanges, and those exchanges only present in the physical form. It's more important to satisfy one's own needs and occasionally consider about others. For instance, "you ate my cake and I'll eat yours", which doesn't consist with justice, ethics or values.

Conventional level is the middle level and will mostly focus on throughout this research project. In this level, maintaining the expectations of the group, which is valuable for the person, such as, community or family, is the prerequisite. The purpose of maintaining is not for social order, but purely showing

2018@ The American Computational Science Society. All rights reserved.

conformity to rules and identifying with the group or community[2]. There are two stages involved: the interpersonal concordance (refer as "good boy - nice girl"; stage 3) and the law and order orientation (stage 4). Stage 3 refers that the distinguishing of good or bad of an action is based on whether this action will please or get approval from people around, including the authority. Also, obey the stereotype images and social conventions. Stage 4 is representing an orientation of thinking that maintenance of social order is essential, and a right behavior includes taking responsibility, presenting respect for authority and following social orders and laws. As for social orders, there are variety of forms, such as, family, community, country, the world and so on[3].

Post-conventional level is the highest and the last level in moral development, and there are rare people who can reach the last stage. In this level, moral values are recognized apart from the orders from authority, concerning negative consequence, loyalty, meeting others expectations or obeying the laws and the rules. There are two stages consisted with this level: the social-contract, legalistic orientation (stage 5), and the universal-ethical- principle orientation (stage 6). In stage 5, rightness and good behavior is based on the general population's rights and agreed upon by the whole community. Population general rights take important stand and the rules should be made with the consensus of the whole society. The law is not fixed, but is alternative in terms of rational and ethical considerations from the society. In stage 6, rightness is defined according to the self-made or self-chosen principles, and those moral principles are made upon the benefits of the society, such as, the rights of human being and the respect and equality of human. No only creating those principles, the person is also willing to follow these rules, supporting, and arguing for those principles.

There is a well-known dilemma practiced and used in many studies and researches about moral development. There was a European lady who was dying of a rare and particular cancer, which can only be treated with a special and recently developed drug. The only cure is invented by a pharmacist, who is selling this cure at ten times higher than the original cost to make. The price was $4,000. The lady's husband, Heinz, gathered $2,000 by borrowing around, and the pharmacist rejected Heinz's request. Heinz tried to negotiate with the pharmacist and told him that his wife is in danger, and the pharmacist said: "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." Heinz tried all the legal means, and Heinz is desperate thinking about breaking in to pharmacist's lab and steal the drug to save his beloved wife[4].

Heinz's dilemma shows the conflict between his wife's life and law, and the moral reasoning and answer for such contradiction can state the moral stage. Following is a brief analysis of the moral stages and the moral reasoning for answers.

Stage 1, Heinz should not steal the drug because he will then become a prisoner, and prisoners are bad people.

Stage 2, Heinz should not steal the drug because he will have a miserable life in jail, and no one likes tragic ending.

Stage 3, Heinz should not steal the drug because stealing is bad and no one likes criminals. Although he shouldn't steal the drug, his kindness and urge to save his wife is understandable.

Stage 4, Heinz should not steal the drug because stealing is against the law.

Stage 5, Heinz should not steal the drug because the druggist is the person who invented the drug, and that give the full right of selling the drug.

Stage 6, Heinz should not steal the drug because it is for sell, and people are obligating to pay in the same price for it. Also, there are probably other people needing this drug, stealing it means taking away their only hope. That isn't fair, because everyone deserves the right to live equally.

2. Method

The procedures of interview are listed below[5]:

Start the interview by asking the interviewee to sign an agreement paper (shown in appendix 1), indicating the full right of the interviewer to publish and analyze his/her answers as a part of the research product.

Make the agreement that his/her information and answers will be completely confidentially protected, and private information such as, name, gender won't be considered and the real name will be replaced by a number or totally anonymous.

Start the audio recording and provide 60 seconds for the interviewee to read the passage/dilemma (shown in appendix 2).

Ask questions prepared in advance, and take notes while the interviewee makes responses to those question. The notes are part of the evidence too (partly notes are shown in appendix 3).

Repeat step 3-4 for each dilemma, and there are three dilemmas in total (shown in appendix 2).

Throughout the investigation stage of this research project, which is doing interviews with different students, I have two concerns. Firstly, with regard to the situation that I'm familiar with their names, gender and appearance as an interviewer, how can I eliminate all different biases that the audience may consider as shows preferences. Secondly, consider the fact that interviews will be audio-recorded, how can I convince the interviewee that the confidentiality of the answers and how can I get their agreement for publishing and analyzing their answers.

Firstly, the solution for that concern is try to disguise all personal information, and prevent information influence the credibility of the research project. In order to achieve this, following actions were taken.

Use numbers to identify the people's answers instead of using their names or other personal information. Prevent writing their gender and other personal information.

2018@ The American Computational Science Society. All rights reserved.

The idea of eliminating personal background and the way that interviewees may relate the setting of the dilemma to their own experiences, which may influence the reliability of their answers.

Secondly, since the verbal agreements isn't credible, letting them sign the agreement sheets, with information, such as, confidentiality and the procedure of the research, is essential. Therefore, the participants were asked to sign the participant consent sheet (see appendix 2) before starting the interview.

3. Analyzing the data

Figure 1: following is a column Figure showing the numbers of students, who are in different grades (grade 7 and grade 10) in different moral development states. Two grade groups are shown in different colors, number of people in every stage in shown, and the differences in number can be seen under the comparison of columns.

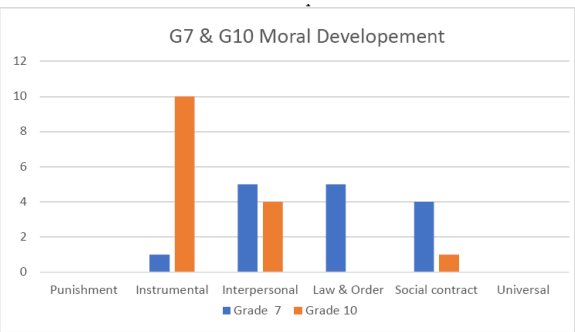

Figure 1. The column figure comparing Grade 7 and Grade10's results.

Figure 2: the pie chart displaying Grade 7's results by seeing 15 students in Grade 7 as a whole, and contrasting number of students in different moral development states. Each state is marked and can be identified with a different color, and the Figure can be seen below.

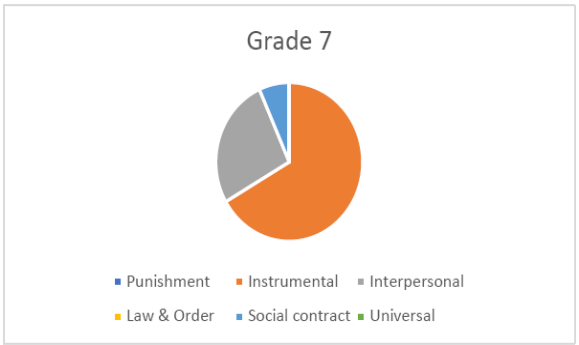

Figure 2. The pie chart showing the number of students in different states from Grade7.

Figure 3: the Figure is showing the number of students in different moral states from 10th grade, and the outcome for each state can be seen from the pie chart. The result and the comparison can be seen below.

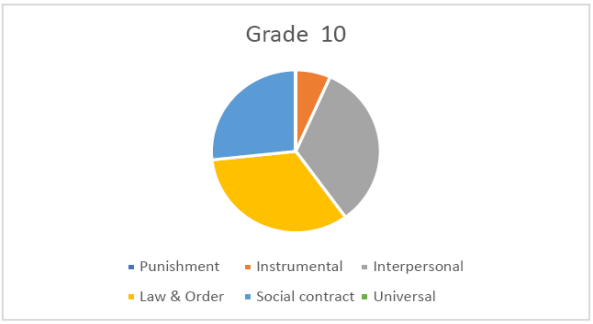

Figure 3. the pie chart showing the number of students in different states from Grade 10.

After analyzing the summarizing the data, one trend is found between student's answers and dilemmas. The detailed table can be referred in appendix 3 and the trend is that there is a significant difference between first, third dilemmas and second dilemma. After profound analyze, the difference between first, third dilemmas and the second dilemma is that second dilemma can be seen as real-life dilemma. Three dilemmas can be referred to in appendix 1. For instance, the difference can see in background setting, dilemma 1 suggest the background information as a doctor with poor family, dilemma 2 suggest "yourself" with a mother and a sibling, dilemma 3 represents the information of a prisoner and a pregnant wife. The background setting for dilemma 2 is relatively personal, and it's easier for interviewee to link to themselves and fit their own personal information to the dilemma. Since my interviewee are students from 7th grade and 10th grade (about 11 years old and 15 years old), a lot of them have a mother and probably a relatively close person. It understandable for them to put themselves in to the frame of second dilemma. Also, the case situations are extremely different. For instance, dilemma 1 indicates the situation of doing illegal operation for the crime group, dilemma 2 claimed the circumstance of taking care of the sibling or going to the camp, and dilemma 3 shows the case of helping pregnant wife to escape from the prison or not. Situations such as dilemma 1 and dilemma 3 are hardly encountered by people and such unusual cases are unlikely to be experienced by the interviewees. Since their occupations are students and they are unable to have a marriage in the age of 11 or 15. They are unlikely to experience dilemmas[6] such as, first and third dilemmas, in their previous life experience; however, it is much more likely for them to experience the similar dilemma such as, go out to have fun while your mother disapproves your idea. After experience similar situation, people may are likely to fit themselves in to the characters showed in the second dilemma[7]. After comparing those three dilemmas, the conclusion can be drawing that the first and the third are mostly imaginary while the second dilemma is based on their real life, which interviewee have tendency to put their personal image showing part of the table, which can be seen in appendix 3.

2018@ The American Computational Science Society. All rights reserved.

In this situation, the phenomena of people overestimate themselves and make judgment that are higher than their actual level or average level is called, Illusory Superiority. There are vary of causes; for instance, incomplete judgements, overly praised by others, mental illness that disable the fully and complete evaluation for themselves. One important feature of this effect is that people conclude other's actions or results to external traits, guiding and other environmental factors; however, "but when it comes to us, we think it's all about our intention, our effort, our desire, our agency-we think we sort of float above all these kinds of constraints" [8]. In this situation, people tend to overestimate their own ability in imaginary situations, such as, the first and the third dilemma, and they will fit their personal experiences and feelings into the second dilemma, which is relatively closer to the real life.

This table is detailed table includes elaborated and processed data. From the table, the first column represents the overall stage of moral development of the interviewee, which is represented by a number instead of the real name. There are quotes selected for each dilemma from interviewee's answers and those quotes are selected in order to show the relativity between the answer and their moral stage. Analyzing the quote is essentially construct the connection between the quote selected the the state that the interviewee takes place for that single dilemma. There are three results of stages concluded for each interviewee, and the average stage will be overall stage, which takes place in the first row. The following example is the fifth interviewee in Grade 10, and the complete table can be seen in appendix 3. Also, this is a classic example showing the issue addressed in last para Figure, which is the difference of state between the first, third and the second dilemmas. The overall state is Law and Order, which is the average result of two Law and Order and one Interpersonal, and the second dilemma shows relatively decrease in moral development contrasting to the first.

Table 1. Third dilemma according the moral development orders

Stage	Interviewee number	Dilemma number	Quotes	Analyzing the quote	State for each dilemma
Law & Order	5	D1	"It's a tough call， but I will try to save her. I will turn myself in later"	Try to do nice things when obeying the law, and law is unbreakable for the interviewee.	Law and Order
		D2	"I will stay at home, but extremely moody, and I'm upset because my mother breaks the promises"	Promises can be seen as laws and rules in this situation and refuse to break them shows conformity.	Interpersonal
		D3	"I won't save her, because law is more important and I won't want to stay in order to be a better person in jail".	For the interviewee, law is more important, and shows willingness to maintain the social order in the dilemma.	Law and order.

4. Conclusion

During the research project, the moral development between Grade 7 students and Grade 10 students are measured and analyzed in order to put Moral Development Theory of Lawrence Kohlberg into real life practices. Throughout the research project, there are three major parts: investigation, practicing and measuring (doing interviews with 7th grade and 10th grade students), and analyzing and drawing conclusions. During the practices and measuring part, major jobs can be divided into three parts: 1, writing the dilemmas, and writing questions for the dilemmas, 2, evaluating dilemmas, write down the criteria and outline the main information for each moral development stage. 3, real-life practice by doing 30 interviews in total with both grades. Furthermore, the third step is analyzing the results and drawing conclusions. The Figures 1-3 and tables are shown and created in order to summarize the answers.

Indeed, there is increase in moral development between 7th grade and 10th grade. Referring to Figure 1, the contrast between number of students in different moral levels are shown and the comparisons are obvious. For instance, there are 10 7th graders are in the level of Instrumental while only 1 10th graders is in the level, the level of Instrumental is in pre-conventional stage, which is relatively low on the scale of moral development. Another example is compare the number of students from two grades in a

2018@ The American Computational Science Society. All rights reserved.

relatively common level of moral development, which is Law and Order. There are 7 students take place of Law and order from 10th grade while none of the student from 7th grade is in the stage. From the comparison, the result we can drew by analyzing is there is a trend of increase in moral development from 7th grade and 10th grade.

Additionally, another comparison can be seen from grade 2 and grade 3. From those two Figures, you can see that the majority of moral development level for grade 7 is centralized in instrumental stage while there is the no trend or pattern for the moral development level for grade 10 students.

Thus, there is significant increase in moral between 7th grade and 10th grade, people tend to preform differently in imaginary dilemma and experienced or suitable dilemma by connecting the picture to their life. However, question such as, how many levels did students increased from 7th grade to 10th grade, what are the cause of those changes, why 10th grade student perform verily than the centralized 7th graders, are the future directions. Those questions are tightly bound to the research project, and will be continuously investigated and analyzed in the future.

Reference

[1] L. Kohlberg, R.H. Hersh. Theory Into Practice, 16 (1977) 53-59.
[2] Shelton F, Brownhill S. Neues Handbuch Hochschullehre, (2013).
[3] Naito, Takashi. The Encyclopedia of Cross-Cultural Psychology, (2013).
[4] G. Knowles. Supporting Inclusive Practice, (2006) 145.
[5] K.E. Brown. Roeper Review, 3 (1980) 8-10.
[6] http://listverse.com/2007/10/21/top-10-moral-dilemmas/.
[7] S. Metselaar, S.M. Van, Widdershoven G. American Journal of Bioethics, 17 (2017) 21-23.
[8] Ethicalpsychology.com.

2018@ The American Computational Science Society. All rights reserved.