REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MORAL MAN: IMPACT AND PERSPECTIVES FOR EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

REFLEXÕES SOBRE A CONSTRUÇÃO DO HOMEM MORAL: IMPACTO E PERSPECTIVAS PARA A PSICOLOGIA DA EDUCAÇÃO

REFLEXIONES SOBRE LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL HOMBRE MORAL: IMPACTO Y PERSPECTIVAS PARA LA PSICOLOGÍA DE LA EDUCACIÓN

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to engage in a discussion about moral development and human relationships within the school environment. Through a constructivist perspective that conceives the human being as a social being that develops through interaction, this work adopts a methodological approach based on a bibliographic investigation of classical and contemporary sources that contribute to exploring answers regarding conflicts within the school context. It perceives the school as a space for social interaction, recognizing that, beyond knowledge acquisition, the institution plays a fundamental role in the comprehensive formation of the individual. Therefore, the family and the school bear distinct and complementary responsibilities in the education process and the child's moral development.


RESUMO: Este artigo tem como proposta traçar uma discussão acerca do desenvolvimento moral e as relações humanas no ambiente escolar. Por um viés construtivista que concebe o ser humano como um ser social que se desenvolve na interação, este trabalho traz como caminho metodológico uma investigação bibliográfica de clássicos e contemporâneos que contribuem pela busca de respostas acerca dos conflitos que emergem no âmbito escolar, concebendo a escola como espaço de convivência, reconhecendo que para além da aquisição de conhecimento a instituição tem um papel fundamental na formação integral do indivíduo. Assim sendo, a família e a escola possuem responsabilidades distintas e complementares na função de educar e no desenvolvimento moral da criança.


RESUMEN: Este artículo tiene como objetivo esbozar una discusión sobre el desarrollo moral y las relaciones humanas en el ambiente escolar. A través de un sesgo constructivista que concibe al ser humano como un ser social que se desarrolla en la interacción, este trabajo utiliza como camino metodológico una investigación bibliográfica de clásicos y contemporáneos que contribuyen a la búsqueda de respuestas acerca de los conflictos que emergen en el ámbito escolar, concibiendo la escuela como espacio vital, reconociendo que además de adquirir conocimientos, la institución tiene un papel fundamental en la formación integral del individuo. Por tanto, la familia y la escuela tienen responsabilidades distintas y complementarias en el papel educativo y en el desarrollo moral del niño.

Introduction

In the constructivist approach, individuals are not born programmed and ready to live in society, unlike other species such as bees, birds, and insects, where we can observe patterns of social behavior indicating instinctive organization. Intelligence, emotions, and socialization are constructed through interactions with the environment. According to Menin et al. (2017, p. 3, our translation) "There are various ways to conceive of morality, such as: respect for the rules that define, within a culture, what is good or bad, right or wrong; forms of judgment about actions; moral feelings."

Puig (1998) emphasizes that "when the need arises to decide how one must adapt to the environment, how one wants to live, how one wants to resolve vital conflicts, we are faced with the germ of morality [...]" (PUIG, 1998, p. 25, our translation). For La Taille (2010), often the words "ethics" and "morality" are identified in academic circles as synonymous. However, in the author's view, unlike Puig, the term "ethics" is related to the "good life," the search for meaning in life, the decision about the kind of life one wants to lead, whereas the word "morality" is guided by duties toward others or oneself.

When a human being is seen as unfinished and not pre-programmed, the question arises again about which needs are essential to complete the formation process. It is necessary to decide what needs to be learned, how to understand it, why to do so, and what meaning it will give to one's existence.

Puig (1998, p. 27, our translation) suggests that "moral education is associated with teaching each individual and different human groups to live within a community." But then, is moral education simply a matter of implanting something from the outside into children? Or is it something individuals already carry within themselves from birth and only need to be reminded of?

For a better understanding of the topic, the studies of Jean Piaget (1896-1980), are recalled here, which made a significant contribution to moral development through his research presented in the work "Moral Judgement of the Child" (1932/1994). In this work, he saw an excellent opportunity to observe how individuals develop respect for rules through the game of management, and he pointed out that morality consists of a system of rules, with the essence of all character lying in the respect that individuals acquire for this system.

Piaget (1994) conducted a study on moral judgment, explicitly stating that his research focus was not on ethical conduct and feelings but moral judgment. This is a necessary but not sufficient condition to explain moral actions. In this work, Piaget explores the following...
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aspects: 1) The practice of rules: How individuals adapt to regulations and how they observe them concerning their age and mental development; 2) The awareness individuals establish regarding these rules, namely, what kind of obligation results for them based on age, as there is a progressive mastery of rules. For a better understanding, Piaget (1994), examines the construction of childhood morality by considering two essentially opposing tendencies in an individual's development: heteronomy and autonomy.

Heteronomy (duty-based morality) is characterized by external authority, unilateral respect, and coercion. The individual's moral conscience stems from egocentric behavior and relationships characterized by intimidation, where rules imposed by authority figures are seen as sacred and unchangeable. These rules are externally set and do not pass through the individual's consciousness; they are followed out of fear of losing affection or punishment.

On the other hand, autonomy (morally good) is marked by self-governance and mutual respect. It arises from cooperative relationships where egocentrism is largely overcome. The individual relies on their reasoning to guide them morally. The basis of their decisions lies within themselves. Their behavior is not influenced by external laws or provisions but by internal reflection grounded in motives and reasons. It represents a moment of self-legislation where they understand, rework, and comprehend the social utility of rules.

According to Piaget (1994), education based on authoritarianism and coercive means reinforces heteronomy. Conversely, in autonomy, provided the necessary conditions for its development, the child becomes aware of the rules and is capable of creating norms among peers, deciding which ones to follow, as they have participated in their construction and have seen the benefits that a particular model can have for their group of peers. They are concerned with the principles that lead them to obey these rules.

From a practical standpoint, Piaget (1994), in his book "Moral Judgement of the Child," identifies four successive stages through which the child passes in their development of rule-based practice. The first stage of rule practice is purely motor and individual. The child acts according to their desires and motor habits. They engage in individual play, establishing more or less ritualized schemes. Therefore, it is still premature to discuss collective rules at this stage.

In the second stage, around the ages of two to five, which can be termed egocentric, the child receives externally codified rules. However, even while imitating these examples from adults, the child still plays alone, without seeking partners, or even when playing with others, they do not have the concern to win or unify different ways of playing. Therefore, even when playing together, children play individually. They can all win at the same time without concern...
for rule codification.

A third stage emerges around the age of seven or eight, referred to by Piaget as "growing cooperation," each player seeks to defeat their opponents, leading to a need for mutual control and rule unification. However, there is still a considerable variety in terms of the game's general rules.

Around the ages of eleven to twelve, a fourth stage begins, which is the codification of rules. Detailed regulations regulate games, and the rule code is known throughout the community with few variations. As for consciousness regarding the rules, which is how a child perceives and interprets these rules for themselves, Piaget (1994) sought to understand whether this consciousness is influenced by adult instructions and divided it into three tendencies: anomy, heteronomy, and autonomy.

At birth, the baby is in a state of anomy, meaning a complete absence of rules since they do not yet perceive themselves, differentiate from others, or understand themselves as members of a community with rules. However, according to Piaget, everything pressures the child to impose the notion of regularity. Certain physical events (alternating day and night changes in scenery during walks) repeat themselves to give rise to a sense of legality or facilitate the development of motor prediction schemes. In this phase, parents impose on the baby several obligations from other regularities: meals, sleep, hygiene, etc.

Although the child has been immersed in a rule-based environment from infancy, they still cannot discern what comes from within themselves and what results from external pressures. Gradually, the individual differentiates and separates from the object, slowly discovering the surrounding reality. During this process, various representations are constructed, allowing for the symbolic elaboration of the concept of oneself, with this concept being formed in the presence of others.

Around the ages of two to five, the pre-operational child already possesses psychic representations that enable them to identify themselves and others. However, there are still no actions based on concern for others, as no cognitive structures will allow the ability to decenter, coordinate perspectives, or demonstrate reversibility (PIAGET, 1994). At this point, in the realm of morality, we speak of the emergence of a heteronomous tendency (being governed by others, a duty-based character) because the child begins to perceive that some actions can or cannot be performed, subjecting themselves to external laws and the will of others.

Rules are considered sacred in this case, and she understands that she must obey her parents, teachers, and authority figures. She refuses to change the game's rules and believes that
any modification, even if accepted by everyone, would constitute a fault. Control is entirely external. The child fears that disobedience could result in the loss of affection, love, care, and the figure of authority, diminishing themselves in the eyes of that adult. According to Piaget (1994), this period is characterized by the fear of punishment, criticism, and the loss of care. The sense of obligation only appears when the child accepts impositions from people they respect.

The rule is considered a law imposed by mutual consent, whose respect is obligatory and can be modified if there is consensus within the group. Egocentric thinking is gradually shaped by adult coercion.

Regarding moral rules, the child submits more or less entirely to prescribed rules, but these remain external to the individual's consciousness, not truly transforming their behavior and causing this respect to be the result not of a mindset shaped by cooperation among equals but instead by adult coercion (PIAGET, 1994).

In the third stage (the second half of emerging cooperation), around the age of ten, on average, the awareness of the rule transforms: heteronomy gives way to autonomy (self-governance, morality of the good). The game's laws no longer appear sacred, as an imposition by adults that must be respected above all else, but rather as the result of a group decision. The child ceases to consider the rules as eternal. This phase demonstrates significant progress in the development of morality because until then, the child's actions were governed by adults and seen as unquestionable and sacred rules.

At this point, Piaget (1994) highlights the emergence of autonomy. The children begin to govern themselves; they already possess cognitive abilities to coordinate perspectives and different points of view and become aware of the social self. The rule is seen as a progressive and autonomous construction. Thus, as can be observed up to this point, moral development results from cognitive and affective structures.

Through experiences and social interactions, the individual regulates themselves, and social coexistence is essential for the development of an autonomous being who reflects on and constructs rules for harmonious social interaction among its members. Within this coexistence, problem situations arise, leading to the need to regulate them through regulations.

Piaget (1994) also leads us to reflect on autonomy, which is only achieved through dialogical social relations, the relationship between the self and the other, cooperation, and collectivity. Piaget (1994) reports that there are two types of essential social ties for understanding moral development: coercive relations and cooperative relations.
The former is characterized by unilateral respect for the figure of authority and mutual respect and exchange between equal individuals. In mutual respect, only cooperation can socialize individuals, as coercion reinforces childish egocentrism and does not establish truly reciprocal contact with adults, keeping the child closed within themselves. The rules remain external, not truly transforming their behavior.

Vinha and Tognetta (2009) assert that moral development is only successful when all the control, which was once governed by external forces and authority figures, transitions to internal regulation, a self-control that no longer relies on rules and laws dictated by adults. From an adult perspective, there is internal reflection, always considering others. This is known as autonomous morality.

The authors (VINHA; TOGNETTA, 2009, p. 528-529, our translation) explain:

It is important not to confuse autonomy with individualism or freedom to do as one pleases because, in independence, it is necessary to coordinate the different relevant factors to decide how to act best for everyone involved, considering the principle of equity when making decisions. This means considering differences, rights, feelings, and perspectives of oneself and those of others. Autonomous individuals follow moral rules that emerge from internal feelings that compel them to consider others beyond themselves, promoting reciprocity.

Thus, obedience to rules is no longer in the hands of others or authority figures, as in heteronomous morality, but rather within individuals who can self-regulate. Puig (1998) also emphasizes the importance of developing an autonomous, conscious, accessible, and responsible individual capable of navigating personal and collective dimensions in a balanced manner, seeking viable ways of life that are personally desirable and collectively just and free. This entails the development of moral capacities that enable each individual to confront value conflicts stemming from their relationships within the community.

When the phenomenon of bullying arises within the school environment, it is crucial to reflect on the individuals involved, as they are individuals in the process of personal and collective formation who rely on the developed capacity for self-regulation to address conflicts arising from internal dialogue. They should be capable of grounding their actions in collective values such as justice, benevolence, equity, and human dignity, among others.

Puig (1998) agrees with Piaget, stating that the autonomy in which self-regulation develops comes from cooperative relationships, through which egocentrism is overcome, and the individual attends to their reason for moral guidance, grounded in universal values. Puig goes even further in his studies on morality, advocating for a space in the psyche occupied by...
character. He argues that during human development, there is the construction of a moral personality, emphasizing that moral education should contribute to forming this personality, serving as a task in shaping one's identity through successive reflection and action based on the circumstances encountered in daily life.

Therefore, according to Puig (1998), the construction of a moral personality requires personal, social, and cultural elaboration, with the process of building an honest character having both psychological and pedagogical aspects, not merely consisting of the acquisition of values or socialization. Puig (1998) outlines essential elements for the construction of a moral personality:

a) The construction of moral personality requires a dual adaptation process to society and oneself, given that basic social norms are indispensable;
b) The second stage is characterized by transmitting cultural elements and desirable normative horizons for communities, such as justice, freedom, equality, and solidarity;
c) Moral personality is not fixed solely in a procedural framework but demands daily personal capacities for judgment and understanding;
d) Self-regulation that will enable autonomous handling of situations requiring value conflicts, hence providing a space for rationality and dialogue;
e) The construction of moral personality is the construction of one's biography as a dynamic crystallization of values, differentiation, and honest creativity.

Puig (1998) states that individuals become moral when reflecting on their interpersonal behaviors when they contemplate conflictual situations in social interactions and consider which values will guide the type of life they lead. In this way, they acquire self-regulation, the ability to assess and regulate physical and mental activities according to themselves.

It is also important to reference the moral psychology of Kohlberg (1971), one of the most significant researchers in the field of moral education, who, initially building on Piaget's studies, argues, as described by Biaggio (2006), that every human being can progress through the six universal stages to reach moral maturity, grouped into three levels: pre-conventional (stages 1 and 2), conventional (stages 3 and 4), and post-conventional (stages 5 and 6).

At the pre-conventional level, according to Kohlberg (1971), as described by Biaggio (2006), individuals have not yet come to understand and respect moral norms and shared
expectations: rules are external to the Self. Judgment of an action is based on consequences rather than intentions.

At the conventional level, there is an understanding that moral norms are necessary for life in society. There is an internalization of ethical principles. The Self identifies with or internalizes the rules and expectations of others, especially authorities. Actions are taken in the name of friendship or respect for the law.

At the post-conventional level, individuals understand and accept the rules but are guided by moral principles that underpin them. Therefore, they act based on the principle of conscience rather than convention. At this level, there is an awareness that laws can be unjust. They differentiate the Self from the rules and expectations of others and define moral values by their principles, which characterizes the categorical imperative.

For Kohlberg (1971), individuals only reach moral maturity when they understand that justice differs from the law and that laws can be changed when they are morally wrong. Furthermore, the author emphasizes that this development cannot be passive; it must be based on an education that promotes a transformative and just society intrinsic to citizenship formation, where the Kantian categorical imperative guides people's actions.

Therefore, at the end of the genesis of morality, the moral plane would be occupied by an autonomous character where the individual bases their actions on principles of justice and equality, with human dignity above all, even if such sociomoral values come into conflict with matters of a personal nature (LA TAILLE, 2010).

**Moral Education: The Role of School in Moral Personality Development**

According to Puig (1998), moral consciousness is one element that shapes honest personality. Consciousness would be the ability to perceive one's own physical and mental activity, a "knowing that one knows," an empowerment to regulate and evaluate – according to oneself – physical and mental activities.

For Puig (1998, p. 78, our translation), "being moral presupposes disentangling what seems personally right to us in controversial situations and feeling obliged by oneself to do so independently of surrounding viewpoints and pressures." Therefore, autonomous consciousness should acquire the power to determine moral criteria.

Segundo Puig (1998, p. 87, our translation), "autonomous moral consciousness refers to a moral regulator that has evolved throughout human phylogeny and that each construct for
themselves during their development." Thus, consciousness becomes a necessary higher-level regulator for complex beings in complex situations, and moral consciousness, in turn, is composed of procedural tools for moral judgment, understanding, and self-regulation, which will be defined below.

Puig (1998, p. 103, our translation) states, "Moral judgment is the faculty that allows rational opinions to be formed about what should be." This expresses a universal form of moral reflection. It is a moral judgment that enables the formation of rational opinions about what should be, about what is judged to be a reality, just as understanding implies a specific problem to be perceived and an understanding of something through reason. Therefore, it is necessary for understanding to take place dialogically, involving rational dialogue with all viewpoints regarding the problematic reality with its peculiarities and exceptions.

Moral judgment and understanding are reflective and cognitive, whereas self-regulation is related to an individual's effort to direct their conduct. It is a self-discipline that requires a high level of coherence between moral judgment and moral action, thus forming moral character. In this way, moral judgment initiates an internal dialogue, a dialogical exercise with oneself, enabling a critical understanding of oneself and reality. Its final step is self-assessment, which allows the individual to find satisfaction within themselves to achieve a higher level of coherence.

Therefore, only activities involving dialogical and reflective practices will enable the individual to self-regulate, have self-governance, and analyze their conduct and the values on which it is based. Moreover, these values should be grounded in universalizable principles that consider human beings as an end and never as a means.

Piaget (1974) questions whether the traditional school method can develop active and autonomous reasoning in children and young people. He emphasizes that education is an indivisible whole. Thus, how can independent personalities be formed in the moral domain if children have not developed logical thinking and are limited to passive learning through imposition?

Colombani (2023) also points out that traditional education has strengthened itself by validating heteronomous behaviors, as it does not encourage reflection and the expression of differences. On the contrary, the school often positions itself as a punitive institution and medicalizes those who do not conform to pre-established standards. According to Illich (1975), because it is an institution that dictates truths, concentrates power hegemonically, and brings elements of superiority in the form of managers and teachers, it reduces autonomy when it
should be fostering its development.

Vinha et al. (2017) emphasize that the school's commitment should ensure the development of a set of competencies in students, such as the ability to argue with ethical positioning, empathy, dialogue, conflict resolution, and cooperation. Menin et al. (2017, p. 5, our translation) state, "If values are to be collectively constructed rather than imposed, dialogue among teachers, students, and other members of the school is the condition for this construction and can be planned and anticipated in different spaces and moments of school life."

Teachers should embrace this comprehensive development of the individual and the overall educational process, empowering students to take on the role of protagonists in their learning. They should propose practices that lead students to reflect on conflict situations positively through dialogue and cooperation.

Puig et al. (2000) emphasize that schools operate with a hidden curriculum that pervades their relationships, often unconsciously promoting individualism, competitiveness, aggressiveness, sexism, and discrimination. The school is responsible for developing young people capable of reflecting on what it means to live democratically. But how can one teach if there is no correlation with experience? One only learns to live in a democratic society by experiencing it and encountering conflicts that lead to moments of internal reflection.

The more emphasis is placed on heteronomy; the more rigid laws will be needed; more cameras and increasingly severe control mechanisms will be necessary because we will act based on a morality of obedience rather than in favor of self-legislation.

In this scenario, education needs to be on a much higher level than merely the transmission of information. What is required is a transformative education focused on citizenship, a democratic education that enables the knowledge-building process by the students themselves and, therefore, allows for the construction of moral BEINGS.

### The Construction of Moral Man: From the Family Universe to the School Universe

Since the 1960s, transformations in the family and society—such as individualism, the primacy of consumption, the pursuit of eternal youth, and immediate happiness—have altered the relationship between parents and children and, consequently, the way of educating (SAYÃO, 2013)

The process of teaching children through coexistence with others, the transmission of history, traditions, family values and customs, the cultivation of virtues and family morals, and the teaching of principles dear to the group,
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among many other attributes of parents, are losing ground (SAYÃO, 2013, p. 32, our translation).

Dessen and Polonia (2007) agree with these changes and add that today, families have different arrangements, leading to transformations in family relationships, the roles played by their members, values, and individual development processes.

They further state that institutions, such as schools and families, are immersed in a particular group's historical, material, and cultural conditions. Both institutions must reflect on their social function, tasks, and roles in contemporary society.

One of their most important tasks, although challenging to implement, is to prepare both students and teachers, as well as parents, to live in and overcome the challenges in a world of rapid changes and interpersonal conflicts, contributing to the individual’s developmental process (DESSER; POLONIA, 2007, p. 25, our translation).

Therefore, family and school are fundamental institutions in the evolutionary process of individuals, sharing and modifying their ways of acting according to the expectations of the environment, particularly in the political-pedagogical context (DESSER; POLONIA, 2007).

The ongoing debate in this context, particularly concerning education in values, revolves around the roles of the school and the family. According to Sayão (2013), the school asserts that the family is not fulfilling its role, failing to provide education and set limits.

Sayão (2013) argues that it is the family's role to transmit to the younger generation the traditions, habits, and customs of a small group from which they originate, a group associated with a larger one, and that family culture is never static: one family always joins another, enriching the civilizations in this process. The world is no longer uniform. The characteristics of each family group have changed, and children go to school with very different behaviors, leading schools to face a diversity they did not see before.

The school's role is to educate these children for public life. Learning is for a better understanding of the world. But today, knowledge is only seen in utilitarian terms: "The knowledge we acquire should serve to secure a good job, earn money, and consume" (SAYÃO, 2013, p. 373, our translation). Dessen and Polonia (2007) observe that it is essential to implement policies that ensure the connection between family and school so that children have the opportunity to experience and expand their repertoire as learners and develop as individuals.

Vinha et al. (2017) also argue that schools and families are responsible institutions for the formal education of human beings; however, they have distinct characteristics. Primary socialization, provided by the family, begins from a child's birth and goes through their
interactions with other community members, from which they learn right from wrong. In secondary socialization, which takes place in public spaces such as schools, the child brings their family values, which are transformed into socially desirable values, and they learn democratic values through diversity.

When considering the school, contemporary educational society has a dichotomous view between the rational and the emotional, with the school's concern to prioritize the cognitive aspect often outweighing the affective element. La Taille (2010), argues that self-representations with positive value are the basis for moral feelings and the sense of moral obligation and that morality lies precisely in preserving these values, making the term "value" central to understanding affectivity.

Let's start by summarizing what we have established, from a psychological perspective, for the ethical plane: the pursuit of a good life implies the search for a meaningful life, and a life that makes sense must necessarily involve the "expansion of oneself," which is expressed through the plan and maintenance of self-representations with positive value (LA TAILLE, 2010, p. 113, our translation).

Contrary to common understanding, schools have never been exempt from transmitting values. They carry a hidden curriculum, often unintentionally (PUIG et al., 2000), disseminating habits and values – often sexist – of competition and solidarity.

Final considerations

The facts discussed in this text highlight the importance of care in delving into moral development and human relationships in the school environment. Constructivism recognizes affectation as the realm where connections can be realized positively and holistically.

If there are still doubts about the importance of the school's role in this comprehensive education, one should question: "What is meant by education?" "What kind of education is desired for children?" "What kind of citizens do we want to nurture?" "Are we fragmenting the development of the individual, focusing solely on intellectual aspects?" "Is it possible for learning to occur in an atmosphere of violence and disrespect?" "What types of interpersonal problems do schools face?" "How are school-related violence incidents understood?" "How is school violence portrayed in the mainstream media?"

Therefore, if education is solely concerned with knowledge acquisition, it will reinforce an individualistic identity in which human values are irrelevant in the face of society's expectations for content-focused preparatory schooling for college entrance exams.
Piaget, in 1974, already emphasized in his writings the concept of holistic education:

Asserting the human right to education assumes a much weightier responsibility than ensuring each person's ability to read, write, and calculate. It means, in essence, guaranteeing the full development of every child's mental functions and the acquisition of knowledge, as well as the moral values that correspond to the exercise of these functions, leading to their adaptation to contemporary social life (PIAGET, 1974, p. 40, our translation).

The school must embrace this comprehensive education and the entire educational process, recognizing its role and responsibility in shaping the individual's personality. It should empower students to take on a proactive role in their learning and propose practices encouraging them to reflect on conflict situations through dialogue and cooperation positively. In this way, it is concluded that moral education is a function of the family, the school, and society.

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