

A Probe into the Role of Educators in Moral and Ethical Education

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Abstract: This paper explores the role of educators in moral and ethical education. Historically, educators have always recognized the importance of moral education, emphasizing the great responsibility of educators in promoting students' moral development and moral decision-making. Through a comprehensive literature review, the study analyzes the dual roles of educators as ethical role models and rule-makers and enforcers. The focused research of Narinasamy et al., and Campbell, is carefully and critically analyzed in this paper to understand how educators' own behavior and classroom rules affect students' moral development. The analysis reveals the significant influence that educators have on shaping students' moral perspectives and the overall moral climate of the educational environment. In addition, the paper explores the impact of multicultural backgrounds and educators' personal values on their role in moral education, and recommendations for future research also highlight the need to address outstanding questions about cultural influences and educators' personal values. The findings highlight the important role of educators in moral education and suggest directions for further research to improve the effectiveness of ethical teaching practices.

Keywords: Moral and ethical education, Educator' role, Teacher influence.

1. Introduction

The concept of education as a moral endeavor has a rich historical lineage, with Lao Tzu, Confucius, Plato and others providing compelling arguments and evidence supporting the significance of moral education. In contemporary society, the role of educators in moral and ethical education is increasingly acknowledged. Moral and ethical education in the classroom is gaining importance among politicians and educators [1]. Given that educators hold a position of considerable influence in the lives of their students, they become central figures in the development of moral valences and ethical principles. As the social landscape continues to evolve, the advantages of moral and ethical education are widely well known, leading to an increasing public demand for schools to impart these values more directly and efficiently [2] [3], creating new opportunities and challenges for educators.

The primary objective of this paper is to explore the role that educators play in moral and ethical education. Specifically, it aims to probe the responsibility that educators have in fostering moral development and ethical decision-making in their students. This research carries significant implications for the development of educational practice and ethics policy, as understanding the role that a teacher assumes as an ethical educator can better capture the essence of teaching ethics [4]. To

achieve this, the paper will provide a literature review of influential research on the theme of the educator's role in moral education, critically analyse and clarify the key studies, give recommendations for future research and make a conclusion.

2. Literature Review

The literature on moral and ethical education is rich and diverse, reflecting a growing interest in moral education among academics, educators, parents and the general public. Consequently, the role and responsibility of educators in moral and ethical education as a key issue has also been continuously defined and discussed. This section briefly identifies two key and selected sources in two areas: educators as role models and educators as rule makers and enforcers in moral and ethical education. These studies have produced an effective aid to my understanding of what role educators can play in moral and ethical education.

A common theme in much of the existing literature is the importance of educators as moral role models in moral and ethical education. This perspective is emphasized by Narinasamy et al. in their study *Teacher as Moral Model - Are We Caring Enough?* [5]. They argue that educators serve as moral role models by demonstrating caring and ethical behaviours, highlighting the significance of caring, empathy, and positive teacher-student relationships in moral education [5]. By observing the case of a teacher named Bing in a school in Malaysia, the researchers confirmed the positive impact of teachers as role models on students' moral development. Using educators as role models to shape students' development is considered as an important approach to fostering moral ethics [5]. Educators are encouraged to be aware of the important roles they play, cultivate caring and communicative relationships with their students and understand the significance of creating an environment that is conducive to moral growth [5].

Another impactful aspect is Campbell's study on the ethical role of teachers [4]. This study delves into conceptual and empirical issues related to the moral and ethical underpinnings of teaching practice, reflecting on the ethical roles of teachers in the formal classroom and in informal daily life [4]. Through the authors' study of two classes in a primary school in Canada, one identified roles of teachers in the classroom are that of moral and ethical rule makers and enforcers. These rules may not always be overt and might be developed for ease of administration or student safety. However, these hidden ethical principles can serve as moral messages, indicating to students the importance of fairness, honesty, kindness, and mutual respect [4]. One teacher interviewed by Campbell claimed that it was her responsibility to build and enforce these rules in each classroom. Although different teachers have different approaches to setting and enforcing rules, they take on this role in order to teach students more effectively about ethics and create an equitable and friendly classroom environment [4].

3. Critical Analysis

Narinasamy et al. and Campbell's work significantly influenced my research of the role educators play in moral and ethical education. It became obvious that educators hold a central position in shaping students' moral values and contribute to the overall ethical and moral climate of the school. Education is already a huge work imbued with moral values [1], there is no longer any doubt about the debate about whether teachers should teach ethics or not, and this has laid a positive foundation for this research.

3.1. Educators as Moral Models

In Narinasamy et al.'s study, the objective was clear, namely to explore the concept of the teacher's role as a moral education role model, providing valuable insights into this role of the teacher and the

meaning of classroom care [5]. The core of this study was a seven-month case analysis in which the main participant was a Malaysian teacher named Bing, along with four students who were involved to provide feedback on how Bing was perceived in the minds of the students. The case study approach has the advantage of allowing an in-depth exploration of the teacher as an ethical role model, providing a realistic and comprehensive understanding of events and teacher-student relationships in the classroom [6], as well as providing valuable insights into the application of ethical caring in real-world educational settings. In the study, the authors used interpretive paradigm to analyse Bing's experiences and perspectives in the school setting, focusing on Bing's own approach as a role model in moral education and its impact on students' moral development, facilitating a deeper understanding from a participant's perspective.

However, the study is not without limitations. While Bing's case contributes rich real-life experiences, it lacks universality as Bing's experiences are situated within specific cultural, educational and social contexts, which may limit the eventual wider applicability of its findings. Lack of representativeness is also a drawback, as Bing is a unique individual and the authors also state that "she is different from other teachers", making it unique and not representative of the entire group. Moreover, potential biases and subjective views of the involved members in the study is also a shortcoming. For instance, the researchers deliberately selected four students to give their feedback on Bing, it may reflect the researcher's subjectivity. These four students and Bing may have been influenced by their own subjective perceptions as well.

The researchers' adherence to ethical guidelines can be seen in their pre-study preparations, where they sought the consent of the head teacher, the teachers involved, and the parents of the students prior to the commencement of the case observations, as well as letters of approval from two authoritative organizations, which safeguarded the right to informed consent of these participants. The researchers were also very respectful of Bing's schedule, prioritizing the personal time of the participants and ensuring the personal freedom of the research participants. The transcription of all interviews and transcripts and the repeated checking of the obtained data with the participants also demonstrated the honesty and objectivity of the researchers and their commitment to the research results, which is in line with professional ethics. However, the study had gaps in ethical considerations related to the feelings of the students involved. Including students' consent was not sought before the study, recording in class may invade students' privacy, having a 30-minute interview with each student may make them stressful. These deficiencies in ethical considerations elevate the potential risks of research [7].

3.2. Educators as Moral Rule-Maker and Enforcer

Campbell et al.'s study aimed to explore the moral and ethical roles of teachers in the educational setting, fostering deeper thought on teaching ethics in classroom [8]. This paper employs qualitative research, specifically using life history and participant observation methods to examine two different Grade 2 classes in a culturally and ethnically diverse school in Canada, providing valuable and authentic examples. Due to the complexity of moral and ethical aspects in education, issues in this area cannot be resolved alone through theory. Empirical observation and exploration are necessary to enable researchers to delve into and clearly present the details of classroom dynamics as teachers become different roles. The personal experiences of two teachers, Tatiana and Farideh, offer rich insights into how teachers' role in moral education emerges from empirical investigations of classroom interactions. Recognizing the diversity of moral and ethical education, the researcher applied the theoretical lens of social constructionism, highlighting the impact of philosophical concepts on moral and ethical education and the complexities of the roles assumed by educators in influencing students.

In terms of ethical considerations, the researchers bend themselves to acknowledged, understood, and respected the diversity of participants' ethical perspectives. They made efforts not to change justice with their own subjective ideas when confronted with complex moral and ethical concepts arising from the different roles of teachers in teaching ethics. Nonetheless, the individual subjective perceptions of the researchers and participants cannot be ignored. While the authors recognize this, specific measures to reduce researcher bias and subjectivity are not discussed, which may affect the validity and transparency of the findings. Such issues can affect the authentic experience of the participants, negatively impacting their rights and interests, violating ethical considerations, as well as diminishing the study's credibility.

It is worth noting that although this study made several conclusions about the roles teachers can take on in moral education through numerous real-life examples, the conclusion that had the greatest impact on me is the one addressing 'the teacher as a moral rule-maker and enforcer in the educational process'. Therefore, this analysis will primarily focus on this conclusion. The study underlines the critical position of teachers in moral rule-making and enforcement, asserting that the existence and enforcement of rules are crucial for conveying moral messages to students. Although teachers share a belief in similar moral principles, there are variations in the actual practice of this role and attitudes towards student engagement across teachers, affecting the effectiveness of the rules and the moral development of students. While this viewpoint is robust and supported by real cases and researchers' analyses of classroom data, some gaps and contradictions are evident. For example, Tatiana stated that ethical rules existed in her classroom, but the researcher never heard these rules directly mentioned or quoted in the actual classroom. This may affect students' understanding of moral rules, leading to disagreements due to individual subjectivity and independence. Refinement could still be made in this area. Furthermore, Farideh stated that after setting moral rules, she prefers to let students solve their problems on their own. This approach may be considered insufficiently caring in moral education. Caring is particularly important in moral education. In addition to teaching ability, qualities such as a teacher's sense of caring and trust are generally desirable to students [9] [10] [11]. As Arthur [12] points out, students perceive their ethical and moral stance through the genuine caring of the teacher during studying process. Lack of caring may diminish the positive impact of teachers when they assume the role of rule makers and enforcers in ethical education, influencing students' trust and compliance with ethical rules.

4. Suggestions for Next Steps

By analysing the above research on the role of educators in moral and ethical education, 'the educator as a role model in moral and ethical education' and 'the educator as a rule maker and enforcer in moral and ethical education' have been critically explored. But as Connell [13] suggests, the concept of a good teacher is constantly evolving and proves nearly impossible to measure directly. In view of the complexity and universality of moral and ethical education, the discussion around the role of teachers in moral education is still relatively underserved. Lots of key questions have not been adequately answered, which means that the pressing need for further research.

4.1. The Influence of Multicultural Background

In the contemporary society, the swift pace of globalization and the continuous integration of different cultures provide educators with challenging multicultural contexts and the variations in the role of educators across different cultural settings remain an issue that still has some cognitive gaps. Existing evidence indicates that every child's thinking patterns evolve through self-generated, changed and defined in interaction with the environment [14]. Consequently, educators must not merely impart knowledge in a rigid manner in one mode, but must support this environmentally based "self-

generation", which means that the role of the educator in moral education has to be intercultural. This question can be addressed with a fieldwork approach, where specific differences in the ethical roles of educators in diverse cultures can be systematically collected through observations, interviews, and surveys.

Peru is a valid example where differences in the role of educators in moral education in different cultures can be studied in depth due to it is a typical culturally diverse country. The Peruvian Ministry of Culture's Database of Indigenous Civilizations recognized in 2017 that there are at least 55 indigenous peoples in the country [15]. Such a social context undoubtedly requires an intercultural dimension to the moral education of Peruvian students. In Peru, students from mainstream hegemonic cultural social background may tend to view their culture as the absolute truth and hold prejudices against the cultures of other groups [16]. Therefore, the issue of multiculturalism should be included in the classroom and discussed from an ethical point of view organized by educators, with the primary aim is to help students understand the existing between groups and realize that empathy and respect should be maintained when facing these differences. In this process, educators may be able to act as an intermediary and guide in moral education for students from mainstream cultural backgrounds, helping them to understand cultural diversity and guiding them to make the right moral choices. For other students from non-mainstream and disadvantaged cultural backgrounds, educators may transform into motivators and supporters of moral education, promoting a more democratic, equal, and inclusive moral education.

Despite the benefits of such a research process, there are challenges. Researchers must be sensitive to cultural bias because if each cultural background cannot be treated fairly and equitably in the research process, the robustness of researchers' claims will be reduced, and the research results produced will be affected by subjectivity. Recruiting researchers with expertise in different cultural backgrounds to form diverse research teams may help to address this challenge [17]. Additionally, it is also a difficulty to thoroughly consider the ethical privacy of all people involved in the research, and researchers must maintain ethical standards at all times to protect the well-being and privacy of participants.

4.2. The Influence of Educator's Values

Beyond the issues that may arise from external environmental factors, the internal factors related to educators themselves should not be overlooked. Hence, further exploration is needed into the impact of educators' personal values and beliefs on the roles they assume in moral education. As noted in the studies by Narinasamy et al. and Campbell referenced in the literature review, educators can be substantial influences on students' moral education by serving as moral role models and as rule makers and enforcers. Quality teachers are individuals whose pedagogy is rooted in values and beliefs fostering caring, positive teacher-student relationships built on trust and upheld by high standards of professional ethics [18]. For educators, their personal values and beliefs shape their own understanding of ethical standards and indirectly influence their approach to moral education and their role responsibilities in moral education.

In order to find new evidence that can address this question, identifying representative examples is the first and most important step. Researchers can then use a combination of observation, surveys, and interviews with educators to corroborate the observed evidence and to draw the multifaceted roles educators play in teaching moral to students. Researchers should also look for multiple case studies involving educators with diverse values to enrich data and enhancing the universality of findings. Considering the subjective nature of individual thoughts, this approach also facilitates the potential risks that may arise in this study and can ensure the reliability of educators' perceptions of their self-values.

5. Conclusion

This paper employs a qualitative research approach through literature review and literature analysis illustrate the complex and indispensable role that educators play in moral and ethical education, aiming to understand the multifaceted responsibilities assumed by teachers when imparting moral principles in the classroom. It must be acknowledged that there are some limitations in this study, as a non-empirical research methodologies was used, this study heavily relied on existing literature. This dependence creates some potential drawbacks, including selection bias of the literature, weak timeliness, strong subjectivity, and a lack of empirical evidence, thereby limiting this study's ability to offer a detailed understanding of individual issues.

Through research, this paper affirms the key role of educators as role models in shaping the moral and ethical character of the next generation and the restraint of students in moral norms. This paper also analyses the influence of external multicultural background and internal different personal values on the theme, explores the changeable role and responsibility of educators in moral and ethical education.

This would be a fruitful area for further work. Subsequent studies in this area could delve deeper into the factors influencing the educators' role in relation to the context of the times, complexing exploration through interdisciplinary collaboration.

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