# Recovering the role of reasoning in moral education to address inequity and social justice

Larry Nucci

Published online: 08 Jun 2016.

Submit your article to this journal 

Article views: 276

View related articles 

View Crossmark data

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

# Recovering the role of reasoning in moral education to address inequity and social justice

Larry Nucci

Graduate School of Education Cognition and Development, University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA

**ABSTRACT**

This article reasserts the centrality of reasoning as the focus for moral education. Attention to moral cognition must be extended to incorporate sociogenetic processes in moral growth. Moral education is not simply growth within the moral domain, but addresses capacities of students to engage in cross-domain coordination. Development beyond adolescence in moral thinking is in two forms: (1) the gradual application of morality in broader adult contexts, and (2) the result of social discourse and progressive readjustments at the individual and societal level of views of the morality of societal practices. Postconventional moral reasoning is not a rarified stage of moral cognition, but an orientation and set of discourse skills potentially available to all normally developing adult moral reasoners.

From its beginnings, a core component of the educational mission of the Association for Moral Education (AME) has been directed at how to promote the development of structures of moral reasoning (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). In recent years, however, the role of reasoning in moral functioning has been downplayed. Authors such as Jonathan Haidt (2001, 2012), who spoke to the AME in 2012, have made the case that most moral decisions are generated through intuitions rather than reflective judgments, and that reasoning is largely a matter of rationalizations rather than the source of moral actions. Other organizations, such as the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley, have shifted the focus of moral education away from the development of moral cognition toward an emphasis upon the cultivation of moral virtues or sentiments such as gratitude, empathy, forgiveness, compassion and happiness. The focus of this article will be on recent work that will help to reconceptualize the role of reasoning in moral education, and to reassert the centrality of reasoning as the long-term focus for moral education. Such a focus upon reasoning, it will be argued, is essential if we are to connect moral education to the development of a citizenry capable of addressing issues of inequity and social justice. Part of my argument is that we need to reframe our historical attention to structures of individual moral cognition to incorporate sociogenetic processes in moral growth. I will be drawing heavily from the work of Geoffrey Saxe (2012), who has conducted a similar analysis of the development of

mathematical knowledge, and of the philosopher Anthony Laden (2012), who has provided a social analysis of reasoning that is fundamentally compatible with our developmental approach to moral education.

This long-term goal of moral education co-exists with the fundamental task of insuring that all students develop what I would refer to as basic moral mental health. In fact, much of the current attention to programs of social and emotional learning is directed at this basic educational responsibility (Elias, Kranzler, Parker, Kash, & Weissberg, 2014). Basic moral mental health entails providing students with skills and capacities for emotion regulation, social perspective taking and social interactions that foster formation of foundational structures of moral judgment (Smetana, Jambon, & Ball, 2014). In other places I have referred to our efforts to provide this foundation for moral education as being directed at producing 'nice' people (Nucci, 2009). Nice people engage in pro-social activities, exhibit basic concerns about fairness and inequality, and refrain from actions that would hurt others. Many of us have recognized the importance of this aspect of moral education, and devoted research and educational efforts at finding ways to optimize students' school experiences in the form of school climate, developmental approaches to student discipline, scaffolding social problem solving and more recently incorporating contemplative practices for mindfulness to foster emotion regulation and interpersonal empathy (Roeser et al., 2014). We have attempted to extend students' capacities for niceness by including direct social experiences in charitable activities, and other forms of service learning (Hart, Matsuba, & Atkins, 2014). All of these efforts contribute toward basic interpersonal moral sensitivity and what Kohlberg (1969) referred to as conventional morality.

The problem with conventional morality, as is widely recognized, is that it serves to recapitulate the immorality embedded within the practices of the existing social system. Individuals with seemingly sound moral character—if you prefer, a fully integrated moral self—have historically participated as members of societies that have endorsed such things as slavery and the treatment of women as second-class citizens. From the Kohlberg theoretical framework, the continued existence of social inequality and injustice is readily accounted for as reflecting the limitations of the natural progression of individual moral growth. In the standard Kohlberg (1984) account, most people never develop beyond conventional stages of moral reasoning. Their morality is defined within the framework of the societal system in which they participate.

The problem with the standard Kohlbergian explanation is that we now have over 40 years of accumulated evidence that children differentiate morality from the conventions of society in early childhood (Smetana et al., 2014). This distinction between morality and convention has turned out to be one of the most robust findings in developmental psychology. The universality of this basic finding, however, leads to an interesting paradox. As one of my graduate students is fond of pointing out, this would lead us to expect that people should be attentive to issues of fairness and human welfare, and that as a consequence observed inequities sustained by social practices should not exist—or would not exist to the extent that they have throughout human history. For example, she asks, how is it that boys, most of whom love their mothers, can grow up to be male chauvinists? How was it possible, we might ask, for White children raised by their African nannies to grow up to be slave holders?

Turiel (2002) and his colleagues (Turiel, Chung, & Carr, 2015; see also Wainrb & Recchia, 2014) have provided extensive evidence that people do indeed engage in

resistance of inequitable social practices even within the context of traditional societies that emphasize hierarchy and tradition. There is now incontrovertible evidence that societies are not uniform and homogeneous, and that pockets of resistance and subversion are the norm rather than the exception. We can no longer describe societies as collectivist or individualist, duty based versus rights based, as the evidence mounts for the co-existence of these orientations across social groups (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Turiel, 2002).

Thus, we have a much more complicated picture than the view of society as having a single general shared set of norms and values, or of individuals as having a single global cognitive stage that encompasses their understandings of morality and the conventions of the social system. Societies and individuals are engaged in a balancing act of weighing competing moral and non-moral considerations partially informed by religious beliefs or empirical information about the relevant facts that might impinge upon those cross-domain coordinations (Turiel, 2002). In addition, individuals and societies are not static fixed entities, but are dynamic mutually implicating systems (Overton, 2007; Witherington, 2011). What this means for a developmental approach to moral education is that moral growth cannot be solely accounted for in terms of a progression through individual levels of moral cognition. Thus, we would need to extend our framework for conceptualizing moral education to include sociogenetic processes as well as the ontogenesis of the individual student. This also means that moral education is not simply about growth within the moral domain, but changes in the capacities of students to engage in cross-domain coordination of moral understandings with societal norms and practices as well as their personal needs and desires.

If we are to engage in moral education that does more than simply produce 'nice people' who reproduce existing social injustice and inequalities, we need to clearly define what we mean by morality solely in terms of fairness, human welfare and rights. This is a point made forcefully by Kohlberg over 50 years ago. It also emerges directly from the research guided by social cognitive domain theory.

Here I also think we need to differentiate our attention to sociogenesis from the positions taken by so-called moral pluralists such as Jonathan Haidt (2012) and Lene Jensen (2011), who building from the work of the cultural psychologist Richard Shweder (1990) suggest that there are at least two other moral orientations which they refer to as a morality of authority and community, and a morality of divinity. Jonathan Haidt (2012) has subdivided these into six value orientations that he labels as moralities. For our purposes, I will focus on what they refer to as the morality of divinity or sanctity (Jensen, 2011; Shweder, 1990) to illustrate the problem of moral pluralism as a basis for moral education. The problem is quite straightforward. If divinity is a morality in its own right, then we would need to accord it with equal force and status as morality defined in terms of fairness and human welfare. Following the ways in which Jensen (in press) has operationalized this form of morality, we would have no criteria for calling into question the moral validity of any rule offered as divine. For example, if the ethic of divinity and the ethic of autonomy are interchangeably supreme, we cannot condemn religiously based 'honor' killings of female family members (Wikan, 2002), or the pronouncements by ISIS regarding the capture, enslavement and rape of non-Muslim women. Consider the following rules posted on the ISIS website (MEMRI, 2014) authored by their leader who has a doctorate in divinity from the University of Baghdad.

Question 2: What makes *al-sabi* permissible?

What makes *al-sabi* permissible [i.e., what makes it permissible to take such a woman captive] is her unbelief. Unbelieving women who were captured and brought into the abode of Islam are permissible to us, after the Imam distributes them [among us].

Question 4: Is it permissible to have intercourse with a female captive?

It is permissible to have sexual intercourse with a female captive. Allah the almighty said:

Successful are the believers who guard their chastity, except from their wives or the captives and slaves that their right hands possess, for then they are free from blame [Koran 23:5–6]

Question 5: Is it permissible to have intercourse with a female captive immediately after taking possession of her?

If she is virgin, he (her master) can have intercourse with her immediately after taking possession of her. However, if she isn't, her uterus must be purified [first]…

These passages touch on issues of divinity and purity, and one might argue that they also include elements of the second of Shweder's (1990) 'big three' of morality—authority and community. Now let us consider for a moment the reaction of a 12-year-old Yazidi girl who was the subject of one of these forced 'marriages' and rape by an ISIS member (*NY Times*, 2015):

He said raping me is his prayer to God. I said to him 'What you're doing to me is wrong, and it will not bring you closer to God'.

Within the framework of the Three Ethics perspective, these acts of violence are to be understood as moral because of their concordance with this ethic of the divine. The problem posed by the moral relativism inherent in this equation of religiously based cultural norms with morality has not been lost on Richard Shweder. Shweder, who is not a relativist, has acknowledged that an unexamined presentation of such moral rules exposes cultural psychology to criticisms of being merely an 'account of the despotism of tradition' (Shweder, 2011, p. 310). I should add here, parenthetically, that Shweder does not endorse Jonathan Haidt's intuitionist moral psychology, nor does he accept the claims about moral dumbfounding as supporting evidence. For Shweder, any valid moral code has to be grounded in rational justifications. Moreover, his current view of the relationship among the 'big three' of morality (autonomy, community and divinity) is that they serve to inform the application of justice rather than serving as stand-alone moral frameworks.[1] For other philosophical and social science critiques of Haidt's (2001, 2012) intuitionist psychology, see Blum (2013), Jacobson (2012) and Turiel (2015).

I would also note here that there is considerable resistance to the violent practices depicted above being waged by religiously devout members within these same cultures (Turiel, 2002; Wikan, 2002) whose own reading of the 'divine' precludes any dissociation of divinity from a morality rooted in concerns with fairness, human welfare and rights. Much of the progressive change that has occurred in human history has been spearheaded by such individuals with deep religious convictions employing morality as we have defined it in terms of fairness, human welfare and rights.

From an educational perspective, this discussion about moral relativism is not an idle concern. For moral education to be 'moral', the processes and outcomes of that education must themselves be defensible on moral grounds (Kohlberg, 1970). In the traditional view, as was stated earlier, the goal was to move students toward principled moral reasoning. More specifically, the notion was that once individuals reached Stages 5 or 6 they would

not only employ their moral understandings in their own personal conduct but would also employ principles of fairness to guide in the moral improvement or reconstruction of societal practices.

As is well known, this has turned out to be something of a lost cause. As Kohlberg began to recognize in his later years, abstract moral principles cannot be translated into genuine moral positions in the absence of dialog with those for whom those principles are meant to apply. To put this in more ordinary terms, men can only imagine, if you will, the fairest way to construe the social world for women; they can never expect to actually get it right. Aside from the easy-to-imagine obstacles that men would face in trying to generate the fairest and most ethical ways to construct a world for women, any group of people in a position of relative power will fail to see at least some of the injustices of those who are not in positions of power. Generating so-called principled positions for others is something that simply does not work. The philosophical views of Habermas, Lenhardt, and Nicholsen (1991) and the later work of John Rawls (2001) were all based on these same realizations. Moreover, if we look carefully at what can be expected from the natural course of individual moral development, we see a rather different picture than the one presented to us in Kohlberg's six-stage sequence.

What we have learned over the past 40 years is that moral growth does not entail the progressive differentiation of morality from non-moral considerations, but instead emerges as a differentiated system from its inception alongside at least two other conceptual frameworks pertaining to the conventions of society and the functioning of social systems, along with a personal domain accounting for the requirements of personal choice and privacy. This is the now familiar claim of social cognitive domain theory (Smetana et al., 2014). We also now have an emerging picture of development within the conventional and moral domains from middle childhood through adulthood that affords a way to reconcile the emergence in late adolescence of what Kohlberg (1969) described as Stage 4 conventional moral reasoning. As represented in Table 1, we can see that it is roughly around the end of adolescence that conventions are conceptualized as the constituent elements of social systems (Nucci, 2009; Turiel, 1983). We also know from more recent work that understandings of morality move through a transitional phase in early adolescence toward the capacity to better coordinate and resolve moral complexity in later adolescence (Nucci & Turiel, 2009). The levels presented in Table 2 refer to judgments about issues of harm or helping.

Somewhat different but similar patterns hold for reasoning about issues of distributive justice (Damon, 1979). These general systemic changes within the domains of morality and

**Table 1.** Age-related changes in concepts of social convention (Turiel, 1983).

Level I (ages 10–12) Convention as Affirmation of Rule System
  Adherence to convention based on concrete rules and authoritative expectations. People in charge make rules that preserve order. People who are not in charge should follow rules so that order is preserved. No conception of rules as components of a social system.
Level II (ages 12–14) Negation of Convention as Part of Rule System
  Convention now seen as arbitrary and changeable regardless of rule. Acts governed by convention have no 'right or wrong'. Thus, conventions are 'nothing but' the dictates of authority.
Level III (ages 14–16) Convention as Mediated by Social System
  Conventions as constituent elements of social systems. The 'rules of the game'. Emergence of systematic concepts of social structure. Though individual conventions are arbitrary, they collectively govern actions of members of a social system lending predictability and order to social interactions.

**Table 2.** Age-related changes in moral reasoning about human welfare (Nucci, 2014; Nucci & Turiel, 2009).

| |
| --- |
| Level 1 (ages 8–10) Straightforward Morality |
|   Straightforward evaluation of right/wrong based on salient moral elements. The decisions made using this pattern appear non-wavering and unambiguous. |
| Level II (ages 12–14) Uncoordinated/Conflicted Morality |
|   Appreciation of moral ambiguity in complex moral contexts; unable to resolve or coordinate moral and non-moral concerns in a systematic, generalized and consistent way. |
| Level III (ages 15–17) Integrated/Coordinated Morality |
|   Consideration and weighing of multiple (moral and non-moral) aspects or concerns with a clear resolution. Individuals who employ integrated/coordinated morality demonstrate awareness of moral ambiguity and arguments that can be made for acting in self-interest in such situations. However, they engage in reasoning that leads to resolution of the elements that generate that moral ambiguity with the integration of non-moral concerns in a consistent and systematic way. |

convention do not entail a single interlocking system, but function as two parallel frameworks that can be brought to bear depending upon the social context.

It is my personal view, based on David Moshman's (2011) extensive analysis of the data from research on adolescent cognition, and the reflections of people like John Gibbs (2013) who have wrestled with the Kohlberg stage theory, that there are probably no further structural changes in either the moral or conventional systems. That what we see as development beyond adolescence in moral thinking is in two forms: (1) the gradual application of morality in broader adult contexts, and (2) the result of social discourse and progressive readjustments at the individual and societal level of our views of the morality of societal practices.

So, we are left with a rather interesting paradox when it comes to the notion of principled moral reasoning. All of the existing evidence suggests that what we have been referring to as post-conventional moral thinking is a matter of orientation toward the willingness to apply morality to evaluate societal convention and the social system, rather than a stage of development. Moreover, the philosophers John Rawls (2001) and Jurgen Habermas et al. (1991) have told us that even when someone at an individual level attempts to resolve a moral issue from a principled moral perspective, that effort will fail in the absence of dialog with the parties on whom those moral judgments are intended to impact. We are incapable as individuals of engaging accurately in idealized social role taking. In other words, no one can ever fully realize a post-conventional moral position on one's own.

At the same time, however, we now have overwhelming evidence that the morality of the young child is differentiated from non-moral considerations and can be used reflectively to evaluate the fairness of social practices. This paradox of moral psychology—that seemingly no one is at Stage 6 and yet everyone including children can engage in moral judgments that are independent of societal norms—provides the key for the integration of our attention within moral education to fostering basic moral mental health along with the capacity and orientation of mature and morally principled adulthood. What I want to suggest is that the way out of this conundrum and to move moral education forward is to extend our perspective on what we mean by a developmental approach to moral education by making use of the approaches taken by our colleagues in math cognition and the recent work of philosophers who are re-energizing the analysis of the social activity of reasoning (Laden, 2012).

What is broadly missing from our standard cognitive developmental picture of moral growth is a contemporary account of what we can refer to as the dynamic system of co-actions between the ontogenetic and sociogenetic lines of development. Figure 1 is taken
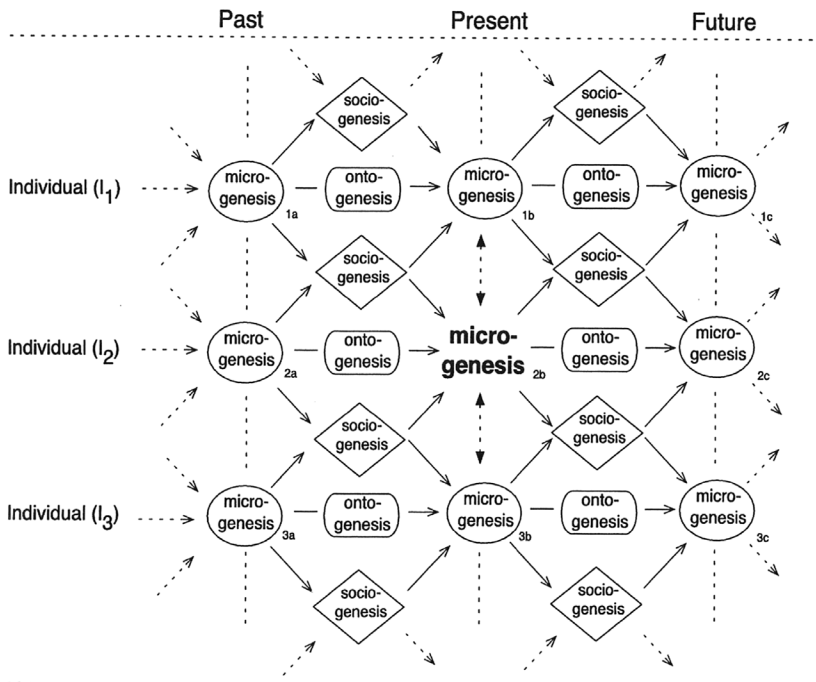
**Figure 1.** The interplay among genetic processes (from Saxe, 2012).

from Geoffrey Saxe's (2012) award-winning book on the development of mathematics among generations of people within a small community in Papua New Guinea. What it represents are the co-actions of ontogenetic and sociogenetic contributions to the microgenetic changes within an individual participating within a community of practice. What can be seen in this deceptively simple representation is that the individual is not merely being shaped by external inputs as in the standard view of socialization, nor is the individual merely reconstructing at an individual level what has been produced at the social level as would be the case in a Vygotskian scheme, nor is the individual engaged in a *sui generis* construction of reality. Instead all elements of this dynamic system (Witherington, 2011) are interpenetrating and co-acting on one another. The ontogenetic line—what we might call the individual's cognitive structure—emerges within, and operates upon the social milieu of the surrounding community of practice.

However, there is nothing in the diagram itself that tells us whether this is a community based upon mutual respect or social hierarchy. As you look at this diagram, you can also begin to imagine how it would be possible for an individual growing up in a sexually differentiated community of practice to construct a worldview, when it comes to gender-based contexts, that might well recapitulate those pre-existing practices. Conversely, as this diagram indicates, the perspectives of the individual members of that community are also sources of feedback and potential pushback against the prevailing social system. The origins of this resistance essential to moral growth cannot be attributed to processes of sociogenesis, but rather to the ontogenetic emergence of basic conceptual claims to a personal sphere and basic moral concepts of fairness and human welfare (Turiel, 2002). What is not shown in this figure is that members of real social communities are capable

of moving their positions relative to one another, and of directing their inputs selectively to targets likely to be receptive to their perspectives. Imagine that the individual 2 in this diagram is a female capable of communicating with individual 5, another female not seen here. Imagine if they switch places and move themselves next to one another. (Or in a more contemporary setting, communicate with each other through social media.) Imagine if their collective inputs influence other females whose own feedback serves to strengthen the arguments and the resolve of one another. You can well imagine the emergence of the kind of sub-cultural resistance to male-dominated society that Cecilia Wainryb (Wainryb & Recchia, 2014) and Elliot Turiel (Turiel, 2002; Turiel et al., 2015) have claimed to be models of the resistances and tensions over issues of morality, social norms and personal desires and freedoms that exist within all social systems including the family.

## Reasoning in moral education

With this dynamic system picture in mind, we can see how a new version of cultural psychology might emerge that is not handicapped by theories that amount to little more than just-so stories of cultural reproduction (Jensen, 2011; Miller & Bland, 2014). We can also now move on to our discussion of the role of reasoning in moral education. There are two ways in which the term reasoning can be applied to our concerns about moral education. Most of our emphasis has been understandably directed at impacting and assessing the conceptual frameworks that structure the cognitions that guide our moral decisions and actions. These internal cognitive structures of our students are a core target of our educational efforts and the measures that we employ to assess moral growth. I will come back to this set of issues when we discuss future research on educational assessments.

The second way in which we can use the term reasoning is with reference to the social activity of engaging others in discourse. It is this second activity of reasoning that connects the ontogenetic and sociogenetic lines of development. Here I draw upon the recent work of political philosopher Anthony Laden (2012), who has provided an analysis of reasoning through discourse processes that is within the broad tradition of Habermas et al. (1991) and the later works of John Rawls (2001), but that sets out fewer formal constraints for naturally occurring discussions or conversations. What Laden refers to as 'responsive engagement' is a form of discourse that has as its goal the location of common ground. That common ground may in fact end up being quite close to the position taken by one of the partners in a discourse, or a third position not anticipated by either member in advance of the discourse. What is essential for this type of discourse to count as 'engaged reasoning' is that each speaker work toward finding a conceptual space that all can share, and accept as their own. 'Engaged reasoning is thus reasoning together in the most robust sense of the term' (Laden, 2012, p. 171). Laden differentiates engaged reasoning from debates or efforts directed solely at persuasive argumentation. This is in the tradition of what Habermas et al. (1991) referred to as communicative discourse and is a far cry from the notion of reasoning offered by Jon Haidt (2012).

As is well known, Haidt (2012) reduces reasoning to rationalizations that we offer to ourselves as explanations for our intuitively generated moral judgments, and as the activity of persuasive argumentation we employ to try and get others to agree with our moral positions. According to Haidt (2012), it is basically a waste of time to try and get students to be open-minded and truth seeking, because individuals work to maintain their own positions. His

advice as spelled out in *The Righteous Mind* (Haidt, 2012) is like a Dale Carnegie course on how to win friends and influence people. In Haidt's world we are capable only of engaging in advocacy like lawyers, and students are best served with practice writing persuasive essays and engaging in debates than in attempts at what Laden refers to as responsive engagement. In Haidt's story there is an escape clause. Somehow groups will arrive at a new position while individuals will hold their ground. For Laden and like-minded political philosophers, this is both a misreading of the ways in which productive political discourse proceeds and is corrosive of genuine democratic society. Laden's educational goal is to foster both the skills and supporting dispositions to generate what he refers to as a civic virtue of responsiveness.

I want to suggest that the picture of social reasoning that Laden has offered, together with the dynamic systems depiction of development provided by Saxe, affords us an avenue to approach education to stimulate growth within the domains of morality, societal convention and the personal, along with students' capacity to coordinate across domains in arriving at socio-moral positions, and as a way forward for generating post-conventional moral reasoning as a realistic broad-based educational goal. What I am proposing is not a disjunction with the historical goals of the AME, but a reinvigorated, targeted and refined focus upon reasoning, and a research agenda to move toward those goals. First, we need to reassert that it is only through the use of reasoning that we can ever hope to generate moral perspectives that correct for the existing immorality in our social systems, or anticipate and respond to unforeseen moral problems. Even Jon Haidt (2012), with his commitment to intuitionist philosophy, admits as much. We need to boldly assert the development of the capacity for addressing the morality of accepted practices within our social systems as a goal for moral education, and not confine ourselves to an agenda defined around basic moral mental health. The role of the sociogenetic strand of development as captured within Saxe's figure means that the morality of each generation is impacted by the input or lack of input into the moral updating of the social practices and views of the community of practice to which the student belongs.

In traditional moral education, the goal is to have the new generation adopt and recapitulate existing socio-moral values and perspectives. Imagine if the goal of math and science educators was to produce a generation of students capable only of recapitulating existing math and science. Imagine if the goal of art and music education was to recapitulate the existing forms and performance of music, art and dance. We would demand a new school board! Not only do we need moral education that will help us to correct the existing social inequalities and inequities; we need a citizenry prepared to address the unforeseen moral problems that will emerge in future society.

We also need to free ourselves from the mistaken notion that this goal is to be achieved through the attainment of a rarified post-conventional stage of moral cognition. Post-conventional reasoning is nothing more than a particular way of coordinating morality with non-moral considerations. This is not a cognitive capacity that is limited to a few moral exemplars or extraordinary moral thinkers. The cognitive structures needed within the moral, conventional and personal domains for the engagement in reflective analysis and moral realignment of shared social norms toward more moral—that is to say, more equitable, humane and respectful—social systems is something that we should expect to be the product of effective moral education for the great majority of young adults—hopefully by the time they leave high school, certainly by the time they graduate from college.

However, to reach this very attainable goal, we need to reconsider how we conceptualize a developmental approach to moral education. We also need educational research that will help in the development of effective methods to enact this re-conceptualized approach to moral education. Such an approach will have the following three basic elements:

1. Differentiated instruction to stimulate development within the moral, conventional and personal domains, and to foster cross-domain coordination.
2. Discourse practices that foster responsive engagement (Laden, 2012) and transactive discourse.
3. Assessments that incorporate microgenetic shifts in conceptual changes around local issues rather than solely focusing upon large macro-adjustments in 'stages'.

In addition to these three core elements, two other components may be important to include, especially in work with adolescents:

1. Connections to 'civic engagement'.
2. Attention to healing of trauma that may resurface in discourse around historical injustices.

## Differentiated instruction to stimulate development within the moral, conventional and personal domains, and to foster cross-domain coordination

Such an approach will of course pay attention to stimulating structural developmental changes in students' moral reasoning. It will come as no surprise to the reader that I will argue for the need to differentially attend to the development within the domains of morality, convention and the personal. This approach is not a disjuncture from what developmental approaches to moral education have explored in fits and starts. However, it shifts the focus on educational goals toward fostering development across developmental systems, rather than within a single stage sequence of moral growth. We have experimental evidence that growth within each domain is optimized when discourse is concordant with the domain of the issue under discussion. In a paper that recently appeared in the *Journal of Moral Education* (Nucci et al., 2015) we present evidence that employing domain-concordant history lessons—that is, where the discourse is in harmony with the moral or conventional features of the issue—leads to growth in each domain.

In addition to development within domains, we need to pay more attention to, and conduct more extensive research on the ways in which students coordinate or fail to coordinate cross-domain considerations. Our goal that students will employ moral criteria in evaluations of the conventions of society presumes that students will engage in cross-domain coordination of morality and convention. We have very little educational research at this point that has looked at patterns of cross-domain coordination systematically across grade levels. We have no studies that have directly examined the impact of domain-based education on cross-domain coordination among college-age students who would presumably be at a point in development in the moral and conventional domains where they could generate post-conventional resolutions of complex socio-moral problems.

What we have found in our educational work with middle school and ninth grade high school students is that they tend to subordinate multi-domain situations to a single domain.

For example, in the study using history course content I just alluded to, we presented students with a true situation that pitted societal gender conventions against the moral value of equal access to education. In the situation a Gypsy King refused an offer of university scholarships for Gypsy (Roma) youth because the federal government required that scholarships be available to women. The King's reason for rejecting the scholarships was that accepting them would go against Gypsy traditions regarding the role of women. Most of the students who had not experienced our domain-based curriculum subordinated this issue to a single domain. That is, they resolved the issue either by saying that the King was right on the grounds of convention and tradition, or by saying that the King was wrong because of moral arguments that women should have equal access to education. Very few of the students who had not been exposed to our educational program spontaneously attempted to integrate or reconcile the two competing considerations. However, the majority of those students who had participated in a domain-based history curriculum in which they had experience engaging in discourse aimed at generating resolutions that would coordinate competing or conflicting moral and social conventional aspects of social situations generated solutions for the Gypsy King and his community that would allow for women and girls to accept the scholarships while making adjustments within the norms of the Gypsy community that would reaffirm the basic cultural identity and social structure of Roma society.

## Discourse practices that foster responsive engagement and transactive discourse

In addition to our focus upon stimulating structural developmental changes in students' reasoning and cognitions, we need to give a great deal of attention to the discourse processes that we employ to stimulate moral growth. This is essential to our understanding of the processes that lead to developmental changes within the individual. It is absolutely fundamental to any effort to impact the social discourse needed for morally directed social change. The basic message of this article is that anything resembling a post-conventional response to social injustice requires the capacity to contribute to the sociogenetic line of development. We need a citizenry that knows how to engage in what Anthony Laden (2012) refers to as responsive engagement and what Jurgen Habermas et al. (1991) have called communicative discourse if we want to realize genuine moral growth in our culture and in ourselves as individuals.

In the 1980s John Gibbs and Marvin Berkowitz (1983) published a landmark article in which they identified the key element of successful developmental discussion—what they referred to as transactive discourse. I am suggesting that we revisit the research that was done by Berkowitz and Gibbs on transactive discourse to update it to capture the relational component of engaged reasoning described by Laden. Since the publication of the Berkowitz and Gibbs paper in 1983, there have been 273 citations in subsequent articles. Of those 273 papers, 12 were empirical studies conducted in the area of moral development, and only 5 of those actually addressed issues of moral discourse. Only one of those five was published since 1992. This was a study done by Europeans Schuitema, van Boxtel, Veuglers, and ten Dam (2011) exploring discourse processes in citizenship education. The vast majority of recent empirical work addressing transactive discourse has been conducted in the area of math and science education. I consider this high level of interest in transactive discourse

within the STEM community and the low level of such research in moral education a sad statement about our own field.

I hope that we can re-energize research on discourse processes in moral education. In our current work at Berkeley, we are expanding the coding scheme developed by Berkowitz and Gibbs, employing video technology to include the social relational components of student and teacher discourse. For example, we have added codes to capture statements that entail invitations to others to contribute ideas, compliments directed at another speaker's contributions, apologies for statements that may have been intemperate or that misrepresented someone else's position. We are coding for affect—such things as laughter, or expressions of irritation or anger. We are supplementing these codes of speech acts with video of facial expressions and body posture. We need to do more of this sort of research if we are to generate approaches to moral education that address the social component of moral reasoning. Let me quickly list five additional areas of needed research just by way of illustration:

1. Nearly all discourse studies examining the impact of transacts are done with student dyads—this was the case for Berkowitz and Gibbs (1983) and continues to be the mode in most STEM research. We need more research that looks at discourse within groups.

2. We need developmental studies that will help us to understand how transactive engaged discourse emerges and how to sequence the structure of discourse around moral issues. There are some intriguing findings emerging from the work of Melanie Killen's lab (Killen, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013; Killen & Rutland, 2011) at the University of Maryland on children's judgments about social exclusion that suggest that young children are capable of applying moral criteria of justice to evaluate peer and school norms supporting the exclusion of children on the basis of gender or other social conventional criteria. To use the language of Geoffrey Saxe, Killen's group has shown that children are capable of employing morality to alter the norms within their own community of practice. However, we don't currently have systematic research on the forms of social discourse that young children can engage in to arrive at such collective decisions. Do they employ transacts as described by Berkowitz and Gibbs (1983)? When can we expect children to employ transactive discussion? We have data from our own work that middle school students are capable of generating high-level operational transacts.

3. We need systematic research on the protocols that teachers should use to generate student transactive discussions that would also fit Laden's (2012) criteria for responsive engagement. There are many existing frameworks that teachers use to set up classroom discussions. However, there has been no systematic study of how those protocols would impact or optimize discussions around socio-moral issues.

4. We need to update our systems for coding and capturing discourse to make use of advances from related research. For example, David Shaffer (Shaffer et al., 2009) of the University of Wisconsin, who does research using game theory, has developed computer-based systems (ENA) for mapping the flow of discourse among participants providing a visual representation of the flow of the core ideas emerging during a discussion. This allows for an analysis of which parties in a discourse are dominating the discussion, who has offered a discourse move that shifted the discussion and so forth. This would be critical to research that moves away from

discussions within dyads. We are currently in discussions with Professor Shaffer about how to use our data from classroom discussions within his framework to visually represent what we mean by responsive engagement.

5. We need research to examine whether the discourse skills learned in school settings are used by students when they engage in discussions concerning socio-moral issues in other contexts. In effect, we need to test Haidt's (2012) assertion that the default form of public discourse is in the form of persuasion and winning over the other side rather than in the engagement of a genuine search for common ground.

It is interesting to note that philosophers are jumping in with both feet to begin this type of work. Anthony Laden and his colleagues associated with the Center for Ethics and Education at the University of Wisconsin are being joined by Michael Burroughs at the Rock Institute at Penn State University to explore these issues not only with adolescents but with very young children.

## Assessments that incorporate microgenetic shifts in conceptual changes around local issues rather than large macro-adjustments in 'stages'

Our work on discourse is not simply to describe energetic discussion about moral issues; it is directed at accounting for development within domains of socio-moral cognition and reasoning. We need to radically alter our approach to assessment. In addition to assessments that examine structural changes in moral reasoning (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 1999) or within domains (Nucci, Creane, & Powers, in press), we need to learn from our colleagues who employ a developmental approach in math and science education, who decades ago stopped measuring whether students were attaining growth in Piagetian stages, and began to employ developmental methodology to assess microgenetic changes in specific areas of their disciplines. We need to shift away from a sole reliance on assessments of growth in stages or levels toward much more contextualized measures of growth within domains and cross-domain coordination that are relevant to a specific educational context. For example, if students in an American literature class are reading Huckleberry Finn, we need assessments for measuring shifts in moral reasoning and cross-domain coordination about the specific issues addressed in that piece of literature. What we can learn from our math and science colleagues like Geoffrey Saxe is that it is precisely these microgenetic contextualized shifts that are in fact the engines of any broader set of developmental changes in students' reasoning.

## Connections to 'civic engagement'

Of course, all of this attention to reasoning is with the larger goal of creating moral citizens for genuinely participatory democracy. Our own work in Oakland on classroom discourse around social and moral issues is in the process of being linked up with students' engagement in participation in civic action. In our case this has to do with direct engagement of our students with the Oakland city council. We are hardly pioneers in this effort to empower students and have them enact their own moral positions. However, what we are bringing to the table is the direct connection between reasoning and social action. Along with many

of our European colleagues, we do not see civic engagement in and of itself as sufficient for moral growth.

What would be innovative and important to study would be the moral discourse that takes place in the context of deciding upon a course of civic action, the discourse that occurs as part of that civic engagement, as well as the discourse that occurs as students debrief with one another about their experiences. The entire enterprise of preparing students to contribute to the moral growth of society is predicated on their capacity to employ the principles of responsive engagement to alter the moral norms of the broader social system. I am aware that political philosophers working within the tradition of Jurgen Habermas have attempted to do this kind of discourse analysis. However, I am not aware of any systematic work being done by those of us within the field of moral education. I am not aware of any research that conducts a domain analysis of the content of such discourse.

## Attention to healing of trauma that may resurface in discourse around historical injustices

Finally, we are well aware that the types of discussion around issues of social injustice that we are having with our inner city students of color have the potential to bring to the fore their own experiences of trauma living within an inequitable social system, leading them to become acutely aware of the deep historical underpinnings and sources of that trauma. As pointed out some time ago by Paulo Freire (1969), one of the common sequelae of the re-experiencing of trauma that can be attributed to social injustice is anger and acts of retribution directed at the perceived sources of that injustice. That is, rather than moving toward post-conventional moral perspectives, the process of moral discourse may contribute to just the opposite reaction. Some of the very intriguing work done by Roberto Posada and Cecilia Wainryb (2008) with child soldiers in Colombia has indicated that coming to terms with the experience of trauma including one's own engagement in acts of violence is part of the process of establishing moral agency (Wainryb, 2011). Once we begin to take the business of moral reasoning seriously, and move away from antiseptic moral dilemma discussion, we enter areas of education that outstrip the resources of many teachers. This is something that we have only begun to consider in our own work. It is an aspect of a serious approach to moral education that needs further study.

## Conclusion

My goal in this article was to restate the case for the centrality of attention to reasoning as the core of genuine moral education. Without downplaying the importance of what I refer to as our efforts to foster basic moral mental health in all students, I have tried to remind us of our larger goal to contribute to the education of moral citizens capable of addressing existing moral inequities in our social normative structures, and to help us make society more fair and equitable for all people. This is entirely in keeping with what I have personally found to be the core appeal of Kohlberg's moral theory and his approach to moral education.

Based upon the work of contemporary developmental researchers and moral philosophers, I have argued that we can only accomplish this by recognizing the role of sociogenesis in individual moral development, and the social discourse nature of post-conventional moral thinking. I have tried to make the case that post-conventional moral reasoning is not

a rarified stage of moral cognition, but an orientation and set of discourse skills potentially available to all normally developing adult moral reasoners. Finally, I have tried to point toward an approach to moral education, and a research agenda for how we might move toward education that would promote the growth of such a moral citizenry.

## Note

1. I wish to thank Richard Shweder for his comments to me by email (5 February 2016) clarifying his positions.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on Contributor

*Larry Nucci* is an Adjunct Professor in the Graduate School of Education at UC Berkeley and Professor Emeritus of Educational Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Nucci has published extensively on children's moral and social development and education. His 8 books include the Handbook of Moral and Character Education (Edited with Darcia Narvaez and Tobias Krettenauer: Routledge 2014; 2nd edition), and Nice is Not Enough: Facilitating Moral Development (Pearson, 2009; Chinese translation) and Education in the Moral Domain (2001; Chinese, Dutch, Italian and Spanish translations). An aspect of his work has focused on children's judgments about issues considered personal matters of privacy and discretion. This research has been carried out in a number of cross-cultural contexts including Asia and Latin America. Recently his work has focused on the assessment of moral and social reasoning and on the integration of moral education within the regular academic curriculum. He is Editor in Chief of the journal Human Development and a member of the editorial boards of Cognitive Development, Parenting Science and Practice, and the Journal for Research in Character Education.

## References

Berkowitz, M. W., & Gibbs, J. C. (1983). Measuring the developmental features of moral discussion. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 29*, 399–410.

Blum, L. (2013). Political identity and moral education: A response to Jonathan Haidt's the righteous mind. *Journal of Moral Education, 42*, 298–315.

Damon, W. (1979). *The social world of the child*. Jossey-Bass.

Elias, M., Kranzler, A., Parker, S., Kash, V., & Weissberg, R. (2014). The complementary perspectives of social and emotional learning, moral education, and character education. In L. Nucci, D. Narvaez, & T. Krettenauer (Eds.), *Handbook on moral and character education* (2nd ed., pp. 272–289). New York, NY: Routledge.

Freire, P. (1969). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Penguin Education.

Gibbs, J. C. (2013). *Moral development and reality: Beyond the theories of Kohlberg, Hoffman, and Haidt*. Oxford University Press.

Habermas, J., Lenhardt, C., & Nicholsen, S. W. (1991). *Moral consciousness and communicative action*. MIT press.

Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Psychological Review, 108*, 814–834. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.108.4.814

Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. New York, NY: Vintage.

Hart, D., Matsuba, K., & Atkins, R. (2014). The moral and civic effects of learning to serve. In L. Nucci, D. Narvaez, & T. Krettenauer (Eds.), *Handbook on moral and character education* (2nd ed., pp. 456–470). New York, NY: Routledge.

Jacobson, D. (2012). *Moral dumbfounding and moral stupefaction. Oxford studies in normative ethics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Jensen, L. A. (2004). Coding manual: Ethics of autonomy, community, and divinity (Revised). Unpublished manuscript, Clark University.

Jensen, L. (2011). The cultural-developmental theory of moral psychology. In L. Jensen (Ed.), *Bridging cultural and developmental approaches to psychology: New synthesis in theory, research and policy*. (pp. 3–26). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Killen, M., Mulvey, K. L., & Hitti, A. (2013). Social exclusion: A developmental intergroup perspective. *Child Development, 84*, 772–790. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12012

Killen, M., & Rutland, A. (2011). *Children and social exclusion: Morality, prejudice, and group identity*. New York, NY: Wiley/Blackwell Publishers. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781444396317

Kohlberg, L. (1969). Stage and sequence: The cognitive-developmental approach to socialization. In D. Goslin (Ed.), *Handbook of socialization theory and research* (pp. 347–480). Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

Kohlberg, L. (1970). Education for justice: A modern statement of the Platonic view. In N. F. Sizer & T. R. Sizer (Eds.), *Moral education: Five lectures* (pp. 56–83). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kohlberg, L. (1984). *Essays on moral development: Vol. 2, The psychology of moral development: The nature and validity of moral stages*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row Publishers.

Laden, A. (2012). *Reasoning: A social picture*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

MEMRI. (2014). Islamic State (ISIS) releases pamphlet on female slaves. Retrieved November 3, 2015, from http://www.memrijttm.org/islamic-state-isis-releases-pamphlet-on-female-slaves.html

Miller, J. G., & Bland, C. (2014). A cultural psychology perspective on moral development. In M. Killen & J. G. Smetana (Eds.), *Handbook of moral development* (2nd ed., pp. 299–314). New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.

Moshman, D. (2011). *Adolescent rationality and development: Cognition, morality, and identity*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Nucci, L. (2009). *Nice is not enough: Facilitating moral development*. Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Nucci, L. (2014). The personal and the moral. In M. Killen & J. G. Smetana (Eds.), *Handbook of moral development* (2nd ed., pp. 538–558). New York, NY: Taylor and Francis. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203581957.ch25

Nucci, L., Creane, M., & Powers, D. W. (2015). Integrating moral and social development within middle school social studies: A social cognitive domain approach. *Journal of Moral Education, 44*, 479–496. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2015.1087391

Nucci, L., & Turiel, E. (2009). Capturing the complexity of moral development and education. *Mind, Brain, and Education, 3*, 151–159.

NY Times. (August 13, 2015). ISIS enshrines a theology of rape. Retrieved November 3, 2015, from http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html

Overton, W. F. (2007). A coherent metatheory for dynamic systems: Relational organicism-contextualism. *Human Development, 50*, 154–159.

Oyserman, D., Coon, H. M., & Kemmelmeier, M. (2002). Rethinking individualism and collectivism: Evaluation of theoretical assumptions and meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 128*, 3–72. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.128.1.3

Posada, R., & Wainryb, C. (2008). Moral development in a violent society: Colombian children's judgments in the context of survival and revenge. *Child Development, 79*, 882–898.

Power, F. C., Higgins, A., & Kohlberg, L. (1989). *Lawrence Kohlberg's approach to moral education*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Rawls, J. (2001). *Justice as fairness: A restatement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rest, J. R., Narvaez, D., Thoma, S. J., & Bebeau, M. J. (1999). DIT2: Devising and testing a revised instrument of moral judgment. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 91*, 644.

Roeser, R., Vago, D., Pinela, C., Morris, L., Taylor, C., & Harrison, J. (2014). Contemplative education: Cultivating ethical development through mindfulness training. In L. Nucci, D. Narvaez, & T. Krettenauer (Eds.), *Hnadbook on moral and character education* (2nd ed., pp. 223–247). New York, NY: Routledge.

Saxe, G. (2012). *Cultural development of mathematical ideas: Papua New Guinea studies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Schuitema, J., van Boxtel, C., Veuglers, W., & ten Dam, G. (2011). The quality of student dialogue in citizenship education. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 26*, 85–107. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10212-010-0038-1

Shaffer, D. W., Hatfield, D., Svarovsky, G. N., Nash, P., Nulty, A., Bagley, E., ... Mislevy, R. (2009). Epistemic network analysis: A prototype for 21st century assessment of learning. *The International Journal of Learning and Media, 1*, 1–21.

Shweder, R. (1990). In defense of moral realism: Reply to Gabennesch. *Child Development, 61*, 2060–2067.

Shweder, R. (2011). Commentary: Ontogenetic cultural psychology. In L. Jensen (Ed.), *Bridging cultural and developmental approaches to psychology: New synthesis in theory, research and policy* (pp. 303–310). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Smetana, J. G., Jambon, M., & Ball, C. (2014). The social domain approach to children's moral and social judgments. In M. Killen & J. G. Smetana (Eds.), *Handbook of moral development* (2nd ed., pp. 23–45). New York, NY: Taylor and Francis. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203581957.ch2

Turiel, E. (1983). *The development of social knowledge: Morality and convention*. Cambridge University Press.

Turiel, E. (2002). *The culture of morality: Social development, context and conflict*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Turiel, E. (2015). Moral development. In W. Overton & R. Molenaar (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science, theory and method* (Vol. 1, pp. 193–214). New York, NY: Wiley.

Turiel, E., Chung, E., & Carr, J. (In Press). In S. Horn, M. Ruck, & L. Liben (Eds.), *Volume 1: Equity and justice in developmental sciences: Theoretical and methodological issues. Advances in child development and behavior*. Elsevier.

Wainrb, C., & Recchia, H. (2014). Moral lives across cultures: Heterogeneity and conflict. In M. Killen & J. G. Smetana (Eds.), *Handbook of moral development* (2nd ed., pp. 23–45). New York, NY: Taylor and Francis.

Wainryb, C. (2011). 'And so they ordered me to kill a person': Conceptualizing the impacts of child soldiering on the development of moral agency. *Human Development, 54*, 273–300.

Wikan, U. (2002). *Generous betrayal: Politics of culture in the new Europe*. University of Chicago Press.

Witherington, D. C. (2011). Taking emergence seriously: The centrality of circular causality for dynamic systems approaches to development. *Human Development, 54*, 66–92.