# Capturing the Complexity of Moral Development and Education

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**ABSTRACT**—This article discusses challenges educators face when attempting to sequence moral education. Two factors are identified as primary sources hindering efforts to engage in effective moral education: (a) the premature application of research findings from developmental psychology to classroom practices and (b) the underestimation of the complexity of interactions between development in students' social and moral understandings and their applications in social contexts. Research is reviewed demonstrating that morality develops alongside concepts about societal conventions and zones of personal discretion and privacy. Results of an ongoing study are presented pointing toward a U-shaped pattern in moral development in which frequency of moral choices is higher among younger children and older adolescents than among early adolescents. Research examining contextual moral decision making is discussed in relation to efforts to sequence moral education.

One of the important issues psychologists and educators have confronted is how to apply knowledge from research on children's development to their learning and education (Kamii & Joseph, 2003; Piaget, 1970). Some of the most extensive efforts at applying developmental research in educational settings have been in the area of morality (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). In particular, Kohlberg's (1971) theory of moral stages has served to define the goals and the sequencing of moral education. In Kohlberg's well-known formulation, development involves increasing differentiations of morality from nonmoral elements, such as personal preferences, and desires, pragmatics, obedience to authority, and the norms and conventions of society. Moral development, according to this account, moves progressively toward an end point in which moral decisions and subsequent actions are structured by universal principles of fairness. In the earlier applications of his theory, teachers employed moral discussion that matched classroom discourse to the modal level of students' moral reasoning in an effort to move students through the series of moral stages toward principled moral reasoning (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). However, as Kohlberg and his colleagues discovered, this approach to moral education did not translate into changes in student conduct, nor was it easily integrated within the natural flow of academic activities valued by classroom teachers (Power, Kohlberg, & Higgins, 1989).

Traditional educators seized upon the failure of this direct application of moral stage theory to the classroom as part of the justification for their call for a return to character education (Wynne & Ryan, 1993). However, recent attempts at character education have also been disappointing. For example, the U.S. Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse (www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc) indicates that few of the major character education programs currently in use have had a significant impact on either student attitude or behavioral outcomes touted by the program sponsors, and none have impacted both attitudes and behavior. As would be expected, these findings have been challenged by proponents of moral and character education (Berkowitz, Battistich, & Bier, 2008), and such research notwithstanding, a majority of states include some mandates for moral or character education. Nonetheless, the general picture suggests that formal efforts to engage in moral education have not translated into gains in student socialization beyond what is obtained through widely recognized "best teaching" practices (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Narvaez & Lapsely, 2007; Wentzel, 2002) that emphasize classroom community, student intellectual autonomy, and high levels of academic instruction.

We argue in this article that the general lack of progress in linking research on moral development with the practice of moral education can be in part attributed to two factors.

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The first is the premature translation of ongoing psychological research on children's moral development directly into recommendations for teaching practices, what Kohlberg referred to as the "psychologist's fallacy." The second and related factor has been the underestimation of the complexities at work in the interactions between development and context in generating moral decisions and actions. We discuss the results of some of our recent work in relation to these considerations. Our hope is that a more realistic appraisal of what we are discovering about moral development and contextualized moral decision making will aid teachers in appropriately considering developmental sequences when constructing educational practices contributing to their students' morality.

## WHAT WE ARE LEARNING ABOUT MORAL DEVELOPMENT

A common approach to explaining development is to look for age-related changes on a topic or issue. These topics might include matters such as language, logic, number or mathematics, space (or other aspects of the physical world), morality, social relationships, psychological understandings, or emotions. The strategy of charting out developmental progressions that are at least loosely associated with age is particularly evident in structural developmental approaches—a general theoretical perspective within which we have worked. In our work on moral, social, and personal judgments, however, we have found ourselves taking an approach that did not focus on age-related changes (Turiel, 1983, 2002). This came about because of unexpected findings regarding progression from "conventional morality" (stage 4) to "postconventional morality" (stage 5) described in Kohlberg's sequence of the development of moral judgments. In an attempt to analyze the transition from moral thinking that does not differentiate morality from social conventions, norms, and authority to a morality in which such differentiations are made, we obtained two key findings (Turiel, 1975). One was that the transition from stage 4 to stage 5 could not be explained as entailing differentiations of morality from social conventions. The second was that even younger children (as young as 4 years of age) distinguished morality from conventions (Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Weston & Turiel, 1980).

Our research then focused on identifying social conceptual domains and how children's moral judgments differ from their judgments in other basic domains, including the domain of personal jurisdiction (Nucci, 1996). We concentrated on what turned out to be complex configurations of children's judgments within each domain, which served to describe the features of the domains of moral, social conventional, and personal thinking (we also investigated a number of related issues, including the types of social experiences associated with each domain). We found that children, adolescents, and young adults distinguish the domains in similar ways and that each domain stemmed from different types of social interactions. Although we conducted some investigations of developmental levels of thinking in the social conventional (Turiel, 1983) and personal domains (Nucci, 1996), much of the research was designed to verify the taxonomy of the domains, including studies in several cultural contexts (see Turiel, 1983; Wainryb, 2006) and studies of the application of moral understandings in a variety of situational contexts (see Helwig, 1995; Killen, Margie, & Sinno, 2006; Wainryb, 1991).

The purposes and achievements of a concentration on identifying domains have sometimes been misunderstood and even distorted. Some have maintained that we take a nativist position because we proposed that, for instance, moral judgments are differentiated from judgments about social conventions by the early ages of 3, 4, or 5 years (Glassman & Zan, 1995). The attribution of nativism to us has been made even though we often explicitly maintained that thinking in these domains develops out of constructions through children's social experiences and interactions (Nucci & Nucci, 1982; Nucci & Turiel, 1978). The attribution of nativism seems to be based on the presumption that, if we maintain that judgments appear by early childhood, then we must be saying they are inborn. However, many social experiences contributing to development occur in the first few years of life (Piaget, 1932). Some may also presume that moral development must involve a process of differentiating morality from other considerations.

A part of the (false) attribution of nativism stems from our proposition that the distinctions among domains, in some ways, are similar across a wide age range. Because we have identified commonalities in judgments across ages, it has also been said that we are unconcerned with development and that the formulations of sequences of the development of moral judgments proposed by Piaget and Kohlberg should be accepted instead of the domain formulations (Lourenco, 2003). If, however, the research on domains shows that children and adolescents make differentiations that are not supposed to be made until later in development (in the shift to autonomy or to postconventional thinking) according to the Piaget and Kohlberg propositions, it makes little sense to accept these propositions because alternative developmental sequences in the moral domain have not yet been fully defined.

Our proposition is that the moral, conventional, and personal domains constitute separate developmental pathways and that, therefore, before adequate analyses of developmental progressions can be made, it is necessary to delineate the features of each type of thought, what distinguishes the domains, and how they are applied in situational contexts. Indeed, findings on the application of domains of thought, including moral judgments, serve to complicate analyses of individual progressions and by extension efforts to define learning sequences

for moral or character education. We come back to these interactions and complexities in the next section.

With these issues of contexts and coordination in mind, we have begun to explore age-related patterns in children's and adolescents' moral reasoning. We refer interested readers to other sources for our work on developmental sequences in the conventional (Nucci, Becker, & Horn, 2004; Turiel, 1983) and personal domains (Nucci, 1996). In our most recent work, we have focused on moral judgments about situations involving harm or human welfare, building from prior investigations indicating that morality begins in early childhood with a focus upon issues of harm to the self and others. Davidson, Turiel, and Black (1983) found that up to about age 7 moral judgments are primarily regulated by concerns for maintaining welfare and avoiding harm and are limited to directly accessible acts. Young children's morality is not yet structured by understandings of fairness as reciprocity. Thus, young children have a difficult time making moral judgments when the needs of more than one person are at stake (Damon, 1977).

In the work on age-related patterns of moral reasoning, we have looked at how children and adolescents above the age of 7 years reason about situations involving human welfare that vary in terms of whether they involve a conflict between the goals and needs of the self and those of another person, and the nature of the relationship the primary actor has with that other person. In sum, we looked at the nature of age-related shifts in children's and adolescents' tendency to coordinate elements involving moral decisions.

The study investigated several variables and followed a complex design that is beyond the scope of this article. However, the highlight of the basic findings can be summarized in terms of the central themes of the research. In this study, we presented participants with three basic types of scenarios: direct harm (hitting), indirect harm (whether to return money to someone who unknowingly dropped it), and helping someone in need.

The harm conditions are of two types. In one case, the harm involves directly hitting and hurting another person. In the other, indirect harm situation, the protagonist in the scenario does not have enough money to participate in an activity with his/her friends. The protagonist had tried to earn the money to be able to participate, but came up $10 short. A few days before the day of the activity, the protagonist boards an empty bus. Soon afterward a second person boards the bus and drops a $10 bill while reaching for the money to pay the bus fare. Neither the driver nor the passenger is aware of the $10 bill on the floor. The protagonist has to decide whether to tell the passenger that he/she dropped the $10 bill or keep silent and pick up the bill and keep it. The helping situations describe a child who falls and is injured. The protagonist must decide whether to seek help for the injured child or continue without helping in order to be on time for an activity that the central figure in the story wants to do.

For each of these situations, we varied the cost of moral action by presenting situations where moral action was not in conflict with other goals of the actor, situations where the action was in conflict with a need or desire of the actor, and finally where the action was in conflict with a need of another person.

Finally, the scenarios also varied the characteristics of the other child depicted in the situation. The other child was described simply as a "girl" or "boy" or as someone who had antagonized the child the previous day by teasing and making fun of him/her the day before or as a vulnerable child who falls or drops money because of a handicapping condition or engages in hitting because of an inability to control emotions. These characteristics of the other were intended to impact the degree of empathy for the other child in the moral conflict situations. Participants in the study were in four age groups: early elementary (7–8 years), middle elementary (10–11 years), middle school (13–14 years), and high school (16–17 years). Children were heterogeneous in terms of race and ethnicity and were drawn from urban and suburban settings in two regions of the country.

### Direct Harm

The direct harm situations all revolved around the act of hitting another person. In the unconflicted scenarios, the protagonist was described as being in a bad mood and hitting another child without provocation. There were two conflict scenarios. The conflict with self-interest scenarios involved hitting in response to being hit by another child; the second set of conflict scenarios revolved around whether to use hitting as a response to a child who is hitting and hurting another child.

In these direct harm situations, virtually all respondents across ages indicated that the protagonist in the unconflicted situation would be wrong to engage in hitting and that the protagonist had no right to engage in the behavior. This is not surprising given that a 3-year-old would treat unprovoked hitting as wrong. Results from the two conflict situations were mixed. Participants were more likely to say that it would be all right to engage in hitting as a response to being hit by another child. At least half of the children at each age argued that one would have a "right" to self-defense in such a situation. The percentage of children claiming this "right" was higher among early adolescents (10- to 14-year-olds) than for 8- and 16-year-old participants. When the child doing the initial hitting was described as emotionally vulnerable, however, the acceptance of hitting as morally acceptable self-defense disappeared. Across ages 90% or more of the participants judged that it would be wrong to engage in hitting in response to being hit by such a child. Participants argued that one should instead flee the situation or seek help rather than engaging in hitting.

The patterns of judgments about hitting as a response to intercede in a case where another child is being hit followed the

same basic developmental pattern as the case of self-defense with 8- and 16-year-olds less likely than early adolescents to endorse hitting. However, the overall willingness to endorse hitting in this interceding role was less than for personal self-defense. Three fourths of the 8- and 16-year-olds judged that it would be wrong to intercede by hitting either a child in general or an antagonistic child in these situations. As with the case of self-defense, the willingness to endorse hitting was minimal across ages in the case where the aggressor was described as emotionally vulnerable.

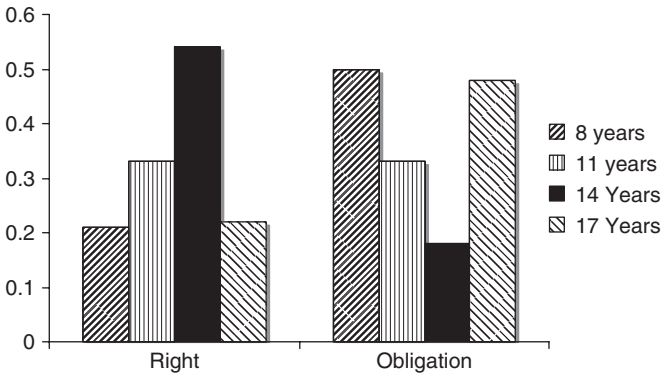


**Fig. 1.** Right to keep money and obligation to help by age.

**Indirect Harm**

The results from the hitting scenarios point to an age-related trend in which the youngest and the oldest participants provided similar moral judgments about whether their acts were right or wrong, whereas the early adolescents were more likely to assert a "right" to engage in hitting—at least in the case of self-defense. This age-related trend was more marked in the case of judgments about the indirect harm of keeping money that someone accidentally drops. Unlike hitting, keeping the money does not result from an intentional act by the protagonist to steal from the other person. Instead, the situation presents itself entirely by chance. When the person dropping the money was described in generic terms or as an antagonist, the responses varied by age. Eight-year-old and 16-year-old adolescents generally viewed keeping the money to be wrong. However, 10-year-olds, and especially 14-year-olds, were more likely to express ambivalence as to whether it might be all right to keep the money. These developmental trends became even more apparent when the children were asked to judge whether or not the protagonist would have a "right" to keep the money if that is what he/she wanted to do. Figure 1 presents the proportions of participants at each age who argued that you would have a "right" to keep the money. As can be seen in Figure 1, young children generally maintained that the protagonist does *not* have a right to keep the money as this would be a simple case of theft. More than half of the 14-year-olds, however, were of the opinion that the protagonist has a "right" to keep the money. By age 16–17, the majority of respondents again took the position that the protagonist did not have a right to keep the money. The reasoning of the typical 8-year-old is reflected in the following excerpts.

> *Suppose Judy wants to keep the money instead of giving it back to the other girl. Would she have a right to keep the $10 if that is what she wants to do?*
> Girl: No, because it's someone else's $10 bill, she shouldn't keep it because it's not hers.
> Boy: He's stealing, and you don't want to, it's not good to steal.

For an 8-year-old, the situation poses little ambiguity and is responded to in the same way as if the protagonist had put his hand into the passenger's pocket and taken the money. For a 14-year-old, however, the situation is much more complex:

> *Would Jim have a right to keep the ten dollars if that is what he wants to do? How come?*
> Girl: Yes, because he's not doing anything wrong. He's not necessarily doing something wrong, but the right thing to do would be to give it back, but he's not necessarily, he doesn't necessarily have any wrongdoing.
> Boy: He's got every right to keep the ten dollars, like I said, because it's in nowhere land. And it's his, he found it. It's not in the kid's house or anything.

The ambiguity of the situation for the 14-year-old ("It's in nowhere land," "He's not necessarily doing something wrong") is coupled with confusion between what one has a right to do in a moral sense and what legitimately constitutes matters of choice that would make something a personal issue. Here, the ambiguity of the harm opens the door to the prospect that keeping the money or returning it to the passenger is a matter of personal prerogative. This is nicely illustrated in the justifications the 14-year-olds provided to explain their view that the protagonist had a right to keep the money:

> Boy: I think she has a right to do what she wants to. Because it is once again, his decision to do what he wants.
> Girl: He has the right to do anything he doesn't want to, so like, if he didn't want to help he didn't have to help.
> Boy: It's his choice. It is a free country.

It is important to point out that the reasoning of these early adolescents should not be characterized as purely instrumental or operating solely from self-interest as depicted in Kohlberg's proposed second stage of moral reasoning. The decisions to keep the money or to help someone in need were quite different when the other person in the situation was described

as vulnerable. In the case of a handicapped person, the decision of nearly all participants was to help the person or to return the money.

By age 16, the majority of adolescents in the study had resolved the ambiguity of the situation as entailing a form of theft. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

> *Some girls have told us that it would be okay, because Judy didn't take the money, it just fell out of the other girl's pocket. What do you think of that? Do you agree?*
> Girl: Who are these people? I mean, it fell out of the girl's pocket!

For the typical 16-year-old, the moral ambiguity posed by indirect theft is recognized as being something different from the act of intentional stealing. However, the knowledge you have that the money originally belonged to someone else serves as a clarification of the meaning of the situation and places moral constraints upon the actor and a companion sense that the protagonist does not have the right to keep the money. This coordinated moral reasoning is illustrated in the following excerpt from a 17-year-old participant.

> *Would Judy have a right to keep the ten dollars if that is what she wants to do?*
> Like I said before, you don't have a right to steal money, and this is still stealing because you know who dropped that money. It's not like breaking into someone's house, but it's still stealing
> *Doesn't she have a choice in this situation? Doesn't that constitute a right?*
> She doesn't have a choice! This is taking something from someone, so she does not have a choice.

### Helping

As was the case with hitting, nearly all of the participants across ages indicated that it would be wrong not to stop and help the child in need in a nonconflict situation. This position was maintained irrespective of the relationship between the protagonist and the child in need of help. In this nonconflict situation, the moral imperative toward human welfare showed little developmental variation. In the two conflict situations, however, we observed the U-shaped developmental patterns with respect to moral judgments seen in the indirect harm scenario. Figure 1 also presents the proportions of participants by age group who argued that one would have an obligation to help. Again, it is the 8-year-olds and the 16-year-olds who are most likely to argue that one has such an obligation. The 14-year-olds were less than half as likely to take that position. As with the direct and indirect harm situations, these age-related patterns disappeared when the child in need of help was described as vulnerable. In the case of the vulnerable child, 85% or more of the participants at each age judged that it would be wrong not to help.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS ON MORAL DEVELOPMENT

With age, children and adolescents proceed toward increasingly balanced conceptions of fairness (Damon, 1977). Development moves from an early childhood set of judgments about unprovoked harm to notions of fairness as regulated by just reciprocity. Along with this greater understanding of fairness, however, comes an expanded capacity for incorporating facets of moral situations that render the application of morality more ambiguous and divergent. Thus, rather than presenting a straightforward picture of moral development as linear moral "progress" toward shared answers to moral situations, moral development includes periods of transition in which the expanded capacity to consider aspects of moral situations leads to variations in the application of moral criteria.

These developmental trends lead to an apparent U-shaped pattern in which the action choices of younger children and adolescents are similar and more likely to be in the direction of unambiguously choosing the moral action than those of older children and young adolescents. Young children tend to focus on the moral implications of acts and are less likely to incorporate situational information that would lead to consideration of moral and nonmoral features. Paradoxically, the increased social and moral understandings of older children and early adolescents, which allow them to attend to and incorporate situational information, leave them more likely to be influenced by the ambiguity of the gray areas of moral situations. This increased ambiguity also means that their resolution of moral situations will be more variable. On a strictly probabilistic basis, their likelihood of selecting the "nonmoral" choice in a conflict situation is increased.

One large element adding to this contextual ambiguity results from the developmental changes co-occurring in the personal domain. Early adolescence is a period of expansion and refinement of what young people consider to be personal matters of individual discretion (Smetana, 2006). There is a tendency at this age to conflate the right to have such personal choice with the notion that any personal choice is the same thing as a moral right. Thus, we see in the responses of these young adolescents an increased tendency to argue for the "right" to select the nonmoral action choice. Taken together, the increase in situational ambiguity and the conflation of personal choice with rights increases the probability that children of this age will select action choices that make them appear as a group to be ignoring moral choices (this, however, does not constitute a period of moral regression).

Older adolescents (the 16- and 17-year-olds) in this study seemed better able than their younger counterparts to

coordinate the disparate elements of conflict situations in ways that afforded a moral resolution while acknowledging competing nonmoral interests. This coordination includes the clarification or resolution of the distinction between one's capacity and right to choice, with the constraints upon individual action that comes with moral obligation. Thus at a superficial level, the choices made by older adolescents and young children appear to be more consistent with morality.

Through all of this, we would emphasize that there remains an aspect of moral judgment that does not undergo development beyond early childhood. In situations in which morality is not in conflict with other personal or interpersonal needs or motives, there is little variation in the decisions offered by children across ages. Similarly, when the moral salience of the situation was heightened, such as with regard to vulnerable others, children and adolescents nearly always selected the action that reflected the moral choice in each given situation. Thus, there is no point in moral development in which children's moral reasoning can be defined solely in terms of instrumentalism. What appears to be taking place is that children become better able to coordinate multifaceted moral situations and to weigh the moral and nonmoral (societal, personal, prudential) aspects of particular social contexts and events (Smetana, 2006).

The U-shaped pattern of development being ascribed to morality in our current work is similar to the oscillating pattern of periods of affirmation and negation in the development of concepts about social convention (Nucci et al., 2004; Turiel, 1983) and comports with other research on helping behavior indicating that the U-shaped decline in helping we observed with early adolescents occurs again in young adulthood (early 20s) (Eisenberg, Cumberland, Guthrie, Murphy, & Shephard, 2005). This more recent work would appear to be at variance with long-standing depictions of development as entailing a succession of improvements as children move from one developmental stage to the next (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). However, U-shaped growth patterns appear to be normative across developmental domains including language, cognition, and physical abilities and may be a general property of dynamic systems (Gershkoff & Thelen, 2004). These fluctuating patterns of development signal periods of increased attention to new elements of moral situations and mark transitions to more complex integrations of moral thought. Such periods of transition in which children appear to "regress" are familiar to most educators. Most teachers also understand that these "regressions" are not steps backward, but are part of the process of moving toward newer levels of competence and complexity. From an educational point of view, periods of transition are critical junctures where proper guidance can assist the developmental process.

## CONTEXT, DEVELOPMENT, AND DOMAIN INTERACTIONS

What we saw in our research on the development of moral judgments about harm and helping situations is that moral judgments often interact with the knowledge individuals possess regarding societal norms and concepts about personal discretion. One of the hallmarks of development is the capacity to coordinate the multifaceted elements of social contexts. Perhaps the best way to consider the Kohlberg (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) moral stages that were proffered as a moral educational and developmental sequence is to view those stages as approximations of age-related coordinations of moral and nonmoral elements in the types of situations posed by Kohlberg-style moral dilemmas.

As we noted earlier, one of the major variables contributing to the complexity of social-moral reasoning is that situational factors along with development impact the weight that individuals give to the moral and nonmoral elements when generating a social decision. This can be readily seen in the results of survey research (McClosky & Brill, 1983) showing that adults often subordinate rights to other considerations, such as preventing harm or community interests. It might appear that concepts of rights are part of advanced levels of moral understandings in which priority would be given to rights—and that many adults have not attained such understandings. However, the survey research also shows that rights are endorsed in many situations. In addition, research shows that children and adolescents understand rights as generally applicable, endorse rights in some situations, and subordinate rights in other situations (Helwig, 1995). It is not the case that with age there is a straightforward increasing ability to give priority to rights. It also depends on understandings of competing considerations, so that in some situations younger children endorse rights and in other situations older people subordinate rights.

Therefore, complicating analyses of moral judgments is that their application in particular situations varies by the concepts held in different domains so that it is difficult to chart out straightforward relations with age. We can make this more concrete with reference to the findings of two studies on judgments about honesty and deception. In one study (Perkins & Turiel, 2007), adolescents of two age groups, 12–13- and 16–17-year-olds, made judgments about deception of parents or peers with regard to moral, personal, and prudential activities. They were presented with hypothetical situations in which parents or peers insist in their objections to an adolescent's choice of an activity and the adolescent continues the activity but lies about it. In the moral domain, the adolescent is directed to engage in acts considered morally wrong (racial discrimination and fighting). For the personal (who to date, which club to join) and prudential (not riding a motorcycle, doing school work) domains, the parents or peers object to the adolescent's

choices. The findings showed differences among the types of activities, between parents and peers, and some age differences. Almost all participants in each age group judged deception of parents to be acceptable for the moral activities. Similarly, the majority judged deception acceptable for the personal activities. By contrast, the majority judged deception of parents unacceptable for the prudential acts (accepting the legitimacy of parental authority in directing such acts but not in directing the moral and personal acts). However, a greater number of the older than the younger adolescents considered deception legitimate for the personal and prudential acts. In turn, deception of peers in the moral and personal domains was judged to be less legitimate than deception of parents (having to do with inequality and mutuality in the two types of relationships).

In addition to showing that adolescents apply honesty in different ways toward different goals and in different types of relationships, the study revealed an age-related difference, in that older adolescents were more likely to judge deception for the personal and prudential domains to be acceptable than the younger ones. Do these findings point to a developmental shift in ways of coordinating honesty with personal and prudential issues and/or a developmental shift in the use of deception as a form of social opposition? The findings of another study render these questions difficult to answer. In that study (Turiel, Perkins, & Mensing, 2009), college undergraduates (who are older than the oldest group of adolescents in the first study) and older married adults made judgments about deception in marital relationships involving inequalities. Participants were presented with hypothetical situations in which a spouse objects to the other spouse's activities, who continues the activity and lies about it. Two conditions were used: one in which a husband works outside the home and the wife does not and the other in which the wife works outside the home and the husband does not. Nonworking spouses were depicted as engaging in deception with regard to four activities: attending meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) for a drinking problem (involving issues of physical and psychological welfare), maintaining a secret bank account, shopping for goods, and seeing a friend. In this study, too, findings varied by the type of activity. Almost all in each age group judged deception to attend AA meetings acceptable. The majority also accepted deception with regard to the secret bank account and seeing a friend, but they were more likely to accept deception on the part of a wife (whether working or not) than a husband. The most relevant finding for our purposes here is that the older adults were more likely to accept the legitimacy of deception in some situations than were the undergraduates. Therefore, there is no straightforward increase with age in acceptance (or rejection) of deception or of social opposition when the activities and relationships differ. In some situations and relationships, the undergraduates were less accepting of the legitimacy of deception than the 16- to 17-year-olds in other situations and relationships.

From an educational perspective, these variations in the ways in which social problems are resolved at different ages and variations in social experience mitigates against a simplistic equation of "learning sequences" with stages of moral development. Teaching for social and moral growth entails not only movement toward higher levels of moral reasoning, but also the capacity to evaluate and coordinate moral and nonmoral factors within social situations. It also means that students will not always arrive at the teacher determined "moral" answer and that there is *no* single correct moral response for all situations.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR MORAL EDUCATION

The research on moral development has added greater clarity and direction to the content of moral education by differentiating the conceptual system of morality from students' understandings of social convention and their claims to personal discretion (Turiel, 2002). This work has offered educators a framework from which to analyze the discourse patterns associated with social and moral transgressions in school settings (Killen, Breton, Ferguson, & Handler, 1994) that have in turn provided guidance for approaches to classroom management that would foster social and moral development (Nucci, 2008). It has also provided analytic tools for identifying moral, conventional, and personal issues that are contained within the regular academic curriculum allowing for moral education to be part of routine academic instruction rather than a separate add-on or package of moral education lessons (Nucci, 2008). These educational applications have employed two guiding principles: (a) that educational experiences be concordant with the social cognitive domain of the issues or content of the material or events being addressed and (b) that educational experiences be aligned with development.

At the same time, however, the research as described in this article has uncovered elements of complexity in the everyday moral reasoning of children and adolescents that mitigate against structuring moral education solely around movement through a progression of developmental stages (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). Evidence that children at all points in development are capable of evaluating actions and social norms in moral terms means that educators may engage students in critical moral reflection at all grade levels. In addition, the multifaceted nature of children's social cognitive frameworks means that the goals of moral education should be extended beyond fostering development within the moral domain to include the more complex task of increasing the ability and tendencies of students to evaluate and coordinate the moral and nonmoral elements of social issues. For example, issues of social exclusion and school bullying that have become the concern of many schools engage students' concepts about

convention and personal choice as well as concerns for fairness and harm (Horn, Daddis, & Killen, 2008).

As we look at the broad developmental trends that have emerged from our recent research, we can offer some tentative additional suggestions for how educators might approach issues of moral education within the elementary, middle school, and high school levels. We are not offering these observations as prescriptions given that our own recent research is still a work in progress and that it is generally unwise to move directly from findings of psychological research to educational applications. In making these suggestions, we are also assuming a baseline of classroom and school climate that attends to students' emotional needs and works toward what some authors have referred to as a climate of trust (Watson, 2003) among students and between students and the teacher. We share the broader perspective of developmental educators that the discourse and reflection that contributes to moral growth is inseparable from emotion and fares best in contexts that foster mutual respect among students and teachers.

Our findings with children in the elementary school years pointed to limitations in their ability to incorporate competing elements in generating moral decision in multifaceted social situations. One implication of this finding is that teachers might employ existing curricula such as reading and social studies along with naturally occurring events in the classroom and playground to help focus children's attention on the various elements competing with the core moral aspect of social situations or events. The goal would be to scaffold children's capacity to address the elements of multifaceted social situations. At the middle school level children appear in our research to be better able to attend to moral complexity, but have difficulty coordinating moral and nonmoral aspects of multifaceted social situations. The emphasis of moral education would be upon engaging students in the process of bringing the recognized complexities of multifaceted situations into coordination with morality. Finally, the increased capacity of high school students to coordinate competing elements in multifaceted situations as seen in our findings would allow teachers to ask for critical analysis of existing social practices from a moral perspective.

As we are learning from our current research on moral development, however, developmental "progress" does not always mean closer alignment with adult expectations. There are two ways in which this is the case. First, periods of developmental transition essential for the construction of complex social and moral reasoning are associated with an increased probability of decisions that give priority to nonmoral considerations in multifaceted social situations. Second, as was seen in the research on deception, development affects how individuals read social situations such that in some cases (e.g., marital relations) young people are more "moralistic" than adults. This moral "diversity" and "regression" may be difficult for some educators to accept and may explain the continuing popularity of programs of character education that focus on instilling or inculcating moral virtues (Lickona, 2004) or building "pillars of character" (Josephson, 2002). As our findings would suggest, however, there is little point in trying to instill basic virtues if the fundamental elements of morality are present in early childhood. Moreover, the traditionalist effort to achieve behavioral conformity through inculcation is at odds with the need for reasoning and judgment to navigate the complexities of the real social worlds of children and adolescents, let alone adults. What we would propose as an alternative would be to engage in developmentally concordant "capacity building" that would enlist the social and moral knowledge of students at each point of development to address social and moral issues. This would entail accepting periods of transition as normative and necessary for the construction of mature moral reasoning. It also asks that educators approach morality as they would to any other subject and not define their goals in terms of an end point (e.g., does math end with calculus?), but rather in terms of affording students an open-ended invitation to apply their moral knowledge and continuously develop within the moral domain.

Our emphasis on moral reasoning and critical thinking asks for considerable reflection on the part of teachers. As John Dewey once put it, "anyone who has begun to think places some part of the world in jeopardy." Some of our research findings, including findings in the studies of adolescents' judgments about deception, pose a major challenge to would-be moral educators. It will be recalled that judgments about deception showed that adolescents and adults believe that deception is sometimes warranted to right injustices, to promote welfare, and to defend against the misuse of power. Other research by psychologists (Conry-Murray, 2005; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994) and anthropologists (Abu-Lughod, 1993) has demonstrated that adolescents and adults are aware of unfairness embedded in cultural practices and in systems of societal organization (e.g., as in practices that promote gender inequalities) and that they engage in overt and covert activities of resistance and subversion toward the goal of correcting injustices (Turiel, 2002). The implications of these findings are that young people do scrutinize social arrangements and critique institutionalized unjust practices. This is a major challenge to educators to attend to positive features of moral resistance and who are likely to lose their credibility with students if they attempt to squelch such opposition and resistance. This is not merely hypothetical. Many traditional programs of character education and the building of pillars of character do just that—attempt to resist moral resistance. Educators must not only lead, but be led when appropriate.

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