REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL SENSITIVITY: A CONCERN OF MORALITY

Dr. T.C. Thankachan

Assistant Professor in Education, St. Thomas College of Teacher Education, Pala.

Dr. Beenamma Mathew

Assistant Professor in Education, St. Thomas College of Teacher Education, Pala.

Abstract

Social sensitivity is an important social skill and having high levels of social sensitivity can make people more well-liked and successful in social relationships. It is described the proficiency at which an individual can identify, perceive, and understand cues and contexts in social interactions along with being socially respectful to others. The reflections on morality including the moral teachers and moral students are one of the prerequisites for ensuring social sensitivity in educational scenario. For this reflection in action and reflection on practice is needed. Education should develop moral behaviour, moral values, moral character, moral emotion, and moral reason among the students. The moral reflection is not setting up a right value over a wrong value; it is a question of finding the possibility of action so as to take into account as far as possible, converging all the values involved in personal and social life.

Key words: *social sensitivity, morality, reflective morality, moral teachers, etc*

Introduction

Social sensitivity describes the proficiency at which an individual can identify, perceive, and understand cues and contexts in social interactions along with being socially respectful to others. This is an important social skill and having high levels of social sensitivity can make you more well-liked and successful in social and business relationships. An example of someone with low social sensitivity would be an individual who only talks about themselves, interrupts and talks over others, and who ignores social cues to stop talking. An example of someone with high social sensitivity would be a person who understands conversational cues and stops talking in order to listen at the appropriate time. Another example is, the co-operation of people of Kerala during and after the flood affected in different parts of the state.

During flood in Kerala, the biggest rescue work was done by Kerala's fisher folk, who arrived with their boats, strong bodies and generosity of spirit and spent tireless hours moving people to safety. A million or so people made it to schools, churches, community halls and other large buildings that turned into functional relief camps. Ordinary people ran the camps. Volunteers turned up in droves. Food and other essentials materialised. It shows, we are educated and we proclaimed the vision of education received by the people of Kerala. Why is Kerala's proactive response to the floods so sharply different from the passive victimhood that mostly characterises the flood-affected in the rest of India? The answer lies not only in the state's superior level of literacy, but also in the political empowerment and social sensitivity of the people over generations.

The man who stood on all fours, his face barely above the water, so that old women could step on his body to climb into the rescue boat, did so out of empowered generosity, not because it was his station in life to serve as a footrest. Such empowerment has created individuals out of the social layers, stacked one on top of the other according to their ritual status, that formed traditional society. The actions of people during flood are apt examples of social sensitivity in our state.

At the same time, there are some citizens including government employees, who showed negative mentality and critical attitude towards flood related issues and not co-operated with the society and government are the question mark in front of the elite society. Let the God Almighty and the history pardon them.

Education for Social Sensitivity

Education is a major institution in most societies. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any industrialised or industrialising society without a system of schools. Sociologists of education examine many parts of educational systems interaction, classrooms and peer groups, school organisations and national and international systems of education. Sociologists see education as one of the major institutions that constitute society; they place the study of education in a larger framework of institutions found in every society.

Even though the equality and equity problems are seemingly not of great concern in Finland as they are some in other parts of Europe and the World, it would be short-sighted not to bring them to light. Educational institutions in Europe have experienced chances that are seen to be persistent. The aspects selected here are gender (since girls tend to achieve different educational outcomes from boys), ethnicity (since ethnic minority pupils tend to experience different patterns of education from white pupils), social class (since educational life chances tend to be persistently superior the higher the social class) and the categorization known as special educational needs.

The effectiveness of organised activities of a society depends on the interaction and inter relationships of these institutions which constitute the whole. Now we will examine the role of education for the society and the relationship between education and other sub-system of society in terms of functionalist perspective. The functionalist view of education tends to focus on the positive contributions made by education to the maintenance of social system. This involves a commitment to society, a sense of belonging and feeling that the social unit is more important than the individual.

The equalisation of educational opportunities is essentially linked with the notion of equality in the social system. In a social system if all the individuals are treated as equal, they get equal opportunities for advancement. Since education is one of the most important means of upward mobility, it is through an exposure to education one can aspire to achieve higher status, position and emoluments. But for getting education he/she must have equal opportunities like other members of the society.

Reflections on Social Sensitivity

Reflective Practice was introduced by Donald Schön in his book *The Reflective Practitioner* in 1983, however, the concepts underlying reflective practice are much older. John Dewey was among the first to write about Reflective Practice with his exploration of experience, interaction and reflection. Other researchers such as Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, William James and Carl Jung were developing theories of human learning and development. Marcus Aurelius' Meditations has also been described as an example of reflective practice. These practices are necessary in the moral dimension of human life.

Donald Schön's 1983 book introduces concepts such as 'reflection on action' and 'reflection in-action' where professionals meet the challenges of their work with a kind of improvisation learned in practice. Reflective Practice has now been widely accepted and used as developmental practices for organisations, networks, and individuals. Schön developed the ideas of *reflection-IN-action* and *reflection-ON-practice*.

1. *Reflection-in-action*. This has two meanings. First, it means reflection in a particular context or workplace – for example, in a classroom, an office, a hospital ward, a leisure centre, a home, a factory and so on. Additionally, it can mean thinking about what you are doing, while you are actually doing it. Some call this 'thinking on your feet'. Much of this can be unconscious; you may be unaware that you are doing it. For example, you ask a child a question, then read the expression on her face. You quickly see that she doesn't understand what you have said, so you re-phrase the question in your mind and ask it again. This happens quickly, in the heat of the moment.

2. *Reflection-on-practice*. This also has two meanings. It can mean reflecting after the event – say, a day or two later. This essentially involves looking back and going over things again. So this kind of reflection is linked with the notion of time. It's done after the event or an encounter with others. It can also mean focusing on something significant. This is where things can become a bit tricky. For example, what would your regard as a 'significant' encounter of incident? This implies that you have to be selective. The key thing is to ask yourself, 'What's significant in what I am experiencing and doing?' You might ask yourself, 'What's caught my eye and stayed in my memory?'

Campbell and Bond (1982) state there are four major questions to be addressed when focusing on character development with respect to the moral dimension of human life:

1. what is good character;

2. what causes or prevents it;

3. how can it be measured so that efforts at improvement can have corrective feedback;and

4. how can it best be developed?

As previously discussed, good character is defined in terms of one's actions. Character development traditionally has focused on those traits or values appropriate for the industrial age such as obedience to authority, work ethic, working in group under supervision, etc.

Reflections on Morality

What Do We Mean by Morality? A large part of the controversy surrounding moral or character education has to do with how morality is to be defined. In everyday discourse morality refers simply to the norms of right and wrong conduct. What is meant by moral right and wrong, and whose criteria shall be used to judge the wrongness of actions. Morality (defined in terms of justice, welfare, rights, right and wrong) can be distinguished from concepts of social conventions, which are the consensually determined standards of conduct particular to a given social group.

Moral Teachers and Moral Students

Schools can best support students' moral development by helping teachers manage the stresses of their profession and by increasing teachers' capacity for reflection and empathy. Students surely benefit from performing community service, being reminded of important virtues, and practicing good habits. The moral development of students does not depend primarily on explicit character education efforts but on the maturity and ethical capacities of the adults with whom they interact-especially parents, but also teachers, and other community adults.

Educators influence students' moral development not simply by being good role models-important as that is-but also by what they bring to their relationships with students day to day: their ability to appreciate students' perspectives and to disentangle them from their own, their ability to admit and learn from moral error, their moral energy and idealism, their generosity, and their ability to help students develop moral thinking without shying away from their own moral authority. We need to rethink the nature of moral development itself. Modeling from both side (teachers and students) is the best method for creating moral teachers and moral students.

Moral Identity

Up to this point, we have endowed our moral person with some anatomical components: moral behaviour, moral values, moral character, moral emotion, and moral reason. Once again we can recognise that we have done a fine job in constructing the core of a moral person. Someone who does the right thing, believes in and cares about goodness, consistently shows the personality traits of goodness, feels regret for transgressions and concern for others, and who can effectively figure out what is good or bad. The more specific notion of moral identity has been an independent process of personal growth based on experiences of mutual egalitarian social co-ordinations. Morality is more a characteristic of the agent than of either action or thinking; the ultimate source of goodness lies in good will, and good will is at the core of what a person is.

Reflective Morality

Morality identifies a person, giving him a name, a face and a character. They bring three qualities in the individual – the quality of life (real models before the society), quality of compassion and quality of character – which leads to morality and ultimately to reflective morality. Today we need people of reflective morality.

There are few individuals whose moral standards are based on their own lines for thinking. Such an individual deliberates on every existing moral issue and decides for himself regarding how to improve upon it. Those persons doesn't accept dictation from outside and are able to develop interest in matters concerning morality, reflect upon the issue and strive for better moral standards. This type of morality - self created, self driven, reflective and creative – is called reflective morality. Many people may reflect but lack the courage to put forth their views. Reflective morality can transcend the narrow boundaries of society in

order to comprehend the ultimate goals of a truly moral life. The individual with reflective morality becomes universal and thinks of universal good only. Reflective Morality answers the questions by the individual on 'why to live and how to live'.

Conclusion

Teachers are in a position to foster the necessary skills to allow students to become autonomous and morally competent individuals. Through the use of cooperative learning, a teacher builds a collaborative atmosphere in the classroom. Teachers need opportunities to reflect on why they have difficulty in empathizing with particular students, on their success and failures in cultivating students' moral thinking, and on the state of their own ideals. Teachers need emotional support from their colleagues in dealing with chronic stress. And administrators need to learn the art of creating opportunities to give moral and emotional support, the art of moral care and the art of pro-moral modeling through reflective morality. Let me conclude, the moral reflection is not setting up a right value over a wrong value; it is a question of finding the possibility of action so as to take into account as far as possible, converging all the values involved in personal and social life.

REFERENCES

Battistich, V., Watson, M., Solomon, D., Schaps, E., & Solomon, J. (1991). The Child Development Project: A comprehensive program for the development of prosocial character. In J. L. Gewirtz & W. M. Kurtines (Eds.), *Handbook of moral behavior and development* (Vol. 3). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Heath, D. (1994). *Schools of hope: Developing mind and character in today's youth*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kohlberg, L. & Turiel, E. (1971). *Moral development and moral education*. In G. Lesser, ed. Psychology and educational practice. Scott Foresman.

Piaget, J. (1965). *The moral judgment of the child*. The Free Press: New York.

Power, F. C., Higgins, A., & Kohlberg, L. (1989). *Lawrence Kohlberg's Approach to Moral Education*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Schon, D.A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

Turiel, E. (1983). *The Development of Social Knowledge: Morality & Convention*. New York: Cambridge University Press.