



Children's Moral Education as a Contextually Situated Phenomenon: A Sociological-Critical Reappraisal

Marzieh Aali 

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophical and Social Foundations of Education, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. Email: m.aali@ut.ac.ir

Abstract

In recent decades, the reconsideration of children's moral education through interdisciplinary approaches has become a central concern in the philosophy of education. The present article aims to offer a critical reflection on a renewed possibility for reconstructing moral education by integrating virtue ethics with critical sociology, thereby providing a conceptual and practical framework for rethinking this field. The main question guiding this study is how a conceptual linkage between virtue ethics and core sociological categories such as *inequality*, *justice*, and *capital* can contribute to the development of a critical framework for children's moral education within contemporary school and social contexts.

Methodologically, the article is grounded in conceptual analysis and adopts a philosophical–interpretive approach, in which ethical and sociological concepts are re-examined through a dialectical dialogue. The findings indicate that an interdisciplinary interpretation of virtue ethics—one that foregrounds social dynamics and unequal structures emphasized in critical sociology—can shift moral education away from abstract and individualistic orientations toward a contextualized, concrete, and critical understanding.

<

Conclusion

The third finding concerns the redesign of moral education in schools. In the proposed model, the child is not a passive recipient of official values but an emerging moral and civic agent who should, in age-appropriate ways, understand power relations, differences in opportunity, inequality, and the social consequences of action. This shift moves education from conformity toward participatory and critical practice. Appropriate methods include guided dialogue, analysis of real-life situations, stories and moral dilemmas, group activities, and reflection on everyday experiences in school and society. The teacher acts as a guide and facilitator who connects the cultivation of virtues to an understanding of their social context. The school, in turn, should be organized as a moral community: teacher-student relations, the distribution of opportunities, rules of participation, and mechanisms for resolving conflict should be consistent with justice, respect, dialogue, and collective responsibility. Critical moral education, however, should not lead to relativism or leave children unsupported in the face of social complexity. Teaching about power and inequality requires gradual progression, developmental appropriateness, professional guidance, and an explicit connection to moral virtues. Overall, the article concludes that bringing virtue ethics and critical sociology together can provide a basis for moving from individualistic moral education toward an approach that is contextualized, social, justice-oriented, and emancipatory. The framework's principal innovation is its simultaneous attention to character and structure. Virtue without the improvement of social conditions, and structural critique without the cultivation of moral character, cannot independently produce sustainable educational action. Because the study is theoretical, field testing and examination of the framework's applicability in schools remain essential directions for future research.

