



HANDBOOK OF MORAL AND CHARACTER EDUCATION, EDT. LARRY P. NUCCI AND DARCIA NARVAEZ

Mecit Aslan

Research Assistant, Yüzüncü Yıl University, Turkey
maslan4773@gmail.com

The purpose of this handbook is to move beyond discourse to bring together a collection of chapters by the top researchers and scholars in the field that reflects the state of the art in moral and character education. With this aim in mind, this is a handbook composed of various chapters written by prominent academicians in this field. In Part I, “defining the field: history, philosophy, theory and methodology”, the authors address the basic philosophical, historical, and methodological issues about contemporary moral and character education. In part II, “Relationships in schools and classrooms”, approaches to moral and character education recognize the importance of social interactions for students’ moral growth. In the Part III, “Contemporary Approaches”, the main focus is on contemporary approaches to moral and character education. In part IV, “Moral and character education beyond the classroom”, education is defined in terms of practices schools and teachers use to influence student learning and development. In part V, “Professional Issues” the main focus is on educational practices and experiences designed to impact the moral development..

Key Words: moral education, character education, education, teaching

BOOK REVIEW

When I was first asked to write a book review, it was the very first book that came to my mind. As it is the book that I used in master degree as auxiliary book, it affected me greatly, because a great many academicians prominent in their fields have gathered in this book to compile what they have done in relation to this matter. While writing this book review, besides my own views about the book in question, I have made use of what Larry P. Nucci and Darcia Narvaez write in this field. The purpose of this handbook is to move beyond discourse to bring together a collection of chapters by the top researchers and scholars in the field that reflects the state of the art in moral and character education. Indeed, the author list comprises a virtual who’s who in the field of moral and character education. The goal here is to be as inclusive as possible

with the one caveat being that anyone included in the volume operates from a solid grounding in scholarship or research rather than simply promoting a set of personal intuitions or political views. The book is structured in sections with chapters intended to flesh out the underlying philosophical and theoretical issues underlying differing perspectives, followed by chapters in which these fundamental ideas are put to the test through various forms of research and educational practice.

In Part I named “defining the field: history, philosophy, theory and methodology”, the authors address the basic philosophical, historical, and methodological issues undergirding contemporary moral and character education. One of the chapters written by Thomas Wren “*Philosophical Moorings*” takes us to the philosophical schools of thought that support traditionalist and developmental approaches to moral education. In one of the others written by Daniel Lapsley, it continues the discourse on virtue and reason started by Wren that extends it to contemporary philosophical and psychological connections between morality and the self. In “*Moral Self-Identity as the Aim of Education*,” Lapsley discusses whether the developmentalist emphasis on reason can suffice as a basis for moral education in the absence of an effort to also impact the development of the “self.” In the chapters 4, 5, 6, it is presented that contemporary overviews of the traditional and developmental traditions have dominated discourse on moral education. In these chapters, authors offer strong defences for the promotion of virtue and traditional approaches to moral education. They offer contemporary rebuttals to Kohlberg’s analysis of the limits of virtue-based moral theories. Part I ends with chapter 8 that is regarding the documented lack of impact of classroom teacher practice found in formal research.

In part II named “*Relationships in schools and classrooms*”, all approaches to moral and character education recognize the importance of social interactions for students’ moral growth. It addresses the affective and social environments of classrooms. One of the chapters written by Marilyn Watson extends the notion of care into the classroom relationships based on trust. His puts emphasis on the developmental needs of elementary school children to establish attachment relationships with nurturant caregivers. In one of the other chapters written on “*Social Interdependence, Moral Character and Moral Education*”, the authors provide a detailed overview of the uses of cooperative goal structures and research on the impact of the uses of cooperative groups. The most radical effort at transforming school culture to promote moral development has been the “*Just Community Schools*” by Lawrence Kohlberg. Part II ends with putting emphasis on the areas of social relations that are not always viewed as related to moral or character education. The authors in this section address the

connections between programs addressing what has been called *Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)* and moral and character education.

In Part III named “*Contemporary Approaches*”, the main focus is on contemporary approaches to moral and character education. For example, in one of these chapters, “*Social Cognitive Domain Theory and Moral Education*” has been tackled and taken into consideration. It presents research on the applications of domain theory to issues of classroom management and the construction of moral and social values lessons employing the regular academic curriculum. The very next chapters present approaches to moral and character education aimed at students in particular grade levels. The author provides a comprehensive view of the Child Development Project (CDP) program and the results of extensive program evaluations demonstrating that constructing a caring school community is crucial to any effort to effect positive student outcome for social and emotional development. The authors, in this section, present the theoretical assumptions and classroom practices of an approach to moral development in childhood settings. Their work builds from extensive research and experience in the application of Piagetian theory to classrooms in collaboration with their colleagues. Part III concludes with an approach to teaching for morality and character developed by Rachel Kessler and her colleagues at the Passage Ways Institute that focuses on the connection to spirituality. They offer an approach to help youth respond to challenges by engaging in educational practices.

In part IV named “*Moral and character education beyond the classroom*”, education is defined in terms of practices schools and teachers use to influence student learning and development. The chapters in Part IV address how formal programs for community service, informal learning experiences through the media, and other modes of learning beyond the classroom can influence moral and character development. A few authors in this section take what has become known as “positive youth development” into account. This inverts the usual attention to youth disorders. This is followed by a comprehensive examination of the impact of efforts to engage youth through service learning. It is generally said sports build character that is critically examined by David Shields and Brenda Bredemeier in this section. They take us beyond the bromides to look at the psychology of morality and to explore the kinds of sports experiences tapping into and build students’ moral character. Finally, the authors take on what may be today’s most daunting challenge to raising and educating youth of moral character: the media. Young people spend more time with television, computers, and cell phones than they do in the classroom. They communicate through electronic media.

In part V, that is “*Professional Issues*” this handbook has focused on educational practices and experiences designed to impact the moral development. In this final section, the main focus shifts to the moral development and character education of professionals, with particular attention to the ethical requirements of teachers. It begins with a chapter written by Muriel Bebeau and Verna Monson. They review decades of research on the impact of professional education on the moral development of health professionals.

This handbook is a compilation that reflects the state of the art and science of moral and character education. This is a field that has grown since the 1960s as the general public and political leaders have come to realize that education is about more than academic learning. As Theodore Roosevelt once said, “To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.” Still, perspectives vary in how best to go about the process of education for moral development, and whether the emphasis should be placed on the cultivation of virtue or the development of moral judgment. Nevertheless, there is a convergence of opinion around the need to continue research and inquiry in this area, and to encourage schools and teachers to include attention to moral development in their educational practices. It is our belief that this handbook will serve as a valuable resource for efforts to engage in both research and practice in the area of moral development and character education. This handbook has been written in an academic language and people groups such as teachers or anyone interested in an educational programme can benefit from reading this handbook.