Beyond Kohlberg

Moral Reasoning and Character Education as part of Aggression Replacement Training®
Kohlberg’s Stage Theory

• Promotes the idea that moral reasoning proceeds through an invariant sequence of stages toward an understanding of what is just and fair.
• Research shows a well-established relationship between moral reasoning and delinquency.
Stams et al, 2006

• Did a nine year longitudinal study that confirmed the reciprocal relationship and delinquency – the higher the moral reasoning score, the lower the rate of delinquency.
Samuelson, 2007

• Demonstrated that a discussion based curriculum (like what is used in Aggression Replacement Training®) produced a statistically significant improvement in higher stage moral reasoning.
Snarry and Samuelson, 2008

Their meta-analysis of moral reasoning studies suggest:

1. Dilemma discussion is a useful method for moral development.

2. Real life dilemmas are more efficacious for moral development than are hypothetical dilemmas.
3. There is a zone of proximal development (+1) in which dilemma discussions advance moral development maximally.
4. Peers are the best teachers during dilemma discussion groups.
Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil

- Paul Bloom (2013) posits that few contemporary psychologists would endorse Kohlberg. He cites extensive research that says Kohlberg underestimated the moral sophistication of children and overestimated the moral sophistication of adults.
Study of One Year Old Babies
Fairness Instinct

• What we see at all ages is an overall bias toward equality.

• Children expect equality, prefer those who divide resources equally, and are strongly biased to divide resources equally themselves.
• We are born with some sort of fairness instinct.
• Babies are moral animals, equipped by evolution with empathy and compassion, the capacity to judge the actions of others and even some rudimentary understanding of fairness and justice.
Huitt, 2004

- Fundamental to many approaches to moral and character education, and a criticism of Kohlberg is a reliance on “right thinking” as leading to “right behavior.”
• Their research distinguished between moral character and performance character. Youth can be taught character traits which must be mastered well to be used for good.
What is Character?

• For most of us, character refers to something innate and unchanging – it is the core set of attributes that define one’s very essence.
Seligman and Peterson, 2011

• Define character much differently. It is a set of abilities or strengths that are very much changeable and entirely malleable.
• They are skills that you can learn.
• They are skills that you can practice.
• They are skills that you can teach.
Character Strengths that predict life satisfaction and high achievement (Peterson)

- Grit
- Self-Control
- Zest
- Social Intelligence
- Gratitude
- Optimism
- Curiosity
If-Then Thinking = Mental Contrasting

• Three Strategies are utilized when setting goals (Duckworth and Oettingen).
• Two don’t work very well.
• Optimists favor indulging, which means imagining the future they would like to achieve. Indulging feels really good when you are doing it but it does not correlate at all with actually achieving your goal.
• Pessimists use a strategy called dwelling, which involves thinking about all the things that will get in the way of their accomplishing a goal.
• Mental Contrasting combines the other two methods: concentrating on a positive outcome and simultaneously concentrating on the obstacles in their way.
• Doing both at the same time creates a strong association between the future and reality that signals the need to overcome the obstacles in order to attain the desired future.
Implementation Intentions

• Specific plans in the form of if-then statements that link the obstacles with ways to overcome them.
Positive fantasizing

• “Dream it and you can achieve it.”
Your History is not Your Destiny

- Past performance is not always an indication of your future results.
Walter Mischell: “From good intentions to Willpower”

• An ingenious study to test the willpower.
Edlund, Clingman and Fowler

• The effects of primary reward on I.Q.
Segal, 2013

• “Working when no one is watching: Motivation, Test Scores, and Economic Success”