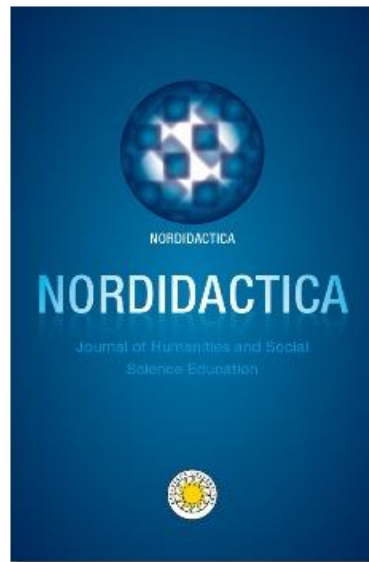


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Perspectives on Learning and their Implications for the Ethics Education Part of Religious Education

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Abstract: Some national syllabuses of religious education (RE) include aspects of ethics. Since ethics education or moral education (ME) as an international research field has been strongly influenced by theories of development and learning, this article examines the relationship between ethics and three major learning theories. Through an exploratory review of publications from the Journal of Moral Education over the last decades, the paper investigates the role of the behaviourist-empiricist approach, the cognitive approach (Piaget), and the situative-sociocultural approach (Vygotsky). The paper shows that behaviourist-empiricist perspectives have received little attention and have been criticised, while cognitive perspectives have been dominant, and situative perspectives have been considered to some extent. During the last two decades, perspectives from neurobiology have been introduced to address morality in ways that point towards an integration of aspects from the previous traditions. This paper briefly discusses the implications of these findings for ME in light of theoretical perspectives on learning and teaching and point out some issues for further investigation.

KEYWORDS: LEARNING, ETHICS EDUCATION, MORAL EDUCATION

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Introduction

In several European countries, ethics education or moral education (ME) is included in curricula, albeit in various ways. According to Korim and Hanesová (2010), ME may be a separate subject or a part of social science education (e.g. France and Spain) or religious education (RE), mentioned as RE/ME (e.g. Norway, Sweden, Austria and Switzerland). Internationally, ME is a well-established research field represented by journals such as the *Journal of Moral Education (JME)*. In the Nordic context, Swedish researchers in particular have paid attention to aspects of ethics education as part of RE, such as competence development and assessment (Franck 2017; Lilja et al. 2023; Osbeck et al. 2018).

Historically, there have been relationships between ME and some major psychological theories of moral development. As indicated in two *JME* surveys (Lee 2021; Lee & Taylor 2013), there has been a particular focus on perspectives related to Piaget's cognitive development theory, while less attention has been paid to other development perspectives such as the behaviourist tradition, stemming from Pavlov and Skinner, and the situative tradition, stemming from Vygotsky. Studies of ME that apply learning theories tend to address one, or to some extent two, perspectives. In the Scandinavian context, some studies have applied situative perspectives (Lilja et al. 2023; Vestøl 2011).

However, studies covering approaches to ME from a broader range of learning perspectives are difficult to find. The above-mentioned review studies of articles in *JME* contribute quantitative overviews of some trends within this particular journal (Lee 2021; Lee & Taylor 2013). I argue that there is a need for more substantial, qualitative studies that can inform researchers and educators about how learning perspectives influence ME. This argument is based on three conditional factors that are important for ME:

One condition is the historical connections between ME and psychological development theory, particularly the cognitive approach (Lee 2021; Lee & Taylor 2013). There is a need for comprehensive overviews that can clarify the implications these connections may have for teaching and learning in RE/ME.

A related condition is the occasional eclectic ways in which single aspects of psychological learning theory are included in RE/ME literature. Examples are found in the way Norwegian RE/ME textbooks for secondary school and ME textbooks for teacher education address the psychological ethical perspectives of justice by Lawrence Kohlberg and the contrasting perspectives of care by Carol Gilligan without presenting a broader picture of psychological theories related to moral development (Christoffersen & Selvik 1999; Eidhamar et al. 2022; Leer-Salvesen et al. 2007). This potentially leaves RE/ME educators uninformed about the wider historical and theoretical landscape within which the perspectives belong and about the possible relationships between different learning theories and RE/ME.

A third condition is the role that learning theories play in teacher education programmes, in which they are presented as basic pedagogical perspectives underpinning and informing the professional teaching practices of students. Examples

of such presentations of learning theories are found, for instance, in Norwegian literature on pedagogy, which includes the behaviourist, cognitive and sociocultural perspectives stemming from B. F. Skinner, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky respectively (Imsen 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2021). As will be elaborated below, such perspectives are also addressed in international research compilations dealing with high quality teaching (Bransford et al. 2005). For student teachers and teachers in RE/ME, there is a need for studies that connect the presentations in the pedagogical literature to the ME domain, creating a basis for the integration of learning theory and RE/ME.

To provide a basis for a broader, more inclusive approach to ME, the present study has undertaken an exploratory investigation of the connections between learning theories and ME. As preliminary literature searches showed that a substantial number of relevant publications were included in the *Journal of Moral Education (JME)*, the decision was made to make a study based on articles from this journal.

The research question was phrased as follows: *How do JME-articles display intersections between moral education and behaviourist-empiricist, cognitive-rationalist, and situative-sociohistoric approaches to learning and what are the implications for the teaching and learning of ethics in RE?*

Since there is no clear distinction between the concepts of *moral education* and *ethics education* in the literature covered in this article, the concepts are regarded as overlapping in meaning. In this article, ME refer to curriculum-based teaching and learning in school with the aim of fostering students' moral and ethical competence. The concepts of *morality* and *ethics* refer to reflections and actions related to values and questions of the right and the good, as well as theoretical understandings of such reflections and actions.

To establish a theoretical framework for the discussion of the findings, the article draws on a presentation of learning theories by Greeno et al. (1996) and a presentation of theories of learning and their roles in teaching by Bransford et al. (2005). To relate the discussion to an empirical RE/ME context, the article also draws on elements of ethics education included in the Norwegian RE curricula (UDIR 2020a; UDIR 2020b).

Previous research

Previous studies undertaking the efforts of the present study are sparse. While a Swedish review study examines ethical competences (Osbeck et al. 2018), the most relevant review studies have been undertaken by Lee and Taylor (2013) and Lee (2021). These studies map the major trends in *JME* over 40- and 50-year periods, respectively. These surveys identify a range of disciplinary approaches that are philosophical, psychological, sociological/cultural, educational and cross-disciplinary in nature. They mention 'behaviorism' and 'cognitive-developmental theory' under psychological approaches, 'social constructionism' under sociological/cultural approaches, and 'socio-cultural psychology' under the cross-disciplinary label (Lee 2021, p. 136, Lee & Taylor, 2013, p. 426). According to these reviews, the majority of the articles in the

journal are review studies, theoretical inquiries and quantitative surveys and about 20% concern teaching and learning strategies for ME (Lee 2021; Lee & Taylor 2013).

The study by Lee and Taylor (2013) also reports that the cognitive scientist Lawrence Kohlberg is the most-researched scholar and Jean Piaget is the second most researched scholar. Lev Vygotsky is listed with only four occurrences. The cognitive-developmental perspective has seemingly had a leading position in the *JME*-articles (Lee 2021). However, the review studies acknowledge that the dominance of Kohlberg's position has diminished, as there is a recent 'lack of consensus' (Lee & Taylor 2013, p. 422), and new perspectives in moral psychology and moral sciences have been introduced (Haidt 2013; Krettenauer 2021; Lee 2021).

Theoretical and contextual framing

As noted, the discussion of the findings in this article is framed within perspectives on learning theories and teaching (Bransford et al. 2005; Greeno et al. 1996) and is related to a specific contextual context, namely the Norwegian RE curricula (UDIR 2020a; UDIR 2020b).

The presentation by Greeno et al. (1996) addresses the characteristics of and relationships between three major groups of approaches to learning: behaviourist/empiricist approaches, cognitive/rationalist approaches and situative/pragmatist-sociohistoric approaches. Although the approaches differ from each other in several ways, Greeno et al. (1996) suggest that they could be regarded as analyses of learning at varying levels of aggregation or as contributors to a dialectical cycle of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. The following paragraphs briefly summarise some main characteristics of the three approaches, according to Greeno et al. (1996).

Behaviourist/empiricist approaches emphasise knowledge as the accumulation of 'associations' and 'components of skills', as they regard learning as 'the process in which associations and skills are acquired' (p. 16). Learning may be defined as the construction of new associations (*associationism*), as formation, strengthening or weakening of connections between stimuli and response (*behaviourism*, related to Skinner), or as strengthening or weakening of connections between neuronlike elements (*connectionism*). These approaches stress the role of positive and negative reinforcement or feedback, and they mainly understand motivation as a type of extrinsic incentive. Learning environments are organised for effective knowledge transmission with efficient adherence to routines in classroom activities. Clear goals, feedback and reinforcement are priorities, and curricula are structured in sequences of instruction that progress from simpler to more complex components. Assessments will emphasise knowledge of the components.

Cognitive/rationalist approaches centre on the 'understanding of concepts' and 'cognitive abilities, such as reasoning, planning, solving problems, and comprehending language' (p. 16). Such approaches may focus on the 'structural nature of knowledge and the importance of insight in learning' (*Gestalt psychology*), the cognitive growth of children and their conceptual understanding (*constructivism*; Piaget) or 'language

understanding, reasoning, and problem solving' (*symbolic information processing*; Chomsky) (p. 16). A *constructivist* approach to learning is mainly concerned with conceptual and cognitive structures. It entails 'an active process of construction rather than by passive assimilation of information or rote memorization', and is strongly influenced by Piaget's ideas of cognitive development (p. 22). Symbol-information-processing models focus on adding to and modifying a learner's procedural knowledge. Finally, cognitive/rationalist approaches regard motivation as stimulated by inconsistency between experience and cognitive representational schemata, and they seek to foster the 'student's natural tendencies to learn and understand' (p. 25). Learning environments are organised as interactive environments for the construction of understanding. Curricula prioritise sequences of conceptual development and problem-solving methods, and assessments target extended processes and credit varieties of excellence.

Situative/pragmatist-sociohistoric approaches view knowledge as 'distributed among people and their environments, including objects, artifacts, tools, books, and the communities of which they are a part' (p. 17). Greeno et al. (1996) distinguish between several research traditions, including *ethnography*, *ecological psychology* and *situation theory*, which have contributed to the situative perspective. Such approaches understand learning as the strengthening of 'practices of communities and the abilities of individuals to participate in those practices' (p. 23) and consider motivation in terms of '[e]ngaged [p]articipation' (p. 26). Learning environments are organised as social practices that support the development of a personal identity as a capable learner and knower. Curricula highlight practices of discourse and representation where students formulate and solve realistic problems. Assessments address participation in learning practices, including student participation in assessments, and consider the effects of assessments on learning environments and interactions.

In a major international contribution to the field of teacher education (Bransford et al. 2005), the three perspectives covered by Greeno et al. (1996) are related to classroom teaching. Bransford et al. (2005) distinguish between four different foci in teaching: 'knowledge-centeredness', 'learner-centeredness', 'community-centeredness', and 'assessment-centeredness' (p. 41), of which the latter three are related to cognitive, situative and behaviourist approaches. Learner-centeredness is related to constructivism (Piaget) and includes relationship to students' existing knowledge and perspectives on metacognition, memory, motivation and transfer. Community-centeredness is described in terms of distributed expertise and is related to Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Assessment-centeredness focuses on purposes of assessment, the role of feedback (Pavlov/Skinner) and questions of transfer. Although knowledge-centeredness is not related specifically to the three approaches, the approaches are said to have strong implications for the understanding, organising and handling of knowledge, as is also indicated in the article by Greeno et al. (1996) referred to above. Discussing the relationships between the four foci, Bransford et al. (2005) take a pragmatic stance, arguing that 'learning occurs most effectively when all four components are balanced' (p. 71).

While Bransford et al. (2005) draw on theoretical perspectives on learning as they describe learners, communities, assessment and knowledge as central aspects of the educational work in schools, theories of learning are normally not addressed as such in the parts of RE/ME curricula dealing with ethics education. Nevertheless, the four foci described by Bransford et al. (2005) will be discernible in the curricula to various extents.

In the Norwegian curricula of RE/ME, ethics is addressed in relation to objectives, core elements, interdisciplinary topics, basic skills and competence aims (UDIR 2020a; UDIR 2020b). While the objectives mention practice in ethical reflection and the development of students' judgement, the competence aims focus on the use of ethical concepts from religious and philosophical traditions in addressing contemporary issues. One of the five core elements in the curricula is entirely dedicated to ethical reflection:

Students should be able to identify ethical dilemmas and discuss issues of ethics with the help of their own experience, ability to empathize and various ethical models and concepts. Ethical reflection provides the opportunity to deal with large and small questions, conflicts and challenges of importance to the school community, everyday life and global society. Philosophical ways of thinking give students the tools to analyse arguments and claims (UDIR 2020a; UDIR 2020b). (Translated by the author)

As is evident, the core element displays a marked learner-centeredness, but also puts a certain emphasis on community issues. The core element, along with the other parts of the curricula, displays both cognitive elements of ethics, such as discussion and analysis, and elements related to existential or emotional issues, such as everyday questions and challenging issues of gender and sexuality. While the competence aims address concepts from both religious and philosophical traditions, the core element seems to be more focused on philosophical models of ethical thinking. In the guidelines for formative and summative assessments, the curricula focus on cognitive and rational aspects, such as reflection and critical thinking and on handling issues in a variety of contexts.

The following section briefly describes the research method. The results section focuses on how the *JME* articles engage with the three approaches in relation to ME.

Method

The investigation was designed and carried out as an exploratory review study of articles published in *JME* between 1971 and mid2022. The journal was selected based on preliminary searches, indicating that the articles in *JME* offered the most suitable foundation for an exploratory mapping of relationships between psychological learning theories and the field of ME.

The investigation was based on searches in Oria (oria.no) using the search term 'moral education' and 'ethics education' combined with all the different author names that Greeno et al. (1996) related to the three approaches. As shown in Table 1, the majority of search results were related to the author name Piaget and to some extent to Vygotsky. Since searches for the names Pavlov and Skinner yielded just a minor

number, additional searches were performed with the search term ‘behaviourism’/‘behaviourist’/‘behaviorism’/‘behaviorist’.

TABLE 1

Numbers of articles in search results and in the reference list in this article (Numbers overlap to some extent as some articles address more than one approach).

Approach	Search result <i>JME</i>	In reference list	References
Behaviourist (Skinner/Pavlov)	41	16	(Akbari & Tajik 2012), (Althof & Berkowitz 2006), (Araújo 2012), (Berkowitz & Grych 1998), (Brunsdon & Walker 2021), (Haidt 2013), (Hyland 1992), (Marantz 1988), (Neng Lin et al. 2011), (Orchard 2021), (Reed 2008), (Reed 2009), (Samuels & Casebeer 2005), (Sherblom 2012), (Slote 2016), (Zigler 1998)
Cognitive (Piaget)	275	32	(Araújo 2012), (Blakeney & Blakeney 1990), (Brooks-Walsh & Sullivan 1973), (Carr 2002), (Collier 1997), (Cook et al. 2003), (Cuypers 2021), (Enright 1981), (Ferrari & Okamoto 2003), (Gardner 1991), (Israely 1985), (Kavanagh 1977), (Korthals 1992), (Leicester & Pearce 1997), (Lydiat 1973), (Lydiat 1974), (Maqsud 1982), (Markoulis & Christoforou 1991), (McCann & Bell 1975), (Nobes 1999), (Pearson & Elliott 1980), (Power & Power 1992), (Richmond & Cummings 2004), (Sherblom 2012), (Steward 1979), (Taylor & Walker 1997), (Turiel 2003), (Weinreich 1975), (Wilson 1976), (Withers 1982), (Youniss 2009), (Ziv 1976)
Situative (Vygotsky)	38	10	(Balakrishnan & Clairborne 2012), (Crawford 2001), (Haste & Abrahams 2008), (Tappan 1991), (Tappan 1998), (Tappan 2006), (Thompson 2013), (Turner & Chambers 2006), (Vestøl 2011), (Öhman & Östman 2007)
Neuro-scientific	47	11	(Han 2014), (Han 2017), (Kim & Sankey 2009), (Krettenauer 2021), (Lapsley & Hill 2008), (Lovat 2017), (Narvaez & Bock 2002), (Narvaez & Vaydich 2008), (Rest et al. 2000), (Sankey 2006), (van IJzendoorn et al. 2010)

Searches for the vast number of additional author names mentioned by Greeno et al. (1996) yielded only a few instances that were deemed relevant to the research focus. Among them are references to the American psychologist David Everett Rumelhart whom Greeno et al. (1996) linked to the behaviourist/empiricist approach of *connectionism* (Narvaez & Bock 2002; Rest et al. 2000), as well as articles referring to the term ‘neural network’, which Greeno et al. (1996) associated with ‘connectionism’, and articles referring to the situative writers Jane Lave and Etienne Wenger (e.g. Öhman & Östman 2007).

During the selection of articles, it became clear that several articles made connections between the approaches outlined by Greeno et al. (1996) and

neuroscientific perspectives on morality and ME. To deliver a thorough description of these connections, an additional search for ‘neural networks’ and ‘neuroscience’ was conducted, identifying 47 articles.

Although Lawrence Kohlberg’s approach is widely considered an extension of Piaget’s cognitive approach, Greeno et al (1996) did not reference Kohlberg and articles dealing with Kohlberg were only included in instances in which Kohlberg was connected with some of the names or approaches identified by Greeno et al. (1996).

All articles were checked, and a selection of articles took place based on the following criteria: Substantial descriptions were prioritised and articles that provided only brief references were generally omitted, although this criterion was used less strictly with regard to the behaviourist/empiricist approach since the descriptions of this approach in the articles were generally brief. In addition, articles that focused mainly on issues such as research methodology, relationships to various theoretical positions and topics not directly related to the research focus of this article were omitted. Book reviews were also omitted. To keep the reference list within a reasonable length, articles were also omitted to some extent, if they addressed aspects covered by other articles.

During the preliminary phases of the analysis, the number of articles was gradually reduced according to the criteria described above resulting in articles included in the reference list (Table 1). While the articles that refer to the behaviourist and cognitive approaches were published over the period from 1973–2021, the articles referring to situative and neuroscientific perspectives were published within a shorter period starting from the 1990s and early 2000s.

In the analysis, the most relevant text passages from the articles were coded for their thematic content and subsequently grouped according to their themes and subthemes. Based on this organisation, comprehensive draft texts were produced that included text passages related to each theme. In the final writing phase, these draft texts were condensed. Most space was allotted to the two themes of *morality (ethics)* and *moral education (ethics education)*, which are considered the most pertinent to the research question. Because of space limitations, the other themes are only covered to some extent in a more condensed manner.

Notably, the investigation was exploratory, examining the characteristics of the approaches as broad perspectives. Accordingly, the results presentation does not cover all aspects of the approaches that are addressed in the articles and does not delve into the nuances or variations within each tradition or the extent of empirical support for applications of the different approaches to ME.

Results

The main parts of the presentation of the results below address how the three learning approaches address morality and ME. In the final part of the results presentation, I address how morality and ME are addressed in articles dealing with neuroscientific perspectives on morality.

The articles concerned a variety of topics. Of the articles included in the reference list, a slight majority can be classified as conceptual or theoretical, while a slightly smaller portion consists of empirical research reports, and a minor number of articles are review studies or meta-studies. Empirical studies are mostly related to a Piagetian or Piagetian-Kohlbergian framework (e.g. Kavanagh 1977; Markoulis & Christoforou 1991; Taylor & Walker 1997).

The articles differ in the amount of space and attention they dedicate to the approaches. *JME*-articles that address cognitive/rationalist perspectives far outnumber articles that deal with other perspectives. The majority of references to behaviourism are brief and descriptive-historical or critical, giving the impression that behaviourism is a reductionist, instrumentalist or deterministic approach (e.g. Haidt 2013; Hyland 1992; Sherblom 2012). Only a few articles take a more positive stance (Neng Lin et al. 2011; Samuels & Casebeer 2005; Slote 2016). The general approach to the Piagetian cognitive approach is descriptive or positive, although some articles pose critical observations or objections on how the approach deals with issues of group relations (Korthals 1992), irrationality (Cuypers 2021), context sensitivity (Nobes 1999), class, racism, and ethnicity (Power & Power 1992). The approach to the situated perspective is likewise descriptive or positive apart from critical remarks on measurement of development (Tappan 1998) and a critique referred by Öhman and Östman (2007, p. 166) that Vygotsky promotes a ‘dualism between “the social plane” and “the psychological plane”’.

Morality (Ethics)

The understanding of morality (ethics) in each of the three approaches is partly expressed through descriptions of the general emphasis of the approach but also in more explicit terms. Morality is believed to be externally evoked (behaviourist), internally developed through social interaction (cognitive) or mediated by cultural tools (situative).

In presentations of the **behaviourist** approach, some articles mention how human nature, cognition and agency are treated as aspects of conditioned reflex and external manipulation (Zigler 1998) and that behaviourist stimulus-response thinking problematises human agency and moral consciousness (Reed 2008). The articles are mainly critical of the behaviourist understanding of morality. Some authors state that, according to Skinner, moral development and engagement ‘doesn’t really exist’ (Sherblom 2012, p. 122) or the child tend to be seen as a morally ‘blank slate’ (Haidt 2013, p. 282). Others state that the behaviourist approach regards moral values as merely internalised from outside (Araújo 2012) and sees ‘overt behaviour’ (e.g. sharing, helping and cheating) as the ‘core of psychological morality’ (Berkowitz & Grych 1998, p. 372). Along with psychoanalysis, behaviourism is considered a theory with implicit moral relativism (Reed 2009). Papers that give behaviourism a more positive treatment address rewarded and repeated behaviour related to Aristotle’s view of the establishment of habits (Slote 2016), reinforcement to maximise altruistic behaviour

(Samuels & Casebeer 2005), or the combination of ‘cognitive, behavioural, and emotional components’ (Neng Lin et al. 2011, p. 244).

In descriptions of a **cognitive** understanding, the articles stress how this tradition focuses on human cognitive and moral development through stages of increased cognitive and social ability. Opinions vary as to whether a clear link can be established between Piaget’s models of cognitive and moral development (Israely 1985; Lydiat 1973; Weinreich 1975). Several authors refer to Piaget’s (1932) work *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, highlighting two main stages – one of *heteronomous* morality and the other of *autonomous* morality (Cuyppers 2021; Israely 1985; Maqsd 1982; Sherblom, 2012; Steward 1979; Turiel 2003; Wilson 1976; Ziv 1976) – although there is a certain variety in stage descriptions, and Ferrari and Okamoto (2003) refer to a later, four stage model of affective moral development. The transition to autonomous morality usually takes place before or slightly after the age of 11 (Israely 1985; Maqsd 1982). Some articles discuss the possible existence of post-formal stages (Leicester & Pearce 1997), discuss whether the stages follow a more generalised developmental progression (Pearson & Elliott 1980) or are situationally dependent states (Wilson 1976; Nobes 1999) or complex experience-based constructions (Turiel 2003). Cognitive development is considered driven by a principle of equilibrium (Blakeney & Blakeney 1990), whereby individuals’ confrontations with their environment may lead to an internal reorganisation of psychological structures (Richmond & Cummings 2004¹; Taylor & Walker 1997) as individuals defend their own-reasoned views (Gardner 1991). Disagreement, responsibility, and community climate are conditions for development to a post-conventional level (Collier 1997), and the ability to decentre one’s own views and adopt multiple perspectives is seen as integral to the development of maturity (Brooks-Walsh & Sullivan 1973).

The articles refer to Piaget’s (1932) own distinction between heteronomous and autonomous morality, which signals the development of moral maturity, changing from a focus on the consequences of an act to a focus on the motives of the actors (Lydiat 1973; 1974). According to the articles, heteronomous morality is an authority-based morality (McCann & Bell 1975), a morality of constraint that follows rules external to the child (Cook et al. 2003) and motivates the child to obey adult rules in conformity with the established rules (Korthals 1992). Autonomous morality, on the other hand, is an individually based ‘sense of justice’ (McCann & Bell 1975, p. 64), a morality of co-operation in which rules are individually constructed through exposure to perspectives in peer-relationships (Cook et al. 2003), with interactions that are ‘reciprocal and symmetrical’ combining ‘solidarity, friendship, equality, universal reciprocity, and generosity’ (Korthals 1992, p. 20).

The papers mention several factors that contribute to the transition from heteronomous to autonomous morality, including a ‘movement in the cognitive realm’ and ‘social interaction’ (Markoulis & Christoforou 1991, p. 80) and the development of

¹ Citing Kohlberg, L. (1981) *Essays on moral development. Volume 1: the philosophy of moral development.* Harper & Row.

norms of reciprocity as a basis for mutual understanding (Youniss 2009). According to Youniss (2009), Piaget argues for ‘a morality in which individuals would come to respect one another’s reasoning on the condition that the parties adhered to democratic procedures of reciprocity and open communication’ (pp. 140-141). Some authors also acknowledge the role of *emotions* in morality. Blakeney and Blakeney (1990) state that, according to Piaget, morality is developed through the ‘conservation of affect into a permanent scale of values’, as feelings generated in the social context are made sense of through an underlying structure (p. 104). Other authors indicate that moral identity is ‘affective, although structured and informed by reason’ (Ferrari & Okamoto 2003, p. 347), that organised emotions have will as their ‘ultimate form of equilibrium’ (Markoulis & Christoforou 1991, p. 91), and that they develop jointly with thoughts (Israely 1985).

Articles dealing with the **situative**, Vygotsky-inspired approach emphasise how humans interact through cultural and mediating tools such as signs, symbols and language (Haste & Abrahams 2008; Tappan 1991), how human action is both constrained by and enabled through the use of mediational means (Tappan 2006) and how the human, moral self can be understood as linguistically constituted (Thompson 2013). Accordingly, they pay attention to the influence of different and even polyphonic moral languages and narratives, among other languages of justice and care (Haste & Abrahams 2008²; Tappan 1991; Tappan 2006; Vestøl 2011). The situative perspective also incorporates the Vygotskian notion of the ZPD, which signals the importance of more capable peers for the development of socially derived higher mental functioning (Balakrishnan & Clairborne 2012; Tappan 1998; Turner & Chambers 2006). This perspective also includes learning as dialogic processes that precede development through appropriation of external discourse into ‘fundamentally new forms of inner speech’ (Tappan 1998, p. 153; Turner & Chambers 2006).

Tappan (1991) relates his understanding to Vygotsky’s notion of higher mental functioning, which originates from social processes and relations and is internalised by individuals, and to Mikhail Bakhtin’s understanding of the social nature of language. According to Tappan (1991, p. 246), Bakhtin describes words as a ‘medium of consciousness’. In another article, Tappan (1998) describes higher mental functioning as a cultural practice or activity where moral practice is linked to a ‘vernacular moral language that fundamentally shapes the ways in which people think, feel and act’ and is shared by persons who participate in the same activities (p. 148). Other authors, such as Haste and Abrahams (2008) and Balakrishnan and Clairborne (2012), refer to Tappan’s understanding of moral functioning (Tappan 1998, 2006) as mediated action, or as a cultural practice mediated by language in a situated context, and to moral development (Tappan 2006) as the process by which people ‘gradually appropriate the moral mediational tools of words, language and forms of discourse’ (Haste & Abrahams 2008, p. 383).

² Referring to : Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a different voice*. Harvard University Press.

Moral education/Ethics education (ME)

The implications for ME correspond with the previously described understandings of morality (ethics) and can be regarded in terms of outcome and behaviour (behaviourist), cognitive construction through interaction (cognitive) and the development of language and narratives through dialogue (situative).

Only some of the papers explicitly recognise the implications of **behaviourism** for teaching and education. These papers interpret behaviourism as an approach that focuses on performance outcomes (Brunsdon & Walker 2021) and offers a basis for teaching programmes that promote competence-based strategies in an instrumentalist way (Hyland 1992). Understanding teaching as managing classroom relationships is associated with ‘reductive and behaviourist assumptions about human nature’ (Orchard 2021, p. 105) and ‘[r]educing the complexity of teachers’ cognition to decision making’ is said to be in line with behaviourist conceptions of teaching (Akbari & Tajik 2012, p. 46, referring to D. Freeman³). However, some positively characterise reinforcement theory related to Skinner as an approach to the acquisition of behaviour that is attractive in its ‘apparent simplicity’, although behaviour reinforcement seems to have no documented ‘lasting effect’ (Marantz 1988, pp. 29-30).

The most specific comments on ME are found in two papers concerning the relationship between behaviourism and character education (Althof & Berkowitz 2006; Neng Lin et al. 2011). The two papers describe how character education has been influenced by a combination of behaviourism and Aristotelian virtue ethics. Althof and Berkowitz (2006) state that this combination is partly due to an ‘under-emphasis on theory in the more practice-oriented field of character education’ (p. 498), whereas Neng Lin et al. (2011) refer to character education as involving ‘a holistic approach to development that emphasises the cognitive, behavioural and emotional aspects of a moral life’ (p. 244). Meanwhile, Samuels and Casebeer (2005) refer to perspectives from social psychology, including Beaman’s ‘revisited behaviourism’ (p. 81), in a paper that emphasise ‘the power of the situation’ for ethical behaviour (p. 85). They underline the importance of ‘situational awareness’ for ethical behaviour and the danger of ignoring the ‘environment of action’ (p. 82) and argue that ME should integrate as a ‘starting point’ the awareness of situational influence (p. 85).

The descriptions of **cognitive approaches** to ME highlight aspects of constructivism, development, social interaction and cultural diversity. Araújo (2012), Carr (2002) and Korthals (1992) describe Piaget’s approach to learning as constructivist or emphasising cooperation, and Korthals (1992) relates it particularly to a type of learning that focuses on a mutual, cooperative evaluation of moral rules and promotes the development of a ‘morality of autonomous solidarity’ (p. 21). Development is also emphasised by Kavanagh (1977, p. 122), who explains that Piagetian education centres on ‘reworking the [pupils’] present stage of thought structure to form a new structure’. This equilibration process occurs through the experience of cognitive conflict, the

³ Freeman, D 2000: The hidden side of the work: Teacher knowledge and learning to teach. *Language Teaching*, 35, 1–13

reorganising of thought structure through experience, and an understanding at the personal level.

Several authors have addressed social interaction as a key implication of Piaget's theory for teachers and education. For instance, Ferrari and Okamoto (2003) stress the importance of co-work for fostering mutual respect, the stimulation of independent discovery, the assessment of social rules, the use of tasks that emotionally engage with live issues and the involvement of students in self-government with implication for 'the entire school' (p. 349). In addition, Enright (1981) emphasises the fostering of cognitive growth based on reflecting on one's own experiences, in contrast to hypothetical dilemmas. According to Withers (1982), Piaget argued that 'the nature of development favours a system of schooling in which pupils work cooperatively in groups and take part in the government of their schools' (p. 166), although Withers asks for further empirical support for this argument.

Youniss (2009) cites Piaget's (1934/1989) description of reciprocity in a community of learners where one would let 'each person hold to a personal point of view as the only one known from the inside, but understand the existence of other viewpoints' underlining that 'truth is never found ready made, but is laboriously elaborated through the very coordination of these viewpoints' (Youniss 2009, p. 141) (Piaget 1934/1989, p. 8). This emphasis on plurality indicates that, according to Piaget and other theorists, pluralism is not a threat but rather a resource for education (Power & Power 1992). Nevertheless, Gardner (1991) states that educators must face particular contextual complexities that are not addressed in Piaget's description of development across cultural diversity.

Descriptions of a **situative** approach to ME focus on aspects such as the Vygotskian notion of a ZPD as well as collaboration, narrativity, dialogue, reflection and the use of real-life dilemmas. Tappan (1998, p. 148) describes ME as a process within a ZPD of guided participation whereby parents, teachers and more competent peers help children 'attain new and higher levels of moral functioning'. Moral development is generated as children internalise 'new forms of practical activity – ...moral thinking, feeling and acting'. What is internalised is 'semiotically and linguistically mediated' through social relations, and overt and external moral dialogue becomes a silent, inner moral dialogue. In a paper on the Malaysian context, Balakrishnan and Clairborne (2012) discuss how the individual and collective aspects of ME can be addressed with an enlarged development zone that encompasses ways of dealing with a diversity of values.

Tappan (1991) remarks on the role of narratives in ME, when students are given opportunities to tell their own stories, speak with their own voices, and 'authorize their own moral perspectives and experiences' (p. 252). The inclusion of 'cognitive, affective and conative dimensions of moral experience' through reflection (p. 244-45) can lead to an increased sense of authority, authorisation, and responsibility. Tappan (1998) also proposes that the educational process does not happen only by exposing a child to a narrative but also in the context of an 'ongoing set of social interactions mediated by a narrative' (p. 152). Tappan (1991, p. 253) argues that an authentic dialogic relationship between teachers and students is vital for ME that focuses on narrative and language and is 'committed to justice and care for all'.

According to Balakrishnan and Clairborne (2012), a Vygotskian education is characterised by collaboration and real-life dilemmas; ‘constructing collaborative community; engaging in purposeful activities involving whole persons actively forming identity; incorporating activities that are situated and unique; using curriculum as a means for learning, not just an end result; producing outcomes that are both aimed for and emergent’ (p. 234, referring to G. Wells⁴). Crawford (2001) also emphasises dialogue and reflection, ‘a dialogical understanding of development’, encouragement of a ‘reflective, ongoing awareness of development’ (p. 124), and the building of ‘competency to think and act reflectively in the present moment’ (p. 122). Turner and Chambers (2006, p. 353, 364) cites Vygotsky (1997, p. 221, 226) that moral behaviour is ‘amenable to education through the social environment in exactly the same way as is everything else’ and that morality ‘has to constitute an inseparable part of education as a whole at its very roots’. They suggest that a Vygotskian theoretical approach resonate with social and language based activities suitable for character education, such as ‘student-centred peer discussions, class meetings, cooperative learning and shared reading’ (p. 366).

Neuroscientific approaches

As stated, some articles make connections to the emerging neuroscientific approach to morality, which has potentially vital implications for ME. A few of these articles refer to David Everett Rumelhart (Narvaez & Bock 2002; Rest et al. 2000), whom Greeno et al. (1996) associated with *connectionism*. Narvaez and Bock (2002) also find a parallel between Rumelhart and Piaget in relation to conceptual structures called ‘schemas’ (p. 298), understood by Piaget as ‘cognitive structures’ organising ‘operational activities’ (p. 300). Other researchers point to differences between Piaget’s notion of development through dynamic construction and the understanding that the brain works through a process of selection (Kim & Sankey 2009).

A recent overview by Krettenauer (2021) addresses neuroscience as part of an emerging academic field formed by an ‘enormous increase in research on morality in psychology, behavioural economics, cognitive science, and neuroscience’ (p. 77). Krettenauer (2021, p. 78) refers to this new academic field as the ‘moral sciences’, though ME has so far not been a part of it. According to Krettenauer (2021), the present situation is characterised by an interdisciplinarity that avoids the dualistic splits that have dominated discussions on moral development. Krettenauer (2021, p. 81) refers to a range of dichotomies that the new field of moral sciences tends to override, including intuition versus deliberation, nature versus nurture, cultural variation versus cultural uniformity, and specific processes versus generic processes. The moral sciences emerge as pluralistic and relate moral action to social surroundings. Moreover, there is heightened interdisciplinarity between philosophy and psychology. Krettenauer (2021)

⁴ Wells, G. (2000). Dialogic inquiry in education: Building on the legacy of Vygotsky. In C.D. Lee & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Vygotskian perspectives on literary research: Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry* (pp. 51–85). Cambridge University Press.

mentions both Piaget and Vygotsky in reference to Tomasello's (2016) synthesis of two types of social experience that are essential to developing human morality: 'interaction with adult caregivers' and the 'construction of social norms among peers' (p. 86).

Krettenauer's descriptions of the emerging field are in line with Narvaez and Vaydich (2008), who describe the development as a shift away from a Kohlbergian view of morality focussing on explicit moral judgment to an emerging view where human thought processes, decisions and choices are seen as 'influenced not only by externalities such as the social context, processed implicitly' but also 'driven by internal multiple unconscious systems operating in parallel, often automatically and without our awareness' (Narvaez & Vaydich 2008, p. 292). Han (2014) similarly refers to the recent trend as 'integration' rather than 'replacement' of previous positions (p. 41).

Several papers deal more specifically with the characteristics of neuroscientific approaches to **morality** (ethics). Morality is influenced by social relations, surroundings and situations in interaction with biological processes that are automatic to some extent (Narvaez & Bock 2002; Narvaez & Vaydich 2008) although the strength of biological factors is questioned (van IJzendoorn et al. 2010). Moral actions include both deliberative and automatic processes (Lapsley & Hill 2008). The role of automatic processes is emphasised (Narvaez & Bock 2002) as well as the role of emotions (Narvaez & Vaydich 2008; Sankey 2006). Narvaez and Vaydich (2008) reference research on brain damage, which shows that reason without emotions is deficient for decision-making. Moral development is viewed as a self-organising, dynamic process based on a notion of development as 'highly variable, dynamic and often non-linear' (Kim & Sankey 2009, p. 283) and brain processing is described as the 'interaction of whole concepts, whole images' looking for 'similarities, differences, or relationships' rather than the assembly of information from 'bits of data' (Sankey 2006, p. 167, citing J. Ratey⁵).

Narvaez and Bock (2002) also comment on the relevance of schemas or scripts to moral perception and action. They understand schemas as 'sets of expectations, hypotheses and concepts that are formed as the individual notices similarities and recurrence in experience' (Narvaez & Bock 2002, p. 300). Schemas are flexible and changeable, vary in their instantiations, and are 'altered through the assimilation of and accommodation to new experiences' (p. 303). In their article, Kim and Sankey (2009) refer to Edelman's⁶ statement that '*value is imposed in the brain by the brain*' (Kim & Sankey, p. 294) and argue that the many levels of morality emerge from interactions between neurobiology and environment.

Explicit references to learning theory and implications for **teaching and learning** are sparse in the analysed articles. Krettenauer (2021) states that ME must address the relationship between reasoning and intuition. He further suggests that ME can take place on two levels: as a subject in 'specifically tailored programs' and as an element

⁵ Ratey, J. (2001) *A user's guide to the brain*. Abacus.

⁶ Edelman, G. M. (1989). *The remembered present: a biological theory of consciousness*. Basic Books

integrated into ‘the process of education itself’ (Krettenauer 2021, p. 84). Han (2017) states that educators ‘can consider the association between moral functioning in general and the psychological processes associated with the default mode network, particularly self-related psychological processes’, and refers to empirical studies that demonstrate the effect of ‘attainable and relevant exemplars’ in ME (p. 107). Lovat (2017) shows how an education focussing on the modelling of values can be interpreted in light of ‘evidence from neuroscience’ indicating that ME can activate emotional and social centres of the brain and that ‘the best forms of cognition’ relies on stimulation of the brain ‘across the range of emotional, social and moral impulses’ (pp. 92-93).

Summary and discussion

This paper has set out to investigate how articles in *JME* display intersections between ME and the behaviourist-empiricist, cognitive-rationalist and situative-sociohistoric approaches to learning, distinguished by Greeno et al. (1996). The analysis reveals that all three approaches covered by Greeno et al. (1996) have been addressed in *JME*-articles and linked to ME, though their positions vary substantially. Behaviourist-empiricist perspectives have received limited and mostly critical attention, apart from some connections to character education and the importance of neuroscientific schemas. Cognitive-rationalist perspectives related to Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg have had a dominant position, as demonstrated by previous surveys (Lee 2021; Lee & Taylor 2013), although the position of this tradition has seemingly declined. Situative-sociohistoric perspectives linked with Vygotsky appear to have had a certain but limited influence over the last few decades. Despite some attempts to combine these perspectives, scholars have mainly viewed the three traditions as separate and have even interpreted the cognitive perspective as a sharp critique of behaviourism. However, aspects of these traditions have recently been included in approaches informed by neuroscience, such as the use of schemas and the interplay between the human mind and the social environment.

In the following paragraphs, I will first undertake a closer examination of the results in light of the theoretical and contextual framing presented earlier in this article (Bransford et al. 2005; Greeno et al. 1996; UDIR 2020a; UDIR 2020b) before I address some pertinent issues for the understanding of RE/ME that are indicated in the results.

The presentation of the results showed that the *JME*-articles, to some extent, confirm the presentation given by Greeno et al. (1996). Concerning morality, behaviourist-empiricist approaches are said to favour an understanding of morality in terms of performance and behaviour or as a phenomenon related to neuro-based schemas, while cognitive-rationalist perspectives reportedly promote a stage-oriented progression in moral maturity with autonomous moral reflection as the end-point. Finally, situative-sociohistoric perspectives are seen as emphasising morality mediated by cultural tools through participation in social practices.

However, the *JME*-articles also introduce aspects that are not explicitly addressed by Greeno et al. (1996). The articles generally present behaviourism in a more negative

light and suggest that it implies a negation of morality and the promotion of determinism. While Greeno et al. (1996) highlighted the conceptual and procedural aspects of the cognitive-rationalist perspective, the *JME*-articles are more concerned with real-life-orientation and peer-interaction. Compared to Greeno et al. (1996), the *JME*-articles present the situative-sociohistoric perspective with a stronger emphasis on language, the role of narratives and the ZPD.

Greeno et al. (1996) tentatively asserted that neuroscience-informed perspectives on knowledge focus on the strengthening and weakening of neural connections. Meanwhile, the *JME*-papers address the distinctions between emotional-intuitive and deliberative forms of morality and the relevance of schemas to moral perception and action formed through experience.

With respect to the implications for learning and ME, the *JME*-articles confirm the characteristics of the three approaches, as presented by Greeno et al. (1998). The behaviourist approach is said to stress the reinforcement of skills, the use of stimuli, the establishment of routines and habituation. The cognitive approach is instead characterised by the construction of understanding facilitated by interactive environments. Finally, the situative approach is described with an emphasis on internalisation through participation in supportive communities.

Compared to Greeno et al. (1996), the *JME*-articles also contain additional aspects characterising the approaches in relation to ME. Some articles point to how behaviourist perspectives are seemingly connected to the tradition of character education, with an emphasis on the combination of certain virtues and habituation. In relation to the cognitive perspective, some articles address how Piaget's focus on real-life experiences and peer-interactions for moral development contrasts with Lawrence Kohlberg's emphasis on hypothetical dilemmas. Finally, the descriptions of situative approaches to ME centre on the role of vernacular moral language and authentic narratives.

As in the article by Greeno et al. (1996), there are only sparse references in the *JME*-articles to the possible implications of neuroscientific perspectives for ME. The literature indicates that ME must address the relationship between reasoning and intuition. Moreover, ME can take place as both special ethics programmes and integrated into education as a whole. Life-relevant exemplars are also identified as important motivators of engagement in moral behaviour.

Turning to perspectives on teaching, the results relate to several of the components of teaching presented by Bransford et al. (2005). The learner-component, partly based on Piaget's cognitive constructivism, resonates with the development of autonomous morality described in the *JME*-articles. The community-component, based on distributed expertise and Vygotsky's ZPD, resonates with similar perspectives in the *JME*-articles, although the emphasis on language and narratives is stronger in some of the *JME*-articles. The assessment-component, which is based partly on a behaviourist emphasis on feedback, is discernible in a minor number of *JME*-articles, although the general verdict of behaviourism in the *JME*-articles is rather negative. The knowledge-component addressed by Bransford et al. (2005) is not related to any of the three learning-approaches, but since the components are said to mutually influence each other, it is indicated that the three approaches will have implications for the

understanding, organising and handling of knowledge. This resonates with the descriptions in the *JME*-articles of how the three approaches promote different understandings of morality and suggest different approaches to the development and learning of morality. There is, however, a difference in the way some *JME*-articles display the three approaches as contrasting or partly historically passé and the way Bransford et al. (2005) balance the approaches as equally valuable contributions. I will return to this question below.

Concerning Norwegian RE/ME curricula, the correspondences are not obvious. The most evident resemblance is found in the emphasis on the cognitive and rational aspects of morality in both the *JME*-articles and the Norwegian curricula. The emphasis on peer-related activity in the cognitive tradition, as presented in some of the *JME*-articles, also seem to be implied when the curricula refer to students' discussions as a central activity. The curricula also address elements of community and context in ways that resemble the situative Vygotsky-tradition. Although the ZPD and the narrative aspects from the *JME*-articles are not explicit, the curricula indicate some interaction between the level of cultural tradition (philosophical and religious) and the individual level of the student (real-life ethical questions).

The picture given in the *JME*-articles thus seems to resonate to some extent with presentations of learning theory and teaching components, as well as aspects of the RE/ME curricula. However, the articles also raise issues and challenges that require further critical examination and discussion.

A fundamental issue raised in several contributions covered in this study is how to understand the relationship between approaches to learning. To cover this issue in its full depth would require a separate study, as would a more in-depth investigation into connections between the three approaches and other perspectives on learning mentioned in articles (e.g. Dewey, Freire and Bruner). However, the literature and the *JME*-articles referred to in this study show that there are varying ways to address this issue. Some *JME*-articles emphasise the differences and conflicts between the approaches (Araújo 2012; Lapsley & Hill 2008) and how the historical development has made approaches lose influence (Haidt 2013; Lee & Taylor 2013). Other articles describe a possible integration of positions, particularly in relation to the emerging moral sciences informed by neuroscientific research (Krettenauer 2021). A possible integration was also discussed by Greeno et al. (1996) who suggested that the situated perspective can be seen as a synthesis or an aggregated level, including the previous behaviourist and cognitive perspectives. Bransford et al. (2005) seem to propose a more pragmatic integration where the behaviourist, cognitive and situative approaches are seen as contributions to a comprehensive understanding of teaching. Although the RE/ME curricula do not refer explicitly to learning theories, as previously mentioned, they seem to open up interactions between aspects from both cognitive and situative approaches.

As stated by Lee and Taylor (2013, p. 422), the present situation is characterised by a certain 'lack of consensus'. In principle, there is still the possibility of cultivating an ME based on one of the three approaches. While the cognitive tradition has been thoroughly explored and has had a significant impact in the field of ME, the situative

approach seems to be less explored and may therefore be in need of further development and investigation.

Even if ME could be conducted based on one of the traditions, the current development indicates that one considers an integration of aspects from previously competitive approaches. Still, more research seems to be needed to establish a theoretically and empirically clarified basis for such an integrative approach to ME, although the integrative framework suggested by Bransford et al. (2005) may serve as a tentative pragmatic basis for the more practical design of RE/ME teaching.

Depending on the degree of integration, the present study indicates that some more specific issues may be of importance to investigate and clarify. One issue is the role of non-cognitive aspects in ME, such as emotions and intuitive/automatic processed morality. Another issue is the role of students and teachers in RE/ME in light of the emphasis on peer-relations (Piaget) versus the significance of the more competent other (Vygotsky). To address these issues, there may be a need to clarify how ME takes place at different curricular levels and in various school settings where these aspects of morality are played out in varying situations.

Finally, there may also be a need to clarify the relationship between the learning approaches and aspects of the knowledge component addressed by Bransford et al. (2005), particularly concerning the understanding of ethical knowledge based on philosophical and religious traditions. While some *JME*-articles in this study display relationships between psychological learning theories and major philosophical traditions such as the Aristotelian and Kantian, the implications of learning theories for the understanding and handling of religious morality and ethics are less covered. Further investigation of these relationships may be of particular importance for the parts of ME that take place in a combined RE/ME setting.

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