# Identifying the Point of View of the Reconstructionism Theory in Relation to Ethics Training and Lawfulness to Students

## Article info

**Authors:**
Aliasghar Ghelichkhan[1]

Mohammad Reza Sarmadi[2*]

Mohammad Hashem Rezaei[3]

Faezeh Nateghi[4]

## Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to identify the reconstructionism theoretical perspective on Ethics training and Lawfulness to students. From a purpose perspective, the research method is fundamental and theoretical, and from an implementation perspective, it is of the philosophical research type. The required data were collected by document analysis and using the note-taking tool, and analyzed by the descriptive-interpretive method. The community under study consists of written books and electronic resources that present the theoretical perspective of reconstructionism, as well as research backgrounds related to the research topic. Research findings indicate that the reconstructionism theoretical perspective in the field of teaching ethics and law acceptance to students has specific educational elements. Reviewing the content of the curriculum with an emphasis on critical thinking, strengthening effective social relationships, employing new technologies, learning the culture of peace, providing a platform for obtaining firsthand social experiences, teaching problem-solving skills, striving to dignify individuals in society and cultivating worthy citizens - each of these theories has educational foundations and principles, goals, content, and instructional methods about moral and legal education, which share similarities and differences. In explaining the findings of the current research, it can be said that from the point of view of pragmatism, real education and training takes place more effectively in an open or democratic environment, an environment that is free from absolutes that hinder the freedom of research. Old and new individualism, stubborn individualism, has been rejected as a historical remnant. Pragmatism strongly suggests planning and social action to adapt the emerging organized social system to human goals and purposes.

[1] . Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy of Education, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran
[2] . Department of Educational Sciences, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran (Corresponding's Author): **ms84sarmadi@yahoo.com**
[3] . Department of Educational Sciences, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran
[4] . Department of Educational Sciences, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran.

**1. Introduction**

Legality or lawfulness is defined as conscious, voluntary, and willing adherence to or observance of law by a clear majority and acting accordingly. Legality becomes pervasive in a community when the public reaches a mindful and sensible conclusion that abiding by the law equally benefits society and the people as a whole (Sobhaninejad et al., 2018). From the perspective of social psychology, community members must obey the law willingly and voluntarily. As a result, legality becomes an agent of socialization for community members. Processes of socialization continue throughout every individual's life (Ballantine, 1989).

Ethics and legality are sub-branches of axiology, which is a key component of philosophy. Axiology is the philosophical study of value and its essence, sources, types, and theoretical foundation, as well as different views toward examining value judgments. Axiology encompasses ethics and aesthetics (Shariatmadari, 1998). Without moral and legal considerations, no community can successfully organize social and cultural issues as ethics and rules largely influence all social, cultural, economic, political, and behavioral affairs. Evidently, along with emphasizing the necessity of adhering to ethics and law, it is critical to consider proper approaches toward moral education and legality. The ambiguities and misgivings regarding ethics and moral values are, for the most part, due to uncertainties about the methods of moral education in schools and other institutions rather than uncertainty about the necessity of these aspects. These uncertainties essentially stem from the lack of specific educational models. Therefore, elucidating and evaluating effective educational approaches in this regard can be an important step toward resolving issues arising from moral education and legality. Given the importance of moral education and promoting legality in the community, it is advantageous to look at relevant philosophical views and educational theories so that they could be taught to and practiced by community members.

Social reconstructionism is a modern educational theory that has proven effective and practical in social restoration. The present study aimed to identify the perspective of reconstructionism and pragmatism concerning the legal and ethics compliance training of students. Pioneered by George Counts, Theodore Brameld, Harold Rugg, and Alvin Toffler, social reconstructionism is a theory that focuses on social and cultural reconstruction as a school task. Primarily focusing on social and cultural structures, the theory of reconstructionism holds that changing and reconstructing the cultural structure of a community can lead to the development of a democratic civilization. Social reconstructionists believe that the modern world suffers from ceaseless crises, which are rooted in inconsistencies and incompatibilities between scientific/technological achievements on the one hand and the fundamental values and cultural/social norms on the other; this phenomenon is often referred to as "cultural lag" (Heidari, 2020). Thomas (2010) states: "Brameld taught me how to view the world with all its problems and landscapes. He used the term *crisis*, which has two contradictory connotations: one pertains to abundant possibilities, and the other to real threats. Our modern world is in crisis, and we must rebuild it to prevent threats and create possibilities" (Thomas, 2010). Dewey strongly supported experiential learning, as it offers students a hands-on, collaborative learning experience, which helps them to "fully learn new skills and knowledge" (Haynes, Sakai, Rees, Gilbert, Frith & Passingham, 2007). Eyler and Giles (1999) asserted that Dewey described service-learning as experiential learning and that such learning has a "continual spiral of events starting with direct experience, followed by periods of reflection where hypotheses are generated about immediate and future meaning, and then tested through experiences and actions" (p. 184).

Reconstructionists believe that through schools and by developing criticism-oriented curricula that encourage social reform as an educational goal, students can become aware of

real problems in their life as they gather real-life social experiences in school; this lays the foundation to resolve social issues more effectively. To reach this goal, it is inevitable to reconstruct the cultural heritage of the community and build new social structures/organizations to create an ideal society based on democracy, welfare, safety, and equality for humankind. In the present study, we assessed the viewpoints of these theories regarding legal and ethics compliance training.

## 2. Methodology

The current research was foundational and theoretical in terms of objective as it focuses on knowledge development and theoretical principles and expands the currently available data on pragmatism and reconstructionism. Thus, the method entails the review of manuscripts/texts, philosophy references, and other related works. This class of data is collected through observation, interviews, and extraction from documents. The adjustment and analysis of qualitative data require three main tasks: a) summarizing data, b) presenting data, and c) conclusions/confirmation (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

The sample population of the present study included all the available articles regarding pragmatism and the theory of reconstructionism published from 2001 to 2022. The databases used by the authors were Google Scholar, Science Direct (Elsevier), Springer, Emerald, Sage, EBSCO, Taylor & Francis, and SID.

The sample population included 159 articles and books about pragmatism and the theory of reconstructionism. In total, 38 articles that met the inclusion criteria of the study were selected by purposive sampling for further review.

Table 1-Inclusion and exclusion criteria for article selection

| | Inclusion criteria | Exclusion criteria |
|---|---|---|
| Geographical location | Iranian and international studies | - |
| Language | English and Persian | Non-English/non-Persian |
| Time | Published since 2000 | Published before 2000 |
| Method | Qualitative data collection and analysis | Non-qualitative methods |
| Samples | Articles published about the theory of reconstructionism | Articles focusing on other subjects than the theory of reconstructionism |
| Study conditions | Factors related to teaching ethics and legality based on the theory of reconstructionism | Other cases than the evaluation of factors related to teaching ethics and legality based on the theory of reconstructionism |
| Study design | Articles published in credible scientific journals | Comments/personal websites |

### 2.1 Research questions

1) What is the theory of pragmatism in terms of (basics and principles, educational goals, educational content, teaching and evaluation methods) in the field of ethics and legality education?

2) What is the perspective of the theory of reconstructionism in the field of (basics and principles, educational goals, educational content, teaching and evaluation methods) in the field of ethics and legality education?

3) What are the differences and similarities between the two theories of pragmatism and reconstruction in the field of moral education and legality?

4) What educational solutions can be presented based on the two theories of pragmatism and reconstruction in the field of ethics and legality education?

Considering the research design, data were collected using a library method and non-field methods. The data required to address the first and second research questions, which focused on ethical and legal education based on the theory of reconstructionism, were gathered by taking notes from library references related to the two theories. The data required for the third and fourth research questions were also obtained through the interpretative and comparative analysis of the findings. In general, data collection in this study was carried out by note-taking and reviewing online sources. Details of the data collection process are presented below.

### Step 1: A systematic review

In this step, the researcher systematically searched for the articles that were published in different journals by choosing relevant keywords. Throughout the study, the definitions of the searched keywords and the timeframe of the studies were continuously re-evaluated. Finally, the researcher conducted some online searches to identify and select relevant articles. The researcher downloaded the full-text version of each article. Other relevant references were also assessed for possible revisions. New keywords were added to the previous list for the online search. In the present study, we used various databases, journals, and search engines to conduct a wide search from 2000 to 2022. Table 2 shows the keywords used in the article search. The online search via databases, journals, and search engines using the keywords yielded 159 relevant articles in total.

Table 2-Keywords used in the online article search

| Keywords | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| Ethics training | designed to teach people how to make decisions in situations where there is an ethical component |
| Lawfulness | the fact of being allowed or recognized by law; the fact of being legal |
| Reconstructionism | a philosophical approach that questions essentialism and other rigid and dogmatic standpoints. It questions the existing standards in order to provide new perspectives to the social, political, economical and other related issues. |

Notably, we selected the most relevant keywords for the research subject. Operators such as "…" were utilized for more accurate search results, the tilde operator (~) was used to find the findings that were relevant or similar to the searched keywords, and the "OR" operator was used to find content encompassing two similar (or different) words.

### Step 2: Article search and selection

Before starting the article search process, the researcher decided whether the identified articles were relevant to the research questions (e.g., *What are the approaches of pragmatism and reconstructionism toward teaching ethics/morality and legality/lawfulness to students?*) For this

purpose, the researcher evaluated a series of select articles several times.

### Step 3: Data extraction
In this step, the researcher evaluated the data of each article separately and extracted the most important ones.

### Step 4: Analysis of qualitative data
In this phase, the researcher combined and analyzed the data gathered from qualitative studies to eliminate identical findings and select unique ones.

### Step 5: Quality control
A review process was undertaken for the quality control of the findings. The researcher initially assessed different parameters, including the title, abstract, contents, and details of the articles (e.g., author's name and year of publication). To this end, the researcher first reviewed the titles of the articles and excluded those that were irrelevant to the research subject/questions from further analysis. Following that, he evaluated the abstracts remaining from the previous step and eliminated other irrelevant articles again. During the process, the number of articles decreased. Next, the researcher re-evaluated the remaining articles closely and excluded those without an author's name or other important details. Finally, the remaining articles were selected for the next step. The present study was conducted on 37 articles, which are discussed in the second section of the experimental literature.

The current research was performed in the following steps: 1) determining the components of the keywords and concepts related to ethics and legality/lawfulness training, 2) note-taking from the library and electronic references based on the concepts determined in the previous step, 3) summarizing the obtained data based on these concepts, and 4) presenting the data in the form of tables followed by a conclusion.

Data analysis was carried out in four main steps based on the document analysis technique by George Brady. The steps include description, interpretation, contraction, and comparison. First, the viewpoints of each theory regarding the context of the question and specific components were extracted. Next, the determined concepts were elucidated, interpreted, and analyzed accordingly. Finally, tables were drawn to compare the viewpoints of both theories concerning each of the research questions, and their similarities/differences are deduced.

### 3. Results and Discussion
The term "reconstructionism" was introduced in 1920 by Dewey in his book called "Reconstructionism in Philosophy" (Yousefzadeh, 2013). Advocates of reconstructionism believe that administrators should devise policies and plans for the development of a community. Accordingly, teachers should use their power to lead students in social reconstruction and engineering programs (Gert, 2018). Advocates of social reconstructionism claim that they adhere to the pragmatic principles of John Dewey, which highlight the need to reconstruct individual and social experiences. Some of the researchers who follow this approach (Naji et al., 2011) also state that the theory of social reconstructionism has distinctive features compared to other similar theories, including a) considering societal changes and reform, b) the increasing rapidity and unpredictability of change in the world, c) opposition to racial segregation, d) criticism of cultural heritage, e) promoting the role of teachers from an instructor to a social activist, f) the necessity of foresight and emphasis on the empowerment of students to forecast the future, g) emphasis on the social education of students, h) serious regard for the concept of cultural diversity, and i) encouraging research-oriented and problem-

oriented schools. Meanwhile, some critics believe that although this theory encourages change, it entails a form of impartiality at its core, which may be threatening to the process of education and learning (Sadeghi, 2015).

According to reconstructionists, if people are genuinely interested in society and education, they show active participation in critical situations that involve decision-making. Further, they strongly believe in social activities and support education that helps people achieve human and social rights. Reconstructionists are also convinced that people, as active, competent, and efficient community members, should be able to deal with both social and global affairs so that social reform could continue.

Reconstructionism suggests multiple approaches to ethical and legal compliance training. To reconstructionists, education is a highly effective medium for creating reasonable social changes and moving toward a democratic and humanistic society. In this philosophy, standing up for democracy is far more important than having national democracy or global democracy. Advocates of reconstructionism hold school teamwork in high regard. They believe that in doing so, the teacher must not be or remain impartial but rather, should encourage learners to freely reconstruct. Instructors should act as social activists, and schools should adopt policies and approaches that prepare students, and society as a whole, to encounter and resolve crises. Today's instructors are considered skilled not in their faithfulness to old methods of learning or regretting the fact that these methods have gone obsolete; they are only considered proficient if they take to the newest technological methods of education quickly and without any prejudgment (Hough, 2008; Baykara et al., 2014). Table 3 shows a summary of the theory of reconstructionism regarding ethical and legal compliance training.

Table 3-A summary of the theory of reconstructionism regarding ethical and legal compliance training

| Educational elements | Summarized viewpoint |
|---|---|
| Principles and foundations | 1. Every society needs constant reconstruction/change, and societal change encompasses both the reconstruction and the application of education.<br>2. Education is a potent tool to create reasonable social change.<br>3. People should be encouraged to attempt to make their lives better every day.<br>4. The modern era demands the instant reconstruction of religious, philosophical, and philosophical value systems.<br>5. Changing and reconstructing the culture and social structures can result in a democratic civilization.<br>6. Problems in today's communities stem from cultural lag, which entails the inconsistency and incompatibility of scientific and technological achievements with values, cultural, and social foundations.<br>7. The future belongs to scientific thinking, and social affairs should be examined using scientifically accurate methods (e.g., social attitudes and habits.)<br>8. A sense of responsibility for the world order should replace beliefs in ageless traditions to increase people's responsibility toward ethics and their actions to change the conditions of life.<br>9. Reconstructionism is not solely a philosophy of crisis or limited to education; it is also a cultural necessity. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 10. The study of today's society must be an inherent element of public education, and students of educational sciences should be more involved with educational sociology and social dynamics.<br>11. Education is a branch of social sciences.<br>12. Culture is the basis of thought and action.<br>13. Believing in democracy and emphasis on assigning people the management of social affairs<br>14. The ultimate goal of national democracy is global democracy.<br>15. The principles of reconstructionism include 1) the role of school in social and cultural reconstruction and 2) teaching of the social process. |
| Goals | 1. Reconstructionists seek a utopia.<br>2. The main goal is individual, educational, and social change.<br>3. Absolutism toward goals is unacceptable, and perfectionism should be a constant in people and society.<br>4. The global culture and civilization should change so that people and society can live better lives.<br>5. Students should be raised to be competent.<br>6. All the people should be able to coexist healthfully within the community.<br>7. Striving toward the global community, brotherhood, and democracy<br>8. Reconstructing the culture and eradicating the useless aspects of culture<br>9. Raising the awareness of learners about social perils and threats<br>10. Foresight, avoiding violence, and teaching peace and social cooperation<br>11. Empowering individuals to face social changes and life crises |
| Educational content | 1. Proper curricula to understand and create a series of meanings associated with facing social issues<br>2. Learning situations should be tangible, practical, and valuable.<br>3. A curriculum should critically analyze the cultural resources of students and reproduce these resources back to them.<br>4. There should be a link between educational content and subjects inside and outside school so that they could be practiced to solve real problems. |
| Educational methods | 1. Providing opportunities to create proper meaning/significance in students while dealing with problems<br>2. Using deep thinking, group discussions, problem-solving techniques, and experimental approaches<br>3. Exposing students to the realities of life<br>4. Creating opportunities to gain first-hand experiences<br>5. Exploiting technology and avoiding its condemnation |
| Evaluation methods | 1. Criticizing commonplace teaching methods, values, and traditional tendencies<br>2. Valuing students' activities concerning social education<br>3. Valuing teamwork<br>4. Educating students for the future rather than the present |

| | 5. Experimenting with realization/actualization thinking |
|---|---|

Based on the viewpoints of the two theories of social reconstructionism, the following educational solutions are proposed regarding ethical and legal compliance training:

1. Paying special attention to the key role of education in creating a constructionist society through providing opportunities and proper conditions/facilities or decreasing/preventing other institutions from intervening in educational affairs and decision-making.
2. In addition to mechanical changes in the educational system, deep qualitative, dynamic, and critical changes should be made and encouraged. Notably, such changes should be instigated by teachers who, as society's agents of intellectuality and cultural transformation, have sufficient power and liberty, as well as the ethical courage and critical thinking abilities, to reach this goal.
3. Steering clear of personal and non-scientific biases when it comes to education
4. Revising educational curricula and eradicating any biases with an emphasis on rational education, critical thinking, and improving the understanding and perception of students and teachers concerning culture
5. Promoting effective social communication, civil culture, and collective participation in education
6. Paying attention to democracy, free access to information, and positive outlooks toward the future
7. Emphasizing the importance of gaining authentic/group experiences and improving effective social communication and social contribution
8. Acquiring effective social functioning, dedication to resolving issues concerning social living through increasing the knowledge of children and the youth and practically engaging them with the issues arising from the surrounding environment, and improving their intrinsic motivation by creating opportunities in the class to gain insight and proper perception of the real problems in life
9. Paying attention to cultural contexts and social constructs while developing educational curricula that focus on one's thinking abilities to gain insight and promote national solidarity in tandem with regional and global adaptation
10. Putting new scientific and technological advances into practice following ethical, humanistic, and social considerations
11. Learning the culture of peace through education and educational curricula
12. Expanding scientific insights and acquiring positive attitudes toward the transformations brought about by science, experimentation, and innovation
13. Attempting to expand the horizons of students regarding living in the global community and moving on from unnecessary customs and traditions
14. Laying the groundwork for gaining first-hand social experiences and reconstructing these experiences
15. Using participatory learning and social contribution in compliance with the three principles of sharing, communication, and participation in the learning process
16. Implementing training on intellectual, problem-solving, conflict resolution, personal discipline, and autonomy skills
17. Using games as a method of teaching social skills, ethics, and legality to students
18. Teaching students responsibility for one's actions within a social context
19. Considering sociological studies as part of public education and paying attention to the sociology of education
20. Highlighting the role of schools in social and cultural reconstruction

21. Attempting to educate every community member to be competent and a well-adjusted citizen is a significant goal of every educational system.
22. Encouraging peaceful coexistence among all individuals and social groups
23. Teaching students skills to protect themselves from social perils and threats
24. Emphasizing the importance of peace, social harmony, social interaction, and avoidance of violence
25. Exploiting educational technologies and incorporating them into ethics training and the teaching of social rules and regulations

The results of the present study are consistent with the findings of Izadpanah and Shamshiri (2019), Yousefzadeh (2013), and Jafari (2009) regarding the viewpoints of the theory of reconstructionism toward educational basic principles, educational goals, educational content, educational methods, and evaluation methods when it comes to ethical and legal compliance training. These findings suggest that based on reconstructionism, there is a reciprocal and dialectical relationship between philosophy and the philosophy of education. Every educational philosophy is realized only when it becomes an educational action aimed at resolving educational problems or challenges that are seen in a specific educational context or situation; undeniably, the philosophy in question should be revised and reconstructed through the channel of education philosophy.

In general, educational philosophies may be either "micro" or "macro" philosophies, both of which are based on authentic educational actions and arise from different educational contexts and situations. The foundations of new pragmatism are the rejection of fundamental epistemology, emphasis on language, the integrity of knowledge, social solidarity/harmony rather than absolute objectivity, and raising democratic and intellectual citizens. From the perspective of new pragmatism, an educational theory should have three main characteristics, namely descriptive (explanatory), specific, and practical characteristics. Further, this school of thought considers five main steps for education, including determining the narrative, creating a link between the narrative and life situations, creating a new narrative, criticizing the narrative, and comparing the narrative to national and collective accounts. Accordingly, integrative approaches are considered optimal when it comes to pre-university education, while project-oriented approaches are reported to yield better outcomes after graduation from the university. Studies suggest that teaching cognitive reconstruction can significantly reduce learned helplessness in individuals Izadpanah and Shamshiri (2019).

Throughout human history, great thinkers and philosophers have contemplated the intricate relationship between legality and ethics. As noted by Alexy (2004), this is a major discourse that dates back more than two thousand years ago. When it comes to the relationship between ethics and legality, there are two categories of philosophers: those who consider any legally valid law to essentially require a compatibility between the content and form of laws with ethics and philosophers who reject any links between these two components of law and ethics. The philosophers of the first category believe in two concepts, namely "natural laws", which refers to ethics (the higher law), and "the enforced law", the legality or legal validity of which requires compatibility with the natural law. Hence, the decision of legislators or the social acceptance of enforced norms does not suffice for these norms to turn into legally valid laws. Rather, any norms should be compatible with ethics or the natural law. On the other hand, the philosophers of the second category consider enforced law to be a set of widely accepted norms within a community, the legality or legitimacy of which only depends on the decision of the community's legislators, not their compatibility with ethics. Enforced norms become legally valid, legitimate laws only when approved by the legislator or accepted socially. Therefore, enforced norms can be equivalent to laws or even legally valid laws albeit incompatible with ethics. To these

philosophers, the definition or legal validity of enforced law depends on matters such as rulers' decision/power or the public acceptance of the law rather than its consistency with ethics (Russell,1994).

The first category, which includes philosophers of law, believes that ethical norms are the higher octave of any enforced laws as these norms are "natural" rather than "enforced" and surpass the decision of any legislator. Thus, their theory is widely known as the "Theory of Natural Law". The advocates of this theory classify law into two categories of "natural/non-enforced law" and "enforced law", considering the latter to be subordinate to the former. Meanwhile, the second category of philosophers rejects the categorization of law into two types (i.e., natural and enforced) and the preeminence of ethics to law. To them, laws are always enforced by the decision of legislators. Their standpoint is commonly referred to as "legal positivism" (Tabatabaei, 2014).

Concerning this finding, it can be stated that each step of life entails a series of tasks associated with intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental growth. During school, which demands the individual's engagement with different growth tasks (including legality in students as one of the most important tasks), laws serve as norms enforced by the government that are essential and valuable legal principles. A key point to be noted here is "the adherence of community members to laws." Legality or lawfulness plays a pivotal role in regulating the life of individuals. The establishment and continuity of every human community demand law and the lawfulness of its members; this can be observed in communities of other social creatures as well. Human beings felt the necessity to set out and abide by laws since the beginning of their civilization and social living and enforced laws and legality to maintain order and discipline throughout the community. Notably, laws are primarily put in place to regulate the relationship of people in society and prevent conflicts of interest or other disturbances.

## 4. Conclusion

Ethical and moral value education refers to the actions of schools and other educational institutions that are taken to help individuals reflect upon what is right or wrong so that they could find their way toward being socially useful. Further, these actions lead individuals to be inclined toward behaviors and dispositions that are moral and consistent with the widely acknowledged moral values of a society. The conscious endeavors in schools for ethical and moral value education entail planned, purposeful, and active learning based on an educational curriculum. The curriculum influences these conscious efforts depending on the subject matter, educational content, special skills, and predetermined attitudes. As for the unconscious efforts of schools, they often take place unpredictably. In these unpredictable approaches, the learning process at school is unplanned and can be referred to as a "hidden curriculum." In any event, students' efforts to understand what is right and what is wrong are largely influenced by unplanned actions and the obvious/hidden aspects of school education.

Starting from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle until the 20th century, scholars and philosophers were greatly concerned about the values a society offers the youth, what attitudes/approaches are used to teach the youth ethics and moral values, and how the youth take steps toward ethical and moral value education. The American John Dewey, the British John Wilson, and Kohlberg are some examples of contemporary moral philosophers who extensively studied the subject in the 20th century.

No community can flourish without consolidating its social and cultural affairs based on ethics and moral values because ethics and moral values are universal concepts that influence all social, cultural, economic, political, and behavioral affairs within every society. In addition to an emphasis on complying with ethics and moral values, the approaches to proper ethical and moral value education must be meticulously studied. Many of the ambiguities and uncertainties

regarding ethics and morality do not necessarily arise from doubting their inevitability but rather, from uncertainties about the methods used to teach ethics and morality by schools and other educational institutions. These particular uncertainties stem from the lack of a specific and clear model of ethics and moral education. In conclusion, elucidating and assessing effective approaches and attitudes toward ethics training and moral education can be an important step toward resolving issues concerning ethics and moral education.

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