

The Use of Theory of Constraints (TOC) in Teaching of Moral Education: Malaysia

VISHALACHE BALAKRISHNAN

Victoria University of Wellington

Abstract

Moral Education has been in existence in Malaysia for the last ten to fifteen years. In fact during pre and post independent days, Moral Education was taught as ethics in almost all missionary schools in Malaysia. Since the subject was formally introduced as a core subject for non Muslim students, various strategies have been introduced to teach the subject in educational institutions, right from Pre School up to the university. This paper looks into one of the latter methods introduced to teach Moral Education that is the use of Theory of Constraints (TOC).

Introduction

Moral Education in Malaysia is part of the school curriculum from pre school right up to secondary and college level. This subject emphasizes the spiritual, family, environmental, social and humanitarian aspects in the total development of the individual. It is in accordance with the Malaysian Educational National Philosophy which states:

Education in Malaysia is an effort towards developing the individual's potential as a whole and combined to deliver individuals who are balanced and harmonious from the intellect, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects, based on belief and obeying the God. This is a continuous effort to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable, dynamic, virtuous, responsible and capable of achieving self fulfillment as well as provide their service towards the harmony and peace of the family, community and country.

(Translated from Moral Education Syllabus for Secondary Students, Malaysia; 2000)

Moral Education is a subject in the form of a program that educates students to become individuals who are moral or good mannered. The moral program in Malaysia stresses on the holistic development of the individual and concerned with development of moral thinking, moral feeling and moral action. Moral Education focuses on the effort to instill spiritual and moral strength through experiential and daily virtues of Malaysian society that is found in religion, traditions and cultural rites of the various races in Malaysia. Thus, students can build a way of life which enables them to be moral individuals. This also enables them to be socially and morally responsible towards any decision or action taken.

The aim of Moral Education in Malaysia is to mould individuals who are virtuous, responsible and are able to contribute towards the harmony and stability of the country and global community. (Moral Education Syllabus for Secondary Students, Malaysia; 2000)

The Moral Education curriculum enables students to:

1. understand and appreciate values which are needed to be virtuous;
2. realize and accept the importance of harmony between human beings and environment and make an effort to sustain it;

3. increase the understanding and cooperation by sustaining a peaceful and harmonious life in a democratic Malaysia;
4. develop matured thinking based on moral and spiritual values in making moral decisions and problem solving;
5. be initiative to act morally based on justice and altruistic in line with the values of the Malaysia community.

(Moral Education Syllabus for Secondary Students, Malaysia; 2000)

In order to achieve the above aims and objectives, various methods have been used to bring out the best in students. Skills like conflict resolution, critical thinking, creative thinking and skills to say no to negative peer influence are embedded in the lessons and text books. Techniques used to teach in Moral Education lessons include group and individual teaching, discussion, role play, drama, project work, field work etc. In recent times, The Theory of Constraints (TOC) has been introduced in all primary and secondary schools throughout the different subject matter. TOC seems to work itself very well where Moral Education is concerned. What is TOC?

Brief Historical Background of Theory of Constraints (TOC)

Dr. Eli Goldratt is the creator of the Theory of Constraints (TOC) and is the author of business best sellers like 'The Goal', 'It's Not Luck' and 'Critical Chain'. TOC is a set of management problem solving tools used by thousands of companies and government organizations and is taught in hundreds of colleges, universities and business schools.

In 1995, Dr. Eli Goldratt established a non profit foundation called TOC for Education. The original generic tools were modified to adapt according to cultural and political differences in the field of education. At the moment, millions of children in over 17 countries are applying these generic tools, including Malaysia. Dr Goldratt believes that through the synergy of the TOC tools and visionary educators throughout the world, TOC for Education will enable the children to think and communicate effectively. They will be able to work together towards a better world through logical thinking using common sense.

TOC for Education in Malaysia

In order to understand the use of TOC in Education better, some background knowledge is of importance. In Malaysia, where Moral Education is concerned, there is always the tug of war between conflicting values in pupils compared to what society expects. Thus the three basic questions asked in TOC are relevant here. The questions include:

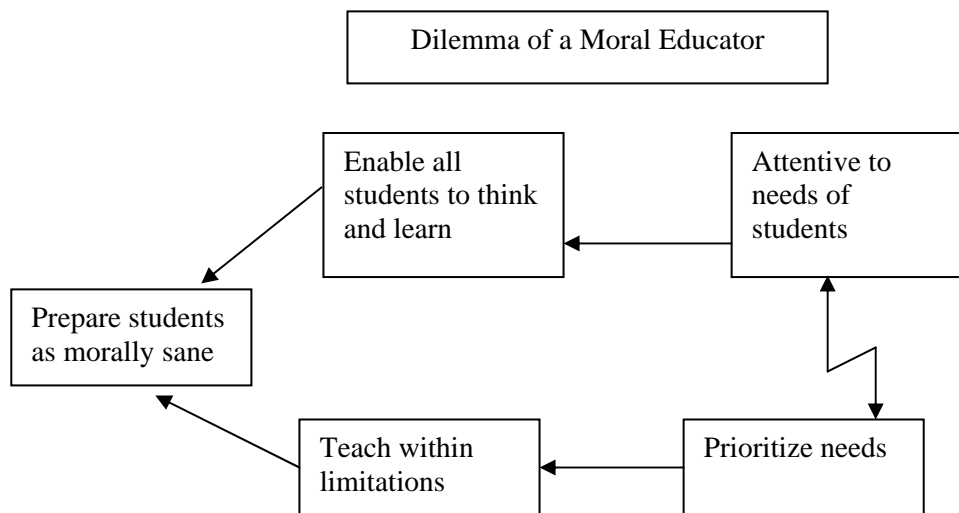
1. What to change?
2. To what to change?
3. How to cause the change?

In order to answer these questions, the target of TOC which is in line with most educational philosophy should be understood. The target in Moral Education in Malaysia is to prepare students for life as morally sane individuals - individuals with virtues that the country can be proud of. This in TOC is called Ambitious Target. But the question probed here is why in spite of all the changes in syllabus and good intentions of bringing those changes in education, many problems persists and prevent educators and policy makers from achieving the target. Obstacles faced include:

1. students do not know how to solve their own problems;

2. students memorize, rather than understand what they are taught;
3. students cannot apply what they learn to other situations;
4. students do not see the relevance of what they learn to their everyday lives
5. students do not accept responsibility for consequences
6. testing requirements drain a lot of resources and students concentrate more on exam questions rather than moral feelings and moral action.

In most cases, Moral Education teachers end up with 30 to 40 students of different levels and they need to understand all their behavior needs. But limited resources frequently require them to prioritize these needs.



Thus, most if not all Moral Education teachers are under so much stress. On the one hand they have the syllabus and programs to achieve. On the other hand, they have the responsibility of meeting all students' needs, prepare them for a government examination at the end of 11 years of education and it is not just possible to do so within the stipulated time frame and existing resources. This reality can be solved or changed if the teachers reflect on the questions below as provided as a provoking moment in TOC.

1. Why do we think we have to spend impossible amounts of time and energy to provide what is needed by all of our students?
2. Is it because we are expected to teach life skills along with academic ones?
3. Is it because students are unwilling to meet some of their own needs and therefore we have to constantly intervene and do it for them?
4. Or is it because we as educators do not know how to do it?

According to the fundamentals of TOC, one possible solution is to develop the students' ability to take responsibility for their own learning behavior. In one of the objectives of Moral Education in Malaysia, students are encouraged to act and be responsible for their own act.

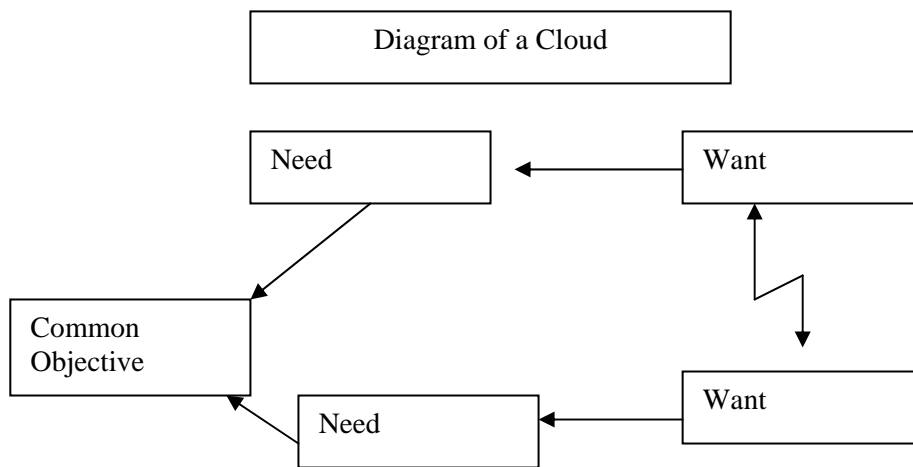
TOC is actually a simple yet powerful thinking and communications tool. These tools enable students to define problems and create thoughtful solutions, effectively analyze, rather than memorize information in curriculum text, enhance achievement in targeted moral standards and benchmarks to which the schools and community are held accountable, think through consequences of actions and ideas and apply on their own initiative, these processes to their own decision so that they act in a responsible and moral way.

The TOC Thinking Tools

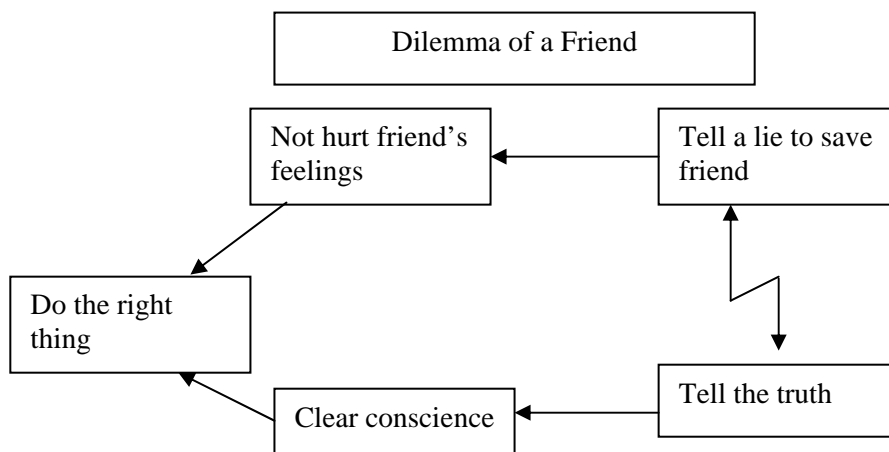
The TOC thinking tools are made up of three. They are all in the form of simple graphics and can be easily remembered by even pre school students. They are namely the Cloud, the Branch and the Ambitious Target Tree. Though these tools are for cognitive or moral thinking but it allows students, for a start to think systematically when faced with a moral dilemma before going out to act on it. TOC provides Socratic questioning techniques to enable ownership of knowledge and solutions to problems.

The Cloud

The cloud is a thinking tool that analyses the details of a conflict, meaningful action or decision in a concise and non provocative way. It is made up of five simple boxes which contain want, need and common objective.



How do Moral students apply such a diagram? In the case of a moral dilemma like to report to teacher about a friend who had copied or not, a student will have this cloud in his mind.



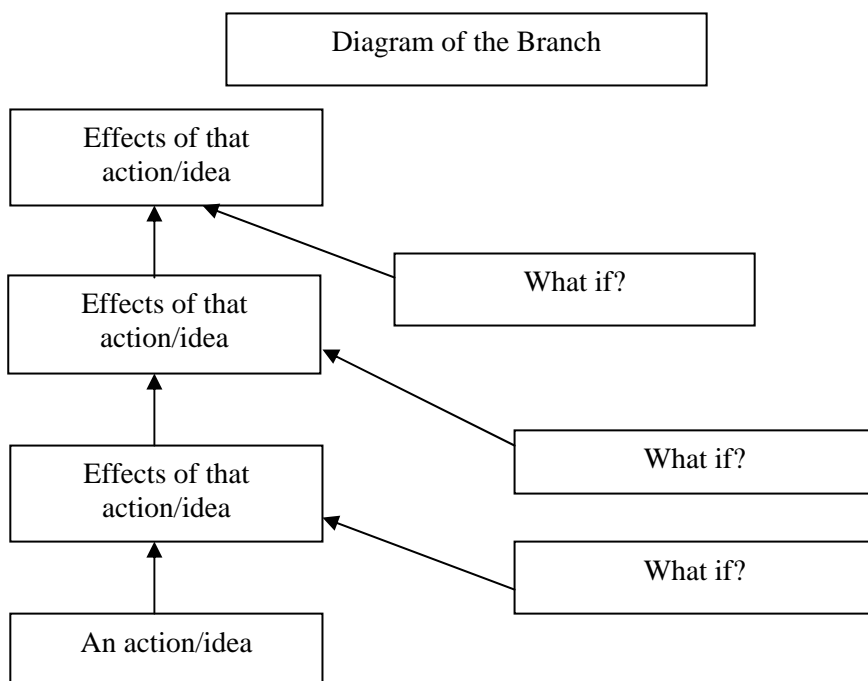
Solution: The friend needs to tell the truth in a non-hurtful way. He could say sorry to his friend but remind him that as a friend he wants him to stay away from such bad habits because he will be caught cheating by others too.

The cloud is a simple tool for students in any level or stages of moral development. Where the Moral Education curriculum is concerned, any meaningful action, decision or conflict in content can be analyzed in a way that promotes the perception of relevance to the students' daily life. This is very essential as a research done in secondary schools in Malaysia detailed that students find learning Moral Education irrelevant to their

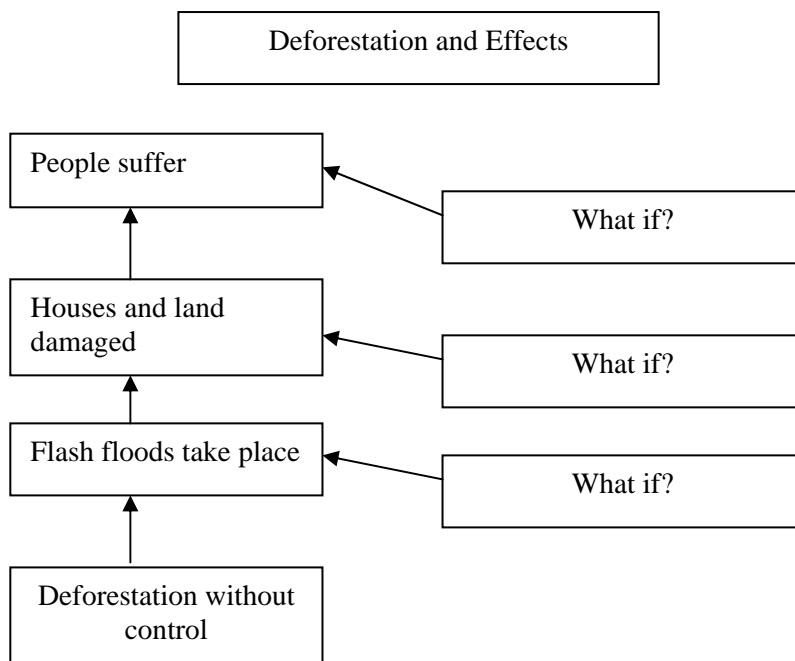
daily lives.(Vishalache, 2002) The cloud enables students to clearly retell key points or conflicts in a moral dilemma. They are also able to draw inferences from text and prior knowledge. Students are able to use sound reasoning or analysis to bring clarity to moral issues and dilemmas. Finally they are able to define problems and create new solutions that meet needs of all perspectives.

The Branch

The popular phrase used when introducing this second tool is “No more you against me and me against you because of the problem.... from now on you and me together against the problem”. Where students are concerned the concept is “Rather than tell me what to do and what not to do, lead me to discover the consequences of my actions or ideas. In Moral Education, one method of teaching is probing students to look into the effects of a certain action and judge it; whether it is morally right or wrong according to the standards of the local community. This is in line with The Branch in TOC. The Branch is used to understand cause-effect links between actions and consequences, make predictions, and create new and better solutions. The graphic for The Branch is as follow:

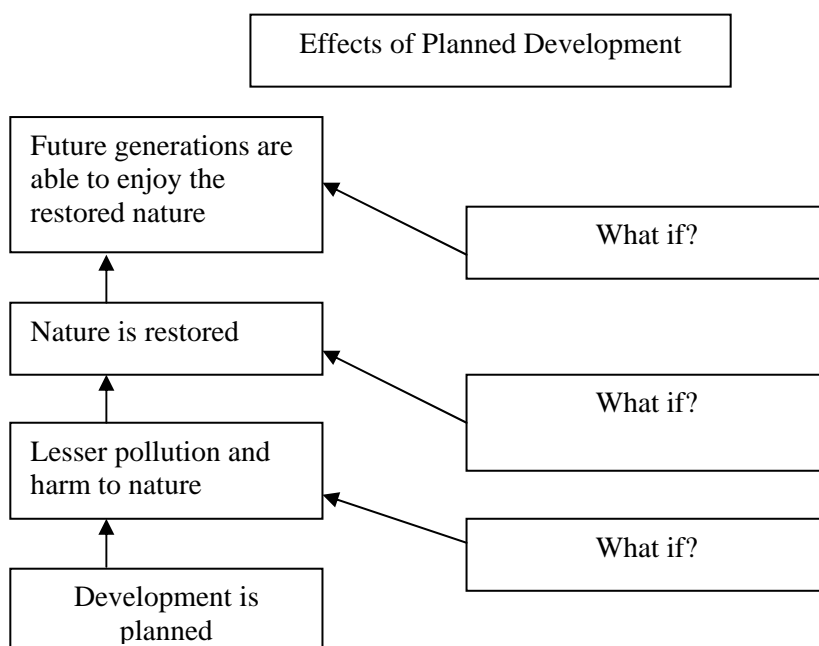


When students are faced with a moral dilemma, they can use The Branch to establish cause and affect relationships to think through consequences of behavior. Chances are they are more likely to take corrective actions on their own. Here is a practical example of how the students apply The Branch in a Moral Education lesson. One of the values learnt is harmony between man and nature. Some of the content learnt in Form Five is deforestation and planned development. Here the teacher can use The Branch to enable students to understand the two issues and the Branch can be seen showing negative or positive consequences.



When the act is a negative one, students will see the consequences throughout and tend to think of ways not to reach a stage as people suffer or deal with their behavior which was negative. Students are trained to think through their trail of thought and become aware of such an act. Intervention to make it positive is possible. The unique aspect of The Branch is, people in all walks of life are able to think through the dilemmas and reach the highest stage of consequences according to their mental capacity. That is why TOC is applicable to all levels of people.

In Moral Education it is important for the students to know and understand the effects of their action when facing a moral dilemma. The systematic way of thinking using The Branch will provide them the skills to think through in any situation and be able to understand the consequences before making a decision and acting upon that decision. Discipline problems will lessen and students will be able to cope with their own daily problems. Teachers can create awareness without indoctrinating because the students are able to use prior knowledge and apply them on any current issues.



In this example, there are the effects of positive action taken and how it results in positive consequences. Thus, The Branch enables students of Moral Education to think through consequences of actions and ideas. They are capable of taking responsibility for addressing negative behavior and for acquiring positive behaviors. They learn how to effectively question relationships in information. They become capable to retell and logically explain cause and affect relationships in information. Where academic text and classroom discussion is concerned, they are able to draw inferences from text and prior knowledge and later be able to apply them.

Ambitious Target Tree

This third and final tool in TOC can be used by students to achieve personal goals. It can also be used by teachers and students to achieve mutual goals and to think through the Moral Education curriculum. Below is a graphic of the Ambitious Target Tree.

TARGET		
Obstacles	Objectives	Plan

The Moral Education in Malaysia is divided into class work and project work which is actually done outside the classroom. At times, students face great challenges when planning their Project Work. Here are a few examples of how students get to overcome their problems when carrying out their Project Work.

Plan and Develop a Visit to the Orphanage		
Obstacles	Objectives	Plan
Group members are too busy to meet	Find a time when every group member is free	Have the meeting during lunch break
Orphanage too far away	Survey for ways to get to the orphanage	Get parents who have transport to take the group there

Thus, when the Ambitious Target Tree is applied, many obstacles and problems which seem impossible to solve becomes simple and solved easily. What is important is that students need to identify the problem and look at it creatively. They will be able to solve any obstacles and enjoy reaching their ultimate goal.

Conclusion

The application of TOC in Moral Education enables students to identify the key ideas or moral dilemmas within a lesson or text. They are able to sequence what they have learned into a logical order for improved

understanding. They are exposed and have the skills to check the validity of assumptions which is important in resolving moral dilemmas. They can clarify the dilemmas and create their own thoughtful arguments and solutions. They also become capable of setting their own goals and developing a logical plan for achieving them. They can resolve their moral dilemmas and know how to predict the consequences of their own actions and therefore be able to control their own negative behavior. All these enable them to be moral students in the future.

In a multi cultural, multi religion country like Malaysia; the use of TOC lands itself very well in the Moral Education classroom. Students come from different background and tend to have pre assumptions, biases and many other myths which need to be clarified, discussed and verified. Through the use of TOC tools as explained earlier, students are equipped with simple generic tools that help structure their thoughts in a simple but meaningful way to generate ideas and solve daily moral conflicts.

References

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Balakrishnan, V. (2002) Teaching Moral Education in Secondary Schools. Unpublished Master Thesis, University of Malaya.