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**FACULTY: EDUCATION**

**COURSE UNIT: HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

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**TASK: QUESTION 8**

**(a) Indicate and explain lawrence kohlberg’s six distinct stages of moral development?**

**(b) What is the implication of kohlberg’s stages of moral development to the teacher in the teaching and learning process?**

**(c) Present and critique jean piaget’s theory of moral development.**

According Crain, W (1985). Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development constitute an adaptation of a psychological theory originally conceived by the Swiss psychologist [Jean Piaget](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Piaget). [Kohlberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawrence_Kohlberg) began work on this topic while a psychology graduate student at the [University of Chicago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Chicago) in 1958 and expanded upon the theory throughout his life.

The theory holds that [moral reasoning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moral_reasoning), the basis for [ethical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics) behavior, it has six identifiable [developmental stages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism_(learning_theory)), each more adequate at responding to moral dilemmas than its predecessor. (Kohlberg, L 1973)

Kohlberg followed the development of moral judgment far beyond the ages studied earlier by Piaget, who also claimed that logic and morality develop through constructive stages. Expanding on Piaget's work, Kohlberg determined that the process of moral development was principally concerned with justice, and that it continued throughout the individual's lifetime, a notion that spawned dialogue on the philosophical implications of such research.

The six stages of moral development are grouped into three levels of morality: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional morality.

For his studies, Kohlberg relied on stories such as the [Heinz dilemma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinz_dilemma), and was interested in how individuals would justify their actions if placed in similar moral dilemmas. He then analyzed the form of moral reasoning displayed, rather than its conclusion, and classified it as belonging to one of six distinct stages.

There have been critiques of the theory from several perspectives. Arguments include that it emphasizes justice to the exclusion of other moral values, such as caring that there is such an overlap between stages that they should more properly be regarded as separate domains; or that evaluations of the reasons for moral choices are mostly post hoc rationalizations (by both decision makers and psychologists) of essentially intuitive decisions.

Nevertheless, an entirely new field within psychology was created as a direct result of Kohlberg's theory, and according to Haggbloom et al.'s study of the most eminent psychologists of the 20th century, Kohlberg was the 16th most frequently cited in introductory psychology textbooks throughout the century, as well as the 30th most eminent overall.

Kohlberg's scale is about how people justify behaviors and his stages are not a method of ranking how moral someone's behavior is. There should, however, be a correlation between how someone scores on the scale and how they behave, and the general hypothesis is that moral behavior is more responsible, consistent and predictable from people at higher levels

## Kohlberg’s theory of moral development states that we progress through three levels of moral thinking that build on our cognitive development.

Morality recognition of the distinction between good and evil or between right and wrong; respect for and obedience to the rules of right conduct; the mental disposition or characteristic of behaving in a manner intended to produce good results

[Lawrence Kohlberg](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/lawrence-kohlberg/) expanded on the earlier work of [cognitive](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/cognitive/) theorist Jean Piaget to explain the moral development of children, which he believed follows a series of stages.

Kohlberg defined three levels of moral development: preconvention, conventional, and post conventional. Each level has two distinct stages.

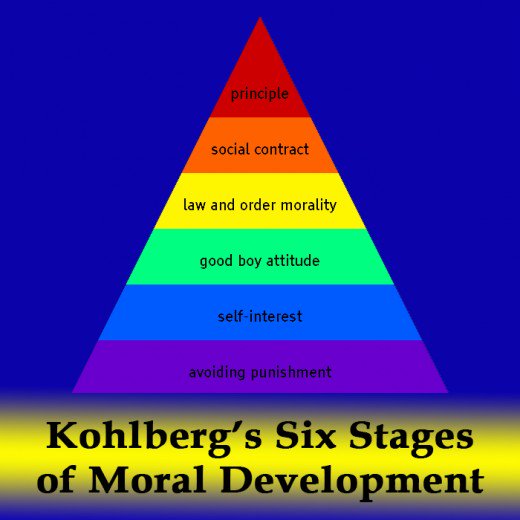
During the pre-conventional level, a child’s sense of [morality](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/morality/) is externally controlled. Children accept and believe the rules of [authority](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/authority/) figures, such as parents and teachers, and they judge an action based on its consequences.

During the conventional level, an individual’s sense of morality is tied to personal and societal relationships. Children continue to accept the rules of authority figures, but this is now because they believe that this is necessary to ensure positive relationships and societal order.

During the post conventional level, a person’s sense of morality is defined in terms of [more](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/mores/) abstract principles and values. People now believe that some laws are unjust and should be changed or eliminated.

Kohlberg’s [theory](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/theory/) has been criticized for its cultural and gendered [bias](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/bias/) toward white, upper-class men and boys. It also fails to account for inconsistencies within moral judgments.

**KOHLBERG’S STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT**



Kohlberg identified three levels of moral reasoning: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Each level is associated with increasingly complex stages of moral development.

Level 1**: Pre-conventional**

Throughout the pre-conventional level, a child’s sense of morality is externally controlled. Children accept and believe the rules of authority figures, such as parents and teachers.  A child with pre-conventional morality has not yet adopted or internalized society’s conventions regarding what is right or wrong, but instead focuses largely on external consequences that certain actions may bring.

Stage 1: [**Obedience**](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/obedience/)**-and-**[**Punishment**](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/punishment/)**Orientation**

Stage 1 focuses on the child’s desire to obey rules and avoid being punished. For example, an action is perceived as morally wrong because the perpetrator is punished; the worse the punishment for the act is, the more “bad” the act is perceived to be.

Stage 2: **Instrumental Orientation**

Stage 2 expresses the “what’s in it for me?” position, in which right behavior is defined by whatever the individual believes to be in their best interest. Stage two reasoning shows a limited interest in the needs of others, only to the point where it might further the individual’s own interests. As a result, concern for others is not based on loyalty or [intrinsic](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/intrinsic/) respect, but rather a “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours” mentality. An example would be when a child is asked by his parents to do a chore. The child asks “what’s in it for me?” and the parents offer the child an [incentive](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/incentive/) by giving him an allowance.

Level 2: **Conventional**

Throughout the conventional level, a child’s sense of morality is tied to personal and societal relationships. Children continue to accept the rules of authority figures, but this is now due to their belief that this is necessary to ensure positive relationships and societal order. Adherence to rules and conventions is somewhat rigid during these stages, and a rule’s appropriateness or fairness is seldom questioned.

Stage 3: **Good Boy, Nice Girl Orientation**

In stage 3, children want the approval of others and act in ways to avoid disapproval. Emphasis is placed on good behavior and people being “nice” to others.

Stage 4: **Law-and-Order Orientation**

In stage 4, the child blindly accepts rules and convention because of their importance in maintaining a functioning society. Rules are seen as being the same for everyone, and obeying rules by doing what one is “supposed” to do is seen as valuable and important. Moral reasoning in stage four is beyond the need for individual approval exhibited in stage three. If one person violates a law, perhaps everyone would thus there is an obligation and a duty to uphold laws and rules. Most active members of society remain at stage four, where morality is still predominantly dictated by an outside force.

Level 3: **Post-conventional**

Throughout the post-conventional level, a person’s sense of morality is defined in terms of more abstract principles and values. People now believe that some laws are unjust and should be changed or eliminated. This level is marked by a growing realization that individuals are separate entities from society and that individuals may disobey rules inconsistent with their own principles. Post-conventional moralists live by their own [ethical](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/ethical/) principles principles that typically include such basic human rights as life, liberty, and justice and view rules as useful but changeable mechanisms, rather than absolute dictates that must be obeyed without question. Post-conventional individuals elevate their own moral evaluation of a situation over social conventions, their behavior, especially at stage six can sometimes be confused with that of those at the pre-conventional level. Some theorists have speculated that many people may never reach this level of abstract moral reasoning.

Stage 5: **Social-Contract Orientation**

In stage 5, the world is viewed as holding different opinions, rights, and values. Such perspectives should be mutually respected as unique to each person or community. Laws are regarded as social contracts rather than rigid edicts. Those that do not promote the general welfare should be changed when necessary to meet the greatest good for the greatest number of people. This is achieved through majority decision and inevitable compromise. Democratic government is theoretically based on stage five reasoning.

Stage 6: **Universal-Ethical-Principal Orientation**

In stage 6, moral reasoning is based on abstract reasoning using universal ethical principles. Generally, the chosen principles are abstract rather than concrete and focus on ideas such as equality, dignity, or respect. Laws are valid only insofar as they are grounded in justice, and a commitment to justice carries with it an obligation to disobey unjust laws. People choose the ethical principles they want to follow, and if they violate those principles, they feel guilty. In this way, the individual acts because it is morally right to do so (and not because he or she wants to avoid punishment), it is in their best interest, it is expected, it is legal, or it is previously agreed upon. Although Kohlberg insisted that stage six exists, he found it difficult to identify individuals who consistently operated at that level.

**CRITIQUES OF KOHLBERG’S THEORY**

Kohlberg has been criticized for his assertion that women seem to be deficient in their moral reasoning abilities when compared to men. Carol Gilligan (1982), a research assistant of Kohlberg, criticized her former mentor’s theory because it was based so narrowly on research using white, upper-class men and boys. She argued that women are not deficient in their moral reasoning and instead proposed that males and females reason differently: girls and women focus more on staying connected and maintaining [interpersonal](https://www.boundless.com/psychology/definition/interpersonal/) relationships.

Kohlberg’s theory has been criticized for emphasizing justice to the exclusion of other values, with the result that it may not adequately address the arguments of those who value other moral aspects of actions. Similarly, critics argue that Kohlberg’s stages are culturally biased—that the highest stages in particular reflect a westernized ideal of justice based on individualistic thought. This is biased against those that live in non-Western societies that place less emphasis on individualism.

Another criticism of Kohlberg’s theory is that people frequently demonstrate significant inconsistency in their moral judgments. This often occurs in moral dilemmas involving drinking and driving or business situations where participants have been shown to reason at a lower developmental stage, typically using more self-interest driven reasoning (i.e., stage two) than authority and social order obedience driven reasoning (that’s to say, stage four). Critics argue that Kohlberg’s theory cannot account for such inconsistencies

**IMPLICATIONS OF THE THEORY TO THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS**

According to Kohlberg’s theory of moral development the following implications are both on the side of leaner’s and that of the teachers as shown below.

## As a teacher should introduce activities and assignments that encourage students to work together toward a common goal to further strengthen your students’ moral character and good relationship.

Understanding Kohlberg's theory of moral development can help you to better understand your students and help to guide them in their moral development. Elementary-aged students will typically remain in stages 1 to 3. Some students may reach the higher stages of moral development more quickly than their peers, but you can introduce your students to different classroom activities designed to help strengthen their moral character at any age.

As teachers you help to guide the moral characters of the students most especially those who in adolescent stage so that they can achieve their goal that is to say if the student having interest in football let the teacher have a hand in modifying the talent.

To strengthen your students' moral character by allowing them to help you to create a code of conduct for the classroom. This lets the students be partially responsible for the classroom rules, which they will be expected to follow.

Teacher should be worthy emulating because student since they do thing according to their interest they can easily copy good behaviors from him or her that is to say if the teacher having a good class conduct they also do the same .

Rules and regulation should be put across within the classroom to improve the moral characters of the student for example in case the student he or she has misbehave punishment like caning this can serve as a lesson to others not to do the same mistake.

Learners should be given the opportunity through their teachers by helping them to create a classroom code of conduct. So that they become responsible for the rules that they set and follow them accordingly, rather than blindly agreeing to standards set by school administrators or other authorities.

As a teacher you should motivate the students to maintain the good moral character to maintain good moral character through giving them a reward, appreciating for being consistent.

It enables a teacher to know the learners right stages of development so that he can deliver information to them that is to say if a student is in stage 4 is expected to acquire information from the teacher about the adolescent. This helps learners to understand faster during the teaching and learning process.

Plan group projects where students work together toward the understanding of curriculum instead of sitting back and listening to the teacher talk at them. Group activities encourage engagement. Responsibility for learning is placed squarely onto the students, facilitating adherence to the classroom goal of educational enrichment. Collaborate learning supports Kohlberg's fifth morality stage, which relates to upholding a social contract

The theory tracks an individual's level of moral reasoning by assigning him to one of six stages, where the first stage is a basic submission to authority and the last is universal ethics for all. As an educator, consider where your students' personal development lies in terms of Kohlberg's six stages. Then work toward achieving optimal moral character along the lines of Kohlberg's level six "Universal Principals" for a positive and constructive learning environment.

Allow for a written self- evaluation as part of any disciplinary consequence. It does not have to be lengthy, but it should provide the student with adequate time to review their own reasoning for misbehavior and to come up with a solution for the future. This type of action relates to Kohlberg's fourth stage of morality, in which individuals do their part to maintain order by reflecting on the impact of their words and actions.

Make time for role play, whether it be related to the curriculum or used as a problem solving tool. By acting or seeing situations through the eyes of others, students gain a more broad understanding of what is taking place. This helps them to make decisions based not on themselves, but on a commitment to the group. Similarly, they have advanced to Kohlberg's sixth stage, in which the needs of every person in society are worth considering. In a classroom, a brief skit or scenario can help students focus on making sure everyone is involved and engaged in learning.

Students at stage one behaves appropriately to avoid punishment. At stage two, students behave to earn rewards. By stage three, students start thinking about other people and caring about their expectations. Give students the opportunity to help create a classroom code of conduct. In this way, they will become responsible for the rules that they set and follow them accordingly, rather than blindly agreeing to standards set by school administrators or other authorities.

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**JEAN PIAGETS’ THEORY OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT**

Moral development is the process through which children develop proper attitudes and behaviors toward other people in society, based on social and cultural norms, rules, and laws.

Moral development is a concern for every parent. Teaching a child to distinguish right from wrong and to behave accordingly is a goal of parenting.

Piaget (1932) was principally interested not in what children do (i.e., in whether they break rules or not) but in what they think. In other words he was interested in children’s moral reasoning.

Piaget was interested in three main aspects of children’s understanding of moral issues. They were children’s understanding of rules, children’s understanding of moral responsibility and children’s understanding of justice

Piaget found that children’s ideas regarding rules, moral judgments and punishment tended to change as they got older. In other words just as there were stages to children’s [cognitive development](https://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html) so there were also universal stages to their moral development.

Piaget (1932) suggested two main types of moral thinking:

1. [Heteronymous morality](https://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget-moral.html#real) (moral realism)
2. [Autonomous morality](https://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget-moral.html#rel) (moral relativism)

## Heteronymous Morality (5-9 yrs)

Under this type we have the pre-moral stage and moral stage.

Pre-moral: this is piaget’s first stage of moral development, in which the child shows little concern for rules.

The stage of heteronymous morality is also known as **moral realism** (morality imposed from the outside). Under this stage children regard morality as obeying other people's rules and laws, which cannot be changed.

They accept that all rules are made by some authority figure (e.g. parents, teacher, God), and that breaking the rules will lead to immediate and severe punishment (**immanent justice**).

The function of any punishment is to make the guilty suffer in that the severity of the punishment should be related to severity of wrong-doing (**expiatory punishment**).

During this stage children consider rules as being absolute and unchanging, i.e. 'divine like'. They think that rules cannot be changed and have always been the same as they are now.

behavior is judged as “bad” in terms of the observable consequences, regardless on the intentions or reasons for that behavior. Therefore, a large amount of accidental damage is viewed as worse than a small amount of deliberate damage.

### Research Findings

Piaget (1932) told the children stories that embodied a moral theme and then asked for their opinion. Here are two examples:

There was once a little girl who was called Marie. She wanted to give her mother a nice surprise and cut out a piece of sewing for her. But she didn’t know how to use the scissors properly and cut a big hole in her dress.

A little girl called Margaret went and took her mother’s scissors one day when her mother was out. She played with them for a bit. Then, as she didn’t know how to use them properly, she made a little hole in her dress.

The child is then asked, “Who is naughtier?”

Typically younger children ([pre-operational](https://www.simplypsychology.org/preoperational.html) and early [concrete operational](https://www.simplypsychology.org/concrete-operational.html) i.e. up to age 9-10) say that Marie is the naughtier child.

Although they recognize the distinction between a well-intentioned act that turns out badly and a careless, thoughtless or malicious act they tend to judge naughtiness in terms of the severity of the consequence rather than in terms of motives. This is what Piaget means by **moral realism**.

Piaget was also interested in what children understand by a lie. Here he found that the seriousness of a lie is measured by younger children in terms of the size of the departure from the truth.

So a child who said he saw a dog the size of an elephant would be judged to have told a worse lie than a child who said he saw a dog the size of a horse even though the first child is less likely to be believed.

With regard to **punishment** Piaget also found that young children also had a characteristic view. Firstly they saw the function of punishment as make the guilty suffer. Paint called this retributive justice (or expiatory punishment) because punishment is seen as an act of retribution or revenge.

If you like young children have a very Old Testament view of punishment (“an eye for an eye”). Punishment is seen as a deterrent to further wrongdoing and the stricter it is the more effective they imagine it will be.

They also believe in what Piaget called **immanent justice** (that punishment should automatically follow bad behavior). For example one story he told was of two children who robbed the local farmer’s orchard (today we might take the example of children who robbed cars).

The farmer saw the children and tried to catch them. One was caught and the farmer gave him a thrashing. The other, who could run faster, got away. However on the way home this child had to cross the stream on a very slippery log. This child fell off the log and cut his leg badly.

Now when you ask younger children why the boy cut his leg they don’t say, “because the log was slippery,” they say, “because he stole from the farmer”. In other words young children interpret misfortune as if it were some kind of punishment from God of from some kind of superior force.

For young children justice is seen as in the nature of things. The guilty in their view are always punished (in the long run) and the natural world is like a policeman.

Piaget (1932) described the morality described above as heteronymous morality. This means a morality that is formed out of being subject to another’s rules.

Of course for young children these are the rules that adults impose upon them. It is thus a morality that comes from unilateral respect. That is to say the respect children owe to their parents, teachers and others.

However as children get older the circumstances of their lives change and their whole attitude to moral questions undergoes a radical change. An example of this is is how children respond to a question about the wrongdoing of a member of their peer group.

Young children typically “tell” on others. They believe their primary obligation is to tell the truth to an adult when asked to do so. Older children typically believe that their first loyalty is to their friends and you don’t “grass” on your mates. This would be one example of the two moralities of the child.

## Autonomous Morality (9-10 yrs)

The stage of autonomous morality is also known as **moral relativism** morality based on your own rules. Children recognize there is no absolute right or wrong and that morality depends on intentions not consequences.

Piaget believed that around the age of 9-10 children’s understanding of moral issues underwent a fundamental reorganization. By now they are beginning to overcome the [egocentrism](https://www.simplypsychology.org/preoperational.html) of middle childhood and have developed the ability to see moral rules from other people’s point of view.

A child who can decentre to take other people’s intentions and circumstances into account can move to making the more independent moral judgments of the second stage. As a result children’s ideas on the nature of rules themselves, on moral responsibility and on punishment and justice all change and their thinking becomes more like that of adults.

Children now understand that **rules** do not come from some mystical “divine-like” source. People make rules and people can change them they are not inscribed on tablets of stone. With regard to the “rules of the game” older children recognize that rules are needed to prevent quarrelling and to ensure fair play.

Indeed sometimes they even become quite fascinated with the whole issue and will for example discuss the rules of board games (like chess, Monopoly, cards) or sport (the off-side rule) with all the interest of a lawyer. They also recognize that rules can be changed if circumstances dictate (e.g. “You’ve got one player less so we will give you a three goal start”) and if everybody agrees.

With regard to issues of blame and **moral responsibility** older children don’t just take the consequences into account they also consider motives. Children begin to realize that if they behave in ways that appear to be wrong, but have good intentions, they are not necessarily going to be punished. Thus for them a well-intentioned act that turned out badly is less blameworthy than a malicious act that did no harm.

So in the previous research study children of 10 and over typically consider Margaret the naughtier child. Although Marie made a much bigger hole in her dress she was motivated by the desire to please her mother whereas Margaret may have caused less damage but did not act out of noble intentions.

It all goes to show, in Piaget’s opinion, that children are now able to appreciate the significance of subjective facts and of internal responsibility.

Children’s views on lying also change. The seriousness of a lie is judged in terms of betrayal of trust. They now recognize that all lies are not the same and, for example, you might tell a “white lie” in order to spare someone’s feelings.

They also recognize that if someone says something that they know not to be the case this doesn’t necessarily mean the other person is telling a lie. It could be that they made a mistake or that this is a difference of opinion. Overall lying is now considered wrong not because you get punished for it by adults (the younger children’s view) but because it is a betrayal of trust and undermines friendship and co-operation.

With regard to **punishment** the emphasis now moves from retribution to restitution. Its purpose is not primarily to make the guilty suffer but to put things right again.

In other words punishment should be aimed at helping the offender understand the harm (s)he has caused so that (s)he will not be motivated to repeat the offence and, wherever possible, punishment should fit the crime – say for example when a vandal is required to make good the damage (s)he has caused.

Older children also recognize that **justice** in real life is an imperfect system. Sometimes the guilty get away with their crimes and sometimes the innocent suffer unfairly. For younger children collective punishment is seen as acceptable.

For example they would not disagree with a whole class being punished for the misdeeds of a single child. For the older children it is always considered wrong to punish the innocent for the misdeeds of the guilty.

Overall Piaget describes the morality of the older child as an autonomous morality i.e. a morality that is subject to its own laws. The change is partly seen as a result of the child’s general cognitive development partly due to declining egocentrism and partly to the growing importance of the peer group.

The reference group for children’s moral beliefs is increasingly focused on other children and disputes between equals need to be negotiated and compromises made. In place of the unilateral respect the younger children owed to their parents an attitude of mutual respect governs relations between peers.

## Critical Evaluation

Piaget’s theory of children’s moral development can be seen as an application of his ideas on [cognitive development](https://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html) generally. As such his theory here has both the strengths and weaknesses of his overall theory.

##### **1. Reliability**

Piaget uses qualitative methods (observation and clinical interviews). His research is based on very small samples. His methods are not standardized and therefore not replicable.

It is impossible to say from his research how generalizable the results are. His is exploratory research, which is useful for generating new ideas rather than for the rigorous testing of hypotheses.

##### **2. Validity**

Is Piaget testing what he thinks he is testing? This isn’t clear. For example in his story of the broken cups Piaget claims to find a difference in children’s views of what is right or fair.

However it may be that the answer the children give is based on their view of what would actually happen in such circumstances not what they think should happen.

##### **3. Underestimating children’s rate of development**

Piaget argues that the shift from “moral realism” to “moral relativism” occurs around the age of 9 to 10 and that children younger than this do not take motives into account when judging how much someone is to blame.

Other research suggests that children develop an understanding of the significance of subjective facts at a much earlier age. Nelson (1980) found that even 3-year olds could distinguish intentions from consequences if the story was made simple enough.

##### **4. What do children’s replies to a story actually mean?**

This again isn’t necessarily clear. Do they understand the story? Are they able to remember it correctly? Do they give the answer that they think will please the experimenter? Is their reply governed by the substantive aspects of the story (what actually happens) or by the moral principle embedded in it?

##### **5. Does Piaget tell us what we want to know?**

Piaget’s research is about children’s moral reasoning. Many psychologists argue that what is far more important is not what children think about moral issues but how they actually behave.

And we should not forget that there is no one to one relationship between attitudes and behavior. La Pierre (1934) proved that in his research with the Chinese couple driving round America.

#### ****CONCLUSION:****

#### **In conclusion, moral development is achieved in stages and continues until death. Therefore as teachers, parents, guardians, bosses and people in positions of leadership we are obliged to respect these stages of moral development so as to create a conducive environment for the learners to learn, the workers to work irrespective of the rules and laws that have been put in place.**

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