

Storytelling and the Inculcation of Virtue in Learners on Cognitive Science, Communication Theory and Virtue Ethics

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Abstract

South Africa is in its 24th year of democracy and is beset with ethical challenges that threatens to derail the young republic. As always, educators have a primary role to play, especially with regards to the ethical education of the youth. While rule based ethical approaches (deontology) have become less popular due to the recognition of human beings and their ethical systems as products of their environment (e.g. German Historicism), virtue ethics has made somewhat of a comeback. Virtue ethics allows people to focus on the virtues valued within their community and the attainment thereof, rather than the implementation of universal rules. The interdisciplinary field of cognitive science, especially cognitive psychology, further supports the use of virtue ethics. Recent research within cognitive science has shown that much of our behavior is subconscious, guided by habit or pre-learned schemata as frameworks of expected behavior. This holds that behavior is not primarily guided by conscious obedience to a set of rules. In other words, we do not think and then act but rather act subconsciously and then think afterwards (deliberate on our behavior). Therefore, in order to change behavior we need to address the habits or schemata that guide behavior. Virtue ethics is especially useful in this regard because it places the focus on virtue and its attendant habits or schemata when changing behavior. The article then argues that educators can use storytelling (communication) to inculcate virtue in learners. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) better known within the field of strategic communication management in conjunction with narratology from the perspective of cognitive science are further fleshed out, resulting in a practical proposal regarding the communication of virtue to learners.

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