Using Forum Theatre in Moral Reasoning Study Among Form Four Students

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Abstract

Raising the dimension of moral reasoning, is still a major challenge in teaching and learning of Moral Education in Malaysia. Previous studies show a variety of techniques and strategies have been used to instil moral reasoning skills among students. One way of working creatively to raising the moral reasoning of students is through a technique called Forum Theatre. Using an action research design, this paper aims is to explain how the use of Forum Theatre can play a role in developing a moral reasoning among secondary school students. The four stages of Forum Theatre were used in Moral Education classes. The result of this study support previous literature demonstrating that Forum Theatre gives room for the development of moral reasoning. The process of moral reasoning among students involves three developmental reasoning elements which are reasonable thought, careful consideration in "decision making" and justification for the action taken.

Keywords: Forum Theatre; action research; moral reasoning; anti-model play; Boal; intervention.

Introduction

Moral Education program in Malaysia focus on nurturing the spiritual and moral strength of students through the appreciation and practice the values of Malaysian society (Moral Education Syllabus, 2000). The program also aims to produce individuals who have a moral and social obligation to the decisions and actions taken (Moral Education Syllabus, 2000). Decision and individual moral action of students depend on the capabilities of reasoning the situation which content a moral conflict (Colby & Kohlberg, 2011). Moral reasoning can also be defined as the process of an individual to reach an informed decision about what should be done in a moral dilemma (Rest, 1979).

Many studies prove the relationship between aspects of moral reasoning and moral behavior (Bergman, 2002; Blasi, 1980). The relationship is said to exist directly in a social situation that is moral activity will drive the development of thinking

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and moral reasoning and moral reasoning helps in defining the moral behavior (Kohlberg, 1984).

Moral reasoning embodied in cognitive development that is related to social thinking or "perspective taking" (Damon, 2002). In this case, if the level of perspective taking is broad then the probability of increased levels of moral reasoning would also increase. Clearly, the development of moral reasoning occurs through a combination of cognitive development and experience.

According to Kohlberg (1976), moral reasoning proved to mobilize moral behavior. His research showed that only 15% of subjects operating in post-conventional stage, mimics the exam compared with 55% (conventional) and 70% pre-conventional. The higher the achievement of moral reasoning then the more likely a person is conduct moral behavior. He also recognized that moral reasoning skills can be taught to students.

In this respect, competence in pedagogical skills is required. Research by Narvaez and Lapsley (2008) states that there is an intimate relationship between teaching practices and student character development. In addition, the study also shows that the pedagogical aspect such teaching technique have a positive relationship with moral development among school students (Mayhew & King, 2008).

Therefore, selection of educational techniques based on personal experience can help students to become moral agents in society. This is because, according to McLaren (2003), students come to school with a wealth of knowledge collected from their own life experiences. Then the teacher should use the students "knowledge-experience" as a bridge to trigger knowledge and new learning. This concept is also based on the idea that humans are conscious "subjects", and human consciousness should be directed to the world inhabited by them (Kincheloe, 2008).

According to Dewey (1909) and Freire (1970), teaching is more effective when it uses real events to address the problems of real people in their relationship with the world. Review by Vishalache (2002, 2009) also proved that the *real-life dilemmas* used in teaching moral education in schools help student deal with real moral conflicts in their daily lives. This implies that to develop as moral agent, it would involve moral reasoning or judgements when making decisions on what they ought to do and act upon them.

One way of working creatively to develop moral reasoning, inherent in the Moral Education Programme is through a technique called Forum Theatre. Forum Theatre was introduced by the South American theatre director, Augusto Boal (Babbage, 2004; Rae, 2013). This interactive teaching techniques could provide opportunities for the students awareness and make them involved in thinking process. Student can see critically a moral conflicts, find solutions to problems and become a person who have moral sensitivity, moral feelings, and moral behavior (Osburn, 2010) as claimed in the National Education Philosophy.

In particular, this study focuses on the development of moral reasoning of students based on their moral reasoning, judgment and justification by answering the following research question:

1. To what extent Forum Theatre can develop moral reasoning among students?

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Forum Theatre as a Teaching Technique

Students were involved in four steps of Forum Theatre as recommended by Boal (2008). These four steps are (a) develop a script (b) *anti-model* play (c) forum, and (d) intervention play. The following is a discussion of how the student used them and how it worked out in the Moral Education classroom to develop students' moral reasoning aspect.

i.   *Develop a script.*

In this session, students are asked to develop a script based on their own experiences of daily life and that has to do with the theme of learning in Moral Education. Participants define problems from their lived experiences and perspectives. The focus of the story is the conflict, or what is referred to by Boal (2008) as "an oppression."

In this study, Form 4 moral education students worked together to develop a script about their shared challenge. In this context the focus was "moral conflict" and the scenario could be almost any topic which resonates with "oppression". The objective of this session is for students to develop a script based on their own experience of daily life. Participants in this study had written three scripts to demonstrate the problems causing the oppressive situation. The issue to be used as a story (script) is taken from the conflict experienced by students in their daily lives. Script A is relating to conflicts between road users and police officers, script B is conflict between students and teachers in the school premises and script C is conflict between children and parents in the family.

ii.   *Anti-model play*

After composing the script, students have to act out the script developed earlier. Developed script was played by the students for class viewing. This moral conflict scene is performed as the *anti-model* play. It is compulsory for the scene performed to display *oppression* or pressure situations, where a character being victimized failed to overcome the persecution that happened to him or her. Thus, the issues were displayed more clearly and are able to the students who appeared to empathize with what they experienced. The original performance always ends with an undesirable challenge for the victimized character.

iii.   *The forum*

After *anti-model* play is complete, immediately another session was conducted by the "Joker". Joker discussed with the audience the problems that appear in the presentation and possible solutions proposed to overcome the above problems. Joker was asking the audience to figure out the right solution or idea that can be implemented to resolve the conflict experienced by the oppressed characters in the play. Discussion, improvisation and audience participation is known as "forum" and it was conducted very well by the Joker. The appropriate solutions were discussed in a forum session by the participants.

iv.   *Intervention play*

During intervention sessions, *anti-model* play was presented for a second time. Audience members participate after stopping the action of the scene. The audience

took the place of an actor to demonstrate his or her ideas for resolving a problem. Some of them (audience) were joining the scene as a new character.

At this stage, the audience (spectator) changed into the role of actors called "spect-actors". Boal (2006) wanted the audience to be active members of society, to act in tackling conflicts that exist in society together. The audience are referred to as *spect-actors* as they are encouraged to observe and interact with the performance at different stages of the process (Boal, 2006). *Spect-actors* would offer solutions through interaction such as stepping in and out of role as well as discussion, reflection and debate. Through intervention play, the conflict was resolved, highlighted in a moral manner and resulted in benefit to society.

Methodology

This study utilised action research design, using a qualitative approach. The action research model which was extended by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), was used to identify the effectiveness of Forum Theatre techniques in developing moral reasoning among form four students in a moral education class. Action research design is appropriate for this study because, the Forum Theatre technique conducted in several phases could achieve the teaching and learning objective of moral education.

Focus groups consisted of six students per group were selected from three different school for the purpose of data collection. They were male and female students of Chinese and Indians ethnic. The study period was 16 weeks.

Four types of instruments were used in this study to collect data . The instruments used were :

i . Observation protocol in the classroom
ii . Interview protocol
iii . Journal
iv . Video recording

Findings

The results are discussed based on the three themes and sub-themes that support the research question. Three themes have emerged to answer questions about the development aspects of moral reasoning. The three themes are:

1. Reasonable moral thinking
2. Consideration in decision-making
3. Justification for the choice of the action

Theme 1: Reasonable moral thinking

Activities such as writing scripts, anti-model play and the forum session can be used to trigger reasonable moral thinking among participants. Features such as interpreting situations rationality and thinking about having a controlled moral behaviour has formed a reasonable moral thinking.
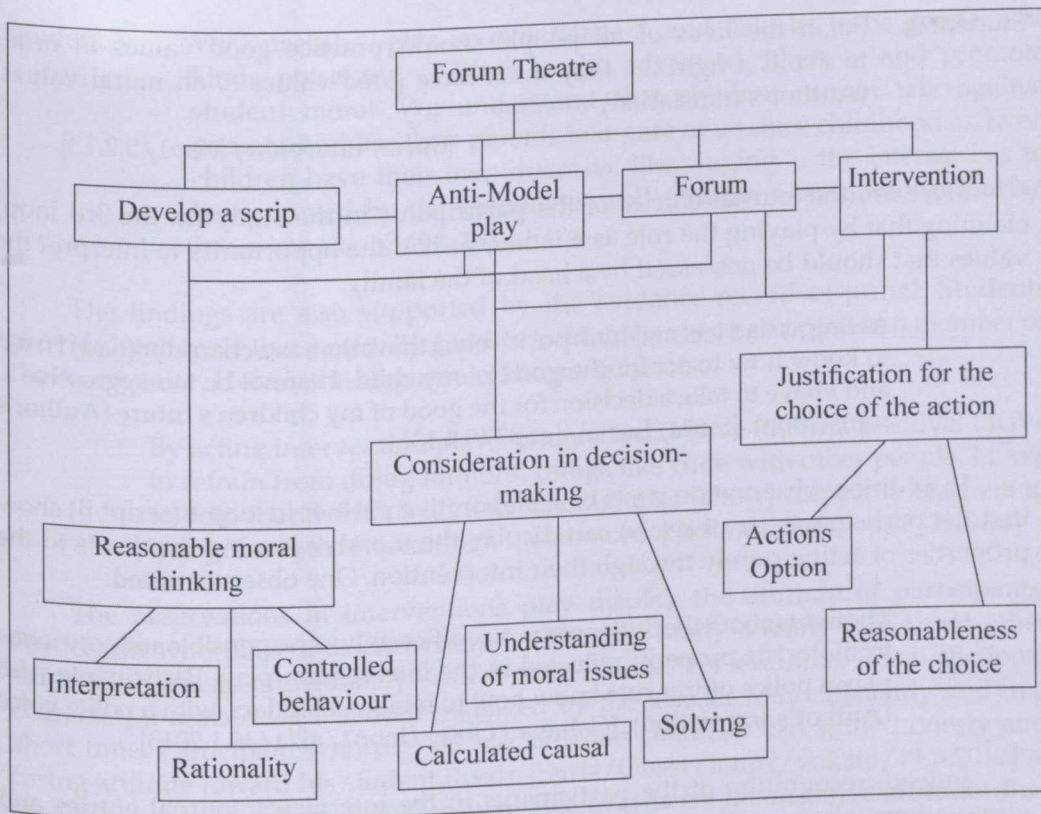
Figure 1: Development Process of Moral Reasoning.

i.   *Interpreting situations*

Analysis of the data indicating that participants can think reasonably in identifying situations involving moral issues. They are able to construe whether the situation they are facing is involving a moral issue or not. In addition, participants also made it clear about the conflict between the fictional characters in *anti-model* play. Willingness of participants to give suggestions through forum sessions to address conflicts that exist in an issue also shows the ability of their interpretations of the situation.

In addressing the conflict existing between the character of Wilson and the police officer (script A), students can express things that should be implemented and which should be avoided. The following transcript of the interview shows their moral reasoning.

Student 1:   In the anti-model play like there is a problem that has not been done, .. happen in life. If left unchecked can lead to problems such as huge noise ... For example, police fight with Wilson. After that, in intervention play ... we change this situation .... police so good, speak politely, ... and Wilson already changed so nice ... he apologize to the police.

Researcher: What would this do?

Student 2:   So..in the lives of all people should practice good values in order to avoid a fight ...... they must have good values ... ah moral values. (Author's translation)

[Suria/Interview/loop1/5.2.13]

Here are the journal entries of the participants in the study (in the 3rd loop) claiming that by playing the role as a father, he had the opportunity to interpret the values that should be possessed by a head of the family.

Acting as dad lets me think positively. I think that, as a character (dad) I need to know how to act for the good of my child. I cannot be too aggressive ... and I have to take a decision for the good of my children's future (Author's translation). [Suria/Jurnal/loop3/9.4.13]

In addition, observation posts by collaborative partner in loop 1 (script B) show that the participants (*spect-actors*) can display the moral reasoning that leads to the properties of acting purely through their intervention. One observer noted:

Thoughts about the duties of a police officer who is responsible and courteous to motorists properly reflected in the intervention play. Participants who play a police officer role know how to rebuke offenders, with a polite voice (Author's translation). [Cahaya /Obser/loop1/aiza/30.1.2013]

Indeed, recognition of the participants in the interviews, journal entries and observations, showing that students provide interpretation for the decision they made. Students also believe that, if every human being has moral values, negative symptoms such as strife among individuals can be avoided.

ii.   *Rationality*
Besides making moral interpretation, participants also support behaviour based on rules or rationally accepted moral behaviour. The participants were able to state the reason and rationale for whether a behaviour ought to be done or not. Participants, for example, admitted that they understand the rationale behind the police duty. Police always ensure road rules are followed by all road users for their own safety. This is evidenced by the following interview:

Student 6:   Wilson should accept the punishment suit given by the police ... because .. police .. run responsibilities for road safety....(Author's translation). [Sinar/Interview/loop1/24.1.13]

Furthermore, students can also rationalise that the experience of Forum Theatre can be used to face the future with care. Participants claimed that the behaviour displayed by all the characters in the intervention play was based on the rationale and that is acceptable to all. This is evidenced in the following interview:

Researchers: Are these conflict or the issue is useful in daily life?

Student 6:   Very useful.... give us experience ... and help us to be good, ... be kind.. poise and ... listen to the advice of others ... and promote student moral. We understand that children cannot talk against parents, because their parents take care of us since childhood .... Even children have their own interests, like singing ... the interest has to be approved by the parents as well..(Author's translation). [Suria/ Interview/loop3/9.4.13]

The findings are also supported by the evidence record of jurnal. Students provide a rationale that a morally good individual has been accepted as a member of the community. Here is the response of the participants:

By acting intervention play I understand, I have to think positive, I have to refrain from doing immoral things like rude with other people. I have to help friend who is hard at school, I also [show] respect to teachers to any point in time. (Author's translation). [Suria/Jurnal/loop2/15.3.13]

The observations in interventions play display the attitude of participants. Participant who plays a teacher character (teacher Man) is really care about other students in a way immediately rushed to the scene. For example, Rosdi (fictional character) a broken leg has been managed by the teacher Man efficiently and in a short time. Participant who plays a teacher Man character can show honesty and caring attitude toward his student Rosdi. [Suria/Obser/loop2/yokam/11.3.2013]

Results show that participants were able to criticize the negative attitudes that exist in themselves openly. Participants also showed rationally a good, should and must attitude to be implemented in the situations that show a moral dilemma.

iii.   Controlled behavior

Students also show thinking about the importance of a person's behaviour based on regulatory standards as specified or accepted by society. Participants expressed the attitude of controlled behaviour as a feature of moral reasoning. People are said to understand a situation before acting and to adopt appropriate behaviour in the community to avoid misunderstandings. In the interview, for example, one of the groups said:

Student 5:   Hmm .... Like when we are angry .... other people angry. We understand ... we have to think first before speaking ..... use good language ... and show good behaviour .... so that no problems arise. (Author's translation). [Cahaya/Interview/loop1/31.1.13]

Analysis of journal entries in loop 1 (script A) also shows the need to control the behaviour of a person in accordance with the rules accepted by society. One of the participants writes:

I know I should not engage in activities that are not beneficial like... quickly angry... because, if we are angry others will upset us. In anti-model play, we see how the police first was angry and then I get angry

too to police ... People do not like mad people. So .... do not get angry!. (Author's translation). [Cahaya/Jurnal/loop1/3.2.13]

Observation notes show that, in a forum session, participants admitted that eating in the classroom while the teacher is teaching is bad behaviour. While the intervention sessions (2nd loop), *spect-actors* (fictional character Tan) show respect for teachers. He also showed patience, self control and admitted that the counselling teacher advise him for his own good. [Cahaya/Obser/loop2/aiza/8.3.2013]

Theme 2: Consideration in decision-making

Once individuals went through the process of thinking reasonably, they should consider carefully in the face of moral conflict before making a decision. Moral conflict refers to a situation where there is a conflict of values that require a person to make choices and give the causality of the results (Power, et al, 2008). Moral decisions are also described as reliable actions to be taken by the person in dealing with an issue in a situation (Colby & Kohlberg, 2011).

The results show that participants make careful considerations in decision making. They show moral judgment as the understanding of an issue of morality, causality count and figure out a strategy or solutions to moral conflicts. Refer to Figure 1.

i.   Understanding of moral issues

In addition to moral thinking, careful consideration in making a decision is also a key element in the process of individual moral reasoning. *Anti-model* play, and acting at the intervention sessions provided an opportunity for participants to understand the moral issues that featured more.

The following interview transcript clearly shows the participants' understanding of the conflicts that exist in the *anti-model* play (script A):

Student 3:   We can understand ... the issue is displayed, for example the issue of road users who do not obey the law ... and the police pretty rough ... Like the Wilson road users should always check whether, if he have a license or not .... cannot be 'careless' ... and the police should also speak well, cannot be arrogant. Police ... to be virtuous ... and talking with customers (Author's translation). [Sinar/Interview/loop1/24.1.2013]

Analysis of journal entries, the loop 2 (script C) also indicates participants' understanding of the conflicts that exist in the *anti-model* play and strategy of the proposed solution. Here is an example of a student journal entry:

I can understand the situation in the school field. There was a problem in the sports teacher and Amri (fictional character). Today's activities helped me understand the moral values like tolerance practiced by the character of the sports teacher. He was not angry with authority. After that Amri also honour the sports teacher (Author's translation). [Cahaya/Jurnal/loop2/10.3.13]

The results of journal entries also show the students participants understand the moral issues that led to conflict between teachers and students in schools. Participants believe such an attitude of tolerance, trust and responsibility should be carried by the teacher to solve problems in school.

Analysis of the findings from these sources confirmed that the process of thinking and understanding of the participants about moral conflicts are displayed through *anti-model* plays.

ii. Calculated causal

Once an issue is understood, participants describe and reason about the causes of the conflicts inherent in a situation that is displayed. Participants are able to calculate the reason for the issues that arise before recommending an appropriate solution strategy.

Interviews in the 3rd loop, confirming the participants' understanding in giving causal reasoning about the choices made by them to resolve the conflict inherent in the situation shown. Here is a sample of the interview:

Student 1:   While the brother have a problem with parents, he should adopt the simplicity.. he should not extreme in behaviour and attitude who raised his voice and ran into the room while dad was talking, is excessive and does not correspond to the eastern culture (Author's translation). [Sinar/Interview/loop3/7.3.2013]

Participants admitted that despite his character (daughter) having the right to determine her ambition and career, the character must also voice opinion to her father in a more polite, gentle and humble way. In this way the tension can be reduced.

Furthermore, analysis of journal entries in the loop 1 shows the root of the problem between the police officers and road users (Wilson) is due to the failure of the police officers in showing good manners and courtesy to other road users. Conflicts may also be attributed to the attitude of Wilson's impatience and disrespect for the police. Refer to the following journal entry:

In acting anti-model play, I understand the conflict that exists between Wilson and the police. The cause of the conflict is no tolerance between police and Wilson. Each had the arrogance and do not want to 'give and take'. They are impatient (Author's translation). [Cahaya/Jurnal/loop2/10.3.13]

In the meantime, recorded observations show that the participants understand the situation or conflict of values shown in the *anti-model* play. Situations of conflict and tension that occurs in the school premises can be played well by the participants in the study through *anti-model* play. The problem that occurs between teachers and students can be demonstrated well by the tone of voice and dialogue. Tensions between the sport teacher character and Amri's character can be seen through dialogue, action and facial expression used by the actors. [Suria/Obser/loop2/yokam/11.3.2013]

iii. Solving

The findings of the three sources show that the participants understand the situation, moral issues and conflicts; they have proposed a solution strategy in a forum session. Participants consider factors such as the social, legal and human morality as a strategic solution to the conflict that exists. Interviews with the participants demonstrate this phenomenon.

Student 4:   We resolved this conflict in the intervention play. Our police character (Kartik) has chosen the high manner to resolve this conflict. When the police showed the high manner .... like he is talking in a polite manner ... use a small voice .... Wilson was not angry .. Wilson listened to the police and when the police summons was he (Wilson not angry) .... Problems in *anti-model* play already solve here. (Author's translation). [Cahaya/Interview/loop1/31.1.2013]

In addition, analysis of journal entries, the loop 2 (script C) also show a causal judgment and problem-solving strategies, which are made by them to resolve the conflict. Here is an example of a student journal entry:

In acting this intervention, I understand some value. It would help me understand the moral values such as mutual help and cooperation of my friends in school. Ravi and Jo had helped Rosdi [who had] a broken leg. They are also kind to Rosdi. Man must help each other to live in peace and harmony of 1 Malaysia (Author's translation). [Suria/Jurnal/loop2/13.3.13]

The observations carried out, showing that the moral judgments of participants [were] based on the causes and the strategies. Participants choose a responsible and loving as a value that should be present in humans. Teacher as an important asset in school should understand how valuable is a human life. This responsibility is the ultimate responsibility of the school. Students are able to demonstrate these values in their interventions acting. [Suria/Obser/loop2/yokam/11.3.2013]

Theme 3: Justification for the choice of the action

The moral person should know and understand what is right and wrong in a moral issue. In this process they not only think purely a matter of right or wrong, but also try to provide a compelling reason or justify the decisions taken by them. Moral decision refers to the way a person provides critical judgment or justification for the action to be taken in a given situation (Colby & Kohlberg, 2011). Options of action is the "content" that should be considered before making a moral decision. According to Colby and Kohlberg (2011) and Chang (2007), participants respond to the choice of action taken in that context can be a catalyst in aspects of development of one's reasoning.

Most of a person's moral judgment is based on the nature or context of the dilemmas experienced by them (Gilligan, 1982). In this study, features such as choice of action and justify the reasonableness of choice was the action taken by the participants. This can be seen when students take moral decisions by choosing certain

moral values as a means of solving problems. Referring to Figure 1, justification theme for the action taken is generated through two sub-themes, namely the actions option (choice of action) and the reasonableness of the choice.

i.   Actions option

Making a justification for the action taken be another important element in the process of the individual's moral reasoning. In making this justification the individual must choose the right thing and give justification to the action in terms of morality.

Interviews show (in intervention play) participants who plays Wilson acted to apologize to the police for the offense of not carrying a driver's license. Wilson also acted by greeting and shaking hands with the police before starting the discussion. Refer to the following interview:

Student 3:   We saw Wilson's action .. when he wants to apologize ... we see the behaviour of the apology made by Wilson. He ask sorry, and Wilson respect the police, the police was not angry. The police help Wilson by explain to him why he (Wilson) have to pay the summons. (Author's translation). [Cahaya/Interview/loop1/31.1.2013]

The interview above shows the action chosen by Wilson's character is correct and appropriate. The action is intended to ease the tensions.

Analysis of journal entries also shows that participants can make a choice of action when faced with an issue. A person acting as Tan acted to apologize to the counselling teacher and respects the advice given by the teacher. The following is a journal entry of participants:

On the issue of Tan and counselling teachers, I acted as Tan. In intervention play, I understand, that I am guilty because I'm not supposed to eat in the classroom. I act to apologize to the counselling teacher .... my actions have solved the problem with my counselling teacher (Author's translation) [Cahaya/Jurnal/loop2/10.3.13]

In addition, the observations source also show an action by character Ravi and Jo (fictional character), who immediately met the teacher to ask for help. It is an act of humanity to help a sick friend. They love other school friends. In the instant action Teacher Man, who sent Rosdi (fictional character) to the hospital, also showed his appreciation of other people's lives. [Cahaya/Obser/loop2/aiza/8.3.2013]

ii.   Reasonableness of the choice.

After selecting the appropriate action, individuals also need to give justification to the choice of the action as a way to justify their choice. The following interview results are a reflection of the play script A and script B.

Researcher: What do you think about the angry police man?

Student 6:   The action is not right. Police man shouldn't get angry and Wilson also should be good to talk with police officers,we have to respect

police officers .. He has the rank of police (Author's translation) [Sinar/Interview/loop1/24.1.2013]

In addition, the journal reflection on script C and D also feature the reasonableness of actions taken by the participants. Refer to the following journal entry:

> On the issue of sports coaches to the players of the school football team, I acted as a teacher of Man has to act quickly to help the player named Rosdi. I immediately there to help Rosdi [who has] a broken leg. My immediate action was to help save life of Rosdi ... Teachers must act quickly to save the lives (Author's translation) [Sinar/Jurnal/loop2/27.2.13]

Action of teacher Man was justified, on the grounds that as a teacher at the school he had a duty to ensure the safety and welfare of every student in the school. This responsibility is a moral duty of a man called "teacher". In addition, the action of saving someone's life is important and it is commendable behaviour that should be in humans.

Furthermore, the observation also highlights the appropriateness of the actions taken by the participants. According to one observer, Wilson's actions shows the reason that he respects people who have the power, or authority, such as the police man.

Studies indeed have shown that Forum Theatre develops Form 4 students' moral reasoning. Participants show a process of moral reasoning through reasonable moral thinking, careful consideration in making the decision and justification for the choice of actions taken. Refer to Figure 1.

Discussion

The results show that Forum Theatre is able to develop moral reasoning aspects of Malaysian form four students. The four steps in the Forum Theatre are stimulating aspects of student reasoning. Students will be able to show reasoning in situations (*anti-model* play) which are established. The process involves the development of moral reasoning of students in a sequence of three elements of reasoning, namely: reasonable moral thinking, careful consideration in making the decision and justification for the action taken.

Thus, the findings are consistent with the findings of Chang (1998, 2007) and Colby and Kohlberg (1987, 2011), that the response to a situation that is structured (in the context of this study, four steps of Forum Theatre) can root the highest level of consideration and thought, especially in moral reasoning of students. Obviously Forum Theatre is able to develop moral reasoning aspects of students.

Conclusions

Forum Theatre techniques can expand the dimensions of moral reasoning of Form Four students. It also serves as an added value to the development of moral education teaching pedagogy for secondary school. Furthermore, with globalization, students today are faced with the greater challenges in resolving social problems that are infused with values. Appropriate teaching techniques are essential to polish and to be a key to open the element of morality among students.

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