

Georg Lind

**Educators' ethics:
Implications of the project Democracy and Education
in Schools (DES)
for teaching staff development**

1999

Contact:

Prof. Georg Lind

University of Konstanz

FB Psychologie

78457 Konstanz

E-Mail: Georg.Lind@uni-konstanz.de

For further information and publications on this topic see

www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/b-publik.htm

**Psychology of Morality &
Democracy and Education**

Educators' ethics: Implications of the project Democracy and Education in Schools (DES) for teaching staff development¹

Georg Lind
University of Konstanz²

Abstract

How should we prepare educators for their tasks in the field of moral and democracy education? On the basis of our experience with the educational project *Democracy and Education in Schools* (DES), I want to add some thoughts to this question. In the DES schools, we observed per-year-gains of students' moral judgement competence about double as high than in regular schools and also an increase of students' rule-conforming behavior (Lind & Althof, 1992; Lind, in print). Interestingly, the teachers, who were hardly aware of this remarkable overall effect of their teaching, reported also big changes of their own teaching style during that time and attributed these to the DES project.

In this paper, I will summarize the findings of the DES project, present additional findings from a follow-up interview eight years later with the principal and teachers of one of the participating schools and draw some conclusions as to the development of teaching staff for improving moral classrooms and democratic schools. In particular I will discuss three models often alluded to in public debate: the *volitional* model, the *academic expert* model, and the *competency* model.

¹ Paper presented at the AME Conference in Minneapolis, November 18 - 20, 1999.

² Prof. Dr. Georg Lind, University of Konstanz, Faculty of Social Sciences, 78457 Konstanz, Germany. E-mail: Georg.Lind@uni-konstanz.de. Internet: <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/>

Introduction

Like in many countries, schools in Germany are to foster knowledge and abilities not only in the domains of mathematics, natural sciences, languages, modern technologies and economics but also in the domain of morality and democracy. Yet, in spite of the general emphasis given to these educational aims in public statements, little is done to actually reach them in our schools. In particular, teachers are rarely if ever adequately prepared for this task.

Some years ago, I initiated the project “Democracy and Education in Schools” (DES),³ in which we - Fritz Oser, Heinz Schirp and among others - tried out cognitive-developmental methods of moral and democratic education in three German schools, one school of each of the three-partied German school system (*Hauptschule*, *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*).⁴

In this paper I want to describe the findings of this project, our experiences with training teachers and implementing moral education, and some observations after the project has ended, up until now, almost ten years later.

The project *Democracy and Education in Schools* (DES)

After more than fifty years of democracy, authoritarian education, as we had it in the past, during the German Empire and the Nazi rule, has almost completely disappeared in Germany. The United States were decisive for establishing not only a democratic political system in Germany after the Second

³ The DES-project was advised by Peter Döbelstein-Osthoff, Ann Higgins, Lawrence Kohlberg, Gertrud Nunner-Winkler, Fritz Oser, Jürgen Raschert, Sibylle Reinhardt, and Heinz Schirp. It was funded by the Ministry of Education of Northrhine-Westfalia, the largest state in Germany, and coordinated by the *Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung* in Soest. I initiated the DES project, drafted its aims (Lind & Raschert, 1987), acted as director and member of the scientific advisory board, co-directed the project evaluation and participated in the instruction of the teachers.

⁴ There is no real equivalent to these school-types in the US school system. The students enter this system after four years of grade school. The choice is made on the basis of the grade school teachers' recommendations. *Hauptschule* is a low track school, usually finished after ninth grade. Most Graduates from *Hauptschule* then either enter some employment or attend a three-year vocational school. *Realschule* ends after tenth grade. Good students may switch to the gymnasium, others also enter vocational schools or specialized high schools. *Gymnasium* is the typical school for those who go on to university.

World War, but also helped to establish a democratic school system. In some respects, I am proud to say, we, the students, have even topped our teacher. Public education is (still) well financed and equally distributed across various socio-economic classes and social groups.

Yet, fifteen years ago (when the DES project was conceived), and to some extent still even today, our education was meant *for* democracy rather than democratic in itself. Many teachers believed that learning at school must prepare adolescents *for* democracy rather than be democratically organized *itself*. While John Dewey (1966) and Lawrence Kohlberg (Kohlberg & Higgins, 1987) believed it as self-evident that democracy should not be only the aim of education but also a means for it, many German educators asserted (and still assert) that the process of education is not compatible with the principles of democracy, and democracy should not be subjected to educational processes.

In the seventies and early eighties, most German educators were deeply divided on that issue. They either believed, schools should keep away democracy from their premises (Brezinka, 1992; Mut zur Erziehung, 1978), or democracy should get rid of all institutionalized education (the movement of “anti-pedagogics”, cf. Braunmühl, 1975). But hardly anyone was ready to view democracy and education not as mutually exclusive concepts but as complementary ones.

On the background of these discussion, I felt that Kohlberg’s Deweyan view of the relationship between education and democracy was highly revolutionary, and the title ‘Democracy *and* Education in Schools’ very appropriate for our project.

The main aims of the DES project were to find out

- a) whether democratic processes and teaching methods could be implemented in the German school system (some expressed serious doubts; cf. Edelstein, 1985);
- b) whether competence-based methods of moral education as dilemma discussion and just community (Berkowitz, 1981; Power et al., 1987; Lind, 1999) were also effective in German schools after they were shown to be highly effective in US-American school settings (Higgins, 1980; Leming, 1981; Lockwood, 1978);
- c) and whether students’ every-day behavior at school would change in any significant way during the project.

At that time, we did not think about changes in teachers' behavior nor did we expect much to happen beyond the project's end.

The project *Democracy and Education in Schools* (DES) started in 1985 and ended in 1991. The first three years were filled with building up a scientific advisory board, with talking to the government, school administration, teachers and parents to get the permission to work in schools and funding, and with developing the design of the project and its evaluation. The talks took the most time. Much anxiety had to be overcome. In all three schools, we introduced the project at length. We conducted at least two full-day meetings with lectures and discussions at each school before the three schools decided to participate.

The DES project based on similar teaching objectives and methods as the intervention projects by Power, Higgins and Kohlberg (1989), but there were also some notable differences:

- Our subjects were relatively young. The schools insisted to start out with fifth graders (who are in their first year at these schools). They began with all fifth graders in the first year and added each year the new fifth graders to the project so that, in the third year, the project comprised three age-groups.
- Neither the teachers nor the students were selected on the basis of their training or their own level of moral development. The whole school and nearly all staff participated (voluntarily) in this project. The teachers were introduced into these approaches during two one-day workshops and continuous supervision. Moreover, some teachers held meetings amongst themselves and engaged in team-teaching.
- At the end of this project, all school principals and teachers were interviewed. In one school, the staff was again interviewed eight years after the project ended. All students were tested before and after the educational intervention.

Immediate Effects of the DES project

Over all, the immediate findings of the DES project were very instructive and positive (see also Lind & Althof, 1992). We found

- a) The combination of democracy and education fared astonishingly well at the three schools. Many more teachers of these schools were willing to participate than we had expected. Instead of half a dozen teachers, which we hoped for, almost all teachers said they would want to take part in the three-year program one way or the other. Most parents welcomed it and none objected (as many school administrators predicted).
- b) We found that the per-year-gain of moral judgment competence in the DES students was double as high as the gain of students in regular, non-experimental schools (Lind & Althof, 1992; Lind, 1998). It should be noted that the DES project involved fifth to seventh graders, who were only ten to twelve years old. Up until then, dilemma discussion and just community meetings were mostly confined to high school age students. Some authors even believe that students of this age cannot profit from such methods (Schläfli et al., 1985). Our findings clearly disprove such assertions.
- c) We found that not only students' judgment competence increased but also the relationship with their teachers improved and they became more rules-abiding. Whereas vandalism, cheating, stealing and bullying decreased.
- d) We found that the teachers could not perceive these changes in their students' moral competencies and behaviors as they had no experience in observing such changes. Yet, they reported several incidents that appeared to support the claims made by the project; for example, they reported that two students who regularly fought against each other outside the school stopped this only after a just community meeting had been held about this issue.
- e) We also found that teachers perceived rather large gains in their own teaching competence as an effect of the DES Project (see *Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung*, 1991). The interviews with the principal and teachers of one of these schools revealed that the overall level of cooperation among teachers improved considerably: While in none of the schools team-teaching took place before the project began, at least in two schools it became common practice, and while the staff meetings used to be dominated by a few senior staff members before, the staff meetings became more just and democratic during the project.

Lasting Effects

We were not able to make any assessments of long-term effects on the side of the students. However, we could conduct follow-up interviews in one of the DES schools eight years after the project has ended. I do not have yet all questionnaires back but some remarkably lasting effects of the DES project are already visible:

- The overall level of cooperation among teachers remained high over the eight year period since the program ended. As one principal explained, there was no regression to the times when only one or two old male teachers dominated all meetings.
- The core method, dilemma discussion, was still practiced by those teachers who cooperated intensively with the project advisors, and
- A special program for fifth-graders⁵ still operated which originated from the DES project. Each incoming fifth grader works out rules of communication in school, together with one of their teachers. These rules are then written on a poster and pinned to the wall of the classroom.⁶
- The teachers and principals who had been intensively involved in the DES-project have been frequently invited by other schools and states to act as instructors and supervisors for the method of dilemma discussion and just community meetings.

In regard to this, I could make some immediate observations. I invited the principle of one of the schools, Heinz Henk, as a co-speaker at a symposium organized by the ministry of education of Rhineland-Palatinate and at a parent-teacher meeting of a local school in Konstanz. Yes, the audience was interested in my research perspective. Yet, they also welcomed very much to have a „practitioner“ available to ask questions and present pros and cons of the DES project from his point of view.

⁵ Fifth grade is the lowest grade in German high schools and middle schools.

⁶ Schools in Germany usually have fixed „classrooms“ for the students. The teachers have to move from classroom to classroom, rather than the students.

Preparing teachers for moral and democracy education

What do these findings tell us about the preparation of teachers for moral and democracy education? Whom should we prepare for this task and how? Three model answers are frequently invoked to answer this question:

- The first model I call the *volitional* model. Essentially, this model incorporates two assumptions, a) that all teachers are hold responsible for moral and democracy education and b) that teachers are sufficiently prepared if demonstrate their *will* to take up this responsibility. Teachers can demonstrate this will by reciting the general aims of education in our societies and by making some kind of oath. In Germany, most teachers are *Beamte*, that is a special kind of civil servants, who have to swear an oath on the constitution when they begin their career. Hartmut von Hentig, one of the most prominent German educational theorists, has suggested to have educators and teachers swear a particular oath, the so-called *Socratic Oath* (Hentig, 1994).

This model has some advantages but also severe drawbacks. The greatest advantage is that its implications for teacher training are rather inexpensive. Yet, it also seems to be the least effective. A great body of research shows that the relationship between knowledge and will (beliefs and attitudes) on one side and behavior on the other is weak at best (Eagly & Chaiken, 1994). For a cognitive-developmental, this does not come as a surprise. As Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1984) have shown, moral and democratic behavior is not merely a matter of good will and conceptual knowledge but depends strongly on one's cognition and competencies. One may even argue like Socrates that only mature moral cognition has a sustainable motivating effect on one's behavior. Those who really understand the good cannot but behave accordingly.

- The second model I call the *academic expert* model. According to the academic model, only a few teachers need to be prepared for teaching ethics (and democracy⁷) at school as a separate subject.⁸ This model requires that courses in ethical and democratic theory are offered to some

⁷ Note that this democracy is rarely a subject by its own despite the high esteem it receives. Mostly, democracy is subsumed under social studies or political sciences at school.

⁸ In German schools, ethics is offered mainly to students who do not wish to attend religion classes. At grades 11 through 13, at some schools students can also chose ethics as a elective. Most classes are taught by teachers who have little or no training in ethics, philosophy, moral education and moral psychology.

teacher students during their study.⁹ These teachers then will teach moral philosophy and ethical rules in specialized courses in schools.

The main drawback of this model is that it is left up to the students to integrate conceptual ethical knowledge with the procedural knowledge of their every-day life and their special professional areas in later life.

- The third is the competence model of ethics and democracy teaching. According to this model, the enhancement of moral and democratic competencies is made integral part of all teachers' education and of all subjects in school, so that each and every individual becomes more competent in making moral judgments and acting accordingly. Derek Bock (1976), former president of Harvard University, defined the ideal moral educator this way: He or she should be proficient in moral philosophy, in at least one special subject field (like physics or history) and in leading rigorous discussions about moral problems in the classroom. However, this model implies not only to foster individuals' competencies but also to foster the „moral atmosphere“ of institutions and democratic interaction in groups.

The DES project was based on the third model, and we feel that it contributed much to the success of the DES project. None of the participating teachers were of the ideal kind when the project started. But most, if not all, seemed to develop and grow during the DES project with that ideal in mind.

In my view, the experiences with this model in the DES project (and my experiences with teacher education on university level) can be summarized this way:

- Teachers must have a good training to be able to apply competence-based methods of moral and democracy education. They do not need to be perfect when starting out but rather will gain such perfection through „learning by doing“ (Dewey).
- This training can and should already be provided during college and university education. This should be done in cooperation with schools, in which the teacher students can try out these methods under the joint supervision of their professor and experienced teachers.
- However, also experienced teachers can be trained and may even profit more of such training as they often value the benefits of moral and democracy education more than inexperienced teacher students.

⁹ The governments of most states in Germany (*Bundesländer*) require teacher students to take courses in ethics if they want to be licensed as an ethics teacher.

- The principal of the school and the school administration must not only tolerate such education but actively support it. We saw that, when the principal actively participated in the development of moral-democratic competencies of teachers and students, the teachers felt more comfortable when being supervised and judged by him or her. It proved also absolutely necessary that the student teachers had enough time and resources available for learning. In the case of in-service training, teachers need to be freed from some of their duties to be able to learn and develop.
After one year of intensive training through experts, the novice moral educator should get the opportunity to share his or her experiences with these experts and to have peer-supervision with experienced teachers at least one more year (Thies-Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1987).

Essentially, our experiences with preparing teachers for moral-democratic education coincides very much with the clinical teacher training model by Reiman and Thies-Sprinthall (1997). In fact, we are meddling their approach with ours in our teacher education and further education programs.

References

- Berkowitz, M.W. (1981). A critical appraisal of the education and psychological perspectives on moral discussion. *Journal of Educational Thought, 15*, 20-33.
- Bok, D. (1976). Can ethics be taught? *Change, 26*-30.
- Braunmühl, E.v. (1975). *Anti-pedagogics. Studies in the elimination of education.* (German: Anti-pädagogik. Studien zur Abschaffung der Erziehung.) Weinheim: Beltz.
- Brezinka, W. (1992). *Education in a society insecure of its values.* (German: Erziehung in einer wertunsicheren Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur praktischen Pädagogik.) München: Ernst Reinhardt.
- Dewey, J. (1966). *Democracy and education. An introduction to the philosophy of education.* New York: The Free Press.
- Eagly, A.H., & Chaiken, S. (1994). *The psychology of attitudes.* New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Edelstein, W. (1985). Moral intervention: a skeptical note. In: M. Berkowitz & F. Oser, eds., *Moral education. An international perspective*, pp. 387-401. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hentig, H.v. (1994). *Rethinking school. (Die Schule neu denken.)* München: Carl Hanser (3rd edition).
- Higgins, A. (1980). Research and measurement issues in moral education interventions. In: R. Mosher, ed., *Moral education. A first generation of research and development*, pp. 92-107. New York: Praeger.
- Kohlberg, L. (1984). *Essays on moral development, Vol. II, The psychology of moral development.* San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row.
- Kohlberg, L. & Higgins, A. (1987). School democracy and social interaction. In: W.M. Kurtines & J.L. Gewirtz, eds., *Moral development through social interaction*, pp. 102-128. New York: Wiley.
- Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung (1991). *Schools and values education - Report from a workshop* (German: Schule und Werteerziehung - ein Werkstattbericht.) Soest: Soester Verlagskontor.
- Leming, J.S. (1981). Curricular effectiveness in moral/values education: A review of research. *Journal of Moral Education, 10*(3), 147-164.
- Lind, G. (1996). The optimal age of moral education: A review of intervention studies and an experimental test of the dual-aspect-theory of moral development and education. Paper presented at the AERA convention in New York, 1996. <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/optimal.htm> .
- Lind, G. (in print). *Morality and education. A dual-aspect theory of moral-cognitive development. Second, revised edition.* (German: Moral und Bildung. Eine neue Theorie der moralisch-kognitiven Entwicklung.

- Zweite überarbeitete Auflage.) Berlin: Logos-Verlag. (the first, 1993 edition is available on the internet: <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ZE/Bib/habil/lind/lind.html> .)
- Lind, G. (1999). *Leading moral dilemma discussions. Aims, activities and time schedules*. <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/edu/dildisk-e.htm> .
- Lind, G. & Althof, W. (1992). Does the Just Community program make a difference? Measuring and evaluating the effect of the DES project. *Moral Education Forum*, 17, 19-28.
- Lind, G. & Raschert, J. (1987). *Moral judgement competence. A discussion with Lawrence Kohlberg about morality, education and democracy.* (German: *Moralische Urteilsfähigkeit. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Lawrence Kohlberg über Moral, Erziehung und Demokratie.*) Weinheim: Beltz.
- Lockwood, A.L. (1978). The effects of value clarification and moral development curricula on school-age subjects: a critical review of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 48, 325-364.
- Mut zur Erziehung. (1978). Beiträge zu einem Forum am 9./10. Januar 1978 im Wissenschaftszentrum Bonn-Bad Godesberg. Stuttgart.
- Piaget, J. (1965). *The moral judgment of the child* (Original 1932). New York: The Free Press.
- Power, F.C., Higgins, C. & Kohlberg, L. (1989). *Lawrence Kohlberg's approach to moral education*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schläfli, A., Rest, J.R. & Thoma, S.J. (1985). Does moral education improve moral judgment? A meta-analysis of intervention studies using the Defining Issues Test. *Review of Educational Research*, 55, 319-352.
- Reiman, A. & Thies-Sprinthall, L. (1997). *Mentoring and supervision for teacher development*. New York: Longman.
- Thies-Sprinthall, L. & Sprinthall, N.A. (1987). Experienced teachers: Agents for revitalization and renewal as mentors and teacher educators. *Journal of Education*, 169(1), 65-79.