Educating competencies for democracy

Thomas Bienengräber

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his final major argument about the institutional structure of further education draws on the political philosophy underpinning his analysis of adult education.

The book’s third major argument is the most trenchant and amounts to a proposal to invoke deliberative democracy in further education college governance. The self-governance conferred upon colleges by the further and higher education Act in 1992 involves boards of governors that have little democratic accountability, albeit that the appointed members are often from a range of interests. Such autonomy and deliberation, Hopkins argues, are insufficient if education is to be understood as a public good. More local democratic input is necessary. Governing boards should be subject to representative election across a wider range of stakeholder groups than at present, amounting to an electoral college. And the concept of deliberative democracy should include that those affected can participate in the deliberation in ways that extend beyond voting for governors.

There is much else in this book that would interest its audience of teachers and educators in the field, including passing analyses of relevant policy positions, and passing ideas for exploring citizenship in particular courses. But its significant achievement is that all these are in service to offering a theoretical framework in which the general question of citizenship education in further and adult education can be explored.

Hamish Ross  
University of Edinburgh  
hamish.ross@ed.ac.uk  
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Reflecting on the serious problems people in some countries—such as Ukraine, Syria or other so-called ‘democratic’ states—seem to have with establishing a working democracy, I thought to myself that this book has been released at just the right time to explain which competencies are necessary for democracy and how they could be taught. After reading it I realised that it has two main foci: one concerning the book’s topic as such, the other to honour an important scholar in the field of moral education, Georg Lind, for his admirable work around the ‘Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion’ (KMDD). Concerning the content, the book addresses moral competence, seen as a core competence for democracy, combined with the question of how mental skills
and, especially, cognitive moral competence for participation in democracy could be taught.

The book collects papers from authors with a very heterogeneous regional background (Brazil, Poland, Italy, Great Britain, Germany, Malaysia, Finland, Columbia, United States, Austria, Argentina and China), and this alone shows the worldwide influence exerted by Georg Lind and the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion. The authors discuss how people in different social settings (e.g. schools, business organisations, prisons), different developmental periods (e.g. childhood, adolescence and adulthood) and different countries, with rather widely ranging understandings of democracy, develop democratic competencies. The perspectives of the authors differ not only in terms of culture, but also in terms of scientific background. Most of the authors are scholars, but some practitioners, who have been educated as KMDD teachers and are now reporting their personal experience with teaching moral competencies for democracy, also have their say. Even the mayor of the city of Konstanz contributes a paper, giving his estimation on the impact of KMDD on the citizens of Konstanz. Of the contributions, 12 use empirical methods or report on empirical results; the other 16 report on experiences with applying and teaching KMDD in different social, educational and cultural contexts.

The volume is focused on ‘the development of moral judgment competence, discourse, and democratic behaviour of the modern subject confronted with diverse and demanding social, institutional, and political contexts’ (p. VII). To do so, the authors build their topics around KMDD as a specific ‘method of discourse and reasoning that is applied to various types of moral dilemmas, encouraging the moral reasoners to reflect upon and discuss cognitive and affective dimensions of moral problems’ (ibid.), as well as on its measurement tool, the Moral Judgment Test (MJT)—both of which are at the heart of Georg Lind’s work. The volume consists of 28 contributions which are subdivided into three main topics. Part I, ‘The Cognitive Competence in Research’, focuses on interdisciplinary research on Lind’s Dual-Aspect Theory of Moral Development and on the Measurement of Moral Judgment Competence. Part II, ‘Educating Competencies’, aims at the application of the KMDD in different countries and social contexts and presents its results. Part III, ‘Developing and Living Democracy’, finally aims to address the third part of the book’s title with its focus on a discussion of democracy and experiences with democratic education.

I found the contribution by Mathias Scharlipp, ‘Experiencing Freedom and Democracy at School’, particularly interesting, as it focuses on pupils’ education in schools—a social setting which, in my opinion, is one of the most influential places for institutionalised democratic education. The author is a lawyer and KMDD trainer and reflects his experiences with applying the method in classes with pupils with a migration background and diverse religious orientations. Starting his argument from the point that for its protagonists a free and democratic
society is ‘a realm of experience and of evolving opportunities for forming
widening views, for changes of perspectives, for discovery and understanding of
the guiding principles of liberty and democracy, and for taking responsibility for
its affairs’ (p. 164), he moves on to the election of Barack Obama as an example
of the ‘power of mutual respect and democratic faith’ (ibid.) and to the question
of how the corresponding competencies could be raised among a society’s protagon-
ists, ‘to enable them to transfer their own perspectives of liberty and freedom
[…] into corresponding behavior (p. 165). In the KMDD the author finds the
method to aim at ‘exactly this consistency and integrity of thinking, speaking, and
acting’ (ibid.). After these rather conceptual considerations he discusses his own
experiences with some KMDD classes, describing how the KMDD is practically
applied while elucidating the effects the particular steps had on the pupils’
cognitive and emotional competencies. His experiences lead him to the conviction
that ‘it is very dangerous to keep away from our youth the direct experience of
freedom and democracy offered by the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion’
(p. 170).

This strict focus on KMDD and the MJT and the description of the method’s
impact in different social settings is what makes me wonder if the book’s title
might promise a little bit more than it can deliver. It may well be that moral judg-
ment competence—in terms of thinking and being willing to act according to such
judgement in varying social situations, as Lind’s Dual-Aspect Theory of Morality
claims—is one of the core competencies for democratic citizenship; however,
according to my understanding of democracy, this is not enough. Yes, competen-
cies for democracy can be taught by using KMDD within a democratic environ-
ment, but what if the prevailing social structures are not democratic and might
make right instead? What if the opponents do not even want to listen to argu-
ments, may they be the best anyone can think of? If the surrounding structures are
not democratic in general, democratic acting requires more cognitive and
emotional skills, such as (moral) courage, assertiveness, self-control or self-confi-
dence. While according to Lind discourse competence is seen as the most impor-
tant democratic competence, this approach is insufficient in environmental
structures where discourse is out of sight. In this context I felt somewhat disap-
pointed, for I expected the book to offer a wider view on competencies for democ-
Racy that would go beyond mere moral judgement.

In total, the volume gives both profound insight into and a broad overview of
the possibilities of educating cognitive moral judgement competencies, but
restricted to KMDD and the MJT as its basis. Concerning this, the greatest
advantage of the volume might, at the same time, be also seen as its greatest weak-
ness, namely the full and exclusive concentration on KMDD and the related mea-
surement instrument, the Moral Judgment Test. Other approaches that could be
associated with the education of democratic competencies, such as moral motiva-
tion, moral courage, character education, assertiveness, self-control, self-confidence
or caring education, are not discussed in this volume. Readers who want to learn about other approaches to moral development and democratic education might be dissatisfied. But readers who want to learn about the impact of KMDD and its wide implications all over the world will find many answers to their questions—and maybe also new questions that expand the field.

Thomas Bienengräber

Department of Managerial Economics, Duisburg-Essen University; Lehrstuhl für Wirtschaftspädagogik und Wirtschaftsdidaktik; Lotharstr. 65; 47057 Duisburg, Germany

Email: Thomas.Bienengraeber@uni-due.de
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Christian B. Miller is an astute analytic philosopher who can be relied upon to write penetratingly about any subject he addresses. To appreciate fully the quality and thrust of this new work—a follow-up to his 2013 Oxford University Press book Moral Character—the reader must, however, overcome two initial obstacles. One is the disappointment, elicited by the sweeping title, that this is not the all-you-have-ever-wanted-to-know-but-never-dared-to-ask critical review of the fields of character and moral psychology that we have all been waiting for. Under the broad remit, Miller tackles quite specific questions, mostly having to do with situationist challenges to the notion of moral character; but he does so with a degree of clarity, insight and originality rarely seen before in the field. The second obstacle is that readers need to develop tolerance for Miller’s idiosyncratic presentational style, which involves writing two books in tandem: one in the main text and another in footnotes, often equally long. The footnotes comprise extended references to relevant writings, which are rarely engaged with directly and will only benefit students in search of reading lists, and observations which should ideally have been incorporated into the main text.

A book which is as rich and has such a tightly woven tapestry as this one is difficult to summarize briefly. Let it suffice to say here that Miller deconstructs intelligently both the situationist claim that people possess no robust character traits—or at best only local, situation-specific ones—and the globalist, virtue ethical claim that people do possess—or at least can be realistically seen on a developmental track towards possessing—robust moral virtues or vices. After disposing of those two contrasting options, Miller offers his own novel theory of people typically possessing ‘mixed traits’: traits that do not coincide with the traditional distinctions between individual virtues or individual vices, but incorporate