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Not Dead, But Alive –  
20 Years of Effective and Responsible Moral Education with the  
*Konstanzer Methode der Dilemma-Diskussion* (KMDD)

Georg Lind

Through the dissemination of the work of Lawrence Kohlberg in Germany in the 1980ies (Lind & Raschert 1987) the method of dilemma-discussions for fostering moral competence has become widely used in schools in various subject fields, not only in ethics classes. In meantime, research on the nature, relevance and origin of moral competence, as well as practical experience, has produced new insights which I used for developing the *Konstanzer Methode der Dilemma-Diskussion* (KMDD).

## Why we need to foster moral competence

Apparently there is a widespread believe that dealing with ethics will lead to better behavior either because one believes that ethics and moral behavior are the same, or because people would not behave morally unless they are taught ethical values and principles. Both beliefs are dubious:

- Morality and Ethics mean two very different things: *Morality* means a characteristic of human behavior. Actually it means two aspects of human behavior which we can observe in people's behavior: *moral orientations* (that is, moral values, attitudes, motivation, foundations, principles, ideals etc.)<sup>1</sup> and *moral competence* (that is, moral ability or Socratic virtue). Individuals do not necessarily need to be able to be aware of these aspects as they are aware of ethical concepts which they have learned in school. A person who risks her health to save someone, is considered a moral person, even if she herself would not call her behavior so. In contrast, *ethics* (that is, moral philosophy) means the conscious reflection on behavior, whether it is moral or not. Ethics deals with questions like: "Should we risk our life in order to save someone?"
- As research studies show, basic moral orientations or principles are not mediated by the society (e.g., parents, teachers, peers, media etc.) but seem to be inborn (Gigerenzer 2007; Hamlin et al. 2007). Already Socrates (469-399 v. Chr.) had observed that all humans desire to be good (Plato: Menon). Levy-Suhl (1912) found in his study of juvenile delinquents that they have the same moral principles as non-delinquent youth. Piaget (1964) showed that children act according to rules which they are not aware of, but that their moral consciousness developed only later. He assumed that conscious ethical reasoning developed later than moral behavior but both developed parallel. Today we know that only the verbalized ethical judgments originate in social interaction. Already in the behavior of primates (Waal 2008) and pre-verbal infants (Hamlin et al. 2007) we can observe basic moral orientations like cooperation.

Nevertheless society and school play an important role in moral development. Moral feelings need to be educated to make morally competent behavior possible.

### Moral competence

If the desire to be good is inborn and can be found in everybody, why, we may ask, are there so much violence, deceit, and power abuse? Socrates knew the answer to this question: It is not enough that we desire the good, but we must also develop the ability to attain it. This means, if we want to fully understand moral behavior we must not only study people's moral orientations but also their moral competence. Socrates called this competence also "virtue."

What makes it so difficult to act as moral as we desire to do? The main reasons seem to be: a) Moral orientations are rooted in our feelings and these feelings are mostly very general and unspecific so that

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<sup>1</sup> Although these words have different meanings, I use them here as synonymous because they all refer to what psychologists and educational scientists call the *affective aspect* of behavior and is measured by them in pretty much in the same way by so-called Likert-scales: The participants must respond to a number of items (questions or statements) by rating them on a numerical scale from, lets say, reject (-4) to accept (+4), like in the MCT (Lind 2008). Moreover it seems that, in everyday-life as well as in educational science, these words are used in so many different ways that we do not need to fear the accusation of abusing them too much.

they do not always give us concrete guidelines what to do and how to decide in a particular situation, and b) our moral orientations and feelings often create a tough dilemma situation: whatever we would do or decide would somehow be wrong. Everyone knows this problem: We feel that we should help in a certain situation, e.g., we see a person lying on the ground. But then questions pop up: “How can I help? What is the person’s problem? Should I stay with the person though my children expect me to pick them up from kindergarten in time?”

Hence, the problem of morally right behavior is not one of lacking moral orientations or motivation but mostly of lacking the ability to solve moral problems or conflicts on the basis of shared principles through deliberation and dialogue rather than through violence, deceit and power (Lind 2015a). If people do not have this ability, they must resort to lower levels of conflict resolution. So the best method to reduce violence, deceit and power is to foster moral competence.

### **How can we foster moral competence effectively?**

Most traditional moral and ethical education uses either techniques of behavior modification or methods of values transmission. It is doubtful whether these methods are successful even by their own standards. The few studies which exist hardly support their claim of effectiveness. A series of carefully designed experimental studies by Hartshorne and May (1928), which were commissioned by an association of churches, showed no effect of religious instruction in Sunday school. On the contrary, youth with intensive religious instruction showed higher rates of deception in these experiments than students from progressive (reform) schools. Also the values clarification approach showed no effects (Leming 1981). Many methods of moral education have not been empirically evaluated at all.

The only method which did show remarkable effects was the method of dilemma discussion which was suggested by Blatt und Kohlberg (1975). The meta-analysis by Lind (2002) of more than 100 intervention studies showed that dilemma discussion seem to be highly effective. In behalf of the Minister of Education of North-Rhine Westphalia we examined this method in the framework of the three-year project “Democracy and Education in the School (DES)” (Lind & Raschert 1987). Our intervention study confirmed the positive findings in the US (Lind 2002; Oser & Althof 1992).

In spite of this remarkable success, Kohlberg remained skeptical. He (and many of his disciples) even distanced himself from the method of dilemma discussion because the teachers whom he worked with did not continue to practice it after the projects ended (Althof 2015). Oser and Althof (2001) summarize the criticism of the Blatt-Kohlberg-method: „First, it is very time-consuming to create dilemma stories in which principles real contradict each other [...] Second it is really hard for teachers to implement the basic model of a dilemma discussion [...]: (a) Dilemma-experience, (b) controversy, (c) plus-one convention (confrontation with arguments one stage above one’s own stage of moral reasoning), and (d) reflection on the process [...] Third, there is a danger that the plus-one-convention turns into a moralizing evaluation of students’ reasoning“ (pp. 250f., my translation).

For all its faults I felt there were good reasons to adhere to the method of dilemma discussion and try to improve it:

- The average effect size (see above) of the Blatt-Kohlberg-method was much higher than of any other method of moral education (Lind 2002). Yet it seemed that it still could be improved.
- This method reflects a greater respect for the moral dignity of the individual than any other method. Again it appeared that this also could be improved, especially by removing the plus-one-convention

and by giving the students more space for clarifying and articulating their moral feelings and practicing their moral competence (opportunities for responsibility taking).

- Kohlberg's notion that morality is a competence has opened up completely new perspectives for psychological research and pedagogical practice – if one does not confine moral competence to conscious ethical reasoning but understands it also as the (mostly unconscious) ability to act according to one's own moral principles. We often do the right thing without knowing why (Gigerenzer 2008).

### **The *Konstanzer Methode der Dilemma-Diskussion* (KMDD)<sup>®</sup>**

Since twenty-five years I endeavored to improve the method of dilemma discussion in order to make it even more effective, to better align theory and method, and to make it more teachable (Lind 2015b; Nowak et al. 2013). These endeavors are always accompanied by self-evaluation using a newly developed objective test of moral competence (Lind 2008), peer-supervision and students' feedback. They resulted in the *Konstanzer Methode der Dilemma-Diskussion* (KMDD, which has now become 25 years old. It contains some profound changes and additions:

We give the participants more time for articulating and clarifying the moral feelings: instead of 45 minutes a KMDD-session takes 90 minutes; instead of four to five dilemma stories the participants need only to deal with one. The KMDD does not work with modeling by the teacher ("plus-one-arguments") but focuses on dealing with counter-arguments of peers. We added a phase of quiet reflection on the story, a phase of conjoint clarification of the possible dilemma(s) contained in the story, a phase of preparation for the controversial discussion, a phase of appreciation for counter-arguments, and a phase of reflection in what one has learned in the session. This gives participants more time to become conscious of their own moral feelings and the moral feelings of their opponents (Lind 2006a). In the following, the phases of a KMDD-session are shown. No phase should be left out.

*The Nine Phases of a KMDD-Session* (with [recommended times]; totaling about 90 minutes)

1. The teacher presents freely an educative dilemma-story of the protagonist X. (On how to construct such a story see Lind 2015a. In the story a hint is given that it is difficult for the protagonist to decide for or against a certain issues, e.g., by letting him/her hesitate before the decision.) [5 min]
2. Each participant gets a written copy of the story and is asked to reflect about two questions: „Why did X hesitate? How difficult do you think the decision was for him/her?“ (This helps to put his/her moral feelings into words which were elicited by the story. The teacher must make sure that nobody disturbs the others while they think.) [5 min]
3. Joint clarification of the question: “What might have crossed X’s mind when he/she hesitated? What do you think: was it a difficult or an easy decision?” (If too many think it was an easy decision, the KMDD-session should be ended. A new attempt should be made later, and with a different story!) [10 min]
4. Ballot: “Was X’s decision right or wrong?“ (Count each vote aloud and document it visibly for all. If there are too many abstentions, press the participants gently to make up their mind, and do a second ballot. If only a few remain undecided, they can be assigned observation jobs. If too many remain undecided, the session should end here. The teacher should have a plan B.) [5 min]
5. Divide the class into two groups according to their votes. They should sit in separated areas. Then instruct them to form small groups of 3-4 (“three or four, not less, not more”) for preparing the discussion: “Collect as many supportive arguments as possible!” [up to 10 min; play it by the ear.]
6. Discussion: „Try to convince the opposite group that you are right.“ Two rules: a) Free speech, but no – negative or positive – evaluation of any people is allowed. b) Ping-Pong-rule: Who has spoken picks the person from the other group who may respond. Willingness to respond must be indicated by hand sign. (The teacher sits where he/she is well visible by all. His/her only duty is that of a referee. With finger signs he reminds the participants when they violate one of the two rules. According to rule #1, the teacher must neither verbally nor non-verbally intervene in the discussion.) [30 min]
7. Nomination of „best counter-argument:” Everyone can say which argument of the opposite group he likes best. (Do not allow repetition, continuation of the discussion, or negative comments on counter-arguments: “Its time for making compliments.”) [10 min]
8. Second ballot: Was X’s decision right or wrong?“ (Count loudly; document the results visibly for all.) [5 min]
9. Reflection: „Did you have fun? What have you learned during this class?“ [10 min]

The KMDD can be used with participants of (about) age eight upward, and be integrated into almost every subject matter teaching. It is now used world-wide. The KMDD has shown to be more effective than the Blatt-Kohlberg-method even though the evaluation is made with a tougher objective test of moral competence (Lind 2002; 2015a; Hemmerling, 2014). The average increase of moral competence due to a single KMDD-session is higher than the increase in a full school-year (see figures). However, such efficacy can only be achieved by a teacher who is profoundly trained and certified as “KMDD-

Teacher.” KMDD-Teacher will learn how to run a session, how to elicit (moderate) moral emotions, how to write “educative moral dilemma stories” for their students and their field of teaching, how to self-evaluate their teaching efficacy, how to instruct a peer-supervisor, and how to continuously improve their teaching. When the teacher learns how to design his entire teaching according to the basic didactic principles of the KMDD, even higher effects are possible (Lind 2015b). However, such a conversion requires much experience and time. Information on training and certification can be found on the web: <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/>. To protect the teachers’ investment in their training, the KMDD has been registered as a mark in the European Union, China, Switzerland and Turkey. Registration in Brazil, Colombia and Mexico is pending. Certified KMDD-Teachers can freely use this mark for advertising their teaching service.

Non-trained teachers can also produce good feelings in their students by using the KMDD, but they can hardly produce higher moral competence, or adapt the method to the needs of their students and the subject field, or evaluate their teaching efficacy. There is also a danger that untrained teachers cannot handle the moral emotions triggered by dilemma stories. They risk that students become emotionally disturbed.

### **KMDD as part of teaching subject matters**

According to the feedback which teachers give me, KMDD-sessions can be used in nearly all subject fields. They are well suited to open up a new topic in teaching subject matter for several reasons:

- In the course of the discussion students become curious in the non-moral, technical aspects of the story presented to them. They understand that subject matter knowledge may ease some moral dilemmas or even make them unnecessary (Lind 2006b). The teacher can use this effect by constructing proper dilemma-stories. Therefore, the KMDD-Teacher training puts strong emphasis on showing how to write and test such stories themselves.
- The participants get heard by others and by the teacher. This seems to be a strong motivation for participating more actively in the class, and also listen to others.
- Participating in a KMDD-session also reduces students’ fear of other students, i.e., that they might make negative comments on their contributions. Thus it improves the whole learning climate in the class (Lind 2006c). For this reason teachers like to include KMDD-sessions also in their teaching even when the curriculum is not on ethics. A biology teacher wrote me: “One such session safes me teaching four lessons.”
- In ethics, the reflection of the participants on certain moral issues can be deepened and enriched with an introduction into ethical theories that relate to that issue. KMDD-sessions should in my view precede ethical reflections on the same topic, because if the participants have not yet made up their own moral point of view there is not much to reflect upon.

A word of caution: KMDD-sessions must not be loaded with too much subject matter, especially not with matter which is not understood by *all* participants! In other words, moral teaching and subject teaching should not be confused. One reason is that the focus of the conversation might to easily shift to the discussion of technical or academic matters and loose sight of the moral issues at stake. Such

confusion might be the reason why various methods like problem-based learning, as used in medical education, are not very effective. Secondly, the KMDD is an *inclusive* method, that is, it should help *all* people regardless of age, status, learning, cultures, etc. to discuss moral issues together on an equal basis. All participants should experience that nobody is excluded from participating just because he or she is different. This is not only the moral principal of democracy but also an important pedagogical principle: Only when all are actively involved in the KMDD-sessions, then all will learn and develop their moral competence.

In sum, when rightly done, the KMDD will help the participants very effectively to achieve a comprehensive clarification and understanding of their own moral feelings and dilemmas, and those of others, and thus help them to solve problems and conflicts through thinking and discussion rather than through violence, deceit, and power. Moreover, when rightly done, I believe, the KMDD can thus help us to make a better world. The method of dilemma discussion is not dead but very alive.

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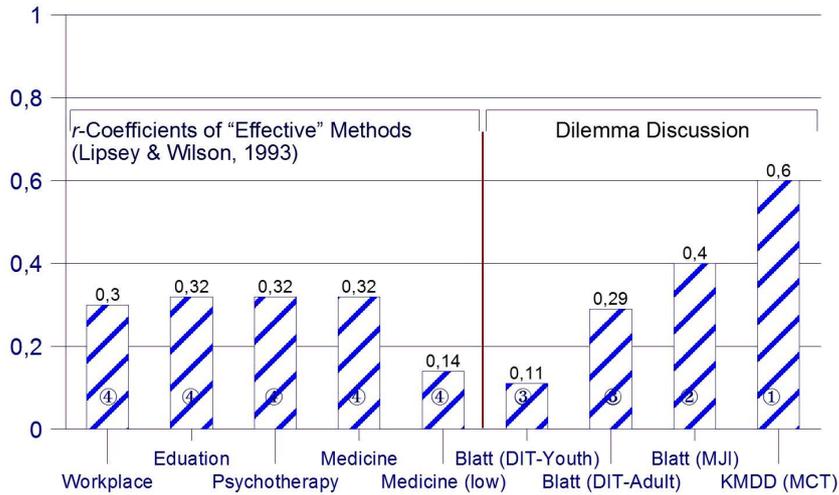
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For further reading on the *Konstanzer Methode der Dilemma-Diskussion* visit:

<http://www.uni-konstanz.de/ag-moral/>

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## The Relative Effect Size $r$ of the KMDD in Comparison to Other Methods and Other Fields



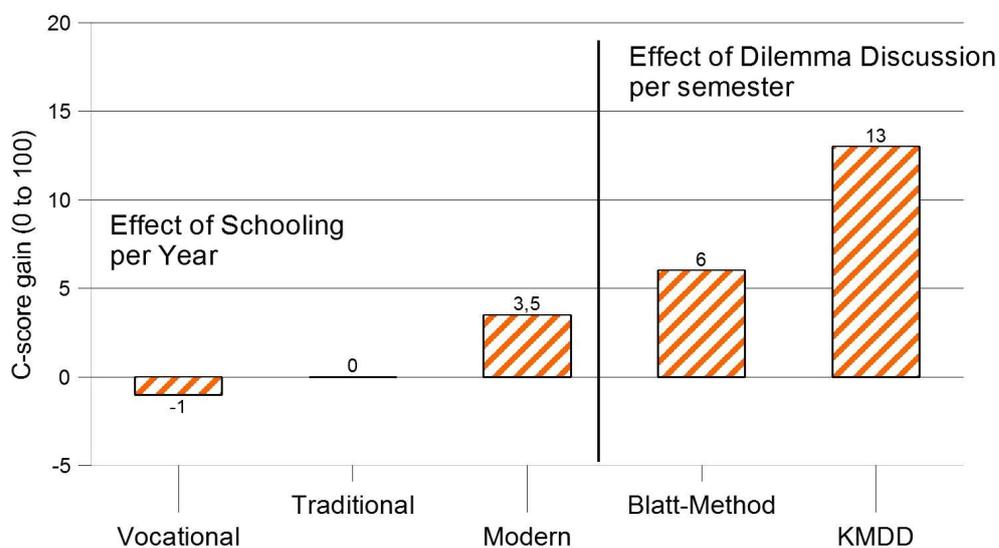
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See next slide for the references ① to ④

- ① The effects of the Konstanz-method on moral competence (MCT) of university students: Unpublished analyses of pretest-posttest intervention study by Lind (unpublished; N = 42), and Lerkiatbundit et al., 2006.
- ② The effects of the Blatt-Kohlberg-method on stage of moral reasoning (Moral Judgment Interview, MJJ): Re-analysis by Lind, G. (2002).
- ③ The effects of the Blatt-Kohlberg-method on moral preferences (Defining-Issues-Test, DIT): Schläfli, A., Rest, J.R. & Thoma, S.J. (1985).
- ④ The effects of medical, psychological, educational & vocational interventions (to the right of the line): Lipsey, M.W. & Wilson, D. B. (1993).

## Estimated Absolute Effect Size of the KMDD

(Sources: Lind, 2002; 2009a)



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# Evolution of the KMDD

1975 - Moral competence research; development of the *Moral Competence Test* (MCT), formerly called *Moral Judgment Test* (MJT), an experimentally designed, objective measure of the two aspects of morality: moral orientations and moral competence. The MCT has been translated and validated in 39 languages.

**1985** - First visit to Lawrence Kohlberg's moral education projects in New York (*Martin Luther King High School*, Manhattan; *Theodore Roosevelt High School*, South Bronx; *High School of Science*, Bronx): Just community meetings and dilemma discussions à la Blatt & Kohlberg.

1987 - 1991 Trying out Kohlberg's methods in the project *Democracy and Education in School* in three schools in the state of North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany (in collaboration with Fritz Oser, Sybille Reinhardt, Peter Dobbelstein, Jürgen Raschert and Heinz Schirp).

**1995** - First seminar on the *Konstanzer Methode der Dilemma-Diskussion* (KMDD)<sup>®</sup> for teacher students.

1995 - First test of the KMDD in a class of 7th graders (Ellenrieder Gymnasium, Konstanz).

1999 - First KMDD workshop-seminar in Mexico for university professors (Universidad de Monterrey, Prof. Cristina Moreno).

2000 - First introduction into the KMDD for a whole school faculty (Theodor Heuss School, Konstanz).

2003 - First KMDD workshop-seminar and training for teachers in *Colombia* (Bogotá).

2005 - First study of KMDD-Teachers' efficacy as a function of their training.

2007 - First KMDD workshop-seminar for officers of the German Bundeswehr.

2007 - First televised KMDD session (with a class of 4th graders, Bayerischer Rundfunk).

2009 - First KMDD workshop-seminar in *Poland* (University of Poznan, Prof. Ewa Nowak).

2009 - First KMDD workshop-seminar in *Croatia* (University of Zagreb, Prof. Suncana Kukulja).

2011 - First KMDD workshop-seminar in *Turkey* (Yiltiz University Istanbul, Prof. Nermin Ciftci).

2011 - First KMDD workshop-seminar in *Brazil* (University of Sao Paulo, Prof. Patricia Bataglia).

2011 - First KMDD workshop-seminar in *China* (Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, Prof. Shaogang Yang).

2012 - First KMDD workshop-seminar in *Chile* (University of Chile, Santiago, Semíramis Llanos)

2014 - First public events with the KMDD in Dresden, Germany, and in Monterrey, Mexico.

In remembrance of the late *Patricia Knoop* who has been a great help over many years. She died on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015.

## Comparison of Dilemma Discussion Methods

Feature	Kohlberg-Blatt-Method*	Konstanz Method (KMDD)
Start with a story about a fictitious person's dilemma	YES	YES
Length of class	45 minutes	90 minutes
Number of dilemma-stories in one session	Four to five stories	Only one story
<i>Story ends with a decision and participants vote on it.</i>	NO decision. Students are to make proposals for how to solve the dilemma	YES, participants vote on the protagonist's decision in the story
Participants get time for thinking about the story for themselves	NO	YES, about 5 minutes
Participants get time to clarify the possible dilemma in the story with peers	NO	YES: "Is this really a problem/ dilemma?" "If yes, what makes it a problem/dilemma?"
Intermitting <i>small group</i> discussions	NO	YES, two
Affect control through alternating phases of support and challenge	NO	YES
Rules for the discussion in the plenum	NO, teachers directs and moderates	# 1 Free speech, but no evaluation of people, # 2 Self-moderation (ping-pong-rule)
Participants respond to <i>arguments</i> of opponents	NO	YES
Meta-cognition: reflection on the learning process	NO	YES: "Did you have fun?" What have you learned in this session?"

\* This comparison refers only to the standard method. There may be many variations.