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Experiencing Freedom and Democracy at School: Konstanz Method of Dilemma Dis- cussion¹

Abstract: The ambitious ideas of freedom and democracy immediately raise questions about the moral and democratic competencies of society's protagonists in everyday life, competencies that enable them to transfer their own perspectives of liberty and freedom (respect for human dignity, tolerance, justice and reason) into corresponding behavior. It is exactly this consistency and integrity of thinking, speaking, and acting that is the aim of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion.

Keywords: freedom, democracy, democratic competencies, Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion

Experiencing Freedom and Democracy

A free and democratic society is not just a matter of elections and votes; it is also a matter of wide open space for conflicting perspectives and interests, vivid public deliberation and debate, and "government by (and after) discussion." Freedom and democracy are molded by constant mental dispute. Its essence is the conflict of arguments (Schmidt-Bleibtreu *et al.*, 2008).

¹ Opening statement at the symposium "Experiencing Freedom and Democracy at School: Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion". At the international conference "Can Morality be Taught? Is it a Competence?", 27-31 July, 2009 (University of Konstanz).

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This understanding of freedom or liberty does not imply some kind of petty bourgeois liberty secured by night watchmen – “what matters most is our own undisturbed peace and quiet” – but a dynamic and sometimes also straining liberty that includes the cost of practical tolerance. It imposes on everyone to forbear peacefully others’ legally permissible ways of life.

Thus, a free and democratic society is more than just a form of government whose institutions and functions we know. For its protagonists it is rather a realm of experience and of evolving opportunities for forming widening views, for changes of perspective, for discovery and understanding of the guiding principles of liberty and democracy, and for taking responsibility for its affairs. What constantly matters in the midst of this manifold struggling for appropriate solutions to problems is that the protagonists get along together. This is also a question of morality because we are talking about the following:

- Acceptance of obstacles as natural triggers to reflective inquiry and mental development,
- Agreement upon norms, rules and requirements of co-existence,
- Renunciation of violence as a means of conflict management,
- Broadening of partnership-based dialogue, and
- Possibilities of influence on opinion formation and decision making processes.

Hereby the basic connecting threads are respect for others’ possibly conflicting moral, political or religious convictions, and faith that even if the majority might sometimes be wrong about truly decisive questions, it will not remain so in the long run (Di Fabio, 2006).

What best reflects this power of mutual respect and democratic faith is the election of Barack Hussein Obama as the first African-American president of the United States of America. The consistent way he conducted his election campaign enables him now to give trustworthy global impulses by his administration of office guided by liberal and democratic principles. This recent example of free and democratic “power of correction” (Grossman, 2008) refers to a constant and “radical” conflict between freedom and power: “the funda-

mental principle of democracy is that the ends of freedom and individuality for all can be attained only by means that are acrid with those ends” (Dewey, 2002).

The ambitious ideas of freedom and democracy immediately raise questions about the moral and democratic competencies of society’s protagonists in everyday life-competencies that enable them to transfer their own perspectives of liberty and freedom (respect for human dignity, tolerance, justice and reason) into corresponding behavior. It is exactly this consistency and integrity of thinking, speaking, and acting that is the aim of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD). With its help, liberal and democratic key competencies can be trained in a skillful and well-balanced manner in our educational institutions, above all in the learning communities in schools. Ultimately, these competencies provide decisive momentum for the future existence of free and democratic societies. Thanks to Georg Lind, we know today that these competencies are a result of democratic-discursive education processes and of the integration of affective and cognitive behavioral aspects (Lind 2002, 2003, 2009; Schillinger, 2006).

For many years now, the KMDD has been applied as a highly effective and experience-based method of moral and democratic education. This education must be truly democratic in the sense “that it cannot adopt any higher position than that of experience which in principle is accessible to everyone” (Oelkers, 2003).

I am a lawyer, and have been trained by Georg Lind as a Senior KMDD-Teacher over the past years. Right now I am using his method with students at a university of applied sciences, unemployed university graduates in public projects for professional development, prisoners on remand and convicts in a large juvenile prison, and pupils at a school in Berlin with a high rate of migrants.

Because of federal compulsory education, the parallel natural right of parents to care for and rear their children, and of our educational tasks, parents and pupils place special demands on effective classes and competent teachers. Only by means of an effective school education can the government justify encroachments on the constitutional right to free development of personality and the natural rights

of parents. Thus, let us now consider what the KMDD provides for liberal, democratic, and moral development.

The Experience of Freedom and Democracy in KMDD Classes

Looking at the script for a Dilemma Discussion, we find quite a balance between supporting and challenging phases. By means of the Konstanz Method pupils are led step by step through various situations in order to (re-)discover their own moral and democratic values and to learn how to apply these in processes of interaction and concrete everyday life situations. The basic learning principles of the KMDD ensure that school is not converted into a moral institute in which the ruling morality, or the morality of the rulers, has to be re-enacted (Ostendorf, 2007).

Of great importance for the direct experience of pupils is a successful start to the phase of presentation and clarification. During this phase the KMDD teacher must provide the class with an educative moral task in a structured and neutral way. He or she needs to completely dispense with dominance and later secure a free exchange about the presented moral story. The challenge is rooted in the fact that the traditional roles of the "knowing teacher" and the "ignorant pupil" are apt to hinder learning in the beginning of the KMDD. When pupils start to trust the teacher's "deviant behavior," from the perspective of traditional ideas of teaching, they welcome the KMDD class as an opportunity for true encounters and communication, being discharged of the demand for knowledge acquisition.

Because an optimal medium arousal is most suitable for fostering moral and democratic faculties, a central challenge for the teacher in the introduction phase is to appeal to pupils' moral feelings in a balanced way. Feelings are always part of rational decisions and are indispensable as a motivational force in decision processes (Damasio, 2004). Considering the latest results of brain research, the old call of political theory to suppress feelings in order to let reason rule is physiologically impossible. The history of free and democratic societies

commenced with not only revolutionary ideas, but also with particular attending passions and feelings. Central terms, such as "common welfare," "equality," "tolerance," "solidarity," and "human dignity" have strong affective aspects (Dustdar, 2008). A well-conducted KMDD class avoids a one-sided strain on pupils, by integrating both affective and cognitive behavioral aspects.

Three factors are essential for an effective start of a dilemma discussion: a well constructed moral dilemma, the teacher's methodical competence, and the teacher's mindful instructional behavior. These factors stimulate communication processes, which are the foundation of all democratic processes. Furthermore, they secure the intrinsic motivation of the pupils.

The clarification of the moral dilemma and the communication resulting from it is followed by a classroom vote in which students declare their positions regarding the protagonist's decision in the dilemma. A second poll is conducted at the end of the KMDD's core phase of problem solution. By means of these two polls the pupils are given the opportunity of taking part in the class's opinion formation. The pupils experience their freedom of opinion and communication as contributing to the discourse and formation of public opinion. This counteracts the growing culture of silence and indifference among young people. This culture finds its social equivalent in a democracy of spectators that expresses itself in a sullenness of elections and political parties. In dealing with pupils who do not take part in, or tend to abstain from, the votes, the teacher must utilize his or her creative leadership. Notably, in our experience, stronger appearances of sullenness could be observed in Eastern Germany and Poland than in other countries.

Another challenge we encountered arose regularly at schools with higher proportions of migrants. In those schools, the question has more and more become: How can a school's educational mission adapt to the increasing plurality and religious diversity in class without throwing out the baby with the bathwater?

The classes we work with are exceptionally diverse in their secular, religious, and spiritual orientation. A comprehensive survey of plurality in North-Rhine/Westphalia, the state with the highest number of migrants in Germany, has shown that religion is an important

factor of identity for immigrants and ethnic German emigrants (Hero *et al.*, 2007). Consequently, the strongest cultural diversification appears in urban agglomerations. Notably, the importance of religion in self perception and the perception of others increases when problems that originate in migration-afflicted social conflicts are not solvable. Under such circumstances, people focus on the traditions of their origin that include their religious background, and join religious organizations that offer a cultural home.

The inclusion of migrants and religious minorities poses one of the most important future challenges, the solution to which will require new ideas, broad alliances and unconventional approaches (IKBE, 2007). Accordingly, the call for migrants to involve themselves in public and political debates remains.

The responsibility of learning communities in schools cannot be underestimated, although it is ever more difficult for them to fulfill their goals. The KMDD can fundamentally assist with these challenges. Diverse groups not only have different but also shared interests; these must be dealt with in public in order to make them transparent for everyone (Oelkèrs *et al.*, 2002). Training for this happens within KMDD during the central phases of "plenary discussion" and "integration," when following the vivid conflict of arguments during the plenary discussion, the "best argument of the opposing side" is chosen.

During the plenary discussion the pupils experience directly that their freedom of opinion and speech is limited. According to the so-called ping-pong rule that the teacher introduces at the beginning of the plenary discussion, pupils must themselves confer their right to speak to each other. The "cost of freedom" becomes part of a discursive counter-trade: "Your freedom of speech for my freedom of speech." In my experience, the dilemma discussion as a moral and democratic process is able to connect quite diverse groups and keep them in touch with each other through the basic practice of tolerance.

The subsequent phase of integration or reconciliation contains the indispensable element of recognition and strengthens the feeling of community among the group members. "Recognition" is an inner attitude that respects the other person's opinions, interests, wishes, and needs regardless of their achievements or profit to oneself

(Honneth, 2005). This aspect of human dignity expresses social interaction in mindful ways. A person is mindful when he or she wants to get to know the views of the other and wants to take them into consideration. The phase of integration fosters – as well observable after a few dilemma discussions – the willingness and the ability to listen to others. It roots the principle of procedure "to always hear the other side as well" within the pupils. Not only does this basic right of "hearing" of all participating parties mean that a judge must listen to everyone, but also that he or she must take their views into consideration actually and legally before he or she makes a decision.

Min.	Activity	Experience	Characteristic Feature
0	Introduction to the dilemma	Confrontation with an educative moral dilemma	Challenging
5	Silent elaboration	Individual reflection	Supporting
10	Clarification of the dilemma	Interaction: respect, transparency, trust, publicity	Challenging/ supporting
20	First vote	Own point of view	Challenging
25	Preparation for the plenary discussion	Joint development in small group communication	Supporting
35	Plenary discussion (large group)	Conflict of arguments	Challenging
60	Integration, reconciliation	Recognition, community, sympathetic joy	Challenging/ supporting
70	Second vote	Own point of view	Challenging
75	Reflection on the lesson	Personal feedback	Challenging
85	Feedback by guests	Mutual respect, transparency, trust	Supporting
90	Farewell	Mutual respect	Supporting

Table 1. Phases of the KMDD.

During the phase of integration pupils can experience themselves and others free from hindering emotions such as envy. They are also faced with how sympathetic joy with the good arguments and the success of others actually feels. This experience is appreciated as being beneficial and strengthening for the class community by both pupils and teachers. Feelings of joy and cheerfulness are in perfect accord with democratic rationality. Reason developed by means of discussion is no antithesis to the use of power insofar as it is in its most reflected form, discursive power. The KMDD builds a sense of common responsibility and a better free and democratic community.

I would like to finish my contribution with a sentence by Plato: "It is very dangerous to allow the wrong kind of music in the republic." Now that my colleague Nadja Groß has discovered, using Lind's Moral Judgment Test (MJT), that high moral judgment competence correlates with high grades in the subject of music, I would like to claim, by way of opening further discussion, 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.

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Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek.
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

This publication was financially supported
by the City of Konstanz and the
Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań
and the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung in Bonn.

ISSN 1619-005X
ISBN 978-3-631-62472-2

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Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften
Frankfurt am Main 2013

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Ed./Vol. 16

Journal for Philosophy and Social Sciences
Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences

Dia-Logos

Herausgegeben von Michael W. Meyer
Herausgeberin: Ingrid Isenhardt

Educating Competencies for Democracy

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EDITION