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## MORAL EDUCATION AND TEACHING AND LEARNING

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**Abstract.** The ultimate effects of education are the ideas, knowledge, skills and attitudes students develop. These effects can be different from the intended goals of education. The process of dialogical meaning making builds on the personal experiences and expertise the learner already possesses. The experiences of the learner are, as Dewey (1923) showed, framing and shaping new learning processes. Learning is, according to Dewey, a permanent process of reconstruction of the experience. Learning in general, and in particular learning in the social and moral domain, should be considered from a social-constructive perspective. To understand moral learning one should inquire the personal learning process of each student; the personal narrative each student develops (De Groot, 2017). For inquiring real learning processes both the active construction of the learner and the dialogues with others (other learners, the teachers, and significant others) should be analysed.

**Keyword:** *moral education, teaching and learning*

### INTRODUCTION

To my own surprise I am recently thinking a lot about the moral development theory of Larry Kohlberg (Power, Higgins & Kohlberg, 1989). In his theory Kohlberg shows, and I use here my own words, that young children first adapt themselves to the moral values of their parents and other relevant others. They accommodate to people that are close to them: to be safe and to be supported.

The next step is that they carefully develop some autonomy: saying no, taking an own position and show some deviate behaviour. This autonomy is more to show their independence than a well-argued reasoning. The next step is then to give this more autonomous behaviour a foundation, rational but also moral. And here enters the crucial ethical phase. What are the moral

values that are steering the personal development?

Kohlberg was hoping it is justice that becomes the moral value that dominates the personal development. But why people should accept justice as moral value and develop a social orientation? It is not a natural (biological) development, culture seems at stake. Some religions and other worldviews like humanism ask for humanity and social care.

According to biologists like De Waal (2014), some animals have already a sense of empathy. And for living together as natural species a certain kind of care seems necessary. In the 'ethics of care', care is presented as an orientation to connect people; it's a social-psychological concept (Noddings, 2004). Politicians and activists of the left or progressive political spectrum

and critical educators like Freire (1972) ask for solidarity: for caring for the poor and for combatting inequality and working on social transformation.

The interesting and important question for moral educators is how the social orientation can be strengthened in moral development, and in what kind of arguments this ply is grounded.

This social orientation is not a natural spontaneous development. The autonomy can be used by individuals to reinforce the personal self and the own benefits; to build a big ego. To put it even stronger and political, the personal autonomy is strongly enforced by structures and institutions of a neoliberal society and market economy and in a competitive and selective educational system. This person-oriented development of society and personal identity is also supported in social sciences and philosophy by perspectives like for example child-centred pedagogies.

This paper focuses on how moral education can be made more social and political. The paper is a reflection on what I learned in 30 years of research on moral and citizenship education. It starts with a reflection on what is learning, in particular learning values.

### **Learning values: a social-constructive perspective**

The ultimate effects of education are the ideas, knowledge, skills and attitudes students develop. These effects can be different from the intended goals of education. We take a social-constructivist perspective on learning. This means that each student develop its own knowledge, its own skills, and its own attitudes. Each person gives a personal meaning – an own articulation - to objects and discourses they encounter; it is a process of signifying the world (Gergen, 2000; Hermans, 2005).

Biesta (2009) speaks of subjectification; of developing the own personality. And to paraphrase Paulo Freire, in language learning people don't read the word but the world (Veugelers, 2017).

This personal construction is not purely an individual activity. In particular the work of Vygotsky (1917) and cultural activity theory made clear that a learner always interact with other people. A learner is permanently in a dialogue with other persons. This dialogue can be explicit but also implicit, and the other can be present or just virtual or even imaginary. This dialogical process of meaning making is very complex, and never complete or finished.

The process of dialogical meaning making builds on the personal experiences and expertise the learner already possesses. The experiences of the learner are, as Dewey (1923) showed, framing and shaping new learning processes. Learning is, according to Dewey, a permanent process of reconstruction of the experience.

Such a social-constructivist view on learning, also on learning in the moral domain, is far away, and even opposite to a notion of learning as transfer. Transfer supposes a mechanical view on learning that goes back to behaviouristic ideas about learning and leaving no space for a personal articulation of knowledge, skills and attitudes; and no attention for a personal process of meaning giving.

Learning in general, and in particular learning in the social and moral domain, should be considered from a social-constructive perspective. To understand moral learning one should inquire the personal learning process of each student; the personal narrative each student develops (De Groot, 2017). For inquiring real learning processes both the active construction of the learner and the dialogues with others (other learners, the teachers, and significant others) should be

analysed. This kind of research is necessary but very complex as shows the study of Bartels, Onstenk & Veugelers (2016) on philosophy with children and studies with Schuitema on dealing with controversial issues (Schuitema & Veugelers, 2010; Schuitema, Radstake, Van den Bos & Veugelers, 2017).

Several other research groups are doing such kind of classroom research. The research of Haste (2004), Berkowitz, (Berkowitz, Althof, Turner & Bloch, 2008) and Nucci (2017) on moral learning shows elements of these complex learning dynamics and takes into consideration the dialogical nature of learning processes.

Research on moral learning should deconstruct the social-constructive character of learning by taking the perspective of the learner, on how he or she reconstructs earlier knowledge, skills and attitudes and includes and transform new information. This is really research on the micro-level of education: on the cognitive and emotional level of individual learning. It is not reducing learning processes to external tests or to neuropsychological brain waves. It is research about what we call reflective, dialogical and democratic learning processes (Veugelers, 2011a):

- Reflective learning refers to personal reflections on moral values.
- Dialogical learning to dialogues with others. in the sense of Buber and Freire of an open inquiry-oriented dialogue without fixed outcomes.
- Democratic learning refers to making in a deliberative and democratic way agreements with others about living together and to develop together morality and society.

### **From moral learning to teaching moral values**

The above-presented social-constructive view on learning has important consequences for teaching. Teachers cannot simply transfer knowledge and values. Teachers' role in working with values is, like the student learning, very complex. Teachers have to guide the personal learning of each individual student. Guiding needs to be both proactive and what Schon (2000) is calling in the action.. Proactive guiding is organising learning environments, learning tasks, and offering knowledge. Guiding in the action is guiding of the learning process itself by reacting to the students activities and expressions.

Teachers don't guide in an open space. Their functioning is steered by the purpose of education and the concrete goals of the curriculum: in the formal curriculum and in their interpretation of the curriculum (Goodlad, 1979). Teachers' guiding of students is an essential part of the pedagogical ethos that is at the heart of the teaching profession (Oser, 1989; Tirri, 2008), Even when these guiding processes are not very transparent, teachers functioning is always driven by an implicit and explicit purpose and ethos (Veugelers, 2010).

Like learning, teaching is dialogical, but teaching differs from learning by its intention to influence the learner; it's a purposeful action. It is a pedagogical and goal oriented intention to influence the development of students (Veugelers, 2000). Teachers' intention to influence the identity development of students is legitimized by the purpose and aims of education. It is the professional pedagogical task and teachers' ethos that build the foundation of teachers' work. This view on teaching is still quite abstract, for making it more concrete we have to link teachers' work with the curriculum.

The professional pedagogical orientation of teachers functions always in concrete educational practices with own goals. These goals are structured on different curriculum levels: in theory, in policy, in the curriculum, at the school level, and in the classroom (Goodlad, 1979). Each level shapes and gives at the same time spaces to an own articulation. We have the ideal curriculum of the policy with its abstract goals, the formal curriculum with its guidelines and books. At the level of the teachers we have the interpretation of the formal curriculum by the teachers, and the operationalized level by what the teacher in fact is doing. At the level of the students we have the experiences and the real learning outcomes.

Research that takes into account the different levels of the curriculum and teachers activities can show coherence and differences between the distinguish levels and can show the own interpretation - the own refraction - made by teachers. It also shows the difficulties teachers are confronted with at the more concrete operational level.

Teachers, like learners, construct actively and dialogical their educational practice. It is their craftsmanship; their way to make teaching a lively and creative profession. Education systems differ in the way and the extent they structure the pedagogical work of teachers and give space to teachers' professional autonomy (Veugelers & Zijlstra, 2004). The general tendency however is to enlarge the autonomy of the teacher. One of the arguments is the social-constructive way of learning and teaching. Learning and teaching even with a lot of technology are human processes.

In this paragraph on teachers we first presented teachers' pedagogical role, and then their position in the education system. And now we include the content, in

particular moral values. We switch now to teachers' methodology, or what on the European continent is called 'didactics'. It is about the way teachers work with the students.

Moral values are always embedded in the curriculum and in teacher's activities with students (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). The values can be formulated as goals; this is however often not the case, and the values are 'hidden' in the curriculum and in the teacher's activities. Research can try to make these hidden values explicit and analyse how they contribute to moral learning of students.

Like with student learning we again take a social-constructive perspective. We cannot speak anymore of value transfer by teachers, but this doesn't mean that teachers are value-free or value-neutral. In their teaching and their use of the curriculum teachers show and present moral values: teachers bring these values into the dialogue with students, in their examples and their answers to students' questions.

Each teacher stimulates certain values: therefore we introduced the concept of value -stimulation (Veugelers, 2000). The concept 'value - stimulation' makes clear that teachers (always) stimulate certain values. Even if they cannot transfer values into the head and heart of students, teachers are not neutral in their pedagogical actions but they stimulate certain values.

Because of the pedagogical relations involved in education, students have to react - formally or informally - to the values stimulated by the teachers. Giving the hierarchical structure of education, the pedagogical authority of the teacher, and in particular the assessment of students the values-input of the teacher is not of equal weight as of students. Teachers are running the business even when students have a strong voice in education (Bron &

Veugelers, 2016). Students have to take the values of the teacher seriously to stay part of the educational community (Veugelers, 2008). Teachers formally control processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Teachers can differ in how strong they emphasize their own values and how strong they present other moral values and other perspectives. In several research projects among students we found that teachers stress their own values quite strong and according to the students they could present more different perspectives (Veugelers, 2000).

There is a lot of research on how to educate student teachers for moral education (see for example the work of Campbell (2003) and of Osguthorpe & Sanger 2012), but we don't have much research on teachers' moral practice. In particular we need observational studies. So not only inquiring what teachers are saying, but inquiring what teachers are doing in concrete educational practices. This research can be done by researchers, but in fact each teacher should analyse its own education in this way. One of the best examples of such ethnographic research is still the book 'The Moral Life of Schools' of Jackson, Boostrom and Hansen (1993). We need more studies like this.

### **School culture**

In the first two parts of the paper we focused on moral values in curriculum activities, on what normally is understood as teaching and learning. Now we turn more to relationships in education: to the school culture. As student in a school youngsters practice moral values. In the formal and informal way of living and learning together in schools moral values are interwoven.

De French sociologist Durkheim (1923) clearly showed how traditional school culture socialises children, in a very

adaptive way. More sociologists of education have showed these adaptive socialising tendencies in education; see for example the work of Willis (1979) and Klaassen (2002). But this socialising reproductive tendency is never complete, critical studies such as the research of Willis and Giroux show that both reproductive and transformative developments are active in education and in the moral development of students (Veugelers 2008). However, an adaptive orientation is still very strong in the practice of education: a focus on following rules and listening to the teacher.

Many child-centred educational thinkers like Rousseau, Steiner and Montessori tried to escape from this authoritarian and adaptive education and developed a more child-centred pedagogy. Characteristic for this kind of pedagogical thinking is the neglecting of the context. It is turning the direction of thinking upside down and places not society but the individual student in the centre. This turning around of the educational process is even more difficult to realize in practice than following the traditional teacher-centred education. In particular in strongly controlled educational systems there is ample space for student input. The problem with child-centred pedagogies is that they are not able to balance bottom-up and top-down forces in education (Veugelers, 2004). They neglect the top-down, and they 'believe' that they have a child-centred education. Or they live in two different parallel worlds: sometimes in the bottom-up, sometimes in the top-down mode. And in such parallel system, the top-down dominates.

Kohlberg also wanted to change the top-down strategy and to transcend the tension between top-down and bottom-up. He suggested that people should not avoid the context, but transform the context and its structure (Power, Higgins & Kohlberg, 1989). As Durkheim showed that

traditional education creates adaptation, more democratic education can in Kohlberg philosophy of education enhance autonomy and social concern. Using the pedagogical work of Dewey, Kohlberg challenged students to become actively engaged in shaping their education. In so called 'Just community schools' students could create more democratic learning environments and could develop more democratic values like autonomy and social concern.

Oser, Althof and Higgins (2008) continued the research on 'just community schools'. And we see similar developments in what is called 'democratic schools' (Apple & Beane, 2004). Student involvement in governance, curriculum design and daily practical activities in schools should stimulate moral development and an engaged and democratic attitude.

Part of the school culture is the social and cultural composition of students and teachers. From our perspective schools should be as inclusive as possible (Veugelers & Leeman, in press). Most private schools have a specific population of elite students. Religious schools are often homogenous in religion and lack cultural diversity. From the perspective of moral development public schools should be stimulated. Public schools are *from* the whole society and prepare *for* the society as a whole. Private education only focuses on partial goals and on supporting specific, mostly elite, social groups.

Like in the texts on moral learning and moral teaching we again ply for observational studies and more ethnographic work; on the learning process of students, the pedagogical activities of teachers, and their interactions with students in the different activities where teachers and students meet each other and practice moral values.

### **Moral Values: adaptation, autonomy and social concern**

In our research three moral values are central: adaptation, autonomy, and social concern. We find them in our empirical studies: both quantitative and qualitative. In theoretical analyses these values became also very central. Adaptation is at the heart of the sociology of socialisation of Durkheim (1913) and in traditional forms of character education, like in the work of Lickona (2004). Autonomy is relevant in the moral development theory of Kohlberg; in moral reasoning and in moral identity. Autonomy is a very central concept in moral psychology. Within sociology Giddens combined structure with agency. Introducing agency in sociological theory made societal development more dynamic and gave space for a personal articulation in identity development.

The social moral dimension can we find in a range of theories; from psychological emphases on empathy (Selman, 2004) and care (f.e. Noddings, 2002) to more transformative political articulations in solidarity and social justice (f.e. Freire, 1982; Veugelers, 2017). In the moral development of each human being there is a specific combination - 'bricolage' - of these three moral values. In educational activities, visions and policies these three moral values are embedded in specific combinations as well.

Statistical analyses of a survey among a representative sample of Dutch teachers showed three different types of citizenship; they make different combinations of the three moral values (Leenders, Veugelers & De Kat, 2008). An adapted type of citizenship emphasize adaptation (discipline) and social orientation, in particular the own community. The second type is the individualised citizenship with a strong focus on autonomy and also to some extent adaptation, but with a weak social orientation. The third type, we call it a

critical-democratic citizenship, combines a focus on autonomy and on social concern. We call it democratic because of its search for balance between the person and the other, the common good and a democratic way of life and politics. We add critical to stress the dynamic character of democracy and the possibility of persons to influence societal development.

We found these different types of citizenship in several studies; studies among teachers, students, and parents. We also could distinguish different educational practices related to these types of citizenship and citizenship education (traditional teacher-directed education, individualised education, and cooperative and inquiry oriented education). We also find large differences between goals and practices. On the level of goals the critical-democratic is strong, in practice however the adaptive dominates. And the individualised type is partly 'hidden' in educational practice: in assessing, selection, and child-centred pedagogies; in competition, in neglecting the influence of society, and in a naturalistic-romantic view on human development (see Aloni, 2007). The combination of a market-oriented neoliberal education strategy in policy and a pedagogical focus on the unique individual strongly emphasised an individualised citizenship.

### **Moral values and the political**

Linking these moral values and citizenship and citizenship education showed already the embedding of moral values in social and political relationships: of the influence of the context. Values never appear in a vacuum. Maybe in abstract theoretical thinking; but then moral thinking is more a kind of preaching. Our research on citizenship education, and also research of Haste and Westheimer and Kahne, clearly shows how moral values are embedded in political relationships.

Different political orientations emphasise different moral values.

From a really other theoretical perspective Haidt (2014) also shows how political orientation are expressed in moral values. The linking of the moral and the political domain don't devaluate the relevance of moral values, it even shows how important moral values are in daily life. Moral values constitute and frame human relationship (see also the work of Lakoff, 2016).

The above-mentioned research activities have been focused on a citizenship that was strongly linked to a nation state. The use of the concept of citizenship has been changed in the past decades; in theory, policy, and in practice. The concept has been deepened: it is now not only used on the level of the political but also on the social and cultural level, on how to live together (Veugelers, 2010). The concept has also been broadened: from the national to regional (f.e. European) level, and to the global level. Many scholars speak of global citizenship and global citizenship education.

The use of the concept global citizenship is even more vague than the national citizenship (Veugelers, 2011b). Some people use it in the sense of open to linking different part of the world with each other and open to cultural diversity in the world. Such open global citizenship is a neoliberal market ideology of openness (see f.e, Soros on 'open society'). A second type of global citizenship is more moral; it is about appreciation of diversity, enhancing humanity and taking care of the world. It a moral call, a call for a better world (Nussbaum, Appiah). This moral call however is not positioned in political power relations. It doesn't challenge power relations and privileged positions. Authors as Freire (1996), Mouffe (2005) and post-colonialism studies (Andreotti, 2011) have strongly criticised such moral global citizenship. In their critics a call for a more

social-political global citizenship can be heart.

Research among teachers (Veugelers, 2011) and in educational practices (Schutte, 2018) in the Netherlands show that teachers find it difficult to include such critical-political perspectives in their education. Teachers try to avoid to be political, in particular political towards social change. This is what we found in our research in the Netherlands. Using a questionnaire with items relating to the three kind of global citizenship we compared in a small study student teachers in Indonesia and the Netherlands. The Indonesian student teachers were more political oriented than a comparative group of Dutch student teachers (Veugelers, in press).

These studies made clear that we as researchers and also as teachers should always analyse moral values in their context: interpersonal, and if relevant societal, and in their social, cultural and political power relationships. This contextualisation of moral education asks for taking a position. We just have stressed that teachers cannot be neutral; neither can be researchers. However, we don't ply for a strong political intervention. We ask for analyses of different perspectives. This means dialogical and inquiring process, with the recognition that power relations are at stake. Showing different perspectives is desirable for the personal process of meaning giving and for learning to live a democratic life.

The power relations can be changed towards more social justice, an inclusive society, recognition of cultural diversity, and a strong and critical democracy. But this is a personal choice.

### **To sum up and to conclude**

- About learning. Students give a personal meaning to values and they develop these in dialogues

with others and with resources. This moral learning should be studied more.

- Teachers guide these learning processes and intervene in these from the purpose and goals of education and from their own pedagogical ideas. These teaching practices should be studied more.
- Autonomy and a social orientation seem to be the moral values that together can construct a just, humane, and democratic world.
- Moral values, like autonomy and a social orientation, are embedded in social and political power relations. Moral learning and moral teaching intervene in these relations and reconstruct them.

This reconstruction can either be in the direction of a strong focus on autonomy and a neoliberal market oriented world or in the direction of more social justice, a strong and critical-democracy, and more equal power relations.

- Each teacher has a specific we focus – purpose - in moral education and citizenship education. But this should not be a fixed direction but a common search full of dialogue and inquiring with many different perspectives and a celebrating of all kind of cultural diversities.
- My overview shows that research and thinking on moral education needs different scientific disciplines: psychology, sociology, political science, philosophy, cultural studies, pedagogy, and curriculum studies. Both disciplinary and interdisciplinary research and thinking is necessary.

The community of researchers and teachers of moral education should be dynamic, dialogical and engaged.