We must foster moral competence!

"Teacher, this is a sin. We must not discuss this." For a minute, there was an awkward silence. I had asked a class of doctoral students of education to discuss a case of organ transplantation. I had told a story about a woman with a 3rd degree skin burn who could only be saved by grafting skin from the corpse of a victim of another accident. John[1], the student who rejected any discussion about this case was a 50-year old priest. While he spoke, he looked intense. Keeping to the rules of such sessions, which I will describe later, I remained quiet. Using my authority to encourage a discussion would have meant that I myself distrusted the participants' reason and morality. "John," another student tried to break the silence, "if the beneficiary of the transplant was your own mother …" "No way," John interrupted her in a stern voice, "my mother would never agree to be saved by sinning." Many including myself thought, "That was it". Awkward silence again. Yet, eventually the students were able to engage John in a discussion. He did not change his stance on this issue but finally he spoke!

Speaking up and listening to others is essential for solving problems and conflicts peacefully and for living together in a free society. If this is not possible, we can solve them only through violence and deceit, or through submitting to an authority. Political scientists and philosophers have identified this ability as the fundamental prerequisite for democracy as way of living together. Benjamin Barber defines what he calls a "strong democrat" as someone who is really able to listen to others: "'I will listen' means to the strong democrat not that I will scan my adversary's position for weaknesses and potential trade-offs, nor even (as a minimalist might think) that I will tolerantly permit him to say whatever he chooses. It means, rather, 'I will put myself in his place, I will try to understand, and I will strain to hear what makes us alike. I will listen for a common rhetoric evocative of a common purpose or a common good.'" (Barber 1984, p. 175) Amartya Sen seconds: "There is a need for reasoned argument, with oneself and with others in dealing with conflicting claims, rather than of what can be called 'disengaged toleration'." (Sen 2009, p. x) He sees democracy resting on people's "engagement in reasoning about a subject on which it is ... very difficult to speak." (p. 4)

This is the topic of this book. It is about the ability to solve problems and conflicts through deliberation and discussion based on moral principles, namely moral competence[2]. I will show how important moral competence is for people's behavior and for the way we live together, and how we can foster it. Socrates' observation has been often confirmed in research: all people desire the good, but vary greatly in regard to their ability to attain the good, which Socrates called *virtue* and we call moral competence. Moral ideals and orientations are not enough. Moral competence is also needed for behaving morally in the way we understand this word in very-day life: keeping the law, helping people in distress, keeping promises, resisting immoral orders, blowing the whistle, rejecting violence as a means of political protest, tolerating ambiguity, and other behaviors. Even the efficacy of teaching academic subjects seems to depend on moral competence (see next chapter). Yet *moral competence* is not innate and does not develop of its own accord. Rather, it must be learned and this learning must be support by education. (Lind 2002)

We must foster moral competence, if we want to reduce criminality and the immense costs violence and deceit produces for all of us, and if we want to preserve and develop peace and

[1] Name changed.
[2] See chapter 4 for a discussion of the concept of moral competence.

democracy. When people have opportunities to use their moral competence, it develops "naturally." Yet in our modern multi-cultural, industrialized, rapidly changing globalized societies, the amount of moral challenges is steadily growing while the natural opportunities for moral learning are scarce. (Lind 2006b) Therefore, in our schools and other institutions of education must provide them for the learners. Providing moral learning opportunities for everybody is easier than one might think with the method, which I present here in this book: the *Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion* (KMDD).

The KMDD is one of the few methods, which roots in moral philosophy, educational experience and experimental psychology. It is one of the few methods, which is very effective and efficient. After only one or two sessions, it produces a measurable and sustainable effect in regard to participants' moral competence. A session takes up only 90 minutes in their entirety, and can be offered to people of all ages (from age eight upward) and in all cultures. It requires little time and no change of the curriculum. The crux of this method is that we do not indoctrinate "values" on the students through verbal instructions but provide them with opportunities for applying and developing their moral competence. Only when they can apply it, it can grow, like muscles which grow only when they are used. Although it requires a thorough training of the teachers who use it, its overall costs are low. Except a few modifications, the original KMDD is in use now for more than twenty years. Teachers worldwide are using it.

Readers who are familiar with Kohlberg's verdict against the method of dilemma discussion may be surprised why we should still count on it. Kohlberg stated, "Our research results indicated the operation was a success in the sense that ordinary classroom teachers [...] reproduced the Blatt effect without being elaborately trained [...]. However, while the intervention was a success, the patient died: that is, we went back a year later and found that not a single teacher continued to do moral discussion after the commitment to the research had ended, even though it did lead to a one-third stage[3] change." (Kohlberg 1985, p. 33)

Obviously, Kohlberg and his disciples threw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. His verdict was premature. Yes, his method of dilemma discussion needed modifications. The participants need to get more time and opportunities for active learning. Thus, the KMDD requires participants to discuss only one dilemma story instead of four or five stories, and gives them 90 instead of 45 minutes per session to think and to discuss this single story. It also gives them more opportunities to experience self-efficacy as they, not the teacher, call each other up in the discussion phase. In contrast with Blatt-Kohlberg's method, the KMDD encourages and supports participants' endeavors to put their moral feelings about an issue into their own words, rather than to mimic the teachers' exemplary arguments (the so-called "plus-1 convention").

The KMDD also challenges the participants' thinking and feelings. It asks them to judge a difficult decision made by a protagonist (right or wrong?) and to deal with the counter-arguments of opponents. Finally, no method works without good training of the teachers who use it. Kohlberg admitted that his teachers had no "elaborate training." This, I believe, was the main reason for the teachers not to continue using the method of dilemma discussion. This method is anything but easy. It requires the teachers to deal with moral conflicts and moral emotions of their students and of their own. Most teachers are not prepared for this. Therefore, we require teachers to take part in a thorough training and certification program. Without this, the KMDD would have no effect.

The Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion is a success and it is alive. Trained teachers are so fond of it that they keep using the KMDD without any external incentives. After more than

[3] According to the Kohlberg's Stage Theory of moral development. (Kohlberg 1958; 1984)

twenty years of training teachers, I have not met a single teacher yet who did not continue using the KMDD after he or she completed my program. They say that it affected not only their students' moral competence, but also their learning motivation and the learning climate in the classroom. They would continue using it for this reason alone.

Recently the KIMDD went public. We perform it now also as *Discussion Theater* (see Chapter 13). The teacher turns into a theater director and the students into participants. This is quite a challenge. Discussion theater performances must be advertised and participants are not mandated to attend but must be recruited. Yet Discussion Theater is also a big opportunity, namely for developing moral competence because it provides a chance to interact with people of different generations and cultures.

How does the KMDD/Discussion Theater compare to the "Just Community" (JC) method? Whereas in KMDD sessions the participants discuss and vote upon the problems and conflicts of a *fictional* protagonist, in Just Community sessions, participants discuss and vote upon their own problems and conflicts. JCs prepare students well for an active role as citizens. Yet, do they also foster moral competence? I will report on my experience with Just Community projects and their outcomes in Chapters 9 and 10. I will also show how we could use KMDD sessions to improve students' ability to speak up and listen to others in Just Community meetings.

The many meanings of morality

Hardly any word term is more confusing than the term "morality." Many of the disagreements about the nature and teaching of moral competence arise from misunderstandings. People often understand this term very differently in everyday life and in science alike. One cannot easily discern these differences because authors often fail to tell us their definition. Without a definition, it is hard to judge the validity of their observations methods and to discuss their findings and conclusions.

In order to follow my own imperative, I have included in the appendix a glossary with the definitions of the technical terms used in this book and my other publications. I also document the changes of meaning and word usage. My terminology follows largely the definitions in mainstream psychology. However, in some instances I deviate from common understanding for good reasons:

- We should clearly distinguish morality from rule conformity. In this book, I use the term "moral" to mean the conformity of a person's behavior with his or her *internal* rules, standards, principles or conscience. Conformity of behavior with *external* norms I call norm conformity. In this, I follow philosophers like Immanuel Kant, who defines conscience as "an instinct, an involuntary and irresistible impulse in our nature, which compels us to pass a judgment with the force of law upon our actions, visiting us with an inner pain when we do evil and an inner pleasure when we do good. [...] This is the conscience, the instinct to judge and pass sentence upon our actions." (Kant 1775-80/1963; see also Wren 1991)

Although morality and norm conformity are different concepts in everyday life, they are closely related. People with high moral competence will presumable respect the law, abstain from cheating, and help people in distress. We will get to this later in this book.

- In contrast to some other theories, we must not consider moral orientations and competence as *separable components* of behavior but as *distinguishable but inseparable aspects* of behavior. The fact that we use the word "morality" as a *noun*

often misleads us to believe that it designates a certain thing or *component* of behavior, which one can separate from other components of behavior. However, morality means neither a thing, nor an object, nor a component, nor can it be separated from behavior. In Chapter 3, I elaborate the *dual aspect model* of moral behavior that I have adopted from Socrates and Piaget.

- There are not one but two moralities. We must distinguish clearly between *moral orientations* on the one side and *moral competence* on the other. Both have different origins, both have different influence on our behavior and we must deal with both differently in moral education.

Let me introduce these two aspects, namely *moral orientations* and *moral competence* to you by asking you two questions. The first question is, "Do you desire to be good?" I am sure your answer would always be: "Yes I do," unless you find it embarrassing to be considered a "moralist." How I know? When I ask this question in workshops and lectures worldwide nearly a hundred percent of the participants answer "yes." The second question is, "Do you *always* act as good you would expect of yourself?" In my informal surveys, again all participants – except a few would-be saints – answer in the negative. I presume that your answer is no different.

The importance of this distinction can hardly be overestimated. Their confusion leads to wrong teaching. Moral orientations, as Socrates and Kant assumed, are innate instincts common to all people. People all over the world share the same basic moral ideals. (Lind 1986a; McFaul 2004; Sen 1999; Welzel 2014) Thus, the quest for freedom, justice and cooperation do not need to be taught. In contrast, moral competence needs to be developed and to be taught.

- Finally, I should explain that this book is about *morality*, not about *ethics*. Although we often use the two words interchangeably, they mean quite different things. Ethics or moral philosophy means reflection about moral behavior. *Moral orientations and moral competence* mean human traits that manifest themselves in a person's behavior.

Even though they are manifest in human behavior, we cannot observe these traits easily, especially moral competence. We cannot just ask people because usually they are not aware of their moral competence. We cannot infer them from observing a specific norm conforming like cheating because such isolate acts are ambiguous. They can be determined by a moral trait like honesty or by other traits or by situational variables. However, with the help of a new psychological method of measurement we now can make moral competence visible: the *Moral Competence Test* (MCT). I will explain the MCT in Chapter 4.

The relationship between ethics and morality seems to be weak and sometimes non-existing. People who are good in ethical reasoning are not always high on moral competence. They may utilize moral arguments for defending their opinions without really understanding their meaning. Instead of using moral arguments for controlling and revising their own decision-making, they use them merely to rationalize it. Sometimes their ethical reasoning provides only the smoke screen for atrocities. On the other side, there are people with high moral competence who are not good in explaining their behavior philosophically but risk their life to safe someone in distress, or risk their freedom to blow the whistle when they witness a big crime by a powerful one.

Who can benefit from this book?

All people can benefit because *all* people feel a gap between their moral ideals and their decision-making, and want to develop their moral competence. The following contexts deserve special mentioning: friendship and partnership, and asymmetrical forms of relationships.

Friendship and partnership: Sometimes in KMDD-sessions, I confront participants with dilemma stories in which friendship and partnership are involved. Many participants argue – at least at the beginning of the discussion – that one should help or support or protect a friend unconditionally. Even when the friend violates the law, one should stick to him or her. However, some also argue that true friendship could also mean to turn a friend in for prosecution, for example, in order to prevent more problems that are serious later on. The number of participants who share this argument often grows during a KMDD-session.

In adult relationships, many people feel comfortable with partners whom they can trust unconditionally. However, some tell me that they think that trust also means that partners should correct and criticize each other when they make a mistake or behave immorally.

How important moral competence can be in partner relationships, illustrates the remark of the translator of one of my foreign-speaking workshops. When I asked the participants whether they have learned anything useful, which was worth, the time and money spent on it, he asked for permission to speak also. He said that because of what he has learned in the workshop by chance he has started to rethink his way of interacting with his wife. Note: the workshop has not dealt with partnerships at all, but with moral competence in general!

Another context are so called asymmetrical forms of relationships between people, that is, those between parents and children, superiors and subordinates, teachers and students, experts and laypeople, police and citizens, soldiers and conquered enemies, or politicians and their constituents. Such relationships have their own challenges. Sometimes they might partially function like a partnership, but mostly one side has more power and a greater responsibility for the other side because of age, social role, legal status, or knowledge. Parents have little training for their roles but have often to solve difficult dilemmas when they want their children to become self-reliant grown-ups. As the children get older, their need for respect and for getting their own will grows. Yet, how much free rein should parents give their children for making their own decisions on the one hand, and how much must they protect them against harmful experiences on the other? What age is appropriate for freedom in decision-making? If their children get into conflicts with siblings or with other children, should parents intervene or let them negotiate their own solutions? Often parents do not get immediate feedback on the effects of their parenting efforts. For example, adolescents whose parents listen and speak to them about problems, show gains in moral competence. However, these gains show up only with a time lag, as Betsy Speicher has found using data drawn from Kohlberg's longitudinal sample. (Speicher 1993)

Similarly, teachers and professors have a special relationship with the learners entrusted to them, which contains a fundamental dilemma: teachers and professors ought to help their students to become mature professional, managers, voters, parents and possibly political leaders, who can think for themselves and make responsible decisions on their own. However, maturity, free will and autonomous judgment cannot be enforced with the use of external learning standards and high stakes tests. This would be a paradox. (Portele 1978) It can only be fostered with opportunities for learning, responsibility-taking and reflection. (Dewey 1916; Kohn 1999; Lind 2001c; 2019; Schillinger 2006; Sprinthall et al. 1993)

This moral dilemma of asymmetrical relationships is especially felt by members of the armed forces of a democratic state. They are to defend "freedom" but must follow commands. When I taught a class of German Armed Force officers, they were skeptical whether my workshop about 'discussion' and 'democracy' (as they were told by their superiors) would benefit them at all. Their service, they told me, was completely ruled by the principle of 'command-and-obedience.' They said in their profession was no room for deliberation and discussion. So I told them about the case of Private Snyder,[4] who was on guard in an ammunition camp in an enemy country late at night. He noticed a person leaving a building and running toward the fence. The person did not stop when he called upon him to stop in his tracks. Snyder hesitated. He thought that it could be an enemy stealing ammunition – but perhaps also a comrade stealing whisky. He decided to shoot into the air. Did he make the right decision? Immediately a very intense discussion broke out among the officers in my class. When I asked them what they were just doing, they were stunned. They realized that beyond commands and orders there is a need to deliberate and discuss what is right and wrong. Later we talked about the extremely difficult decisions they often have to make, for example, when searching private homes for snipers. While on a mission, each time a door opens, within a fraction of a second they have to decide whether they must shoot in order to protect their lives or not to shoot because a civilian is standing in the doorway. Right or wrong is not just an academic question or thought experiment for them. It is a question of surviving or killing innocent people, and then potentially suffering from "bad conscience," or, as it is nowadays called, *post-traumatic stress disorder*. They informed me that they are not prepared for this kind of decision-making during their military training. At the end of the week, they told me that indeed the KMDD workshop was of great use for them in their service as a soldier.

Prisons are my last example for a special context for moral learning. Prisons are not merely meant as punishment but also as a means of preparing criminals for a non-criminal life. Yet most prisoners' moral competence regresses and regresses the more the longer they stay in prison. Their life in prison does not help them to solve problems and conflicts in legal ways but lets them loose whatever moral competence they had when they entered. Kay Hemmerling (2014) wanted to turn the tides by offering inmates KMDD sessions. Indeed, with only three sessions he could not only stop regression but could effectively foster their moral competence. He also reports that they appreciated the opportunity to discuss serious matters with others, and that in the department in which his intervention took place the number of misdemeanors decreased.

How the KMDD developed

My original inspiration for the KMDD came from the Blatt-Kohlberg method of dilemma discussion and the method of Just Community, and from the project 'Democracy and Education in the School' (DES), which I initiated with the help of Jürgen Raschert, Fritz Oser, Sibylle Reinhardt, Karl-Heinz Schirp, Peter Dobbelstein, and Lawrence Kohlberg. We created the DES project to test the usability and efficacy of dilemma discussions and Jut Community. It gave us an opportunity to study the strength and shortcomings of both methods. I will report about this in more detail later in this book.

Over the years, I had many opportunities to try out new ideas for improving the KMDD method in many KMDD sessions as well as workshop-seminars with diverse participant groups in different institutions and countries including:

[4] I got this story from Dr. Roland Wakenhut who introduced the concept of moral competence into the military psychology.

- Student teachers at the *University of Konstanz*, *Germany; Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China; Universidad Santo Tomas, Bogotá, Columbia; Aristotle University of Serres, Greece;* and at the *Yldiz Teknik Universitesi, Istanbul, Turkey*.
- Psychologist and psychology students at the *University of Konstanz, Universidad Santo Tomas, Bogotá*, *Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, PR China*, and the *Universidad the Concepción*, Chile.
- Students at the *University of Applied Sciences of Special Needs Education* and the *University of Social Work,* both in *Zurich, Switzerland*.
- Teachers of various subject fields (biology, ethics, German language, mathematics, philosophy, physics, social studies, and sports) in the context of their continued education in the German states of *Baden-Württemberg*, *Hessen, Hamburg*, *Rhineland-Palatinate*, *Saxony*, and *Hamburg* as well as teachers in *Bogotá*, *Columbia* and at the *Universidad de Concepción* in Chile.
- Social workers, youth workers, law enforcement officers, and consultants as part of their continued education.
- Prospective ethics teachers at the *Pedagogical State Institute* in *Rhineland-Palatinate* and at the *Adam Mickiewicz University* in *Poznan, Poland*.
- University professors from various disciplines (e.g. medicine, psychology, philosophy, pedagogy, technology, engineering, economic and natural sciences) through further education events at the *University of Konstanz*; *Guangdong University of Foreign Studies*, China; *Universidad Santo Tomas*, Bogotá, Columbia; *Universidad de Monterrey*, Mexico, at the *Institute of Technology and Higher Studies at Monterrey* (ITESM), the *Universidad de Chile* at Santiago de Chile.
- Troop officers, troop psychologists, and chaplains of the *German Armed Forces*.
- Editors, reporters and marketing personnel of the national daily newspaper *El Tiempo* in *Bogotá, Colombia* as part of their in-house training.
- Mixed groups of individuals who participated in public *Discussion Theater* performances which I offered in Bogotá, Konstanz, Dresden, Monterrey, and Sao Paolo.

Measuring effectiveness

In order to test effectiveness of the KMDD we need make moral competence and its change visible. How can we do this? Surely, most participants give positive feedback. They say that they had fun and that they have learned a lot. However, this cannot be the only source for judging the efficacy of a teaching method. As I said, moral competence is an unconscious trait of our behavior. It is not easily observed. People are usually not aware of it. Therefore, we need psychological tests for measuring it.

Numerous studies have used instruments for assessing the effectiveness of curricula that measure either rule conformity or moral orientations, preferences, attitudes, values, or the like—but they do not measure moral competence. Piaget and Kohlberg did not only draw our attention to the cognitive aspect of morality, namely moral competence. They also suggested new ways to study it, namely through interview instruments. Kohlberg's *Moral Judgment Interview* (MJI) made it possible for the first time to measure the efficacy of teaching methods in the field of moral education.

It turned out that the Blatt-Kohlberg method of dilemma discussion was more effective than most others methods. First, we were not fully aware of this. Researchers used as criterion for the effect size of their interventions only "statistical significance." However, this criterion does not reflect effect size but only the precision of measurement. "There is no good excuse for saying that a statistically significant result is significant because this language erroneously suggests for many readers that the result is automatically large, important, and substantial." (Carver 1992, p. 288) Therefore, I re-analyzed 141 intervention studies using a measure of effect size. I report on the findings of my analysis in Chapter 5. As it turns out, the Kohlberg-Blatt teaching method is not only effective, but it is *very* effective. It is also noteworthy that no negative effects were found in any of the interventions. The effect size excelled the typical effects of interventions found in other fields of education, psychotherapy, workplace enhancement, and medicine. (Lipsey & Wilson 1993)

In spite of this success, the late Lawrence Kohlberg recommended not to use the dilemma discussion method. I decided to ignore this recommendation because dilemma discussions are so powerful and because I had some ideas how to improve is efficacy and its teachability. I developed a new, objective and more economic instrument for measuring moral competence, the *Moral Competence Test* (MCT), and the new *Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion.* Both are not only highly effective but are welcome by teachers and other professionals who want to foster people's moral competence. The MCT is in use for more than forty years. It has been translated into thirty-nine languages, and validated in most cases. I will tell you more about these ideas in this book.

Changes to theory and method

Although the basic concept of the KMDD has worked well for over twenty years in varied contexts, in my writings I have made some changes and clarifications of the method and the theory:

- I no longer use the term moral *judgment* competence, but only moral competence. I have realized that the term "judgment" may create confusion. Piaget and Kohlberg have used it to refer to certain verbal behavior, namely the judgment or appraisal of a person's actions and arguments. Thus judgment is often associated with moral consciousness and reflection about behavior: "Conscious realization is a reconstruction and consequently a new and original construction superimposed upon the construction already formed by action." (Piaget 1965, p. 177) I have also changed the name of our test accordingly, from Moral Judgment Test to *Moral Competence Test.*
- A *dilemma* is something that exists only in the eye of the beholder. (Lind 2006a) That is, it is not objective and does not exist outside our minds. Therefore, it is not correct to say that we write or tell a "dilemma." We can only write or tell stories that will trigger the feeling of a dilemma in our audience. As a teacher, one develops over time an increasingly better feeling for stories, which trigger the feeling of a particular dilemma in certain target groups. However, the teacher can never be sure whether the participants of a KMDD sessions see the same dilemma as he or she sees. The ability to conceive a good story that triggers the feeling of a moral dilemma in all participants is what makes a good KMDD teacher. Of course, this is all the more difficult, the farther away the group of people with whom we perform a KMDD session may stand from us, such as the very young or very old, or people from other cultures than our own.
- Formerly, I recommended changing the story during a session if two discussion groups could not be formed due to the vote. (If none or only a very few in the group vote for one