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What do Moral Educators Know About Their Students? A Study of Pluralistic Ignorance[*]

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Introduction

Teachers are taught about the general functioning of people, but what do they know about their students' moral wants and worries in particular? Teaching is a practical process, in which the teacher must heavily rely both on general knowledge of didactical rules *and* on specific knowledge of the situation and persons involved. For example, if a student disrupts class, the teacher must choose among several courses of action depending on *what is the case*. If disruption is accidental, the teacher may want to ignore it. If it is due to the student's malevolent intentions, the teacher may choose punishment as a proper reaction. However, should the disturbance indicate the student's disappointment about a previous decision by the teacher, integrative action may seem the most appropriate way to deal with the situation. Ideally, the teacher would thoroughly research the situation or, if necessary, would have a moral discussion of the issue, before coming to an conclusion. In practice, however, quick decisions are often called for, implying that a teacher's perception of what is the case, is mostly determined by his or her *generalized knowledge about students.* This type of knowledge is often called an *image* or *stereotype*, since it is rarely based on teachers' actual research into the situation and persons involved, but is based to a great extent on *indirect* sources like past experience as a teacher or student, didactic authorities, or research literature.[3] Stereotypes are not *a priori* false. On the contrary, in many instances they may provide the most accurate educational knowledge that is available. In fact, successful classroom management seems often to depend on such generalized knowledge about students.[4] In domains of teacher-student interaction in which, for various reasons, teachers are not able to directly assess the situation, such indirect learning is the only source of information.

However, stereotypes are always *second-hand* knowledge. To be accurate they need continuous correction through feedback from students. If they become inaccurate, or false, they lead to a deterioration in student-

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[3] For an overview on sources of teachers' knowledge see Dann, 1989; Kramis, 1990.

[4] Dann et al., 1987; Dann, 1989; Fraser et al., 1987; Shulman, 1987.

teacher-interaction. Hence, in domains in which teachers have personal access to students' wants and worries, *direct* ways of knowing are preferable, if not ethically required. This is especially true for students' school-related moral views.

This study into teachers' knowledge about students is of exploratory nature. It has been guided by theoretical consideration, e.g., by the concept of pluralistic ignorance,[5] and by the cognitive-developmental approach to moral development and education.[6] Yet the study is not designed to test a particular hypothesis, but is directed at two questions concerning educators' knowledge about students. First, to what extent do teachers possess an image of *the* student? Second, how accurate is this knowledge? The study tries to answer these two questions by comparing the answers that students have provided on central issues of school life, with teachers' perceptions of students' answers.

These questions arose from my involvement in a series of studies on the moral atmosphere of school. Within this context, we asked students of secondary schools, grades 5 to 12, how much importance they would assign to moral wishes such as

- students helping each other, even if they do not belong to the same clique
- being a member of a clique which holds together against others
- teachers treating students justly and respectfully
- school being a community in which teachers and students care for each other
- school providing a good training
- students doing less cheating
- decisions in school being made democratically, that is, that teachers and students have one vote each.

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[5] F. Allport, 1924; Kretch & Crutchfield, 1948; Breed & Ktsanes, 1961.

[6] Kohlberg, 1984, 1987; Lind, 1985, 1992; Oser, 1986; Power et al., 1989.

The return rate was nearly hundred per cent. Most students were eager to respond to the questionnaire. As one student said, "we never discuss these topics in class; this ought to be done more often." In some cases, the survey stimulated students and teachers to discuss issues of community and justice in class.

When presenting the findings to a teacher audience I wondered whether they were surprising, or whether the teachers already *knew* students' wants and worries before seeing my results. So, I asked the audience to give me their view on "what an average high school student, from 5th to 12th grade, would say about each of topic." Of course, asking someone to produce a stereotype like this, may cause annoyance. Therefore, I encouraged the teacher subjects to resist giving a cliché answer where they deemed inappropriate. I should point out that the teachers were *not* asked what they thought about the moral climate of the school, nor were they asked whether or not they would agree with students' views. I rather wanted to see how accurate teachers' knowledge was. Would they produce a stereotypes of students' views? If yes, would their stereotypes be accurate, or would they diverge markedly from the students' answers?

I did not take a chance on predicting teachers' responses. On the one hand, teachers should know students very well. They interact daily with students, they have access to textbooks based on a great body of research into adolescent students' attitudes, intentions and behavior. In addition, in a recent study, "without exception all teachers attach great importance to knowing the moral issues and opinions the pupils are engaged in" (Brugman & Dohle, 1990, p. 13). On the other hand, teacher-student communication is often constrained by the official curriculum. Accordingly, students' questions which do not fit in with the curriculum, are often considered merely as disturbances that distract from the main goals of teaching. Moreover, as Achtenhagen and his colleagues observed ten years ago, "students' intentions, wants and worries do not exist in textbooks." (Achtenhagen et al., 1979, p. 191). There are still hardly any studies on teachers' knowledge of students' views. In Dunkin and Biddle's 1974 published model for the study of classroom teaching, which "had an enormous impact on the field" (Shulman 1986, p. 5), the acquisition of teaching competency is conceived as a solitary process: although the model is very complex discourse with students is not accounted for. Consequently, most research focusses on

teachers' *rule knowledge*, i.e., knowledge that can be put in statements like this: *if* disruption occurs *then* do this or that. However, the craft of teaching also requires knowledge about the subjects and circumstances involved in everyday classroom interaction if rule knowledge is to be applied successfully. Effective and responsible teaching requires both kinds of knowledge (Oser 1986, 1990; Brugman & Dohle 1990).

Methods

Two sets of data are used for comparing students' responses with teachers' perceptions. The first set of data stems from *lower grade ("young") students* who participated in ongoing research associated with the educational intervention project "Demokratie und Erziehung in der Schule" (DES) in Nordrhein-Westfalen.[7] In the years 1987 to 1989, approximately 650 secondary school students were surveyed. From this survey, only 5th to 7th grade students were taken resulting in a sample size of *N*= 402. The second set of data stem from *upper grade ("old") students*; these data were collected as part of a study on the development of social responsibility (Link & Lind 1988). For the present analysis only those students are considered who attended full-time school (excluding part-time students of vocational schools), leaving *N*= 143 subjects, 8th to 12th grade. Thus the total student sample consists of *N*= 545 secondary school students.

The teacher data have been collected by the present author on various occasions in the years 1987 to 1989, involving *N*= 129 teachers of various school types, with ages ranging from 21 to 63 years, and teaching experience ranging from 2 to 33 years; 44 percent were male and 56 percent female. Since our aim was to find out about teachers' *general* knowledge of students' views, no direct matching of students and teachers was necessary. The teachers and students were in fact sampled from different schools.

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[7] The DES-Project has been initiated by the Nordrhein-Westfalian Minister of Education in 1985, involving three schools (see Lind & Raschert 1987). The DES project comprises the just community model by Kohlberg and his associates (Kohlberg, 1987; Power et al. 1989) and Oser's (1986) discourse perspective. I wish to thank the Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung, Soest NRW, for making the data available. For a report on the DES research see the 1992 issue of *Moral Education Forum*, edited by Lisa Kuhmerker.

For assessing students' moral wants and worries, 22 questions were asked which have been developed as part of a larger questionnaire for the study of the moral atmosphere of the school.[8] The questions tap five major domains of school life:

1) Student-student interaction (4 statements)
2) Student-teacher interaction (3 statements)
3) The relationship of students to their school as a whole (6 statements)
4) Keeping rules in school (6 statements)
5) Students' participation in decision making (3 statements).

With the first four domains, students were asked to rate statements according to their subjective importance. They could endorse one of five possible answers ranging from "1" (not important) to "5" (very important). With the fifth domain, students could rate the statements from "1" (I consider this to be completely wrong) to "5" (completely right). Since, in some of the teacher studies, for the latter domain only a three point scale was used, subsequent analysis will be based on a transformed scale ranging from "1" (wrong) to "3" (right).

The student questionnaires were administered during classes. The teacher questionnaires were handed out in seminars on school education. No information on the students' data were given prior to filling in the questionnaire. The wording of the individual questions was identical for all samples. However, the teachers were instructed, as noted above, to say how *most* students would typically respond to the questions at hand. They were told to imagine a typical student, 5th to 12th grade, attending any type of secondary school. In addition, the teacher subjects were instructed to indicate for each questionnaire item if they presume some, or a large, variance among students.

As a measure of *effect size* we chose Cramér's *V* (cf. Cramér 1966). *V* represents the degree of association between the variable "group" (teachers and students) on the one hand, and the responses on the other (see Fig.

[8] The "Moralische Atmosphäre Fragebogen" (MAF); see Lind & Link (1986). A copy of the MAF can be requested from the author.

1).[9] A high *V* indicates big differences between the two groups, a low *V* great accuracy of teachers' stereotype. Throughout this paper we have omitted reports on statistical significance. As with most educational research, this study was not designed to estimate "population" parameters, hence no random sampling and statistical significance testing was adequate. Moreover, significance coefficients do *not* provide a measure of agreement between hypotheses and data, since they usually depend more on sample size than on effect size (Glass et al. 1978; Bozarth & Roberts, 1972).

The findings will be presented according to the two main research questions: First, to what extent do teachers know students moral wants and worries? Second, how accurate is this knowledge? These two questions correlate to the differentiation between *content* and *structure* of teachers' stereotypes as suggested by cognitive-developmental theory[10] and by recent teachers studies.[11] Whereas content of teachers' stereotype is defined as their *mean* responses to each individual question, teachers' *stereotype structure* is defined as the *relationships* among their responses. In other words, the analysis of structure aims at the *meaning* of individual answers. Structural analysis addresses, for example, the question as to what does "wanting a good school" mean for students and teachers? That is, which other wants does this want seem to imply, or exclude, from the students' point of view? Which other wants does it seem to imply, or exclude, from the teachers' point of view? Since people may or may not be aware of such meaning structures, we chose to analyze their "tacit" meaning structure, i.e., that structure which is exhibited in the pattern of responses, rather than to obtain their conscious reports. For this structural analysis, coefficients of correlations between pairs of statements are calculated

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[9] *V* is inversely related to response similarity, i.e., a larger value indicates less accuracy of teachers' stereotypes. The *V* coefficient can be derived from P^2:

$$V = \frac{P^2}{N \cdot (q - 1)}$$

with *q* being the smaller number of categories of the two variables. Thus *V* can vary from 0 to 1 even if the two-way frequency table is not square. *V* has been calculated using the statistical computer program KOSTAS (cf. Nagl, Walter & Staud, 1986).

[10] See Kohlberg (1984); for the particular view adopted here, see Lind (1985).

[11] In their study on teachers' handling of aggression in the classroom, Dann et al. (1987) provided convincing evidence for the significance of structural aspects of teachers' cognition for teaching efficiency.

separately for each sample. In addition, in order to get an overall impression of students' and teachers' meaning structures, the correlations are factor-analyzed.

Findings

1. Most teachers seem to possess an articulate stereotype about the secondary school student. That is, teachers seem to definitely know students whom they never personally interacted with. This conclusion is based on three findings. First, 70 to 100 percent of the teachers have acquiesced in the request to describe the responses of an archetypical student. Second, only 5 - 15 percent indicate that students' answers vary somewhat, or even strongly, in regard to their moral wants and worries. Third, teachers differ only little as to what they perceived to be students' answers. The range of their mean ratings of students' answers to questions # 1 to # 19 is greater than the range of students' response means. Teachers really seem to be quite confident in their "knowledge" about students.

2. By and large, teachers' typical stereotypes concur with students' typical answers. Their answers exhibit patterns very similar to those exhibited by the students who were interviewed on the same issues. According to this overall impression, teachers seem to know students' moral wants and worries quite well. However, one might object to this conclusion as it is based on an overall analysis only. After all, teachers' ratings are not based on really knowing the students whose data was used in the comparison, but are based on stereotypes. Besides, the fact that there is a high similarity between the mean response profiles of teachers and students does not guarantee that there are no differences. In fact, *when taking a closer look at the data, striking inaccuracies of teachers' perceptions become visible in regard to both content and structure*. The differences in structure will be discussed later. Let us first examine the differences in content of teachers' knowledge about *the* student:

G *Teachers substantially underestimate students' commitment to a good school.* Although, as we noted above, the range of teachers' responses is larger than that of students' responses, students generally attach greater importance to moral issues than the teachers seem to imagine.[12] Technically speaking, most teachers' stereotypes are biased toward the zero point ("not important") of the response scale. The teachers' answers are not biased toward the mean, i.e., they are not generally closer to the scale mean of "3" than students' ratings, nor show they less variance than students' answers. Therefore, we cannot explain inaccuracies of teachers' answers as a result of their making cautious guesses. Besides, whatever explanation holds true, it does not call the diagnosis of inaccuracy in question.

G *Teachers are most accurate in regard to moral wants and worries concerning student-teacher interaction*. All three questions pertaining to student-teacher relationship rank among the four most accurate (Fig. 1).[13] Teachers seem to realize well that students want them to be just and respectful (70-80 percent of the students say this is "very important" for them) and open for discussions (approx. 60 percent), and that students place only little importance on teachers enforcing school rules (approx. 5-15 percent; Fig. 3).[14]

G *Teachers are only moderately familiar with students' moral wants concerning student-student interaction and student-school relationship.* Though there is a good general agreement between mean responses of students and teachers, a look at the "very important" ratings reveals significant differences. On average, teachers underestimate the degree to which students want their peers to be helpful and friendly to each other, and express the need for cliques which "hold together against others" (Fig. 2). Teachers also underestimate students' desire for having a good community ("students and teachers care for each other"). Many teachers were surprised to hear that a great majority of students attribute great value to a good training in school (60-80

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[12] In Fig. 2 to Fig. 6, the relative frequencies of the highest response category ("very important") are depicted for students (bars) and teachers (line). In addition, the region of endorsement rates above 40% is shaded gray.

[13] For the measure for accuracy used, see the section *Methods*.

[14] In the following figures, data are presented separately for grade 5 to 7 students and for grade 8 to 12 students.

percent). The *V*-coefficient for the latter is 0.41, which means that teachers' perceptions differ notably from students' real wants (Fig. 1 and Fig. 4).

G *Many teachers markedly underestimate the extent to which students worry about rule breaking in school.* Rule keeping is more highly valued by students than many teachers seem to believe. Especially young students, 5th to 7th grade, worry considerably about vandalism, stealing and fighting among peers (Fig. 5). Playing truant and cheating on tests also seem to be a concern for these young students, though to a much lesser degree. Older students are even less concerned about playing truant and cheating in school. They worry more about high levels of competition among students. (Competition is not usually considered as rule breaking from the teachers' point of view, but may be considered as breaking of the rule of solidarity from the students' point of view.)

G *Many teachers underestimate students' desire for democratic participation in making, and enforcing, school rules.* Regardless of age, most students assign great importance to wishes like "students having a say in school's decision making," and "democratic principles of voting." They also say that students participation in school decision making is right, though older students seem to be more hesitant about considering the demand for more democratic participation in school to be a *right* (Fig. 6).

The main questions guiding this second section of the analysis is: Do the meaning structures of teachers and students match, or do they differ markedly? Of the meaning structures involved, the connotations implicated in three issues seem especially critical for the moral education process: good community, cliques, and democratic participation. We shall examine the structure of each of the three questions in two ways, (a) by analyzing the (Pearson) correlation between each of these three questions on the one hand, and each of the other questions on students' moral wants and worries on the other hand, and (b) by grouping the interrelations among all questions by means of factor analysis.[15] Both analyses show that, apart from the differences in content of teachers'

[15] The numeric results of the factor analysis underlying the following paragraphs can be requested from the author.

stereotypes, *the structure of their knowledge also deviates considerably from the structure of students' moral wants and worries*:

G *In students' view, their desire for a school that is a good community implies several other desires which may be called "friendship orientation."* Friendship orientation correlates considerably with the desire for peer students being friendly and helpful to each other (even when they belong to different cliques), for school rules being fair and good, and for teachers and students engaging in open discussions about problems. The correlations among the respective statements are described by one factor which resembles, in Kohlbergian terms, a Stage 3 moral point of view.

G *Students' desire for a good school community that is based on mutual care, helping and friendship, is positively related to most other domains of moral wants and worries*. In particular, it is related to wants aimed at student-teacher relationship: those expressing this want also indicate that teachers should promote open discussions on problems and conflicts, and, to a lesser extent, treat students justly and respectfully, and enforce school rules. Students who assign great importance to a "friendly" school also say that students should have a say in school decision making, and that rule breaking at school should be reduced.

G *Teachers' meanings structures of "school as a good community" matches that of students quite well*. They perceive this topic to be closely related to friendliness, helpfulness and mutual caring among students. In some respects, however, teachers' meaning structure deviates considerably from students'. *Teachers seem to see a closer relationship between wanting a good community and wanting less rule breaking*. All correlations between "good community" and the responses to the items in the domain "rule keeping" are higher in the group of teachers than in the group of students. The same is true for the domain "student-school relation," with one important exception: *For students the desire for a good community and for democratic participation correlate, for teachers they do not.*

G *Teachers tend to misjudge considerably the meaning of cliques for students. For students cliques are part of a good community; especially for young teachers cliques seem to mean the opposite.* Many

(particularly, the young) students wish to be members of a clique that holds together against others (Fig. 2). From the students' point of view, this desire to be members of a clique seems to have positive connotations beyond student-student interaction. It is also (moderately) correlated with the wish for good student-teacher relationships, good school life (fair rules as well as good training), and little rule breaking.

In this regard, too, *in the teachers' opinion, students' desire to be members of a clique is negatively correlated with nearly all aspects of a good school.* Students who desire to have cliques are perceived as caring little for friendliness and helpfulness, caring less than other students for keeping school rules, and for having open discussions and participation in the greater community. Further analysis reveals that especially young teachers seem to misunderstand the meaning that cliques have for students. (In other domains, however, young teachers have a more accurate knowledge of students than more experienced teachers do.)

G *Teachers tend also to misunderstand what students mean when they desire democratic participation in school*. Analysis shows that their meaning structure in regard to democratic participation poorly matches students' meaning structure. Students' valuing of democratic decision-making is positively correlated with all other domains of moral wants. Students who want democratic decision-making also say that good and fair rules are very important. Both questions correlated $r = .37$ in the student sample. Many teachers, however, seem to be unaware of this highly positive association, and seem to believe that student advocates of democratic government express little concern about good and fair rules. The correlation is considerably lower ($r = .15$). *In particular, educators with long teaching experience misconceive students' connotations. In this group the correlation is even negative* ($r = -.12$). *Older teachers also seem to believe that, for students, a desire for democratic rule connotes opposition against teachers who enforce rules* ($r = -.25$), whereas students' responses indicate that this is not the case. Young teachers have a more accurate knowledge about students' democratic desires. In this respect, long teaching experience does not seem to improve accuracy of perception.

G Factor analysis of students' moral wants and worries results in three factors describing three meaningful clusters of correlations that are conceptually similar to Kohlberg's (1984) Stages of moral development: *Factor*

3, called "friendship orientation," seems to bundle concerns parallel to Stage 3 (good boy - nice girl) moral orientation of individual moral-cognitive development; *Factor 1*, "norm orientation," binds together moral wants related to Kohlberg's Stage 4 (preserving law and order); and *Factor 2*, "discourse orientation," resembles Stage 5 (legal contract and principled morality) of Kohlberg's moral development scale.[16]

Factor analysis of teachers' perceptions results in four factors. Despite the fact that the pattern of correlations differs markedly, these factors can be rotated to match roughly the factors in the student sample. Teachers seem to differentiate norm orientation into two factors: one norm factor is characterized by the wish that students take up responsibility for keeping school norms (Factor 1), the other norm factor is typified by the wish that teachers enforce school rules.

Discussion

The present paper has focussed on teachers' knowledge of students' moral wants and worries. Assuming that teachers usually have to make decisions under pressure, we have been especially interested in their general knowledge, i.e., their stereotype of *the* student rather than of a particular student whom they would personally know. We have found that (1) *most teachers seem indeed to possess an articulate stereotype about the secondary school student. That is, teachers definitely seem to know students whom they never personally interacted with.* (2) *Although by and large, teachers' typical stereotypes concur with students' typical answers, the data also show striking inaccuracies in teachers' perceptions in regard to both content and structure*:

Teachers tend to substantially underestimate students' commitment to a good school.

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[16] For a discussion of the correlation between students' individual moral development and the moral atmosphere in the school, see Power et al. (1989). For studies on teachers' moral development see Althof (1990) and Rulon (1990).

Teachers are most accurate in regard to moral wants and worries concerning student-teacher interaction. But they are only moderately familiar with students' moral wants concerning student-student interaction and student-school relationships. Teachers markedly underestimate the extent to which students worry about rule breaking in school, and their want of democratic participation in making, and enforcing, school rules.

Teachers' connotations of "school as a good community" match only roughly those students have. They associate the wish for a good community with less rule breaking to a greater extent than students do. For students, the desire for a good community correlates with the desire for democratic participation; for teachers it does not. Teachers tend to misread considerably the meaning of "cliques" for students. For students, having a group that holds together against others seems to be part of a good community; for teachers, students' desire for being member of a clique is less positively, or even negatively correlated with nearly all aspects of a good school. Younger teachers seem to misunderstand students' desire for cliques more than older teachers do. Teachers tend also to connote students' desire for democratic participation in school more negatively than students do. For example, whereas for students democratic participation is positively related to the desire for keeping school rules, for teachers, it means opposition against teachers who enforce rules. In this case, older teachers have a more inaccurate understanding of students' meaning. Teachers' knowledge of *the* student is then better than one might guess considering the task we presented to them. However, the fact that they submitted generalized knowledge as well as the inaccuracies in this knowledge let us call this knowledge a *stereotype*. Admittedly, most, if not all, our decisions are based on stereotypes, that is, on generalized knowledge, which is more or less accurate. If stereotypes about other persons in a group, e.g., people in a classroom, are conspicuously inaccurate, we speak of *pluralistic ignorance*. On the grounds of the present study we can at least conclude that *in regard to some central aspects of students' moral desires and worries many teachers exhibit considerable pluralistic ignorance.*

Of course, we may find very plausible explanations for some of the inaccuracies of teachers' judgment. Many teachers may, for example, have had the question in mind how students *usually* behave rather how they *wish* to behave. Indeed, we did not record students' moral behavior but their wishes in regard to a good moral climate in school, nor did we ask the teachers about students' *overt* behavior. Overt behavior is the most crucial object of educational concern. Yet it must not be regarded as the sole object of concern, nor as a simple, unambiguous concept. Overt behavior may be interpreted unambiguously only from one particular point of view. For example, from the teacher's perspective a particular behavior may be seen as an aggressive behavior whereas from the student's or parent's perspective the very same behavior may be seen as an defensive act. Without recognizing the actor's desires behind his or her behavior, it seems hardly possible, if not improbably, that those participating in the interaction can reach an agreement on what the particular behavior has *meant*. Hence, teachers' accurate perception of what students' moral desires and worries are seems to be a necessary condition for the possibility of an ethical discourse and consensus in the classroom.

This raises some questions about the teaching profession and teacher training. Does pluralistic ignorance have an impact on school life? What are the causes of pluralistic ignorance? How can it be remedied? Little is known about the definite answers. As to the impact of pluralistic ignorance, I believe that it has an inhibitory effect on teaching and learning. Evidence on the morally inhibitory effect of pluralistic ignorance comes mainly from research into helping behavior. This shows that pluralistic ignorance is one of the major causes for not helping when someone is in need. For example, if a person "knows" that the victim is not a helpful person herself, or if she believes that other bystanders are more competent to help, then she is less inclined to help.[17] Accordingly, if the teacher believes that his students are completely unconcerned about moral issues such as fairness, care, helping, and responsibility, he may treat them likewise. The teacher may be misled by the assumption that students' character can be easily inferred from students' overt behavior. But this behavior is often more

[17] Cf. Latané & Darley, 1970; Bierhoff, 1980.

determined by the situation (of which the teacher is an important part) than by dispositions. We learned both from research and personal experience that students are likely to reveal their moral concerns, if the educators provide a supportive discourse climate.[18] A supportive discourse climate requires the teacher recognizing herself as the main cause of disruptive non-moral behavior of students, and refraining from disrespectful comments on students as well as from immediate punishments.[19]

What causes pluralistic ignorance? How can it be remedied? The phenomenon of pluralistic ignorance was discovered by the social psychologist Floyd Allport as early as 1924; but there has been little research on this topic since then. Kretch and Crutchfield hypothesized that pluralistic ignorance develops especially "in groups with large memberships" in which "the individual members are rarely in direct communication with each other, and the communication that does take place is frequently through rigid channels" (Kretch & Crutchfield, 1948, p. 389). According to Breed and Ktsanes' (1961) study on pluralistic ignorance (involving beliefs about racial segregation in the United States in the fifties), the size of groups has no effect. However, their findings support the hypothesis that false stereotypes are caused by rigid channels. In the school, teacher-student communication is often constrained (a) by time pressure caused by the official curriculum, and (b) by teachers' anxiety to meet the multiple expectations of colleagues, parents, students and the school administration for which teacher training does not sufficiently prepare them.[20] If teachers cannot continuously probe their professional knowledge in teacher-student communication, it can easily turn into pluralistic ignorance.

We must then ask: How can professional knowledge be protected against turning into pluralistic ignorance? Let me tell an episode told by the teachers of the schools participating in the project *Democracy and Education*

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[18] Oser, 1986, 1990; Kohlberg, 1987; Power et al., 1989; Perret-Clermont, 1990.

[19] As Dann et al. (1987) have shown, the teacher's awareness of being a cause is highly correlated with a good learning climate and little disruption by the students.

[20] Novice teachers often experience the hiatus between his or her training and the expectations as a *praxis-shock* (Dann et al., 1978; Fend, 1977).

in Schools (see Footnote 5). Students were caught violating the norm forbidding them to leave the school grounds during breaks. In this school, the teachers did not rely on their "knowledge" of the situation but had a moral discourse with their students, resulting in a more accurate knowledge of students' motives. On being asked why they had transgressed the rules, students said they had to leave the school grounds to buy breakfast. A "just community" was scheduled to discuss the issue and find a solution. Teachers and students together decided to operate a kiosk on the school grounds which led to a considerable reduction of norm breaking.[21] As Higgins, Power and Kohlberg (1984) have shown, moral discussions like these reduce pluralistic ignorance among students. On the basis of these findings we claim that such moral discourse would also increase the accuracy of teachers' knowledge of their students. Moral discourse in the classroom may focus on various topics. Kohlberg and his colleagues have proposed two main topics: the discussion about (a) so-called "fictional" moral dilemmas emanating from the particular field of learning, e.g., liberal arts, social sciences, religion, history, sports, biology, and (b) moral conflicts in school life, e.g., issues of fairness, norm violation, personal recognition.[22] Schirp (1990) has suggested that moral discourse in school may be even widened to include ethical problems in the world outside the school, e.g., in the student's personal life space, in the community, or anywhere on the globe.

Of course, reduction of pluralistic ignorance in school is not easily achieved, but depends on several conditions. Teachers and students have to learn how to discuss moral problems in a constructive manner. In particular, they have to learn to listen to each others' argument, and to use reason rather than violence to reach their goals. Teachers have to become able to initiate, and maintain, "complete discourse" (Oser 1990). They must, as Sibylle Reinhardt (1990) has pointed out, both represent cultural traditions to the students, and pay attention to, and accept, students' special ways of understanding. For these eminently important and difficult tasks

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[21] Personal communication by teachers of the Anne–Frank–Schule, Hamm.

[22] Kohlberg, 1987; Power et al., 1989. As many intervention studies show, moral dilemma discussion has a considerable and lasting effect on moral-cognitive development of students (cf. Lind 1990).

teachers need additional training during college as well as on the job. The curriculum must allow for time to have regular moral discussions in classes and in the school community. We all must recognize the particular importance, and challenge, of teaching moral-democratic competencies.

Abstract

This study's the question how well moral educators know their students' moral views, is part of the more general question whether they base their efforts to foster moral development on adequate understanding of children. The findings show that most teachers indeed seem to possess a stereotypical image of *the* student. In order to reduce pluralistic ignorance, I recommend that moral educators should engage in a direct ethical discourse with their students, rather than relying merely on indirect knowledge about students' moral wants and worries. It seems that programs like Kohlberg's "Just Community" and the program "Demokratie und Erziehung in der Schule" in Nordrhein-Westfalia, especially help teachers to reduce pluralistic ignorance and enhance mutual understanding in the school.

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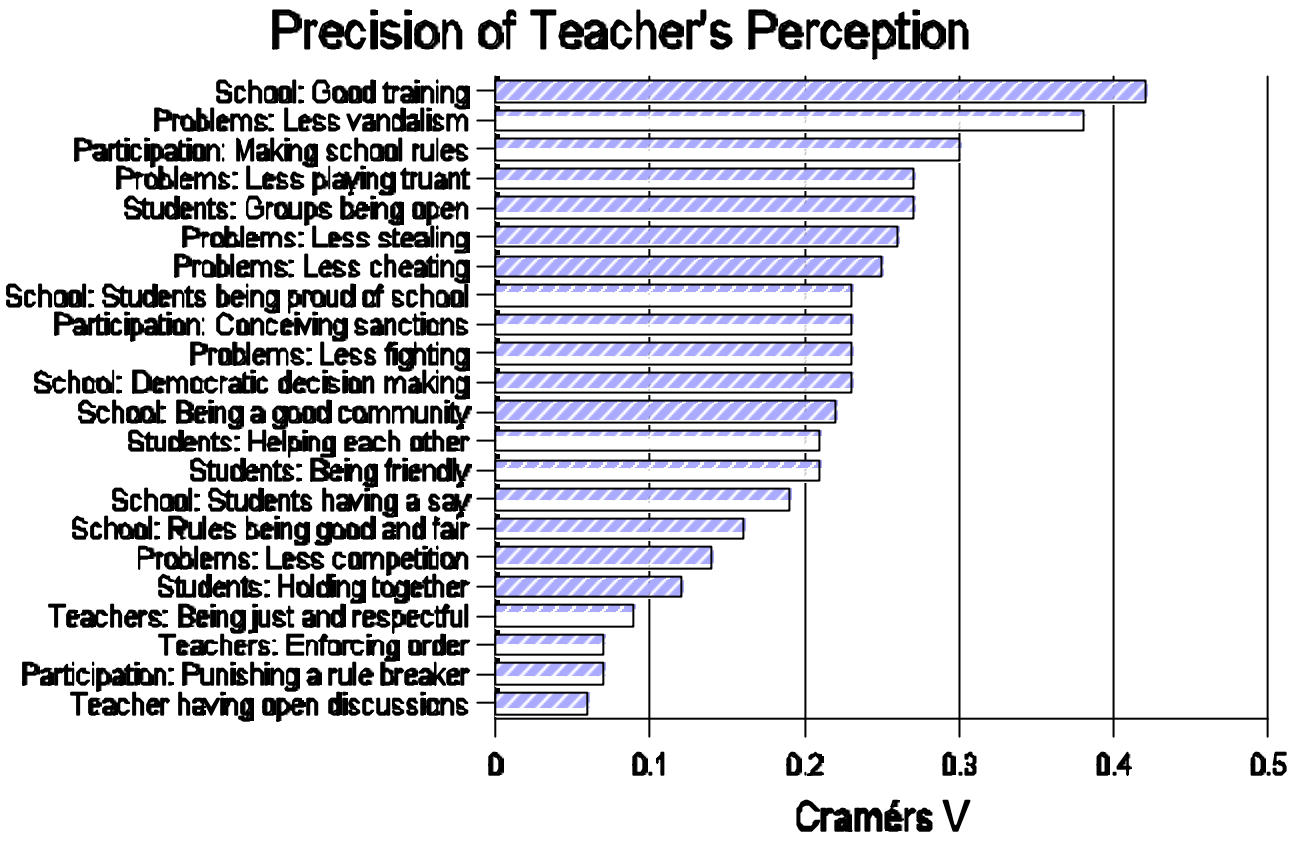
Precision of Teacher's Perception
School: Good training
Problems: Less vandalism
Participation: Making school rules
Problems: Less playing truant
Students: Groups being open
Problems: Less stealing
Problems: Less cheating
School: Students being proud of school
Participation: Conceiving sanctions
Problems: Less fighting
School: Democratic decision making
School: Being a good community
Students: Helping each other
Students: Being friendly
School: Students having a say
School: Rules being good and fair
Problems: Less competition
Students: Holding together
Teachers: Being just and respectful
Teachers: Enforcing order
Participation: Punishing a rule breaker
Teacher having open discussions
0
0.1
0.2
0.3
0.4
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Cramérs V

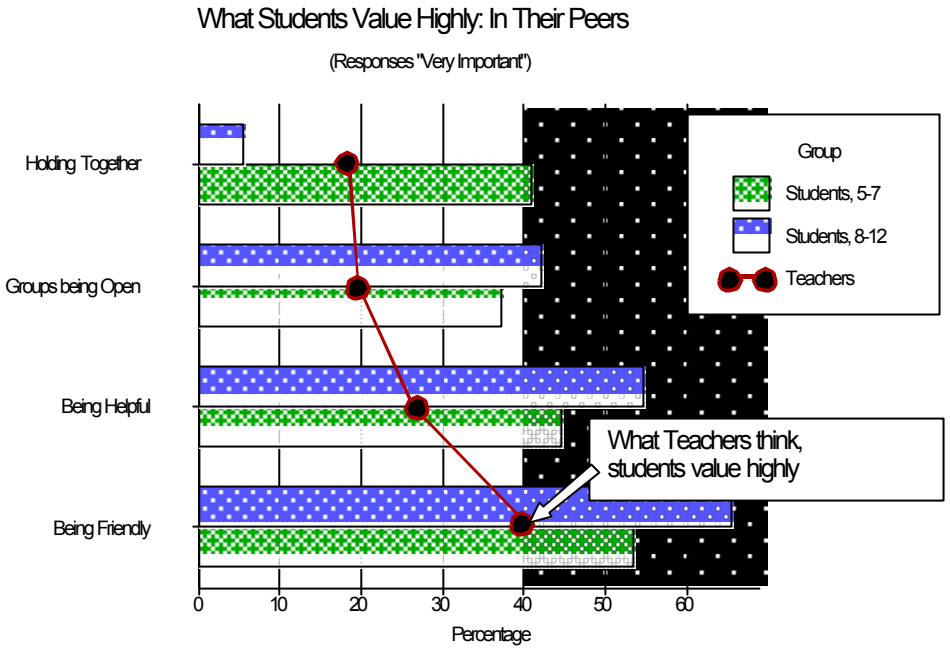
What Students Value Highly: In Their Peers
(Responses "Very Important")
Holding Together
Groups being Open
Being Helpful
Being Friendly
Group
Students, 5-7
Students, 8-12
Teachers
What Teachers think, students value highly
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
Percentage

Fig. 2

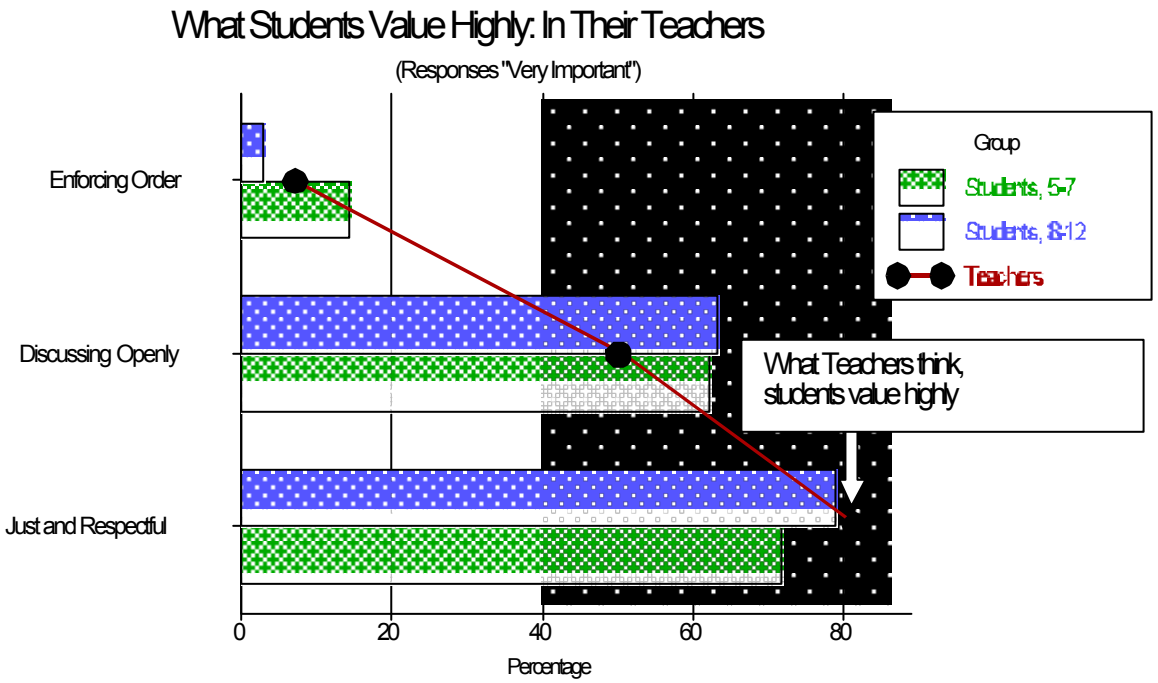
What Students Value Highly: In Their Teachers
(Responses "Very Important")
Enforcing Order
Discussing Openly
Just and Respectful
Group
Students, 5-7
Students, 8-12
Teachers
What Teachers think, students value highly
0
20
40
60
80
Percentage

Fig. 3

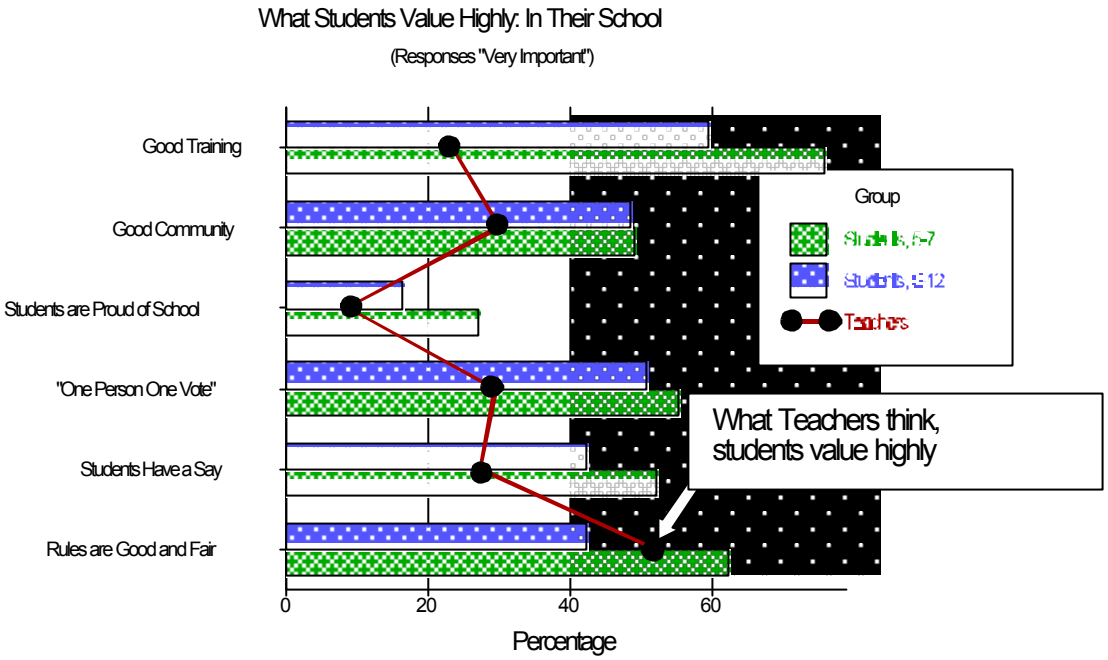
What Students Value Highly: In Their School
(Responses "Very Important")
Good Training
Good Community
Students are Proud of School
"One Person One Vote"
Students Have a Say
Rules are Good and Fair
Group
What Teachers think, students value highly
0
20
40
60
Percentage

Fig. 4

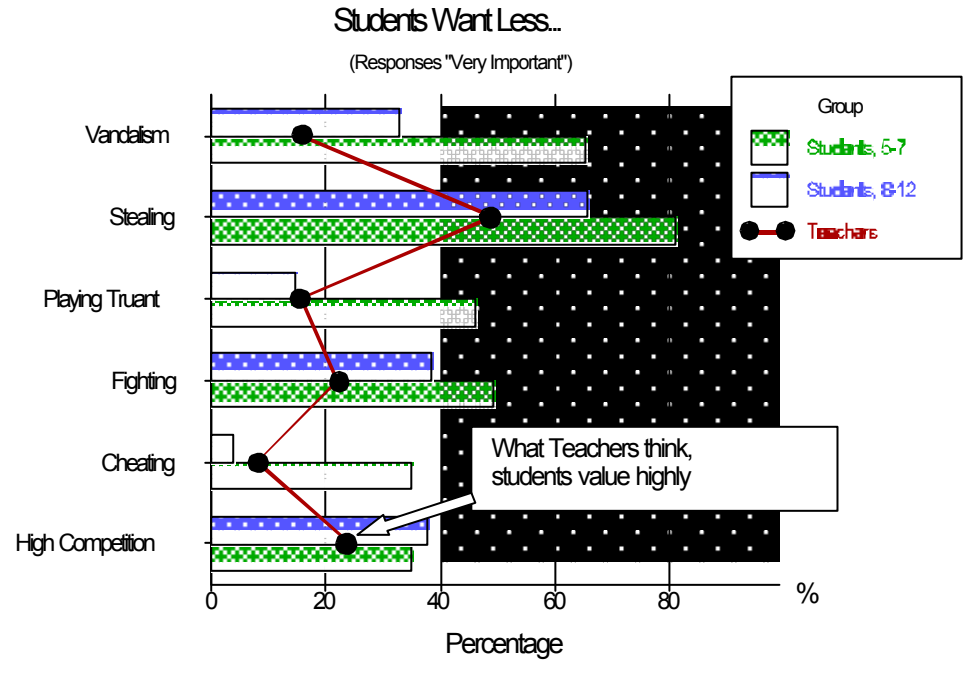
Students Want Less...
(Responses "Very Important")
Vandalism
Stealing
Playing Truant
Fighting
Cheating
High Competition
Group
Students, 5-7
Students, 8-12
Teachers
What Teachers think, students value highly
0
20
40
60
80
%
Percentage

Fig. 5

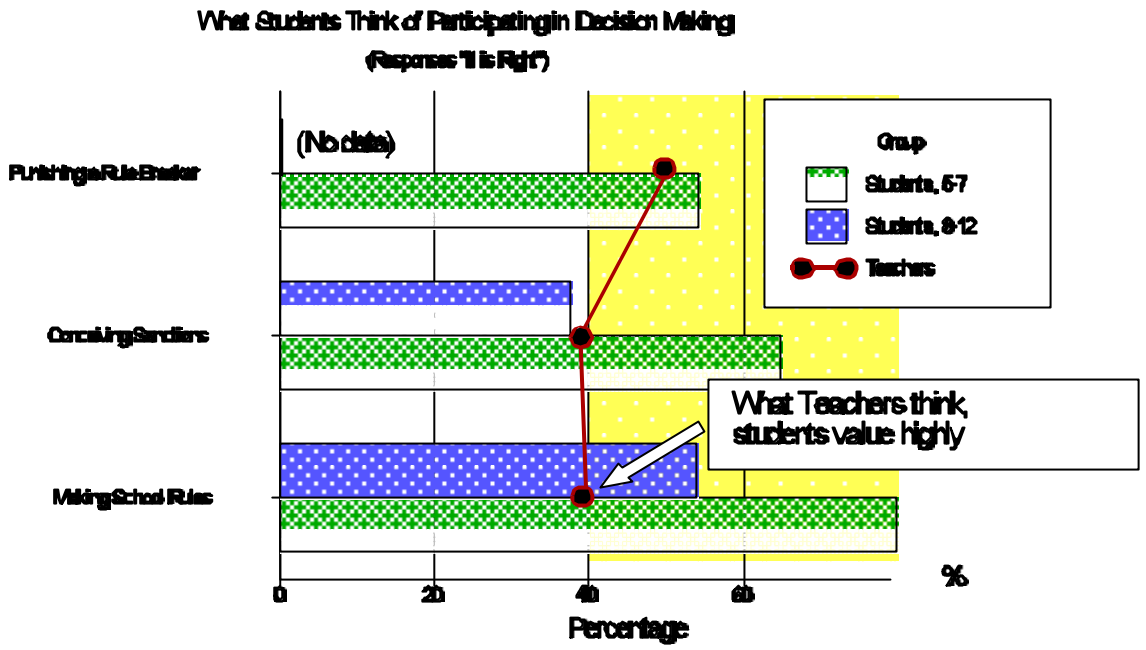
What Students Think of Participating in Decision Making
(Response "It is Right")
(No data)
Group
Students, 5-7
Students, 8-12
Teachers
What Teachers think, students value highly
%
0
20
40
60
Percentage

Fig. 6

Appendix: Questions on Students' Moral Wants and Worries[23]

How important are the following things for you... (Please endorse "1" for not important, "2" for little important, and so on, and "5" for very important.)

Student-student interactions

1. Students being friendly with one another.
2. Students helping each other even when they are not friends.
3. Students getting along with one another even when they belong to different cliques and groups.
4. Having a group which members hold together against others.

Student-teacher interactions

5. Teachers treat students justly and respectfully.
6. Teachers and students discuss openly problems and conflicts with one another.
8. Teachers being dedicated to enforce school rules.

Student-school relationships

7. Students having a say in decision making processes in their school.
9. Important decisions in school being made democratically; every student and teacher having one vote.
10. Students being proud on their school and feeling to be a member.
11. School being a community in which students and teachers care for each other.
12. Sschool providing a good training; students being able to learn much.

Rule breaking

13. Less competition among students.
14. Less cheating.
15. Less fighting.
16. Less playing truant.
17. Less stealing.
18. No vandalism.

Dmocratic decision-making
What do you think about... (Please, endorse "1" for completely wrong, "2" for sonewhat wrong, and so on, and "5" for completely right.)

19. that students decide what should be allowed in school, and what should be forbidden?
20. that students, together with teachers, conceive sanctions against rule breaking.
21. that students, together with teachers, decide about how someone should be punished who breaks the school's rules.

[23] The items were presented in the order as indicated by the question numbers on the left. The subdivisions were not presented. The question numbers are also referred to in the tables and figures in this paper.