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Education for Democracy

Fostering Moral Competence in the School and Beyond

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World-wide, democracy is one of the highest moral ideals. Yet, democracy is under siege in many countries. Moral ideals are essential, but not sufficient for moral behavior. In addition moral competence is needed, that is, the ability to solve problems and conflicts on the basis of moral principles through deliberation and discussion, instead of through violence, deceit and power. If we want to maintain democracy we must foster moral competence in all citizens.

Moral competence bridges the often seen gap between moral ideals in the one hand and behavior on the other. It has shown to be a very important factor in many behaviors which are important for social life and for living together in a democracy (Lind, 2016): for being honest, for helping others in distress, for blowing the whistle, for advocating publicly democratic principles (like justice, freedom of speech and collaboration), for evaluating orders and even for school learning. Without a minimum amount of moral competence in all citizens, no democracy can survive. The more people lack moral competence the more they need autocratic leaders for solving their problems and conflicts.

Moral competence does not develop by itself. It must be learned. If people do not have sufficient opportunities to apply their ability, their moral competence does not increase or may even decrease, as is the case with prisoners, who loose much of their scares ability, and also professionals in some areas like in medical education.

Moral competence can be learned. It cannot be learned not through lecturing, indoctrination, or transmission of (verbal) values, but only through providing adequate learning opportunities (Schillinger 2003; Hemmerling 2014). While Lawrence Kohlberg (1985) has given up the method of dilemma discussion, we have developed an improved version, namely the *Konstanz Method of Dilemma-Discussion* (KMDD)®. It requires no structural changes and takes away no time from the syllabus. A single session can already foster moral competence more than a full school year. The KMDD is used in many countries. In order to foster also moral competence of people outside institutions of education, we have transformed the KMDD into a new kind of theater: Discussion Theater. However, both methods are only effective, if the teachers are well trained.

Fostering moral competence is the core task of our schools

During the past years many things were undertaken in this regard, often however, with little success. Often one overlooks the need for new approaches to democratic education. Many of the practiced, well-intentioned methods have proved to be insufficient and ineffective. Some have turned out to be successful only in so-called light-tower projects, where certain personnel-wise and financial conditions were met. Therefore, they cannot just be copied. Before we request more money and personnel, we should consider the aims of democratic education and how it can best be done.

We need a method of democratic education which is effective without requiring a change of the system, an enlargement of the staff, or a reduction of the lesson plan. Such a method would open the chance to reach all people. In a democracy, the change of the conditions must be initiated by the people and not by politicians and experts. These are needed in order to enable people to change their conditions by democratic means, instead of using violence, deceit or bowing down to others.

Among the ideals guiding education the moral ideal of democratic living together is the most central, but also the most difficult to achieve. Teachers, parents and students ask themselves how the contradiction between the democratic promise of freedom and the autocratic self-understanding of traditional education can be overcome. How can young people be educated to become mature and responsible citizens when the educational methods hold them back in a state of immaturity? How can they be encouraged to think for themselves and to question existing norms and expectations without turning them into anarchistic rebels or libertarian individualists who see in fundamental democratic values such as fairness and solidarity only a restriction of their own self-realization or economic success?

For Socrates the main task of education was to question the existing order, including education itself. Can virtue be taught? What does it even mean? All men desire the good, but they mostly lack the power to attain it. Is it not better for education, therefore, to promote the powers of attainment rather than concentrating on values and desires?

Socrates believed that education gives no answers, but can only teach how to ask questions. The government of Athens at the time saw in this kind of education incitement to rebellion and anarchy and a threat to society; it condemned him to death. Yet he by no means advocated questioning everything. When friends offered to help him flee he turned the offer down. His justification provides a powerful moral message. By fleeing, he argued, he would question law and order, to which he had always been committed.

Socrates possibly recognized himself the danger lying behind his questions if they were presented to citizens who had not yet developed powers of independent thinking. In their case, as Hannah Arendt (2007) remarked with reference to Socrates, critical questions could lead to a rejection of existing norms without their being replaced by personal, inner norms, by true morality.

However, such a process places high demands on moral-democratic competence. It calls for the ability of every individual to solve the problems and conflicts that inevitably arise when orienting personal behavior on moral principles, without recourse to violence, deceit or subjection

to others, to whom the burden of responsibility (and hence also the power) is transferred.

As the economist and philosopher Amartya San (1990) has ascertained, it is things which seem so simple, such as speaking and listening, which first enable democratic, self-governing life together. In a democracy, according to Sen, every citizen must be in a position to speak with and listen to others when important issues are at stake. Michael Sandel (1998) calls for a new culture of public debate. Similarly, Darling-Hammond and Ancess (1996) assert that the “citizens must have the knowledge and skills to be able to intelligently debate and decide among competing conceptions, to weigh the individual and the common good, if they are to sustain democratic ideals throughout the complex challenges all societies face. (p. 154) Many people lack this competence, as Socrates already pointed out and as our studies reveal, because they obviously have too few opportunities to develop it. (Lind 2002; 2016)

It is, above all, the task of the schools to provide the opportunities for the development of democratic competence by means of both general education and specific education for democracy.

Democracy needs general education

How important the general education of *all* citizens is for the creation and maintenance of democracy was demonstrated, above all, by Thomas Jefferson, the co-author of the American Declaration of Independence: "This last is the most certain and the most legitimate engine of government. Educate and inform the whole mass of the people, enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve it, and it requires no very high degree of education to convince them of this. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.” (Jefferson 1940)

The French political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville, who travelled extensively in the then still young "Democracy in America" and analyzed his impressions in his book published in 1835, saw education as the third pillar of democracy alongside the separation of powers and civil commitment. He recommended that the government should spend all the money it could afford on education as this is the only way of preventing democracy from turning into a dictatorship. "Suffrage without schooling produces mobocracy, not democracy." (Adler 1982, p. 3) For researchers on democracy such as Benjamin Barber (1992) "education and democracy are inextricably linked". (p. 9)

The insight of Jefferson, de Tocqueville, Adler and Barber that education primarily serves to enable people to govern themselves and hence to prevent racism, nationalism, civil war and dictatorship, shaped educational policy in the young United States and also in my country, the Federal Republic of Germany, after the collapse of the Nazi regime: As it is in the interest of the democratic community, general education should be available to all citizens free of charge. In fact, the public education system has turned out to be an important, perhaps the most important pillar of our democracy.

The revaluation of education

Today it seems that this insight is being increasingly lost. The more the importance of education

for living together in a democracy fades from sight, the more the democratic task of schools to provide education is converted into an individual right to prepare for a career. The democratic educational task of the school is often not even mentioned nowadays in discussions on the maintenance of democracy. Education is often seen as being only indirectly important for the preservation of democracy as it helps to increase economic performance. Consequently the quality of education is no longer measured by its contribution to democratic living together but by the (supposed) requirements of the economy. The aims of education are no longer defined by the people themselves or a democratically elected body of government, but by a globally operating testing company. (Meyer &, Benavot 2013)

As a result of this revaluation the task of education is now more and more confined to promoting reading skills, calculation skills, and factual knowledge in our children instead of developing their capacity to think and discuss. Driven by the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) of the OECD, worldwide test scores become the basis for the evaluation of students, teachers and schools. Consequently, in many schools teaching is increasingly devoted to meeting the requirements of the test industry instead of promoting the needs of democracy. Learning in schools is more and more restricted to those areas that are tested and sanctioned by means of simple tests.

These tests (not tests in general) threaten democracy as a way of life (Dewey) without bringing any recognizable benefit to the economy (Berliner & Glass 2014). The intensive use of "high stakes" tests associated with hard sanctions for students, teachers and schools do not enhance the education at our schools but increasingly hamper it. (Ravitch 2010) Unsurprisingly, PISA test scores show a strong *negative* relationship with interest in science and with activities related to experiments and laboratory work (Sjoberg 2017). The fifty-year long-rule of these high-stakes tests has not even led to an improvement in test performance (Lind 2009; Koretz 2017).

These tests have to be worked on under extreme time-pressure and instill fear in many test-takers. Through this they massively obstruct students' thinking and reflection, which are essential virtues for participating in a democratic society. Research has shown that participants can get higher scores on these tests by guessing than by knowing. (Hopmann et al. 2007) Moreover, these tests apodictically lay down what is right and what is wrong. They permit no questions and no criticism. Taking a math task from the PISA tests nuclear physicist Sjoberg (2007) shows how "unrealistic and flawed" many of the test questions are. "Students who simply insert numbers in the formula without thinking will get it right. More critical students who start thinking will, however, be confused and get in trouble!" (p. 217).

As the curriculum and the methods of teaching are increasingly aligned to such tests ("teaching to the test"), they also obstruct students' deliberation and the discussion between students and teachers in the classroom, and force them to bow down to the truth of authorities instead of encouraging them to think on their own, as is the case in good lessons. Thus these tests directly and indirectly obstruct the development of moral-democratic competence. They teach subjects but do not educate citizens who are able to take responsibility for the decisions.

The more these tests determine the lives of the children, the more the opportunities disappear which would enable them to use their moral competence, and the more their moral development suffers. Someone who is not allowed to learn how to solve problems through reflection and discussion can only have recourse to violence and deception. Someone who cannot experience the solution of conflicts through dialogue will regard other people with suspicion and attempt to

protect himself by acquiring material goods and by subjection to leaders who promise to take a tough line on dissidents and to abolish democracy (Adorno et al. 1950).

As psychological studies (partly of an experimental kind) have shown, in fact a causal relationship exists between low moral-democratic competence on the one hand and obedience to authorities, violence, deceit, breach of contract, the covering-up of criminal acts, omission of help, lack of decision, drug abuse, and even with poor learning performance, bad school grades in academic subjects and, finally, with slight commitment to basic democratic values on the other hand (for source references see Hemmerling 2014; Kohlberg 1984; Lind 2016).

Moral-democratic competence does not develop by itself, but must be fostered in our schools

Two discoveries have led to important new insights into the nature, measurability, relevance, development and teachability of moral-democratic competence, and point the way to a new approach to education for democracy (Lind 2002; 2016; 2017a; 2017b). The first discovery is that moral behavior is not only a matter of good intentions, beliefs, values and principles but, as scholars like Socrates, Darwin, Piaget and Kohlberg have argued, it is also a matter of the ability to apply these. The second discovery is that these two aspects of moral behavior must not be confused, but are of different nature, and thus need to be treated differently in research and education. Nor must they be separated like components.

Good behavior cannot do without good moral intentions. These are indispensable for democratic behavior. Fortunately most, if not all, people always want to do the good. Moral orientation on democratic principles such as justice, freedom and cooperation seem to be inborn and deeply anchored in our emotions, so that they do not need to be conveyed to us by education. But the statistics on criminal behavior and our every-day experience tell us that people often fail to live up to their moral goals. Emotionally anchored moral principles like justice, equality and solidarity are powerful, but they are not sufficient for making the right decisions. They are mostly very indeterminate, can easily lead us astray and often bring us into dilemma situations in which every conceivable decision turns out to be morally wrong.

In order to cope with these difficulties we need a second aspect, namely moral-democratic competence or more simply moral competence. This is *the ability to solve problems and conflicts on the basis of (felt) moral principals by means of thinking and discussion with others and without recourse to violence, deceit or subjection to others* (Lind 2016). While traditionally moral competence was defined as the ability to judge and act in accordance with inner moral principles (Kohlberg 1964), moral-democratic competence is its extension to discursive debates with others. It is the ability to solve problems not only through reflection but also through discussion with others instead of resorting to violence, deceit or submission to others.

The degree of moral competence we possess cannot simply be assessed by enquiring about it. We are scarcely aware of how high or low our moral competence is. Yet it shows itself in our behavior. It is shown, for example, very clearly in discussions when participants judge the arguments of their supporters and opponents. Most people judge arguments according to their agreement (or disagreement) with their own but find it difficult to judge them according to their moral quality, which is indispensable for democratic discourse (Habermas 1990). As it has turned out, this behavior is a very good indicator of moral competence, or lack of it. (Keasey 1974; Lind

2016).

Previous methods of assessment have either ignored these discoveries or used them only partially. Aspects are distinct but not separate like components. Hence, they must be assessed distinctly but not separately. Most morality tests measure moral orientations as if they were a separable component of moral behavior. Some claim to measure moral competence as well though they contain no moral task which would be difficult to solve for the participants. Only with Kohlberg's *Moral Judgment Interview* did it become partly possible to assess moral competence. Yet this method produces only a compound score, the so-called “Stage” score. In this interview, participants are asked to judge the decisions of fictitious protagonists on a moral dilemma, and to justify their judgments through arguments. At least in the early forms of this assessment method, the participants were also asked to think of counter-arguments. Yet this method has serious drawbacks, which have not only to do with the subjectivity of its scoring, which makes it susceptible to biases. The main drawback is that it does not provide distinct measures for the two aspects, as if this distinction did not matter. (Lind 1989)

Therefore, I designed a new test which is fully objective and lets us measure moral competence as a distinct aspect of moral behavior: the *Moral Competence Tests* (MCT). By means of a special multivariate test design the MCT makes both aspects of the answering behavior visible and measurable. The MCT presents two dilemma stories and requires the participants in the test to judge a series of arguments for and against the decisions taken in the stories. The arguments are so chosen that each of them represents a certain moral orientation. The pattern of the answers to the MCT enables us to recognize whether and how far the interviewees are capable of judging arguments according to their moral quality instead of their agreement with personal opinions.

Research using Kohlberg's interview method and the MCT consistently agree: a) that this ability is very unevenly distributed and is overall very weakly developed; b) that - as must be the case with abilities - it cannot be simulated upwards; and c) that it is causally related to a variety of behaviors and competencies which are relevant to democracy (see, among others, Kohlberg 1984; Lind 2016). For example, moral competence determines to a high degree whether people observe the obligations of a contract, whether they are honest in examinations, whether they can solve the problems they have in life without resort to drugs, whether they report a crime even though it is disadvantageous for themselves, whether they help people in need, whether they critically examine the directives of authorities, whether they can quickly find solutions in dilemma situations, whether they avoid violence to reach their political goals and whether they are actively committed to the maintenance of basic democratic rights. New studies further show that people with a high degree of moral competence can register facts better, get better grades in Math and German and have better average grades in their *Abitur* (high school diploma). Particularly important for living together in a democracy is the finding of Wasel (1994) that people assess the moral competence of others more precisely the higher their own moral competence is. In a certain sense it is, therefore, true to say that a people gets the government it "deserves." But the reverse also seems to be true. If a democratic government neglects the education of its citizens it gets citizens which desire more authority and less democracy.

Fostering moral competence is the key

Moral-democratic competence is not inborn, but it only develops fully by use. In this context the number and the nature of the opportunities we find in our environment play a decisive role. There should be not too few, but not too many, not too simple, but not too difficult problems which test our moral competence. The optimal level shifts, as in other fields, with the increasing development of moral competence in the direction of greater challenges. From a certain stage of development onwards the individual is in a position to find suitable learning opportunities and to train his/her moral competence without outside assistance. In order to reach this level of development, however, most people are, as already mentioned, dependent upon a good and sufficiently long democratic education.

Just as muscles only develop to the extent that they are used, so too moral competence only develops according to its use. That is to say moral competence development depends on people finding opportunities which present a challenge to their abilities but do not overstrain them. Many children find few such learning opportunities in the environment in which they grow up (Lind 2006). Parents provide their children with such opportunities in as far as they are able and have the necessary time. This is more often the case with parents who have themselves enjoyed a good education (Speicher 1994). Consequently, for most children, the development of moral competence depends on assistance in school.

This assistance is evidently provided by good schools and teachers, although to this day the "subject" is not offered in teacher training or the school curriculum. The extent and quality of school education is by far the strongest factor in the development of moral competence. There are occasional reports on connections with social class, cultural background and gender, but these are clearly of slighter significance and often disappear when the share of education in the connection is factored out (Lind 2002).

In view of the great challenges of the present time (such as social inequality, technical change, immigration, inclusion of the handicapped, environmental pollution, the extinction of species, armed conflict, terrorism, xenophobia and drug addiction) the opportunities for moral development provided by schools today are insufficient and unsustainable. They are insufficient because they depend on the individual initiative of teachers and on the free spaces left to them by the pressure to achieve higher grades and by school supervision. At the end of their school careers far too many students have not achieved even the minimum of moral competence necessary to live in a democratic community.

Moral education in our schools is also not sustainable. Many students fail to achieve the degree of moral competence they need to seek learning opportunities on their own, without school, and hence to develop further. People with low moral competence see many decision situations not as opportunities for learning, but as threatening and overwhelming. The failure to take advantage of such opportunities leads to a stunting of their moral competence. This vicious circle leads to a regression of moral competence which can be found in children who have enjoyed less than 12 years of school education (Lind 2002), or in prisoners who are refrained from interacting with others (Hemmerling 2014) and even in students of medicine whose curriculum prevents them from moral reflection and discourse (Schillinger 2006, Feitosa et al. 2013).

As moral research has shown, schools must not necessarily do more in order to improve the moral competence of all students sufficiently and sustainably. But they must be more purposeful

in their approach, that is to say they must work with better methods and with better trained teachers.

Which methods?

Hardly any of the methods prevailing in schools today meet the challenge of providing effective education for democracy:

Institutional studies: We were hitherto of the opinion that for the maintenance of democracy it is sufficient to convey knowledge of democracy, to acquaint young people with the Basic Law and the institutions of the state. The mediation of this knowledge could give young people the opportunity to weigh up the pros and cons of individual good and social good and to discuss competing ideas on the meaning of basic democratic principles such as justice, freedom and solidarity. But teachers often fail to take advantage of this opportunity in their lessons because the pressures of testing and grading leave too little time or because the teacher lacks the confidence to deal with reflection and discussion in the classroom (Lind 2016).

Imparting of values, ethics lessons. For democracy to flourish citizens must desire it and attribute great value to ideals such as freedom, justice and cooperation. In fact this ideal is highly esteemed by most people in the world (Sen 1996; McFaul 2004) even when they are disappointed by real existing democracy and themselves often fail to live up to their own ideals. The mediation of values by the school is hence not only superfluous. It is a "performative self-contradiction" (Karl-Otto Apel) to the ideal of democratic freedom (Lind 2017b). Moreover, the theoretical mediation of values in the form of lectures or reading text shows no empirically demonstrable effect on the development of moral competence (Narvaez 2001; Lind 2002).

Living democracy: The method of "living democracy" is only limitedly suitable as a means of promoting moral competence. On the one hand, the learning opportunities it offers are only available to a small proportion of young people, and mostly only to those who already have a relatively high degree of moral competence and are not overtaxed by this method (Comunian & Gielen 2006). On the other hand the effectiveness of "living democracy" is highly dependent on the quality of the "democracy" the students experience and the accompanying pedagogical program (Westheimer 2015). Even the *Just Community* schools, which practice democratic procedures in an exemplary manner, cannot promote the moral competence of students effectively. On balance the JC projects in the USA brought no developmental gain for the participants (Power et al. 1998; Lind 2002). In the project "Democracy and Education in Schools" in Germany there was a clear learning effect (Lind & Althof 1992), but this cannot be unequivocally attributed to the method of "living democracy", as the students also participated at the same time in many dilemma discussions, whose teaching effectiveness has been clearly demonstrated (Lind 2002; 2016). Positive effects of free discussion and genuine participation in democratic decision-making processes were incidentally revealed by the Konstanz longitudinal study of university students from five European countries undertaken between 1977 and 1985 (see, e.g., Bargel et al. 1982; Lind 2002). Whereas in four countries only a low improvement in moral competence was established it increased strongly among students in Poland at the end of the 1970s, as many of them had the opportunity to participate in the democratic *Solidarność* movement in their country at that time. When the military took over the power and enforced martial law, regression set in (Nowak & Lind

2009).

Dilemma discussion: This method of education for democracy developed by Moshe Blatt and Lawrence Kohlberg (1975) proved to be very effective as a means of stimulating the moral judgment competence of students (Lind 2002). But it was later abandoned as a failure by Kohlberg and his students because teachers did not accept it (Althof 2015). In order to promote moral competence the method requires the teacher to confront students with several dilemma discussions and then to present and justify their opinions. In order to maximize the teaching effect the teacher was called upon to offer the students arguments which lay exactly one stage above their developmental level (the so-called "plus 1 - convention"). To this end the teachers had to determine the students' "level of moral judgment competence" before teaching (with the help of Kohlberg's interview method). The effectiveness of the Blatt-Kohlberg method was subjected to more intensive empirical examination that any previous method of moral education. We found over 140 intervention studies which were undertaken between 1970 and 1984. The average effect size of the method was astoundingly high, amounting to $r = 0.40$ and $d = 0.88$, a value scarcely achieved by any previous pedagogical method (Lind 2002).

The reasons why teachers were not willing to adopt the Blatt-Kohlberg-Method in spite of its high effectiveness seem obvious. It is very time-consuming, requires intensive training of the teachers (which they did not get) and involves the carrying out of long interviews with the students, which can only be evaluated by experts. The interviews are subjective and nontransparent for the teachers (Lind 1989). A further difficult problem lies in the instruction for the teacher to present arguments (plus-1-convention). This instruction stands in contrast to Kohlberg's own development theory, which calls for *discovery* learning instead of reproduction. An experiment by Lawrence Walker (1983) in fact shows that the arguments of the teacher have an effect not because the students simply reproduce them but because they stimulate the students to think for themselves. Counter-arguments presented by other students also achieved the same effect. Hence, the method could be even more effective if the teachers took a back seat and left the students with more time for discussions with each other (Lind 2016).

The *Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion*

On the basis of this knowledge I have developed the *Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion* (KMDD). It includes some elements of the Blatt-Kohlberg method, but differs substantially from it (Lind 2016; 2017a; Reinicke 2017). It has been used for over twenty years in a variety of educational institutions: in schools from the third grade on, in high schools, in vocational schools, in universities, in prisons and military academies, and in senior home. It has been employed in many countries. It has proved highly effective. A single KMDD session already achieves a greater growth in moral competence than an entire school year. However, a thorough training of the teachers is a precondition for effective and responsible use of the KMDD. Without this training there are no, or even negative, effects (Lind 2016).

We now also employ the KMDD in the public sphere as "Discussion Theater" (DT). The piece we put on stage is called "Speaking and Listening." First performances in the Dresden Frauenkirche and in Poznan, Poland, were well-attended and successful. They show that there is a need for serious, free discussion of sensitive topics with others that are carried out without accusations

and aggression.

Although the KMDD and the DT are theater pieces with a story about decisions taken by a fictitious person, the story mostly has a factual basis or could have happened in the way presented. Above all the discussions between the supporters and opponents of the decision of the protagonist are *real*: the participants in the discussion theater, as in the KMDD, are asked to give their own opinions and to attempt to convince their opponents of the rightness of their standpoint. The KMDD and the DT do not, therefore, involve role-playing; they present genuine debates in which emotions are noticeably present. Nonetheless, in the innumerable sessions I have led in more than twenty years there has never been a violation of the only inalterable rule, namely that everything can be said and that all arguments can be judged and criticized, but not any people. Violation of the rule would not be sanctioned; the leader of the session would simply remind the participants by a certain hand-signal. But reminding was never necessary. It seems that everyone wishes for hard but fair discussions and that is enough for the session leader, as the perceived authority, to state the rule openly at the beginning and to promise to ensure its observation, but otherwise not to intervene in the course of the discussion (Lind 2016).

Allow all people to develop their democratic competence

Self-determined living together in a democracy is not easy. It can only function if all citizens have sufficient opportunities to develop their moral competence. Only in this way can they be enabled to solve problems and conflicts in accordance with the rules of morality, that is, to say by reflection and discussion and not by resort to violence, deceit or subjection to. Otherwise they will need a "strong state" (Hobbes, Leviathan), which prevents them from indulging in violence and deceit and takes their decisions for them. Democracy cannot be maintained by force but only by effective democratic education.

In order to develop the necessary competence children need help from the school. The school must provide suitable learning opportunities, not only in ethics and politics lessons, but in all subjects. The use of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion and Discussion Theater require good training if they are to be applied responsibly and effectively. Without sufficient training and certification the KMDD and DT are ineffective and can even harm the participants.

In contrast to other methods of education for democracy their application requires no changes in the curriculum, timetable or school organization. Every teacher can employ it on his own responsibility. It takes up little time and hence does not involve any curtailment in the rest of the curriculum. On the contrary, it has a positive effect on the students' motivation to learn and on the learning climate in the classroom. A biology teacher reported that after a KMDD session her students worked through the learning material much more quickly than before. They asked more questions and discussed more extensively what they had learned. The teacher explained: "They now know better why they are learning".

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