

Democratic moral education

LAWRENCE KOHLBERG

I shall try to talk today on my basic educational theory and how it works in practice. My title is democratic moral education. A more neutral title would be democratic civic education, but the value core of civic education we believe are moral principles of justice. Furthermore we call it moral education because we assume that every educator is a moral educator, like it or not. Educators pronounce rules and obligations, they administer discipline and act as models, good or mediocre, of moral relationships. This is the hidden curriculum of the school, it is better to articulate it and reason about it than to leave it concealed. Finally democratic school practices and organization runs into great difficulty unless student participation focuses on moral issues of justice and community welfare rather than on issues of curriculum and administration, which are confusing and boring to most adolescent students.

This first phase of our work in moral education started in 1968 and was democratic but in a very limited sense. It consisted of classroom discussion of hypothetical and real moral dilemmas in relation to social studies and literature. Its *goal* was moral stage development as the aim of civic and moral education. Its *method* was democratic in that the teacher did not preach the right answer or indoctrinate but asked Socratic questions and encouraged argumentation, disagreement and dialogue between students in an atmosphere of mutual respect and listening to one another's reasons. Researched in more than one hundred classrooms in social studies

or literature, such discussion over a semester or a year produces about an average of one half stage increase in a class compared to no change in control classrooms with parallel social studies curriculum but no moral discussion. This has been found equally true in elementary schools, high schools, and universities.

While democratic dialogue led to moral stage-changing, preaching or indoctrination did not. In 1968, my student, Moshe Blatt, did a study using three groups of classes. Blatt led one group of classes using Socratic peer dialogue of moral dilemmas. This group of classes showed one half stage change. One group of classes had no discussion and no change. A third group was led by the regular classroom teacher in whatever style he or she chose. In one class I observed, a variation of the Heinz dilemma was asked, was it right or wrong to steal an expensive drug to save a wife dying of cancer. A heated argument started among the students, quickly terminated by the teacher announcing, "yes class, but the point is stealing is wrong", which he wrote on the board and underlined and went on to the next dilemma. Not suprisingly, there was no stage change in moral reasoning in these classes based on indoctrination. Neither does preaching or indoctrination of honesty seem to lead to behaviour change toward increased honesty. Large studies by Hartshorne and May in the 1930's showed that preaching and indoctrination of what they called character did not work.

Experimental measure of behavior, behaviors in-

volving honest altruistic service and self control showed no change after classes of character education.

Nevertheless, the concern of teachers and administrators for an indoctrinative approach to moral instruction is very understandable and our own developmental approach had to address the concerns which led to indoctrinative methods. The teacher's first concern leading to indoctrination is a concern for moral *action* as well as judgement or reasoning.

The teacher's second concern is a concern for moral *content* as well as stage or structure. The teacher can't wait until Stage 4 or 5 to stop stealing or cheating. The question I asked myself was how to add to our non-classroom moral discussion to do this.

My answer led us to a more fundamental focus on democracy in education than the creation of a classroom democratic discussion. For non-indoctrinative moral discussion to influence student action, moral discussion had to be about real life student actions, which meant that it had to lead to consequences in the way school rules and policies were made. As an example, in 1970 a Newton principal questioned me about the value of using what he called science-fiction dilemmas like the Heinze dilemma to deal with his school problems of theft, drugs, fighting and pregnancy. My response to him was influenced by the fact that he and I had earlier sat in the back of a classroom led by Blatt asked students if they had a real moral dilemma to discuss. Seeing the principal in the back a student said "I have a dilemma. The principal last week Later I pointed out to the principal that while he wished students to discuss real school moral problems such discussing would be felt by students as futile if their discussion had no influence on school rules and policies. This meant some democracy in the school as I proposed to consult with him about this. He was not convinced and was happy to leave us discussing science-fiction dilemmas.

Let me explain philosophically my reasons for believing in school democracy. First, a participatory vote is thought of as a basic right for everyone over 18 in a democracy. By what magic is this to be awarded to youth over 18 while participatory voting in the smaller society of the school is to be denied those under 18?

Second, we are always worried about whether and what moral and political values should be transmitted in the schools, whether as hidden or overt curriculum. Common sense would say that teachers should generally advocate or help students see that stealing is wrong, when it occurs it violates the rights of others. How can such moral advocacy be done without indoctrination, without violating children's freedom of belief or ability to think critically?

If one accepted the idea that the teacher can be an advocate for certain moral content, what are the limits of advocacy? The teacher in real life has to go beyond being a process facilitator, a Socratic questioner or a Carl Rogers type of reflector and supporter of development. This stance of teacher as process facilitator is quite workable for hypothetical moral dilemmas, but if there is, for example, an actual episode of stealing, the teacher is going to become an advocate. But advocacy is not indoctrination in the context of democracy.

In terms of teaching method, moral advocacy of justice is not indoctrinative if carried out through the appeal to reasons which the teacher and students sincerely accept, rather than through the appeal to the teacher's authority or power. In terms of teacher attitude advocacy of justice by the teacher can and should be based on an attitude of respect for the student as autonomous moral agent. Finally in terms of consequences, should stimulate discussion as an autonomous moral agent, and critical reflection, not blind fixed belief. I believe that the most effective approach in preventing advocacy from being indoctrination is the establishment of participatory or direct democracy in the classroom or in the school. The teacher should only advocate as one individual, the first among equals, speaking from a rational point of view and not from one that relies on authority and power.

Undoubtedly, reducing the educator's power to that of legitimate advocate in a structure of school participatory or direct democracy raises alarm of mob rule or chaos in the school. Before giving examples from our experience that this need not happen, let me explain the just community theory which explains why direct democracy should not lead to chaos or injustice though students outnumber teachers.

Just community theory postulate that all older children and adolescent have two central moral

concerns or passions. The first is a passion for justice whatever this stage of justice of the student. The worst thing a student can say about a teacher or a school is that is unfair. The second is passion for community, for a sense of membership in a group which has collective solidarity, care and loyalty. The theory does not romantically postulate that students are always or naturally wise or good. It does postulate students are usually responsive to teacher advocacy which is fair and is at a somewhat higher stage than their own, in a context of reciprocity and equality.

Major exceptions occur when the teacher's advocacy for justice faces student loyalty to a student or peer community which is a *we group* opposed to the teacher's *they group*. Teachers have little influence on student morality in a *we-they* school society. Let me use as an example a discussion by a trained staff worker and educator with four students in a youth correctional center. The four students had blanketed or beaten up a fifth student for ratting, for reporting a theft to a staff member. In retaliation the student had been beaten bloody by the four students. No amount of rational discussion and questioning the four students as to how they would have felt if they were beaten up, if they were stolen from or if everybody stole, would change the students mind that beating up was fair retaliation. The educator was up against what the students called "the code". The code was what we call a collective expectation or norm of a peer group, with some collective solidarity, it was part of its moral culture. The code was in total opposition to the moral expectations of the adults in authority who were powerless to change it in a *we-they* society. How can educators change the peer group moral culture? Only by creating a common community including both students and teachers. In some school we have studied educators and students share values from the same social class and religion and create a common community or moral culture without direct democracy. But, in most schools we have studied, there are two cultures, a student culture and a staff culture in conflict. In such schools, we think only democracy can work to make a common moral culture. With democracy educators and students must work to make a common community with democratically agreed upon norms, expectations, rules and disciplines. We should think of democracy as not only helping

free students from a sense of being bound by Bureaucratic authority but also as freeing them from the tyranny of peer group pressure and retaliation.

The just community approach uses appeals to justice and to solidarity to support a common morality. It appeals to justice to develop a sense of community and a sense of collective solidarity, to develop justice of community. Fairness and respect between students and between teachers and students builds a sense of community, a sense of belonging to a good or worthwhile group. A sense of solidarity and shared valuing of the group and its goals makes students feel the importance of acting fairly. If students vote for and make rules and disciplines, they feel they own the rules, they identify with them. For instance if they make rules against cheating themselves based on the unfairness of cheating to each other and to the teacher, violations of the rules will be felt as self-contradictory violations of their own standards, as a contradiction of the self's integrity as well as being felt as a harm to the community. I shall illustrate the interplay between justice and community by episodes from the schools where we have consulted recently. One is the Scarsdale Alternative School, part of a wealthy suburban high school outside New York city. The other is the Roosevelt community cluster, part of the Theodore Roosevelt high school in the south Bronx, New York city, a very poor neighborhood of blacks and Puerto Ricans. Roosevelt High School has the highest rate of dropout, violence and theft in New York. In spite of these great differences in high school and neighborhood both Scarsdale and Bronx direct democracy clusters have similar structure. Each has 100 students and four teachers. The four teachers each teach one class which includes in curriculum literature and social studies.

More important, each teacher has one meeting a week with their students, a core or advisory group meeting to discuss and outline alternatives of an issue coming before the whole community meeting of 100 for a democratic discussion and vote. This core or advisory meeting is preceded by an agenda committee of the teachers and some representative students to determine the issue to be dealt with by the community.

After the four separate core class meetings, all one hundred students and teachers meet in a two

hour democratic community or student welfare not one of administration or curriculum, two students chair the meeting supported by a teacher friend of the chair. After the community meeting, two students from each core group and two teachers meet as a fairness or discipline committee on another day. Part of the function of the fairness or discipline committee is to establish facts and recommend discipline for rule violations. Part is to mediate perceived incidents of unfairness between student and student, or student and teacher.

Eventually we hope each direct democracy cluster will elect student representatives, along with teacher and staff representatives to the school wide councils or boards discussed by Bob Howard.

Let me illustrate from Scarsdale and the Bronx how two issues of justice and two issues of caring or altruistic concern were resolved in community meetings by direct democracy.

While Scarsdale is wealthy and free of theft and violence, cheating is widespread in the large high school where competition for grades is intense.

Teachers, parents and students have high academic expectation and positively evaluate *competitive* achievement for grades, a pressure which influences students to use illicit means (i.e., cheating) to achieve. Peers, in particular, not only condone the use of illicit means to get good grades but may actually expect each other's help and ignore cheating, conflicting with official or teacher-based norms against cheating, a variation of the not ratting norm of the delinquent center. A student in the regular Scarsdale High School described it in an anonymous letter to the local newspaper, saying, Scarsdale's biggest problem is that nobody is happy. Priding itself on being a great prep school, they have created a hellish atmosphere... The pressure is evident in many facets of the school. What people do for good grades is unbelievable. Obviously, there is much cheating in Scarsdale. As an aware student, I approximate that 95 percent of the students will cheat without guilt whenever they need something. This habit is taught to them by the school, not dissuaded at all...

It should be noted that developing a peer-supported norm against cheating is more difficult than developing one against stealing. Peer group norms against stealing from one another develop readily because peers are clear victims of unfairness in stealing. In the case of cheating, those most obvi-

ously concerned or victimized are the teachers, so that peer group norms in favor of cheating can develop in an atmosphere in which students are a "we-group" distinct from a "they-group" of teachers. Strong collective norms against cheating can usually be only developed if the peer group and the teacher group are seen as members of a common community making community norms fair to teachers as well as to students. This is, in fact, what happened at Scarsdale.

In 1982 Judy Cidding, the director, held a core or advisory group meeting in which students talked about the cheating that took place when they had been in the regular Scarsdale High School and about the moral atmosphere that made it acceptable there. In answer to her question: "Is cheating widespread at the school?", Sam answered, "It's very common at the high school, there's the opportunity to cheat and get away with it. Teachers can't really keep their eyes on every student. There's a feeling that your friend is going to help you if you don't know the answers."

The norms of friendship and affiliation, especially strong at Stage 3, create a peer counter-norm to honesty. In the cheating situation, not only peer norms but parental expectations act as semi moral forces which actually prevent students from making judgements of responsibility not to cheat. To fulfill parental expectations and "making them feel happy". Rick said, "I got a lot of pressures from my parents and in the ninth grade I was saying, 'OK, it's your first year of high school, you have to do well', and I was just cheating because I wanted to do well and make my parents happy". Going on to describe how other students acted, he said, "I just know there has to be in other people's minds that parental pressure of 'I have to do good on this test or my Dad is going to kill me'. That's how it was for me so I cheated".

The net combination of these factors was to create a collective student norm in the regular high school where no one had a responsibility to refrain from cheating though many did not really think cheating was right.

In the Scarsdale Alternative School a community meeting was held about making and enforcing a rule against cheating after an episode of cheating occurred. «I disagree that under pressure people have no responsibility not to cheat. I was under a lot of pressure and I was hysterical I was going to

fail this test. But I'm saying is that cheating isn't necessary. The reason for cheating is that people are lazy and don't want to study so they make up crib sheets. It's not responsible or fair to those who don't cheat».

Other students gave reasons against cheating not in terms of fairness or justice but in terms of community valuing. A male student said, «It goes with being in a community. Ending cheating is a good direction for our community, it's for the benefit of our community». Judy, the director, advocated for a shared norm against cheating by invoking the value of such a norm for the mutual trust necessary for a community, including teachers and students. She said:

«Cheating is an issue that can really divide our community, students against teachers in terms of cheating. It sounds like on this issue that it's we against them because obviously teachers don't participate in cheating. Peter, you were asking for reasons in this school. It's because it's fundamental to our school that there's trust within the community. You know my attitude when I give a test. It's based on trust. I would hate to mistrust people in the community. When people say it's not so bad cheating on a little test because you won't ever take it again and it's not relevant to your later life, it ignores a decision about trust which can divide the community».

Another teacher advocated a norm against cheating not in terms of community but in terms of the injustice of cheating. He said, «You have to see that cheating is hurting other people as a way to get ahead. I can't imagine you can think that's a principle you can live by despite all the temptation we talked about». While making a rule against cheating was soon agreed upon, the question of how to enforce this rule was extremely controversial. The teachers proposed that not only the faculty but the other students had the responsibility to enforce the rule by confronting other students they saw cheating. From the start the faculty were concerned that the students share in responsibility for enforcement of agreed upon norms. In our theoretical language, they were determined that the collective against cheating should reach a high phase of persuasion to desist from rule violation or to confront someone who had violated the rule. Their reasons to the students were that teachers and students belonged to a democratic or equal community and that it was

not fair to the faculty to leave it to them to be the policemen or enforcers of a rule arrived at by the whole group. As stated by one of the teachers:

«Is it fair in a democratic school to make these rules and then shuffle down to the teacher's corner for their enforcement? There are certain rules that we make and the problem of who finds out about violation of them and who enforces them doesn't arise. But for others that are hard to enforce like this one I would say if we can't enforce it together we can't make it together. We don't own it. It's all our responsibility to deal with the cheating problem. If John sees someone cheating, why is it any different from my seeing someone cheating?».

The meeting voted that if students know that another student cheated, it is their responsibility to confront the cheater. The decision against supported rules and justice primarily.

A more student centered decision resolved a conflict between rules and the welfare of a single student. The issue at hand was whether or not to expel Lisa, a first year tenth grade student: this meant that she would return to the regular Scarsdale high school program where she had been very unhappy and done quite poorly. The staff, in a staff meeting, had unanimously decided that such a return would be best for the school community and possibly for Lisa herself. Until the threat of expulsion became imminent, she had regularly cut classes in spite of many reminders. She had frequently been verbally abusive to the staff, something almost unheard of in the school. The teachers felt she had not made the necessary to the alternative school and that she was taking time and energy that the other students should receive.

The larger community meeting began with a statement by the director that the decision would be a community decision. She asked students to think about the issue from Lisa's point of view, from the staff's point of view, and from the point of view of the whole community. Then a spokesperson for the staff read a report recommending expulsion and giving the reasons for it.

The two students chairing the meeting asked for student discussion. Many hands went up. One of the first to speak was Sharon, who proposed that the school was strong enough as a community to form a support group for Lisa. Even if Lisa wasn't sufficiently self-disciplined to come to class regularly,

others should help her and put some daily pressure on her to come to class. Other students then made comments supporting Sharon's position, one student saying he took pride in the community but would value it less if they didn't try to support Lisa. Other students were more critical of Lisa's behavior, expressing doubts about the community's ability to help her. One student commented, "No one else had an attendance problem like Lisa's. Why should the community tolerate it? Another student said, «I didn't know this was supposed to be a therapeutic community. It's a community... That means we all care about each member of the school, with or without problems».

After still more discussion, Lisa was asked to comment. In tears, she asked to have another chance and stay in the school. It was as if a Stage 3 awareness was dawning in her as to what the school could be for her, that it could be a place where people cared. The discussion continued, other students remarking that being a caring community sounded good but who would really take the responsibility? At this point several students individually volunteered to assume responsibility for Lisa. Her alternatives were outlined on the blackboard: (1) Stay in the school; (2) Stay in the school on probation, with an individual contract to be worked out with the staff; (3) Expulsion with the chance to return the following year if she did well in the regular school. Lisa was then asked how she herself would vote, and answered, «Stay in the school on probation». Extensive discussion followed, with signs that some staff members were changing their minds. An hour and a half later a vote was called for. Lisa initially wanted to leave the room so she would not see who voted against her, but eventually agreed to stay. Of the seventy-six voting members present all but four voted for Lisa to stay. In the days after the meeting a contract between Lisa, her advisor, and a support group of students was worked out. Lisa met once a week with the support; for the rest of the year she not only attended all classes, but her work improved and her abusive or disrespectful language disappeared.

Let me now turn to an issue bringing justice and community together this fall in the first year of the Bronx community cluster.

A day long outward bound type excursion day was planned for the fall. The students readily accepted the teachers proposals that no drugs or al-

cohol should be allowed on the trip and proposed no knives or guns should be allowed either.

The excursion was a great success with no violations of these two rules and a good time and a sense of sharing by all.

The next day, however, a teacher told me twenty dollars had been stolen from her purse by one of the students, she didn't know who. She was apprehensive about casting this light of gloom on a happy event and confronting the students with the problem. Let the discipline or fairness committee investigate the facts of the theft, I suggested, your obligation is to confront the community with this violation of fairness.

The teacher announced the problem at the community meeting and it was agreed that the thief be given the opportunity to anonymously retribute before the next meeting. A few students suggested that if it was not returned the whole community should contribute 25 cents to make the twenty dollars to the teacher. The money was not returned and the next week, a discussion about collective restitution was held. Many students said that the teacher had been helping them and they should help the teacher. Some students said it was not their responsibility, they had not attended the trip. A student asked the teachers if they would support collective restitution for a student victim of theft, the answer of course being that it was one community in terms of helping.

The majority vote was that the community ask each member for a voluntary contribution but that it would not be obligatory or required. A bag was passed around the room. The result, ten dollars and some notes meant to be humorous. Several students expressed disappointment, and the bag was passed again. This time ten more dollars and no humorous notes. The teacher victim said her trust in the community was reinforced and she would give the twenty dollars to the community activity fund for a later social event.

This of course did not end the discussion of stealing. Teachers asked students how many had been stolen from. The majority had. The teacher coordinator Al, pointed out that even in the community meeting students kept on their coats in a hot room, and students admitted they were worried about being stolen from. The students agreed that even though there was a general school rule against stealing, they needed to make their own agreement

against stealing and bring a possible violator before the discipline committee. Now students and teachers leave their belongings freely in the community meeting and classroom. Thus teacher support for a community ideal of trust and collective responsibility helps build norms of justice or individual rights, if students and teachers are felt as equals. The community ideal helps even poor and deprived students reach out beyond themselves to help others.

This spring the Harvard research project paid two dollars to each student in the control group sample for answering interviews and questionnaires. The community cluster had agreed to do these interviews when they volunteered for the program. In a community meeting, students said it was not fair that Harvard should pay the control students but not them. I agreed and said Harvard would pay each student two dollars but the community should decide what to do with it. Some students suggested keeping it, some giving it to the Cluster community activity fund, some giving it to a charity like Icu-kemia. Only a minority wanted to keep it themselves. Those who most wanted to reach out beyond themselves had to clarify the reasoning, Nelson, a leader said «if we keep the two dollars we give ourselves some extra food and drink. What do we get, heartburn. If we give it to sick children we help them and we get an award, our community gets a good reputation and fame». Another student challenged this collective egoism, saying no one would notice. Nelson answered, yes, I guess it must be because it makes you feel good inside to help a sick child. It was voted to split the money between the community activity fund charity. Yesterday, Ann Higgins reported the many measures of school climate, of moral reasoning stage and moral behavior we use to evaluate these programs. In the Bronx,

the school director does not wait for our numbers, he has come to community meeting and hears about student behavior in the classes and halls. On this basis, he has decided to start another community cluster for the students with the highest rate of inattentance and failure.

In Portugal, here at the University of Minho, there is a plan which is in advance of our in America. João and Júlia Formosinho and colleagues have decided to start a teacher-preparation program based on the democratic principles. Obviously this would be an ideal way to bring democratic education into the schools through experience and commitment to the process.

RESUMO

O artigo chama a atenção para o facto de, querendo ou não, todo o professor ser um educador moral. Esta é mais uma razão que aponta para a necessidade de os professores debaterem este tema. Passa então a apresentar as experiências de desenvolvimento moral iniciadas em Harvard em 1968 e que evoluíram de discussões socráticas, dentro da sala de aula, a partir de dilemas reais ou actuais, para o envolvimento de toda a escola no processo educativo.

ABSTRACT

This article calls our attention to the fact that, willingly or not, every teacher is a moral educator. This is one more reason for the teachers to debate this theme.

Then it refers to the experiments on moral development that began in Harvard in 1968. These experiments had their starting point in dilemma discussions centered in the classroom, which developed in order to involve the whole school in the moral development educational process.