

A comparison of different approaches to moral education

The development of moral capacities in regular and democratic schools in the Netherlands

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“The parents must exercise patience, secure in the thought that the child has been born good, and that he inevitably will turn out to be a good human being if he is not crippled and thwarted in his natural development by interference. [...] there is no need whatsoever to teach children how to behave. A child will learn what is right and what is wrong in good time – provided he is not pressured.”

A.S. Neill, founder and headmaster of Summerhill (1962)

“Children and adolescents need others to be able to cultivate themselves, among who teachers, who can offer knowledge and expertise, and can model certain values and ideals in their behaviour. [...] But this is not the only thing: a teacher, by being who he is and doing what he does, is always cultivating, intentional and unintentional.”¹

Onderwijsraad in their rapport *Onderwijs vormt* (2011)

Summary

Although the development of moral competence of children is often seen as a family matter, schools have a major impact on the moral development of their students and should therefore see it as their task to nurture this. In this thesis different methods and approaches to moral education of both regular and democratic schools are compared. To this end, first a common sense and theory neutral conception of moral agency is offered and three essential core capacities for moral agency are stated, being the ability to engage in critical discussion, to sympathise, and to act for the right reasons cross-situationally. Subsequently, a summary of both school systems is provided (chapter two), followed by an analysis of how certain methods for moral education, implemented in the unique framework of each school system, could suitably enhance these three core capacities of moral agency (chapter three). While both school systems use modelling, verbal instruction, and rules and reinforcements as ways to influence the moral development of their students, democratic school's vision on education (the role of teachers; the physical, formal and informal environment it offers; etc.) offers extra valuable support for the realisation of capacities of moral agency. Although the traditional mainstream school system has the possibility to provide all students with the same moral education, it does fall short on many aspects. But while democratic schools prioritise the moral education of their students to a greater extent, they are not able to secure the development of all three core capacities in all their students either. I will conclude by recommending small changes that each school system could implement to enhance the moral development of their students, leaving their own vision on which framework is desirable for education in general intact.

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While raising children was once a matter involving a whole community, it is now often seen as a family affair. While once the consequences of your actions only had an impact on a local scale, they now seem to influence global problems. This increasing individualisation regarding raising children, together with the increasing complexity and urgency of moral problems, forms the motivation to re-think moral education. First of all, we cannot simply expect people to mature their moral senses from some innate generic program sufficiently to be equipped with all skills that are needed to handle these moral problems sufficiently. Second, it would be naive to expect that all parents offer this kind of moral education to their children. And even if they did, providing children with skills and an understanding of moral values gains in efficiency when the development is supported in all different social contexts of the child – at home, at family or friend’s homes, during sports training, and at school.

In this paper I will focus on how different school systems approach the moral education of their students. ‘Moral education’ implies that educators play at least a contributory role. This does not need to be through intentional instruction, but can also be through the social environment, exemplary behaviour of teachers, or experiences that school offers. Moral education concerns moral development, which I understand as the improvement of (one’s ability to) identify a moral problem, reason about

* I would like to thank Sander Werkhoven for his support and critical feedback during the realisation of this thesis. Thanks also to all my interlocutors who offered me insight into their regular or democratic school experience and how this has possibly influenced the strengths and weaknesses of their current moral behaviour. I am especially grateful for the clarity and lively (counter)examples of Johan Wester and Lucas van Duin, as they have helped me escape from my moments of confusion.

¹ Onderwijsraad, *Onderwijs vormt* (Den Haag: Onderwijsraad, 2011). Published online at <https://www.onderwijsraad.nl/publicaties/2011/onderwijs-vormt/volledig/item281>. “Om zich te kunnen vormen hebben kinderen en jongeren anderen nodig, waaronder leraren, die kennis aanreiken en deskundigheid tonen en die bepaalde waarden of idealen in hun handelen laten zien. [...] Maar dit is niet het enige: een leraar is met wie hij is en hoe hij optreedt altijd vormend bezig, bedoeld en onbedoeld.”

what ought to be done, an individual's intention to act, and the actual (prosocial) behaviour.² Ideas about how schools can contribute to the moral development of children differ immensely between school systems, as do their visions on education, their ideas about important character traits that should be developed, and to see moral education as school's responsibility (as opposed to merely a family matter) differs. The aim of this paper is to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different methods for moral education used in two types of primary and secondary schools which I will respectively call regular and democratic education. To be able to do this, an understanding of the aim of moral education – what it means to be a moral agent – needs to be discussed first. In chapter one I will offer a common sense and theory-neutral description of moral agency and present three core capacities that are essential to this. In chapter two I will describe two school systems and their approach to moral education. While regular schools are the mainstream school system, democratic schools, characterised by the freedom and responsibility they trust their students with, is still highly controversial. In chapter three I will compare the specific methods they use for moral education, and analyse to what extent they could support the cultivation of either of the three core capacities. To conclude, I will recommend small but promising changes that both school systems could implement aiming at a more thorough development of moral agency in their students. While I respect each vision on how children should be educated, I will show that both systems can learn a lot from the other approach.

² Gibbons, Sandra L. and Vickie Ebbeck, "The effect of different teaching strategies on the moral development of physical education students," in *Journal of teaching in physical education* vol. 17 (1997): 89.

I A common sense view of moral agency

In this section I will present a common sense view of what it means to be a moral agent as an adult.³ In doing this, I aim not to commit myself to specific (normative) ethical or educational theories, but rather to provide a relatively common sense picture of what it means to be a moral agent that should appeal to philosophers, teachers and lay people of all persuasions. In the first part I will elaborate my focus. This will be both pragmatic and instrumental, which means that I will often not touch upon (meta-ethical) debates about certain aspects of morality when I do not think this is needed to reach my final goal: analysing different approaches to moral education. After this I will describe a broad list of conditions that seem necessary to reach moral agency. As it is not possible to discuss possible links between all used moral educational methods and the possible cultivation of these conditions, I will present three core capacities that form the framework of these earlier described conditions. These three capacities are neither sufficient for moral agency nor a direct reduction of the conditions described earlier; they merely offer a framework that captures the most important elements of the common sense view of moral agency.

Focus

Morality comes into play when the consequences of your actions affect others.⁴ I am not taking a consequentialist turn here – even Kantians would agree that taking the possible consequences of your actions into consideration is a necessary ingredient of morality and practical reasoning.⁵ Affecting other people can either happen directly or indirectly, and can happen on a small scale, e.g. among friends, or on a big scale, e.g. regarding national politics or global problems.

What can or cannot be called a *moral* act is often controversial. However, clear and relatively uncontroversial instances of *immoral* acts are more easily found. All of us would repel murdering innocent people, unnecessary lying or exploiting someone's bargaining weaknesses (when there are good alternatives). Often this common sense feeling of immorality is grounded in that we should

³ This differs from the question of whether children can be moral agents and if so, how. I will not go into this, as most normative ethical theories agree that (especially young) children cannot be moral agents. Therefore, I will focus on what a child needs to do or achieve to grow into moral adulthood. However, children can of course still act *the same way* a moral agent would, and it would probably be wise to nurture this as well to some extent.

⁴ I will not go into the question of whether you can be immoral to yourself.

⁵ For example, decades ago, when the world did not camp with possible destructive climate change and overpopulation, eating meat could barely be called a moral issue (when one does not take the possible rights of animals into account). However, nowadays, when the meat industry is excessively polluting and there are many more sustainable alternatives, one could argue that (supporting) big scale and intensive stock farming is a moral issue.

respect other people as autonomous beings. Therefore, unnecessary and excessive imposition on other's ability to fulfil their basic needs (and probably more) can safely said to be immoral. For this reason – our agreement on the immorality of many forms of behaviour – I will describe this common sense account of moral agency in terms of the absence of this immorality.⁶ This means that amorality – not thinking about an action being either moral or immoral – can often cause immoral action and should be taken into consideration as well.

The most common sense view that we can deduce from this is that we should simply (Aa) restrain from acting in a way that is clearly immoral. Ideally every adult should know and feel himself what is moral to do (in every situation) and should be motivated and able to act in accordance with this. However, the expectation of such perfect moral agency would be naive. Nevertheless, moral awareness is crucial for moral agency, and I will therefore add a less perfect, but still substantial element: (Ab) one should understand himself why certain acts are immoral. This means that it is not moral when one merely stops oneself from acting immoral because of the existence of external motivators (fear of punishment, losing one's social status) or the willingness to conform to certain etiquette. All deontologists, Humeans and virtue ethicists – despite their different ideas regarding 'why' a certain act is immoral – agree with me that acting *for the right reasons* is essential for moral acting.

However, most humans are not very good at changing one's moral behaviour all by themselves. Most change in moral beliefs happens in social interaction or in interaction with stories of others, e.g. via television programs or books.⁷ Therefore to be a moral agent (B) one should take initiative to make others aware of the immorality of their actions (when they are not aware of this) and stop others from acting in a way that is clearly immoral. So even though you are simply witnessing your neighbour being excessively violent towards his child in the supermarket, ignorant bystanding is not allowed on the picture of moral agency I will use.⁸

I believe that many problems – within the family, but also on local and global scale – that excessively and negatively influence people's autonomy are directly or indirectly caused by the actions and decisions of other humans. For this reason, (A) and (B) focused on the removal of immoral behaviour (of yourself and others). However, sometimes people find themselves in very poor conditions without this being the fault of others. One may lose everything in an earthquake, or simply

⁶ I agree with the possible critical response that it is indeed possible to phrase morality simply as 'morality is x'. I simply do not choose for the latter phrasing because of the pragmatic (noncontroversial) purpose of this paper. I do not equal 'being a perfect moral agent' to 'not doing things that are clearly immoral'. This has to do with the difference between not crossing lines that are not/barely ever allowed to cross (similar to not crossing deontological constraints – described below in (A)) and actively 'doing something extra' (in a not self-destructing way). The latter is similar to Kant's imperfect duties, i.e. it is still immoral when you never act this way but it is impossible to help humanity with every problem she has. This is described below in (B) and (C)).

⁷ Haidt, Jonathan, et al., "The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology," in *Science* no. 316 (2007): 999.

⁸ This is not included in (A) as acting clearly immoral yourself should *always* be prevented, while stopping *every* other human being from acting immoral when they do so is not feasible. One should participate in influencing others to act as described in (A) which is why (B) is still very demanding. So not being able to do so in every instance does not make you immoral.

fall ill, fall of a cliff, be in a car accident or simply need help because of the passage of time. A moral agent (C) should help those people in dire need, independent of her own involvement in the matter. Again, your ability to help others depends on your resources and even when these are sufficient it is impossible to help every person. Nevertheless, moral agency includes helping those in dire need to some extent and not being ignorant about these people.

Conditions

To achieve the kind of moral agency as described above people need to have certain feelings, experiences, habits, values, knowledge, skills – and probably even more. I will name these, regardless of their subjective or objective character, ‘capacities’ because of practical reasons. The context of one’s moral decision-making, e.g. whether you are in a hurry or live in autocratic or democratic regime, also influences your decisions. Next to capacities of the individual I will include these situational influences to some extent, insofar as they are relevant for the purpose of my paper.

To decide whether an action is wrong, one needs to link her own actions to its possible (or likely) consequences. This linking can happen via individual reflection on this, but happens most frequently when confronted with the consequences brought about by others. This confrontation comes in two forms. First of all, the person that is influenced by your action can confront you with this. She can show you *that* your action affected her (in case you were not aware of this), but most importantly she can offer a first-hand story about *what* it was like. For example, you may have assumed that replacing your friend’s vase after you broke it was the good thing to do, but you did not consider the emotional significance of the vase and were therefore not aware of another consequence of your accident – your friend feeling sad. When your friend confronts you with her feelings, you may feel responsible for the consequences of your actions in a new way. Second, people who were not affected by your actions can inform you of its effects on others. This is especially important when your actions (indirectly) influence events literally or metaphorically far away. For example, your brother may inform you that the piece of clothing you are about to buy was very likely made in sweatshops where child labour was commonplace. This information is critical to show the undesirable effect of something you thought to be very innocent. To a certain amount one should be willing to research the possible effects of one’s actions, but a society where this information is transparently obtained and publicly shared is also important, e.g. via television programs as *de Keuringsdienst van Waarde* or websites as *Rank a Brand*.

Once one knows the consequences of one’s actions, one should be able to decide upon the wrongness or rightness of it. Again, being confronted by others helps to equip you with reasons and feelings to make you reconsider the moral issue. A moral agent should be equipped with the skills and courage that is needed to participate in and start a critical and fruitful discussion with others about the moral status of one’s own or other’s actions. This includes being able to express your beliefs, to critically scrutinise your own and other’s views, to actively listen to other’s stories, to use clear

language, to be willing to change your beliefs when someone gives you solid reason to do so, etc. It is necessary to see all possible future interlocutors – despite their differences (from you) – as worthy of equal recognition and concern.

An important part of being concerned with others and trying to understand them is sympathising with them, i.e. being able to recognise an emotion in others and being able to communicate with this. However, often people's (well developed) ability to sympathise with others only extends to people close to them or people just like them. Moral agency requires the ability to sympathise with people we do not have daily contact with or are very different from us, e.g. hold different (extreme) beliefs, have different preferences, have a different physical appearance or have different vulnerabilities. But as it is impossible to be confronted by others in every new situation or to discuss moral issues with all people who are different from us, a certain amount of abstraction is needed. One needs to be able to generalise and apply one's existing experiences, knowledge and values to (groups of) people and situations that one is not directly familiar with.

Finally, once one has rightly decided that an action is morally wrong, one should not act this way. The common sense view regarding motivation for acting morally consists on the one hand of a belief that reasons for (not) acting should survive demands of consistency and coherency. On the other hand, we acknowledge that most of the time our actions and decisions are largely motivated through our feelings and subjective beliefs about moral issues. Taking an elaborated stance on what it exactly is or should be that motivates pursuing only right actions and not pursuing wrong actions – whether this should be purely rational matter (as Kantians would argue) or happens purely through sentiments (as Humeans would argue) or springs from a nuanced and grey area in between – is not needed for a common sense description of the conditions for moral agency. I will assume that both the ratio and sentiments play a role in moral decision-making, and that the proportion of actual influence of both 'camps' differs for each person. Obviously, the environment of the moral actor should not prevent him from acting on his moral decisions.

Three core capacities

In the remainder of this paper I will analyse which educational methods seem most promising to cultivate moral agency in children. Even though the above described list of conditions all seem necessary for moral agency, I will describe three core capacities that I believe to be most central for moral agency and can be cultivated and nurtured in individuals (via moral education). These three capacities are neither sufficient for my common sense description of moral agency nor cover all conditions described above. From here on situational influences will be seen as a (possible) means to improve or weaken the development of these individual capacities.

First of all, critical thinking and being able to engage in a fruitful discussion seem inevitable for moral agency. As Martha Nussbaum puts it in *Cultivating Humanity*: this is the “capacity for

critical examination of oneself and one's traditions."⁹ We should not simply accept beliefs as authoritative, but only accept beliefs when they correspond to demands as consistency and justification. All major normative ethical theories endorse the importance of critical examination of one's values.

However, Nussbaum rightly sees that we often "neglect needs and capacities that link us to fellow citizens who live at a distance or who look different from ourselves."¹⁰ Therefore, people need "an ability to see themselves not simply as citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern."¹¹ To feel connected with those people we need an

[...] ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. [...] [Part of this is the] ability to decipher such meaning through the use of the imagination.¹²

Some people argue that this form of empathy is needed to sympathise with others who live distantly from us. I think however, that mere sympathy is enough to get a deeper understanding of why others think differently and therefore why the judgement of the moral status of an action can differ between interlocutors. I therefore see the ability to sympathise as the second core capacity. However, it is important that this ability to sympathise with others is sufficiently developed that it also extends to people who are very different or distant from oneself.

Sympathising and critically scrutinising one's values and beliefs will probably equip people with the tools they need to prevent immoral acting in many known situations. However, to engage with new people in new situations, one needs a more abstract understanding of moral goodness that can be generalised to new situations. I do not think that this abstract understanding and the ability to generalise this cross-situationally is necessarily a direct result of the first two core capacities. One can be very good at discussing fairness with like-minded people or sympathising with the homeless guy at one's local supermarket, but acting with an awareness about people who are very different from you or live very far away can still be missing. Therefore, third, I see the capacity to act for the right reasons *across situations* as essential for moral agency. This means that, because of a thorough understanding of why a certain principle, moral law or a virtue is virtuous one is able to generalise this to different unknown situations.

To summarise, I have just described three core capacities [CC] that I argue to be three fundamental conditions to moral agency. I do not argue that these are conclusive or sufficient for

⁹ Nussbaum, Martha C., *Cultivating Humanity* (U.S.A: Harvard University Press, 2003): 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 10-1.

moral agency, but for practical reasons I will merely use these three essential capacities in my analysis, instead of the wide list of conditions described in the previous section. Also for practical reasons, I will call these conditions for moral agency, despite the greater nuance than the name would suggest, the capacity to [CC1] engage in a critical discussion, [CC2] sympathise and [CC3] act for right reasons cross-situationally.

II Two approaches to moral education

In this chapter I will describe two diverse approaches to education that subsequently imply different approaches to moral education. I will offer a neutral description of each, without taking a stance on which method seems more effective or desirable, based on current practice and the underlying persuasions. First I will analyse the mainstream approach to moral education in most regular primary and secondary schools in the Netherlands at the moment. As a great variety of schools fall under the label ‘regular school’, I will specify my choice. I include all schools that are not named in the second half of this chapter under alternative forms of education; do not teach according to a strict religious dogma (linked to the divine command theory); and are aimed at teaching ‘the average child’, meaning that I exclude schools developed especially for children with e.g. great learning difficulty, mental disabilities or giftedness. Using a report from the *Onderwijsraad*, the Board of Education, I will link this trend in education to a moral educational practice based on Bandura’s social learning theory and a minimal form of deontology. Second I will analyse a more ‘free’ and controversial form of education which is highly influenced by the example school *Summerhill* and the experiences and beliefs of its headmaster A.S. Neill.

Regular schools

Even though the schools that I have labelled as ‘regular schools’ all have their own focus and characteristics – sports, drama, music, vocational education – I believe that their approach to moral education is very similar which makes it possible for me to analyse them as a more or less homogenous group. These regular schools are all characterised by offering education to groups of students, each class varying between 20 and 30 students. The students are sorted by age (and often also by their intellectual capacity) to create a more homogenous group. In primary schools children usually have the same teacher for all subjects, while in secondary schools students move to a different classroom with a different teacher several times a day – teachers are experts in their subject and teach according to a strict schedule and method (being e.g. books or computer programs). In both primary and secondary education children learn according to a pre-set curriculum, though free choice courses are often offered. Most students are not included in decision-making or organising boards, which means that children have little influence on their own the content and pace of their learning process.

Moral education is not offered as a special subject, though alternatives that partially aim at the moral development of students are often presented. Citizenship¹³ is a mandatory subject for one year in upper secondary school; philosophy is a free choice subject in upper (and sometimes lower) secondary schools; and depending on the school, religious education¹⁴ is either mandatory or can be chosen for at least several years, in both primary and secondary schools.

Moral education in regular schools

Educational laws or general curricula rarely explicitly talk about moral education. They often do mention the cultivation of the individual, the teaching of democratic values, and to a certain extent gaining moral insights into living in a pluralistic society. The *Onderwijsraad* described the cultivation of the individual, including the moral side of it, as

[...] the transfer of knowledge in a broad sense, which means informing children and adolescents of the knowledge and traditions that build our society. Acquiring knowledge becomes cultivation when one also includes guiding notions: (moral) insights, values and ideals that show what is true, what is of value, and what is right and appropriate. Knowledge about this offers orientation and makes forming a sensible judgement possible; somebody is able to do this when he can apply this knowledge with assessment and wisdom.¹⁵

Though the rapport clearly talks about a mixture of moral education and teaching norms and values of society, the examples that are used throughout the rapport do not explicitly touch upon clear moral issues. For example, they mention the prevention of littering. However, this chiefly aims at maintaining the social order in school and a clean school environment, rather than the moral development of students. The difference between these are that the prevention of littering is mostly a behavioural change in students aiming at a more manageable school environment, while moral education both focuses on the individual's behaviour and the development of proper moral intention and reasoning. The absence of proper examples regarding moral issues shows that the *Onderwijsraad's* aim is clearly not solely the moral development of students.

To cultivate the individual, whether purely moral or otherwise, the board mentions three methods that teachers and schools should use to bring this into practice: through the delegation of

¹³ In Dutch: maatschappijleer.

¹⁴ Or the Dutch 'levensbeschouwing', a non-religious equivalent.

¹⁵ Onderwijsraad, *Onderwijs vormt*. "Vorming is kennisoverdracht in brede zin, dat wil zeggen kinderen en jongeren laten kennisnemen van alles wat aan kennis en tradities in de samenleving is opgebouwd. Kennisverwerving wordt vormend wanneer daarbij ook wordt ingegaan op richtinggevende noties: (morele) inzichten, waarden en idealen die aangeven wat waar, van waarde, en juist en zinvol is. Kennis hiervan biedt oriëntatie en maakt een verstandig oordeel mogelijk; iemand is daardoor in staat verworven kennis 'met beoordeling en wijsheid' toe te passen."

knowledge, exemplary behaviour and setting rules.¹⁶ Though many alternative schools accuse regular schools' conception of learning to be based in behaviourism, I would argue that these methods are more nuanced, and clearly reflect Bandura's social learning theory (SLT). While behaviourism states that a change in behaviour can only occur after explicit external influence through rules, punishment and rewards, the SLT sees learning not as purely behavioural but also as a cognitive process. The mind is perceived as a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*,¹⁷ and the social context of the actor is of great importance to his learning process. In this social context, learning occurs via direct observation, i.e. observing the behaviour of others, and indirect observation, i.e. observing the consequences of the behaviour of others, e.g. getting punished or gaining social status. This so called modelling happens via 'live performances' by actual persons demonstrating desirable behaviour, via verbal instruction, or via symbolic, e.g. through media. Thus, moral competence is acquired via empirical observation and explicit instruction, and morality is therefore a product of socialisation and internalisation¹⁸ – this theory of Bandura is precisely in line with how the *Onderwijsraad*'s rapport talks about moral education.

Though modelling can be an implicit affair, verbal instruction and setting boundaries are inherently explicit. This explicit moral education comes in different forms, each arguing from a different conception of moral agency linked to a major normative ethical theory. First, and used most often, is a form of moral education similar to 'minimal' deontology. One transmits duties and rules, for example 'do not steal' or 'do not lie', but only rules that are relevant for a peaceful and attractive school climate. An action is seen as permissible when it conforms to certain (moral) rules or principles.¹⁹ However, while Kantians would argue for the importance of dictating the moral law to oneself, resulting in deontological constraints and imperfect duties, this minimal deontology differs in the sense that morality is defined by subjective values of the adult world. This means that, while Kantian's final aim is the confirmation to the objective Categorical Imperative, minimal deontology offers deontological constraints without a strong theoretical background. Second, and gaining in popularity, a 'minimal' idea of character education can promote certain virtues within school, e.g. honesty, respect and fairness. However, different from the character education grounded in Aristotelian thought, these virtues are only instrumentally used as they are aimed to promote pro-social behaviour. Aristotle, on the other hand, believed that the cultivation of these virtues was necessary to be able to flourish in life. Third, religious education is often grounded in the divine command theory. Set rules reflect God's will, and this approach therefore differs from Kantianism in the sense that autonomous and rational reasoning is perceived as less relevant. But as I focus on

¹⁶ Onderwijsraad, *Onderwijs vormt*.

¹⁷ Cuyper, Stefaan E. "Moral education, moral responsibility, and deontic morality," in *Moral Education and Development*, ed. Doret J. de Ruyter and Siebren Miedema (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011): 155.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kooij, Jacomijn C. van der, Doret J. de Ruyter and Siebren Miedema. "The influence of moral education on the personal worldview of students," in *Journal of Moral Education* is. 44 no. 3 (2015): 356.

secular schools in this paper, I will only include the minimal forms of deontology and character education in my analysis.

Democratic schools

In the past decades, a wide variety of new alternative schools concepts found its popularity in the Netherlands. More traditional alternative visions on education were founded in the reformpedagogy in the 1900s and therefore these beliefs have existed for decades. Examples of these alternatives are Montessori schools (after Maria Montessori), JenaPlan education (after Peter Petersen), free schools (after Rudolf Steiner), Dalton education (after Helen Parkhurst) and Freinet education (after Célestin Freinet). Newer alternatives take giftedness very seriously (Leonardo schools) or are focused on the endless possibilities of the quick ICT development (Steve Jobs schools). In this paper I will focus on a third group of alternative school systems, one that completely trusts children's intrinsic ability and motivation to learn, and where all students are part of a democratic community. These views gained popularity through books of A.S. Neill, the founder and headmaster of Summerhill (Leiston, Suffolk, U.K.). Neill's thoughts are best materialised in Sudbury Valley schools in the U.S.A. (but there are also very small initiatives in the Netherlands e.g. *de Kampanje* in Amersfoort), in *Iederwijs* schools or in 'democratic schools', e.g. *democratische school De Ruimte Soest*. As the method of moral education does not differ much between these schools, I will refer to this third group of initiatives as 'democratic schools' for practical reasons.²⁰ I will analyse the ideology behind the school through books of Neill and Daniel Greenberg, but base my description of the daily school practice also on my own and other's experience with these schools. Where Neill's ideas differ from current educational practices in Dutch schools, I will describe the latter. For example, Dutch democratic schools use sociocracy instead of democracy as a decision-making system.²¹

Democratic schools differ from regular schools on two very important points. The first is well summarised by Greenberg:

The fundamentals of the school are simple: all people are curious beings by nature; on the long run children learn most efficiently, as the child takes the initiative of his own learning process;

²⁰ Neill calls his school a 'free school', but this is not the same as *vrije scholen* in the Netherlands, as these are based on the anthroposophical ideology of Rudolf Steiner. To avoid confusion, I chose 'democratic schools' as this is what most schools influenced by Neill's vision on education call themselves nowadays. However, also this is confusing as democratic schools in the Netherlands do not use democracy in their decision-making, but sociocracy.

²¹ In a democratic system of governance a rule or sanction is binding when the majority of the votes are in favour of it. In the sociocratic regimes used in most democratic schools in the Netherlands, a decision is binding when *none* of the students and staff-members at the meeting gives a paramount objection – an *overwiegend bezwaar*, i.e. a *well-founded* objection that is insurmountable for at least one person affected by the decision. All members are heard beforehand, and the discussion goes on until all members of the group *consents* to the plan (i.e. nobody has a paramount objection).

[...] the mix of ages of students enhances the growth of all members of the group; freedom is essential for taking personal responsibility.²²

The natural development of the child is at the centre of these schools, and education has merely a facilitating role. This is a very radical interpretation of e.g. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's natural education as presented in *Emile* or Ellen Key's *The Century of the Child*. This trusting of children's intrinsic motivation to learn and need to develop results in three freedoms that are granted to children: the freedom to choose what you want (to learn), to choose how you want to achieve this and to allow children bear the consequence of their actions.²³ For example, it is not compulsory to start learning how to read when you are five or six years old. However, when a child wants to learn how to bake an apple pie (during school time) but is not able to read the recipe, he finds out that reading (or simple maths, or knowing how to use kitchen tools) is needed in life and he therefore becomes motivated to learn this. Freedom is understood as "doing what you like, so long as it does not interfere with the freedom of others. The result is self-discipline."²⁴ Translated to daily school practice this means that there are no (compulsory) classes offered, and children are not obligated to learn about certain subjects or take exams. A child can decide what she wants to learn for herself. This means that there is no discipline from the outside imposed on the students which results, according to Neill, in a thorough development of children's capacity to act upon their intrinsic motivation to learn and act right, i.e. self-discipline. One does not need to justify time to relax (e.g. cook, garden, listen to music) or play (e.g. outside, board games or sports) – this is a cherished part of daily school life and it is believed that children learn from this immensely. Children can set their own goals – or choose to not set any goals. Children can manage their own time – or not. Either way, the influence of adults is to be kept to a minimum.

The second important difference with regular schools is that all members of the school community, i.e. all students and staff members, are considered equals. Decision-making and the organisation of all matters that affect students is done in different boards (so called *kringen*) with weekly meetings. All students and members of staff can take part in these and have an equal vote – often except for safety issues where adults' opinions are binding.

Moral education in democratic schools

While the approach to moral education of regular schools is based on behaviouristic thoughts, moral education within democratic schools is based on a constructivist view of learning: "moral competence has to be actively constructed to the mind in a dialectical relationship with its social environment."²⁵

²² Greenberg, Daniel et al. *De vrijheid van de Sudbury Valley School*, trans. Bas Rosenbrand et al. Published online (Stichting Sudbury Nederland, 2014).

²³ *Ibid.*, 95-6.

²⁴ Neill, A.S., *Summerhill* (U.K.: Penguin books, 1974): 122.

²⁵ Cuyper, "Moral education," 155.

Though constructivists have not been able to come up with a plausible mechanism of how this may work – e.g. Piaget’s notion of moral equilibration and Kohlberg’s notion of reversibility in moral judgement remain vague²⁶ – Neill and Greenberg both offer an extended account of how they believe that moral competency can be developed.

According to Neill, happiness can cure and prevent all feelings of hatred and unsocial behaviour as e.g. bullying, lying or stealing.²⁷ Happiness is not merely instrumental for moral acting (or, mainly, the prevention of immoral action) but is perceived to be the final goal of education and life.²⁸ Adults can deprive a child of his happiness in many ways, e.g. through giving a bad example, letting him feel inferior, or making him feel feared.²⁹ Neill’s idea about the development of moral agency is closely related to how he pictures the nature of a child. She is intrinsically good and automatically forms manners, develops sympathy for others, and develops moral competence unless she is spoiled by the external influence of adults.³⁰ Of course children, and especially adolescents, find themselves in annoying stages, but they will mature well and grow out of this stage as long as they are happy and receive love.³¹ Therefore, imposing anything on a child by authority – e.g. forcing him to learn how to read or say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ – is wrong and will merely work counterproductive. Neill understands moral education as the imposition of society’s rules, values and etiquette on children and is therefore fundamentally against this.

As I use a wider understanding of moral education in this paper however, it is still interesting to analyse the broader approach to children’s moral development of democratic schools. For example, Greenberg, like Bandura, talks about the importance of informal learning of moral values via direct and indirect observation. And though Neill argues actively against any form of censuring, rewarding or punishing,³² reinforcements and censuring are used in contemporary Dutch democratic schools, as long as this is the result of the community’s ruling. Last, and most important, democratic schools are a small community in which children participate. By offering real-life experience, children discover the value of a democratic regime and learn through a wide variety of experiences. Greenberg believes, as many proponents of democratic education, that learning moral or democratic values from a teacher is ineffective, and that a child will learn best via discovering the value of these abstract ideas himself. Self-governance produces children who are at the same time strong individuals and eager participants in a community.³³ Some believe a stronger thesis, holding that children *cannot* learn democratic or moral values such as equity and inclusion while being educated in an autocratic environment. In both cases it is believed that by simply living in a democratic community and thereby experiencing a wide

²⁶ Ibid., 155-6

²⁷ Neill, *Summerhill*, 125

²⁸ Ibid., 36-7

²⁹ Ibid., 25

³⁰ Ibid., 219, 222

³¹ Ibid., 223, 245

³² Ibid., 148-50

³³ Ibid., 11

variety of contexts, social interactions, etc. one generalises concrete feelings and thoughts to an understanding of abstract values – one that is more valuable and more easily applicable in many (more complex) contexts compared to values taught in traditional education.

It is believed that democratic schools, characterised by freedom and responsibility, nurture a diverse set of character traits, such as “independency, self-confidence, openness, tolerance to differences, ability to concentrate, goal-orientedness and flexibility in difficult situations.”³⁴ Regular schools are accused of teaching their children a herd mentality, “which results in that children trust other’s judgements instead of their own.”³⁵

³⁴ Greenberg, *De vrijheid van de Sudbury Valley school*, 111. “Ik denk dat wij een opzet hebben, waarbinnen bepaalde karaktereigenschappen verbeterd worden, eigenschappen als onafhankelijkheid, zelfvertrouwen, zekerheid, openheid, tolerantie ten aanzien van verschillen, concentratievermogen, doelgerichtheid en flexibiliteit onder moeilijke omstandigheden.”

³⁵ Ibid. “‘volgmentaliteit’ krijgen, die maakt dat ze leren vertrouwen op het oordeel van een ander in plaats van op eigen oordeel.”

III Analysis of moral educational methods

In chapter one I described three core capacities [CC] to make an analysis of pedagogical methods in terms of its possible influence on the development of moral agency more accessible. To freshen your mind I will briefly repeat the capacities of moral agency [CC1, 2 and 3] and their fundamental conditions [CC1a-3c]. Necessary for the cultivation of moral agency is the cultivation of the capacity to:

[1] Engage in critical discussion.

- [a] One scrutinises one's values, rules, judgements, etc. according to demands of reason (e.g. consistency, coherency) rather than accepting authoritative statements as true;
- [b] One possesses the skills that are needed for [CC1];
- [c] One understands that all (possible future) interlocutors, despite their differences, should receive equal recognition and concern.

[2] Sympathise.

- [a] One's sympathy also extends to people who are distant or different from oneself;
- [b] One understands that different people have different backgrounds, vulnerabilities, etc. that explain their different approaches to moral issues.

[3] Act for the right reasons cross-situationally.

- [a] One understands why an abstract value as fairness or equality is virtuous;
- [b] One can generalise current beliefs or previous experiences to new situations;
- [c] One's motivation to act is of moral kind, instead of e.g. personal gain, fear for punishment or loyalty to the juridical law.

In this chapter I will analyse which of the methods of moral education described in chapter two is most suitable to develop one or more core capacities, and therefore the moral agency described in chapter one. Where possible I will strengthen my analysis with available empirical research.³⁶ I will first

³⁶ I choose to analyse different specific methods of moral education instead of whole educational systems, as I believe that this will benefit the usefulness of my final recommendations for both educational systems. Also, empirical data focused on the moral choices of ex-students of a specific school system are scarce. On top of that, besides moral education in the school environment, many other factors influence the moral development of children and adolescents. It is likely that for example the home environment, the values of student's parents and a possible religion practiced at home differs immensely between students from regular and democratic schools.

discuss the moral educational methods of regular schools, then the different use of these methods at democratic schools and lastly some extra characteristics of democratic schools that clearly influence the moral development of their students.

Modelling, verbal instructions and reinforcements at regular schools

Though the SLT focuses mainly on learning via (in)direct observation, this can only be considered a teaching method when it happens intentionally and explicitly. As students are not expected to be moral exemplars, I will focus on modelling done by teachers and other staff members. Even though teachers are rarely named by students as their role models (typically around 3%, while parents were mentioned 45% of the time), this does not mean that they do not have an influence on students' behaviour and the development of their moral competence.³⁷ Students simply do not recognise their teacher's influence on them.³⁸ However, as teachers are often unaware of their role in moral education as well – especially at secondary schools where teachers are primarily considered to be experts in their specific subject – modelling often happens implicit and unplanned. Therefore, modelling can barely be called a teaching *method*.³⁹ But as modelling is frequently named by policy makers as an essential part of being a teacher,⁴⁰ I will analyse it nevertheless as it can be a promising method.

In the Aristotelean sense, modelling is understood as doing virtuous things frequently and consistently, under the guidance of a tutor.⁴¹ This tutor should be a moral exemplar, who is distinguished from ordinary people by his admirable character traits (and not his moral reasoning skills as taught in Socratic dialogue, as Kohlberg suggested).⁴² This moral character is an integrated set of virtues or dispositions required for human flourishing (*eudaimonia*).⁴³ At first, one can question whether (all) teachers can be considered moral exemplars. Second, it is questionable whether teachers possess the knowledge and skills to make their modelling explicit. Research done by Lunenberg et al. suggests that this is not the case: “[Teachers] know that they should ‘teach as they preach’ and ‘walk their talk’, but they do not connect their moral ideals to their actual behaviour in the classroom.”⁴⁴ Even if both of these points were the case, one could argue that it is not enough to merely enhance student's pro-social behaviour through modelling, but that it is important that the students already understand *why* the showed character trait or act is morally favourable. This suggests that merely

For example, parents who trust a highly controversial, non-publicly funded and small school with their child's education may already trust their child's intrinsic motivation to learn above averagely.

³⁷ Sanderse, Wouter, “The meaning of role modelling in moral and character education,” in *Journal of Moral Education* no. 42 is. 1 (2013): 31.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁰ For example in Onderwijsraad, *Onderwijs vormt*.

⁴¹ Steutel, J., and B. Spiecker, “Cultivating sentimental dispositions through Aristotelian habituation,” in *Journal of Philosophy of Education* no. 38 is. 4 (2004): 536.

⁴² Power, C. “Anne Colby,” in *Moral Education: a handbook* vol. 1, ed. C. Power et al. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007): 91-2. For the important role of character traits for being a moral exemplar, see also: Hart & Fegler, 1995; Walder et al., 1995; Matsuba & Walker, 2004, 2005.

⁴³ Kristjánsson, K., *Justifying emotions: pride and jealousy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002): 9.

⁴⁴ Sanderse, “The meaning of role modelling,” 38.

imitation of good behaviour is not enough, but *emulation* of the role model is essential.⁴⁵ Understanding why certain behaviour is virtuous, and why this virtue is a good character trait, is not only necessary for emulation, but also for students to be able to apply this virtue in other contexts as well – students need to be able to go their own way and go beyond what they have seen or heard from their teacher.⁴⁶ When teachers aim to educate their students resulting in emulation of their virtuous behaviour, it will probably positively influence student's capacity to act for the right reason cross-situationally [CC3]. When teachers' exemplary behaviour includes showing sympathy and being critical, this could also positively influence these other two core capacities [CC1, 2]. However, current research suggests that teachers shy away from talking about norms and values explicitly⁴⁷ and lack skills to make their modelling explicit.⁴⁸ Reflectiveness about one's teaching practice is needed.⁴⁹

Besides modelling via 'live performances', modelling also occurs via verbal instructions. This is the second method of moral education used in regular schools. At regular schools students are mostly educated in groups, which is the mainstream approach to teach children about different e.g. cultures, religions and social standards. Second, information about people with not mainstream backgrounds, vulnerabilities, values and beliefs can be presented. Biological information about e.g. orofacial cleft or dwarfism can influence bullying practices towards people with these and similar handicaps. Third, citizenship education presents the advantages of a democratic society and living by democratic values. Fourth, knowledge about how our actions influence people (far away) is offered. For example social geography teaches about the production process of goods and the working conditions of labourers, and in history class children learn about the Netherlands' involvement in slave-trade. In this case the advantage of classroom teaching according to a curriculum is that one can make sure that all students are equipped with this knowledge. Knowledge about distant or different people possibly develops student's sympathy towards them [CC2a]. Also, both the information offered via verbal instruction, as the reserved time in class to think about these matters, probably develops an understanding about it to a certain extent [CC1c, 2b, 3a].

Verbal instruction also applies to cases where one teacher directs his attention to one (or more) students, for example to explain why her behaviour is unwanted. In this case teachers embody what some would argue to be the most essential part of Aristotelean habituation: the authoritative role of the virtuous tutor.⁵⁰ Sleutel and Spieckler argue that modelling without this authoritative tutor can merely enhance virtues understood as solely corrective, i.e. to moderate excessive temptation or to

⁴⁵ Sanderse, "The meaning of role modelling," 36; Kristjánsson, J. "Emulation and the use of role models in moral education," in *Journal of Moral Education* no. 35 is. 1 (2006): 46.

⁴⁶ Bandura, A., *Self-efficacy: the exercise of control* (New York: WH Freeman, 1997): 90; Annas, J., *Intelligent virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 19.

⁴⁷ Klaassen, C., "Teacher pedagogical competence and sensibility," in *Teaching and Teacher Education* no. 18 (2002): 155.

⁴⁸ Lunenberg, M., F. Korthagen and A. Swennen, "The teacher educator as a role model," in *Teaching and Teacher Education* no. 23 (2007): 597.

⁴⁹ Smith, Elisabeth, "Teaching critical reflection," in *Teaching in higher education* vol. 16 is. 2 (2001): 219-20.

⁵⁰ Sleutel and Spieckler, "Cultivating sentimental dispositions," 110.

compensate for deficiency of motivation through practicing virtues such as patience or diligence.⁵¹ However, to strengthen affective dispositions – concerns, care, commitments – a tutor is needed to tell a child what he needs to do in specific circumstances and to reinforce the child through blaming, rewarding or punishing.⁵² So, Sleutel and Spieckler agree with regular schools on the importance of verbal instruction to (implicitly or explicitly) explain *why* certain behaviour is desirable which is a condition for emulation of a role model's behaviour (rather than the insufficient possible imitation).

In both the verbal instruction to groups and to individuals it is questionable to what extent authoritatively transferring of facts, norms and values can enhance a student's understanding of moral values and his capacity to reflect on this by himself [CC1]. The efficiency of learning via verbal instruction is often criticised, especially by those in favour of active learning deployed in democratic education. This is sometimes based on a misrepresentation of Edgar Dave's 'cone of experience'⁵³ – the so called 'cone of learning' – where unfounded percentages show how effective a certain experience (verbal instruction, demonstration, participation, direct experiences) would be.⁵⁴ Though this specific model is not backed up by scientific proof, most people would intuitively agree that something that you discover yourself or explain to others lasts longer than knowledge received via verbal instruction.

The change from passive to active learning (especially in moral and citizenship education) can already be noticed in e.g. the quickly raising popularity of extra programs focussing on specific themes (trying to minimize bullying, prevent violence or improve health) at regular schools. As most regular schools are aware of the shortcomings of their methods, they introduce a special programme aiming to incorporate active learning about moral and democratic values. An example of a very popular program, especially in poorer or multicultural neighbourhoods, is The Peaceable School (*de vreedzame school*).⁵⁵ Though its main aim is to create a positive social school environment, it stimulates children to become responsible actors and to contribute fruitfully in a democratic society. Though this program fits the teaching system of regular schools (i.e. groups of students in classrooms, supervised or actively led by a teacher), methods that support active learning are used in e.g. giving positive feedback, self-reflection, developing self-control or self-confidence, understanding how your actions can affect others, etc.⁵⁶ Via this way, (deontic) moral values are transgressed, such as 'we solve

⁵¹ Sleutel and Spieckler, "Cultivating sentimental dispositions," 109-10.

⁵² Ibid., 109.

⁵³ For example by an informative site about democratic education: "Leerrendement," *Natuurlijk Leren*, accessed in June 2016, http://www.natuurlijkleren.net/?page_id=297.

⁵⁴ While proponents of active learning use this theory to justify it, Dave himself explicitly states that the cone of experience is merely an intuitive model – not based on scientific research – showing the variety of concreteness in audio-visual teaching methods, and Dale states multiple times that we should not take the (different stages of the) cone too seriously (Dale, *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching*, 51-2).

⁵⁵ For more information about *de vreedzame school* visit: "Wat is De Vreedzame School?" CED groep, accessed in June 2016, <http://www.devreedzameschool.net/wat-is-dvs>.

⁵⁶ Kooij, "The influence of moral education," 349.

conflicts ourselves’, ‘we listen to each other’, ‘we care for each other’ and ‘we are all different’.⁵⁷ This suggests that, when learning about interpersonal moral themes, active learning is desirable. Though these programs are still very different from democratic schools in the sense that students are not perceived as equal contributors and therefore do not enjoy the freedom to choose to learn what they want to, it is also an improvement of the minimal deontology described above as it seems to implement Bandura’s theory more effectively. For example, teachers become more aware of their role in moral education and are therefore more motivated and equipped to enhance students emulation of their virtuous behaviour. Also, while discussion democratic values in citizenship or history class may fall short, this program invests time to compensate for this.

The third way in which regular schools try to develop their students’ moral competence is by setting rules and to inflict disciplinary punishments when students transgress them. Rules do not merely try to maintain the social order and effectiveness of traditional schooling, e.g. by punishing latecomers or those who litter, but can also function as a moral framework reflecting the norms and values of society. This framework shows what is prohibited and what should be pursued regarding moral issues, e.g. the prohibition of bullying or using violence. As (young) children do not possess the capacity for moral thinking this framework seems needed for pro-social behaviour within schools. Also, the existing framework gives students the possibility to reflect on it, possibly resulting in either an understanding of the rule (which means that acting for the right reasons is possible [CC3]) or dissociation from it (which shows the insight that one should not simply accept authoritative imposition but reflect on it [CC1a]). However, in general rules or reinforcements (without proper explanation of *why* these specific rules should be followed) work merely as extrinsic motivation to prevent immoral behaviour, and does not enhance students’ competence to think in moral terms – ‘right and wrong’ are in this sense clearly different from ‘allowed and not allowed’. By merely following rules students do not act for the right reason, and I therefore do not see how they enhance either of the core capacities directly. However, to some extent pro-social behaviour (learning *how* to act and actually performing these actions) is a precondition for understanding these actions (learning *why* one should act this specific way and not different). This Aristotelean thinking suggests that being drilled to act according to certain rules is a necessary steppingstone for the development of rational thinking and sympathy (cross-situationally) [CC1-3]. Besides this, when a child disobeys a rule this does offer an opportunity to reflect on his misbehaviour – via verbal instruction the importance of the specific value or norm can be illustrated.

Apart from these three methods there are other occasions that aim at developing the core capacities (especially at secondary schools). For example, debating skills and critical thinking [CC1b] is taught in language classes, and direct reflection on abstract moral issues [CC3a] may be handled in philosophy class.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Modelling, verbal instructions and reinforcements at democratic schools

The methods for moral education at regular schools are also part of moral education at democratic schools. However, the implementation and results differ due to the different school system and the ways students and staff members act upon the methods. Because of this I expect that these same three methods will have different advantages and disadvantages compared to their implementation at regular schools. I will therefore discuss modelling, verbal instruction and the use of reinforcements at democratic schools in greater depth in this section.

First, while students at regular schools are often not motivated to show exemplary behaviour for their peers or younger fellow students, i.e. they are not pushed or explicitly invited to do so, students at democratic schools are more motivated to do so. Bearing responsibility for their school environment is explicitly expected from them, and especially older students understand that they should practice what they just preached in one of the *kringen*. Also, because of student's active involvement in school's decision making, they understand why certain prosocial behaviour is desirable and are therefore more intrinsically motivated to behave accordingly.

There is also reason to assume that staff members at democratic schools are more aware of their modelling role. First, the school has a very clear vision on which traits should be nurtured (e.g. creativity, taking initiative, inclusion, tolerance to differences) and which habits should be broken off (e.g. to follow authority without reflection). Also, as democratic schools are still very controversial, the members of this community are more motivated to show why their vision on education makes sense. This could lead to a clearer reflection of the staff's values in their behaviour in school, and staff members are therefore more likely to adopt a more conscious and scrutinised modelling role. Second, as staff members are not expected to teach one single subject but have a more general role in supporting students' learning process, their priorities lie elsewhere. Transferring knowledge is not a priority, while supporting students' moral development is. For this same reason, and also because the school environment is less authoritative, staff members and students may start a conversation about *why* certain behaviour is morally (un)desirable more easily, and hence adopt a modelling role more explicitly. For these reasons it is more likely that the step from merely imitating to emulating an exemplar's behaviour is more easily made in democratic education. As emulating means that students do not merely imitate other's behaviour but also gain understanding of its virtuousness and are therefore able to act consciously with the right intention, core capacities that presume the understanding of certain values or differences are likely to be more developed via modelling at democratic schools. This includes the understanding that all (possible) interlocutors should receive equal concern and recognition [CC1c] as a basis for critical discussion; the understanding of differences in moral reasoning between people with different backgrounds, vulnerabilities, etc. [CC2b] in order to sympathise with them; and the understanding of why certain values are virtuous [CC3a] in order to apply these values cross-situationally.

As there are no obligatory classes offered according to a curriculum, verbal instruction to a group of students is far less common in democratic schools.⁵⁸ This school system sees learning by doing and discovering yourself as far more valuable than learning via verbal lectures or from books. This has an important disadvantage. As listening to verbal instruction about many subjects – different cultures, different religions, different vulnerabilities – is not obligatory, students only learn about many of these subjects when they are directly confronted with it or choose for themselves that they *want to* learn about it. This means that many students may not prioritise spending time on these topics, which can result in having no knowledge at all about it or in being left with stereotypical knowledge and prejudices. Of course, experiences in school life offers many insights in different learning processes and the backgrounds of different people, but as one cannot learn about all these differences via experience a certain amount of abstraction is needed. Not receiving this knowledge, though passively learned, may negatively impact the development of sympathy [CC2]. For example, when somebody never met a gay person at (or outside) school, he may simply not think about the struggles gay people face and is not able to prevent acting in a way that hinder gay people.

Finally, the use of rules and punishments has a very different background at democratic schools compared to the use at regular schools. Though Neill is strongly opposed to the authoritative imposition of rules and punishments on children in general, at first glance the content and use of rules does not differ much between contemporary Dutch democratic schools and regular schools. Both schools have rules that prohibit the use of violence, try to ensure safety on school grounds and try to prevent the exclusion and discrimination of students by their peers. However, at democratic schools all students can participate in deciding on fair rules (in weekly meetings of the *schoolkring*, the ‘schoolboard’), which means theoretically that all students and staff members gave their consent to the established rules and therefore understand their utility and intention. Also, students are supported to reflect on the existing norms, as they are in the position to suggest an alternative. Through this involvement in the decision-making process, children automatically develop the skills that are needed for critical discussion [CC1b] and are less likely to except authoritative imposition without reflection [CC1a]. Also, as the sociocratic method expects students to actively listen to others’ stories, they realise soon that their fellow students and staff members can have very different approaches to moral issues [CC2b]. Through this, the equal concern and recognition for all members of the school environment is actively nurtured, though this does not necessarily mean that students develop an understanding of the equality of all human beings and develop the capacity to sympathise with people more distant from them.

The ideal of equal participation in decision-making of all students and staff members is also reflected in the legal system of the school. Students can only be punished after a verdict of the *onderzoekskring* (the ‘research board’). This main justice system consists of fixed members (both

⁵⁸ Verbal instruction to groups of students does occur in democratic schools, but only when this is initiated and organised by students themselves. Attendance is never compulsory.

students and staff) but is also open for people who want to join a particular (part of the) weekly meeting. When problems occur among students or between students and staff members, both parties tell their story to the *kring*. As this does not happen in the heat of the moment when both parties are angry or sad, a more neutral reflection on one's own actions and the other's experiences is possible. This gives the accused insight into the moral wrongness or inappropriateness of his actions. When this learning process is achieved, punishments usually do not follow. However, one may be asked to replace for instance the damaged goods. All parties need to consent to the particular way the accused is asked to take responsibility for the consequences of his actions. Sometimes punishments are proposed, especially when the accused has shown the same problem behaviour before. However, the proposed compensation or sanction is often connected to the initial problem. For example, one may be asked to replace a toy one has broken, one is not allowed to play on the trampoline for several weeks as one's risky behaviour was against safety rules, or one has to pick up litter after school after excessive littering himself. By offering a neutral environment where all parties are supported to reflect on their own and other's behaviour and intentions the *onderzoekskring* offers a similar environment to the *schoolkring*. Students are therefore likely to develop similar capacities at *onderzoekskring* meetings, as they are less likely to accept authoritative statements as true [CC1a], they develop skills for rational reasoning about moral matters [CC1b], and they develop an understanding of how different backgrounds of people can strongly (and possibly implicitly and unconsciously) influence people's reflection of moral matters [CC2b]. Older students who are actively involved in these boards are also likely to develop a more thorough understanding of abstract moral values [CC3a] and the ability to apply this to new situations (that are brought up in the *kringen*) [CC3b].

Other approaches to moral education at democratic schools

Besides modelling, verbal instruction and reinforcements, I have discussed other methods or environmental factors (in chapter two) that could greatly influence student's moral development. First, the environment of the school is intentionally designed to offer children a wide variety of rich experiences. The physical environment invites to many activities, ranging from e.g. playing outside in the woods, looking after the little goats at the mini-farm, gardening in the vegetable garden, (all of which are often still on school grounds), making music in the music room or studying in the silent room. The formal environment of rule making and deciding on issues within school embodies values as equality among all members of the community, inclusion of all and tolerance of differences. Though they may also be reflected in formal rules, the vision of the school is first of all implicitly spread by simply doing the activity yourself, e.g. showing that the 'natural way of solving a problem between people' is via discussing it. This way, democracy is less remote. Every day, when students are bothered by something, they can choose to either bring it up at a *kring*, or stay bothered by it. The value of discussing your problems with others (when they involve others) and listening to all parties concerned is quickly discovered by all students. This is different from regular schools where ideals of

a democratic society may be verbally spread (in citizenship or history class), but children are definitely not seen as equal and useful members of society. Those in favour of democratic schools doubt whether children will be able to develop an understanding of abstract values as inclusion or equality when this is not embedded in practice in the autocratic school system [CC1c, 3a].

Second, and actively argued for by Neill, the informal school environment is meant to be a trusting and loving environment. Adults trust on the intrinsic motivation of children to learn and develop when and how this suits them. Though Neill thoroughly believes that imposing anything on a child (as an authoritarian adult) is wrong, even when she shows ‘annoying’ behaviour as stealing, contemporary democratic schools do quickly intervene in these cases – especially when problem behaviour impacts someone else. However, this is still in a non-authoritarian way, using constant reflection in verbal discussions to nurture the learning process. A result of this is that, instead of trusting on adult’s judgements, this way (even very young) children have to judge the safety or desirability of their plans for themselves [CC1a]. As one actively needs to reflect on situations and one quickly learns from one’s own mistakes, wiser decisions are made in the future. Reflecting on how fair or wise a decision is (before or after acting) can lead to a more thorough understanding of these abstract values [CC3a] and therefore to the ability to apply these reasons in other situations [CC3b].

Third, the above described freedom that is offered in democratic schools also includes the freedom to take responsibility for one’s own actions. I understand moral responsibility as the following: when doing x is morally wrong, one has a moral obligation not to do x and therefore one can be held morally responsible for doing x.⁵⁹ Those in favour of democratic education accuse regular schools of the prevention of ‘risky’ behaviour of students as (e.g. letting the bully and bullied work together in a project) which accordingly also prevents the possibility to learn from one’s mistakes. One of the ex-students from democratic education I spoke to gave a clear example of how he experienced differences in staff member’s reactions to student’s problem behaviour at regular and democratic schools. At a regular school, when a teacher sees that child A hits child B – just once, they are not in a fight and child B is physically not hurt – he will most likely confront child A with his behaviour resulting in possible punishments or consequences decided by the teacher. At democratic schools, a staff member will most likely go to child B and asks him whether he is going to bring it up at the next meeting of the *onderzoekskring*. This way, both children need to reflect on their initial behaviour, gain insight in the other party’s story and have a say in possible sanctions. Therefore, this specific form of freedom (to carry the consequences of your actions) does not only force the ‘bully’ to take responsibility for his actions, but also emancipates the ‘bullied’ to stand up for himself.

⁵⁹ Zimmerman, M. J., *Living With Uncertainty. The Moral Significance of Ignorance* (U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 171.

IV Conclusion and recommendations

I started this paper with what I took to be a common sense and good theory-neutral description of what it means to be a moral agent as an adult, and derived from this three core capacities (with several conditions) that I henceforth took to be essential for moral agency. These core capacities were the capacity to engage in critical discussion, to sympathise and to act for the right reason cross-situationally. I then described two substantially different approaches to primary and secondary education in general, and subsequently to moral education: regular and democratic schools. While the former is the mainstream approach to moral education, characterised by its similarities to Bandura's social learning theory and a minimal deontology, the latter is more controversial and characterised by the freedom and responsibility it gives to its students. After deducing specific methods of moral education from both school system's visions, the main concern of this paper was analysing to what extent these specific teaching methods or environmental factors could facilitate or inhibit the cultivation of either of these three core capacities.

I will conclude this paper by discussing several disadvantages of each approach to moral education (as discussed in chapter three) and giving recommendations on how this may be solved. I think that my analysis shows that one cannot simply favour one approach to moral education over the other, but rather that each has its own distinct advantages and disadvantages that can be used to improve the other approach. In all cases, the shortcoming of the method is not due to the method itself, but rather to the framework in which it operates, e.g. a lack of teachers' priority to support the moral development of students. Gaining on the analysis of the method in a school system where the method theoretically does have a positive influence on the cultivation of a core capacity, I will give recommendations on how the other school system may learn from this, leaving both visions on education in general intact.

Democratic schools

Those who participate well in democratic schools are very likely to develop most of the core capacities because of the wide variety of social interactions and experiences the physical, formal and informal environment the school offers. However, the free structure and trusting environment of democratic schools has a difficult downside. As learning moral values happens mostly via experience, everything that is not experienced at school is something that misses completely in the offered moral education. While at regular schools all students follow the same curriculum that makes sure that all important

subjects are covered, at democratic schools children only learn about a subject when they take initiative to learn about this or coincidentally get in contact with it in the school (or home) environment. This means that some children may not learn how to cope with specific vulnerabilities or cultural backgrounds of people. However, every prevention of this needs to include compulsory activities for every student, which does not correspond to the school's vision and would therefore never be introduced.

Hence, leaning on my analysis from regular schools I recommend two adjustments that could fill this gap in moral education in democratic schools. First, staff members could more actively encourage students to think about abstract values or moral decision-making in more complex situations (that are far away – in distance or in the future), e.g. by encouraging students to defend somebody else's problem or view during a *kring* meeting. Second, at the moment the democratic school communities are very homogenous groups. Most students are from white parents that are interested in alternative ways of living (e.g. above averagely spiritual and interested in living sustainable, not extremely religious) and can pay for a school that is often not (completely) funded by the government. Although some students who get stuck in regular education, e.g. because of learning disabilities or their difficulty with social interactions with other children, find a democratic schools a fitting alternative, the school could do more to invite diversity among the school community members. Democratic schools could actively engage in admitting children from different backgrounds or with physical, psychological or social difficulties which could offer richer experiences at school. Therefore, also children who do not explicitly choose to learn about e.g. different cultures or physical disabilities develop a more thorough understanding of people who are different from themselves.

Regular schools

When analysing moral education at regular schools we can see that it falls short on many aspects. Therefore, programs as The Peaceable School gain quickly in popularity, as their methods focus specifically on cultivating skills and insight in moral matters via active learning. However, without these programs, especially secondary school teachers do not prioritise moral education and are therefore not very involved in this. Also, students are not challenged to solve conflicts together or in other ways invited to actively reflect on (complex) moral matters. Therefore, I recommend, first, that teachers shift their priority from being merely an expert in their field to being an educator focused on the moral development of her students. They should reflect on their own behaviour in classrooms – make sure that this reflects important moral virtues as honesty and courage – and embed the school vision in this so all members of the community focus on reflecting on the same values. Also, teachers should gain skills to explicitly show *why* this behaviour is morally significant and virtuous, as they currently lack these. They can either show this explicitly in their behaviour or, where appropriate, via (one on one) verbal instruction.

Second, solving problems between students should happen in conversation between all involved parties where all individuals are invited to actively reflect their own and other's behaviour. Taking the time and patience to solve problems in a less authoritative way can improve student's understanding of different moral perspectives. This open discussion can develop a more thorough understanding of why one should prevent problematic behaviour – not because it is against school regulations and one may get punished, but because your behaviour actively harms others and those other people matter. Understanding why problematic behaviour impacts someone else's life negatively should enhance sympathy for other parties which subsequently motivates you to reflect on your plans and behaviour in other (new) situations.

Third, it is advisable to change time spend on transferring knowledge (passive learning) into time where students can actively engage with a subject (active learning) and therefore develop a more thorough understanding of abstract values. This motivates students to critically reflect and discuss their points of view, compare these with different views from others, and gain insight into how certain moral values or principles can be applied in new and more complex situations. Although the active engagement with subjects as democratic values, bullying or consumption patterns has its limits in traditional classroom education, this should not be seen as merely a family matter as we can simply not expect that all families cover these subjects with their children.

The limits of this paper and future research

My conclusions and recommendations all aim at showing to what extent the above described moral educational methods develop one of the core capacities. Although I have tried to thoroughly describe and justify my choice for these three common sense and essential moral capacities, my analysis has limits the extent in which it completely reflects the development of actual moral agency.

I chose to compare the mainstream educational system with democratic education because of the interesting presumptions and features the latter has. Also, my experience with both systems, together with the availability of many contacts in both fields, could offer a unique possibility to compare both systems. However, as empirical research of both systems is not sufficiently available, I was unable to compare the actual efficiency of both approaches to moral education. As moral education is merely instrumental for adult moral agency, future research could compare the moral competence of ex-students of both regular and democratic education. When those empirical data is available the comparison of different approaches to moral education can become less abstract and theoretical and therefore recommendations following from this will be more useful for educational practices. However, this paper was not an empirical research aiming to show a link between certain teaching methods and moral agency, but rather a preliminary analysis of desirable presumptions, practices and possibilities of moral education in the different educational frameworks in which they are implemented.

Concluding, my analysis has shown how democratic education encourages intrinsically motivated learning, which, together with offering a wide variety of experiences and social interactions to its students, could lead to a more thorough understanding of moral values and a more internalised moral compass compared moral education at regular schools. However, the extent to which all students are exposed to this moral education is limited. Regular schools can ensure that a desirable and complete curriculum regarding morality is taught to its students because of the more authoritative nature of the educational system. But unfortunately, they fall short in doing so. Also, this more authoritative system poses other challenges to the moral educational methods that are currently used in regular schools.

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