

Review

# From Supporting Moral Competence to Fostering Spiritual Growth: The Psycho-Didactic Potential of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD<sup>®</sup>)

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**Abstract:** This paper aimed to introduce the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion KMDD<sup>®</sup> as one of the most effective methods that are designed to foster moral competence and, therefore, to promote tolerance and equality, regardless of cultural background, religion, or views. It is mainly used within the educational context, but it can be also implemented in different environments and conditions. The Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion should also be considered as the representative of a psycho-didactic approach to education. There is a possibility of assessing KMDD<sup>®</sup>'s effectiveness with the Moral Competence Test (MCT<sup>®</sup>), as well as comparing its significance with other methods that are not only based on the discussions of moral and spiritual dilemmas. Therefore, dilemma discussions would seem to be the best framework for practicing not only social skills and a democratic attitude but also positive mental health and psychological stability by providing a background for personal moral and spiritual growth.

**Keywords:** KMDD<sup>®</sup>; moral competence; spiritual growth; spiritual and religious education; psycho-didactics



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## 1. Introduction

This paper focuses on introducing the *Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion* (KMDD<sup>®</sup>) as an educational and psycho-didactic tool that is aimed at fostering moral competence development in a course of moral and spiritual education and supporting overall personal and psychological development. The authors consider moral education to be of pedagogical importance, the task of which is to support and stimulate the individual development of the moral autonomy of an individual. Spiritual education is understood similarly, but it relates to the sphere of spiritual autonomy. Within the concept of spiritual education, a more specific area of religious education can be distinguished from the perspective of a specific religion. Given that a contemporary spiritual and moral crisis translates into an increase in ideological, moral, and religious conflicts (Agrimson and Taft 2009), the spiritual and moral education of the next generation, the development of respect for other cultures, religious tolerance, and the development of readiness for cooperation are the most urgent challenges facing today's education. Moral and religious education in eastern Europe is underestimated in schools and is treated as indoctrination entities in which moral educators tell people what to do and religious educators what to believe. The aim of both should be to help sensitize students to ethical issues and help them to form their own judgments and beliefs within the context of a broader social perspective. Therefore, fostering personal development is one of the most important, as well as one of the most demanding, tasks of education at all levels.

In the latest studies examining the importance of moral and spiritual education for general human development, it was indicated that many significant factors that empower

personal growth should be taken into consideration. Among them, one can find personality and self-identity, but also moral character and spiritual needs (Narvaez and Lapsley 2009; Benson et al. 2003; Dowling et al. 2004). In this context, moral and spiritual education does not appear as offering a ready pattern of obligations or a catalog of norms to be implemented, but rather as encouraging people to undertake efforts and independent reasoning through the prism of personally selected categories of moral and spiritual values that underlie the motivation of choices and decisions. This idea seems very close to the idea of moral character education (Berkowitz 2012). It also refers to the link between religion and identity (Ebstyn King 2003). This approach remains consistent with the theory of virtues defining practical competencies in the field of morality as socio-moral skills that can be shaped by subjecting them to appropriate stimulation (Slote 1995). All this has to lead to the individual's ability to resolve moral and spiritual dilemmas and to implement behavior that is consistent not only within the individually understood sphere of moral reasoning and spiritual feelings but also with an objective set of norms and ethical and religious values. This is important since behavioral consistency contributes to mental stability and a low level of neuroticism (Funder and Colvin 1991; Sherman et al. 2010).

According to the cognitive-developmental theory, a person who is about to be morally shaped should be placed in the role of an active agent (Broughton 1978; Rest 1974). The social cognitive theory also promotes agency through intentionality, forethought, self-regulation, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura 2001). The agent is aware of the reality and the overpowering need of putting one's own psychological structures through a continuous reorganization based on a dialogue that attempts to build an understanding of the basic principles and specificity of interpersonal interactions in their socio-democratic dimensions. Dialogue is understood here as mutual, feedback-based interaction between the individual and their environment, as well as in the context of social relationships. Cognitive and developmental theories, as well as constructivism, seem to correspond best with the postulates of an agentic approach to moral education, and although they focus mainly on the role of cognitive factors in the process of shaping morality, maturity, and restructuring patterns of reasoning, which is considered to be shown in behavior, they do not consider them sufficient to achieve this goal. The classical constructivist view seems to empower this kind of thinking and fits alongside self-regulation and attempting to use what has been thought (Kohlberg and Mayer 1972). However, agency is desirable not only in moral education but also in religious and spiritual education. What is more, moral development seems to be parallel to spiritual growth understood as a process of opening oneself for sanctity and one's own spiritual needs (Kohlberg and Power 1981; Roehlkepartain et al. 2006; Steć and Kulik 2021). This is why the meaning of moral education in the processes of religious education is strongly emphasized (Marek et al. 2019). On the other hand, it is assumed that the pedagogy of religion can positively influence the formation of moral competence, which in turn brings an improvement in quality tone's mental stability and life in general (Marek and Walulik 2021).

For thousands of years, many philosophers and theologians have linked moral principles that seem absolute and eternal to the existence of an Absolute (McKay and Whitehouse 2015). Kohlberg and Power (1981) emphasized the relationship between moral and religious development, recognizing morality as a kind of condition for religious growth. Fowler (1981) also confirmed the strong relationship between moral and religious thinking. Over the years, a distinction has been made between moral reasoning and religious reasoning (Hoehn and Fowler 1983; Oser 1991). Religion can be understood as a belief set that regulates the relationship of a person or community to transcendence or another type of sanctity (Boschki 2017). Each religion also represents a specific system of attitudes, thinking, and actions, providing a specific framework for moral behavior, while at the same time supporting people by observing them and overcoming their own limitations. Regardless of the adopted worldview, religion is an important element of identity and has an impact on human life by answering questions about the meaning and purpose of life. It also provides certain tools for achieving moral competencies which, by shaping a

right conscience, strengthen the need for shaping harmonious social relations (Marek and Walulik 2021). In the context of religion, moral competencies are related to intercultural competencies, where religions treat them as dispositions of a person who combines knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained in the space of values and experiences (Byram 1997). Their shaping consists of moving from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence, which refers to the assessment of norms and behaviors that are discovered by a person and assessed at the level of one's conscience (Donati and Watts 2005). One's conscience refers to a moral judgment about an action, the performance of which becomes a source of internal approval or guilt, perceiving oneself as a good or bad person (Tangney et al. 2007). A properly formed conscience brings peace and a sense of security into a person's life. Religion or spirituality provides a frame of reference for moral thinking about oneself and the world around us, but it does not mean that without religion, a person is not able to achieve a high level of moral development. Moral competence is a disposition that is acquired in a specific context that is typical for a given environment and is subject to dynamic transformations throughout a person's life (Marek and Walulik 2021). In this regard, both moral and religious development contribute to personal development and may influence mental health and stability in a positive way (Furrow et al. 2004; Roehlkepartain et al. 2006; Leak 2009). There is controversy about the role of morality in life and its relationship with religion, and at the same time, there is growing research output emphasizing the importance of living a moral life for the development of a healthy identity and the general mental health of individuals (Burton et al. 2011). Morality is a kind of internal compass that shows the path of moral behavior, where its main goal is to internalize a specific world of values (Marek and Walulik 2021). People with high morality are characterized by life optimism, openness to other people, and willingness to help (Hart et al. 2016). Religion and morality can therefore be considered as factors that strengthen the sense of integrity of a person and the harmony between individual spheres of life, and thus provide health protection benefits (Furrow et al. 2004).

In terms of the psycho-didactic approach to education, being a self-regulated learner requires many other skills and abilities besides the accomplishment of the process of developing reasoning skills to a certain level (Zimmerman 2002; Steć and Kulik 2021). Proper moral and spiritual development cannot consist only of shaping cognitive structures and the process of reasoning. Similarly, an effective impact that stimulates development should include not only cognitive processes but also other psychological competencies. This statement became the starting point for the development of educational methods of supporting moral development within the social and, therefore, the democratic context that may lead to fostering personal growth, as well as in terms of spirituality and mental health.

Currently, one of the best-researched, although at the same time relatively unknown, methods of stimulating moral development that is based not only on supporting moral reasoning is the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (org: *Die Konstanzer Methode der Dilemma-Discussion* (KMDD<sup>®</sup>)), which was introduced by Georg Lind from the University of Konstanz in Germany (Lind 2016). Educational experience related to participation in classes conducted using the dilemma discussion method supports moral competence, which should be understood as the ability to make decisions and moral judgments and to take actions that are consistent with them. Lind showed that KMDD<sup>®</sup> supports development more broadly than just morally since it includes the development of democratic competencies as well (Lind et al. 2017). The potential of the method to shape religious reasoning or religious and spiritual competence has not been explored so far. However, it can be assumed that whether it will translate into supporting the development of personal spirituality will depend on the dilemma used during the discussion.

Moral competence is not only the skill of moral reasoning but, above all, is the moral behavior that is consistent with the corresponding cognitive and affective components, as well as the context of the democratic principles of social coexistence that define human behavior in the social world. In other words, moral competence is the ability to apply a moral orientation in the decision-making practice of everyday life in a democratic society.

If the moral agent is at the same time a religious and highly spiritual person, the moral competence reveals, for example, religious tolerance as a moral norm that is essential for human coexistence. Religion, morality, and law are the most important public relations regulators in the field of intergroup, interethnic, and intercultural communication (McKay and Whitehouse 2015). Research shows that tolerance is more demanding and more difficult to maintain than intolerance (Verkuyten et al. 2019). It is easier to convince tolerant people to quit tolerance rather than persuading intolerant people to be more tolerant (Gieling et al. 2012; Van Doorn 2014). People tend to believe that moral issues are objective, universally true, and thus moral rules apply regardless of differences (Skitka et al. 2016); however, the acceptance of divergent beliefs and practices that are viewed as moral issues is lower than for non-morality issues (Ellemers 2017) due to the emotions involved (Cole Wright et al. 2008). It is not only important to know and understand the differences in beliefs and practices of other groups, but it is also necessary to understand the importance and difficulties of practicing tolerance (Verkuyten et al. 2019). In the educational environment and in the context of stimulating tolerance, various civic and intervention curricula have been developed (Avery and Thomas 2004), among them, KMDD<sup>®</sup> (Lind 2016). Discussions of controversial issues concerning civil liberties of unpopular groups in a climate of openness and respect for democracy translate into a greater ability of youth to adopt the perspective of another person (Sherrod et al. 2010).

Just as it is difficult to imagine a moral behavior that is dispassionately subordinated only to the sphere of thinking, it is also difficult to imagine a morally significant situation assuming only a simple calculation of profits and losses as the basis for choosing a specific action by an experienced agent. Such an assumption would exclude, in a sense, the existence of moral dilemmas in general. Life practice shows a different tendency. Morality in practical terms consists of making choices and acting in accordance with these choices, which indicates the need to face dilemmas relatively more often than one might think. Choices are not the simple result of a quantitative comparison of available alternatives, but instead are the result of complex cognitive-affective qualitative processes that take into account the context of interpersonal communication, which implies the social effect of morality in the communication context. By studying the individual moral development of individuals, we wanted to know how it translated into the social behavior of individuals and groups living together in societies and communities (Cohen and Morse 2014). Morality is an area of varied, certainly incompatible, and perhaps practically contradictory, ideal images of human life (Wallace and Walker 2021). The position of an individual in society and his relations with others may determine the norms of moral behavior (Aristotle and Broadie 2002). A social or religious group can be a key source of moral codes of conduct and, at the same time, shared moral values within social and religious groups that regulate the norms of moral behavior (Gert 2012). The goal of moral behavior may be to achieve social integration and to express belonging to a group that is the point of reference for the moral identity of the individual (Van der Toorn et al. 2015). It should be emphasized that if the educator's goal is to change an individual's behavior, especially in a multicultural context, one should be aware that for the individual, this may mean a departure from the current identity and relationships that are important to them. In the context of moral behavior, a lack of appropriate reference to a social group may cause resistance and defensive reactions (Ellemers 2017). It turns out that by using the complex structure of moral identity, it is possible to predict ethical intentions and deviations in social roles that are fulfilled by an individual and the relationship between them. Moreover, acting as a central pillar, the related moral identity provides a dominant influence on the ethical choices of the individual (Hannah et al. 2020). This context can be applied to the principles of democratic life. Through utilizing multilevel social contract theory instead of violent conflict resolution, minimal behavioral restrictions are necessary to ensure mutually beneficial peaceful long-term cooperation in deeply morally pluralistic societies by maximally respecting the interests of all members of society (Moehler 2018). In this regard, in his considerations, Lind referred to the theory of the communication

community by Habermas and his proposals for defining democratic discourse through communication acts that are free from violence and the use of force. What happens in every violent act was considered by Habermas at the same time as a systematically distorted communication act (Ashenden 2014). Therefore, it should be assumed that any verbal manifestation of moral (Skitka et al. 2013; Wright et al. 2013) or religious intolerance is in fact violence and may adversely affect the quality of a person's mental functioning (Dilmaghani 2018). Fostering moral and spiritual competence to prevent these types of situations is a matter of mental health. From this perspective, the KMDD<sup>®</sup> method and other similar techniques based on the discussion of different dilemmas may significantly contribute to increasing the quality of the mental health of a person.

## 2. KMDD<sup>®</sup> and Its Theoretical Basis

Through implementing the assumptions of the cognitive and developmental approach in developmental psychology, it could be argued that moral development is the result of not only stimulation of the moral sphere of reasoning but also of moral competence, which, as research results show, is subject to learning processes by performing specific activities in the practice of everyday life. Moral education should be based on this as well (Lind 2011b). Thus, the concept proposed by G. Lind realizes the postulates of pedagogical progressivism based on the principle of learning by doing by John Dewey, for whom education was an inseparable element of democratization processes and, therefore, has been very close to morality (Dewey 1997). The assumption about the possibility of shaping moral competence through specific educational interactions based on democratic principles and communication is the basis of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (Bardziński and Szopka 2011).

The method is a response to the need for moral-democratic education, which is so urgent in modern times, especially given the global crisis of morality and spirituality (Purpel et al. 2004). Preventing this crisis from deepening further may also have a positive effect on the psychological well-being of individuals (Hendriks et al. 2018). Effective support of moral and spiritual development is thus one of the most important educational challenges, especially with the increasingly influential changes of the modern world, including globalization processes (Ben-Nun Bloom et al. 2014). This applies equally to the field of moral and religious or spiritual education. What binds these two spheres together is personal development, which contributes to positive mental health (Yachina 2015). KMDD<sup>®</sup> itself is not specifically aimed at fostering religious or spiritual reasoning or competence. However, due to the openness of this method and the possibility of using any kind of dilemmas during the discussions, it can be used not only to support moral but also spiritual development, which are understood as equivalent aspects of personal development. To maintain the clarity of the argumentation and to emphasize the original idea, this part of the paper mainly focuses on morality.

The theoretical beginnings of Lind's work on the KMDD<sup>®</sup> method are the effects of polemics, with the idea of discussing moral dilemmas during school classes over a cycle of twelve weeks, during which, each student is faced with moral conflicts involving the structure of thinking for a level higher than the currently represented stage of moral reasoning (Blatt and Kohlberg 1975; Berkowitz 1981). The presented dilemma cannot exceed the learner's cognitive abilities, but also must introduce a specific cognitive challenge that the learner will be able to undertake with a certain probability of success

The KMDD<sup>®</sup> method is based on the model of the two-aspect theory of behavior and moral development, also known as the two-aspect theory or the two-aspect theory of moral action (Lind 2016), taking into account the cognitive (level of reasoning) and the affective (motives, orientations, attitudes, ideas) aspects. The proposal of a two-aspect theory of moral action is the result of a critique of the classical cognitive-developmental approach, which recognizes the cognitive-structural elements as largely independent of affective factors. Lind, referring to Piaget's (Piaget 1981) approach, points to the importance of the subject's own activity in the course of development processes and emphasizes

the importance of qualitative changes taking place in thinking, not only at the level of structure but also in the sphere of behavior. According to the main representatives of the cognitive and developmental approach, the latter can coexist with structural and cognitive factors, but cannot be combined with them within one coherent construct, which is moral development. Meanwhile, Lind assumes that cognitive and affective factors are two inseparable and always coexisting aspects of human behavior (Rest 1980) that can at best develop in parallel (Lind et al. 2017). Moral competence is understood here as the basis of a natural human inclination to participate in democratic processes that are based on a common communication space and not on relations of force and mutual violence.

The proposed method of defining moral competence guarantees a parallel understanding of moral behavior as derivatives that are adopted and internalized by the subject of moral principles, and not only the processes of adaptation to external standards and norms toward the perpetrator. In terms of cognition and development, it is the so-called socio-moral perspective (Kurtines and Gewirtz 1984). In practice, this means the ability of the perpetrator to think carefully and conduct an adequate discourse, which is a good justification for proposing methods of stimulating appropriate competencies. KMDD<sup>®</sup> is a practical dimension to Lind's systematic view of moral development. Many years of research on the two-faceted theory of moral action showed that moral development and moral behavior must be effectively stimulated through educational interventions in order to foster the awakening of the democratic personality. It can be assumed that the same may be true of religiosity or spirituality. Moreover, it was shown that

moral-religious education increases the effectiveness of self-conscience training as well as the effectiveness of training of different competencies such as self-conscience or reflectivity. (Croitoru and Munteanu 2014; Stokes 2019)

According to the *Educational Theory of Moral Development* (orig. *Bildungs theorie der Moralentwicklung*), moral development requires not only the ability to understand and adapt to general social norms but also moral competence that enables the application of moral principles to specific events and dealing with moral, spiritual, and religious dilemmas (Lind 2016). Competence is a broader concept than skill because it relates not only to learning processes but also to the broader context of thinking, actions based on motivational processes and previous experiences, and individual emotionality. The concept of competence is firmly embedded in a practical and dynamic context. The latter aspect concerns cognitive and meta-cognitive skills; knowledge; understanding; interpersonal, intellectual, and pragmatic skills; and ethical values and moral attitudes. Moral competence understood in this way can be developed through appropriately adapted educational interactions (Kohlberg 1964).

Lind believed that moral competence is based on skills that depend on the learning processes that can be applied as a part of educational interactions. They cannot, however, be the same as knowledge, which, if it is the basis of skills, is just one of many aspects of competence. From this point of view, if there is not enough stimulation in moral education, there may even be a regression observed in the course of moral development, especially in an unfavorable environment that does not stimulate moral and spiritual development (e.g., medical studies, imprisonment) (Lind 2000). The classical cognitive and developmental approach does not consider this aspect at all. The KMDD<sup>®</sup> method is Lind's answer to the question of how to stimulate the development of students' moral competence in the best way. Although the method itself originally evolved from the method of discussion proposed by Blatt and Kohlberg (1975), in the course of research and numerous modifications, the earlier assumption about the necessity of using dilemmas from a higher stage than is represented by the learner was abandoned. It is much more important, according to Lind, to face arguments that oppose student's own opinions. The same situation happens when it comes to discussions regarding religious issues (Bozorgmehr et al. 1993). What is more, all moral dilemmas to some extent touch the problem of spiritual involvement of discussing agents even if they are not directly visible. For example, some spiritual dilemmas may touch specific religious values and hence involve spiritual engagement.

The aim of the discussion in the KMDD<sup>®</sup> method is, therefore, not only the stimulation of moral reasoning but also the promotion of democratic attitudes and communication skills that can guarantee tolerance, understanding, and dialogue. The development of moral–democratic and discursive skills becomes an introduction to the world of a democratic society, the essence of which is conduct based on the principles of democracy. KMDD<sup>®</sup> contributes to tolerance education. By positively influencing tolerance, KMDD<sup>®</sup> is at the same time a tool that supports spiritual and religious development. Religious tolerance promotes mental stability and self-confidence, which contributes to positive mental health and personal self-actualization (Papaleontiou-Louca 2021). The basis for this is the ability to discuss with other people according to democratic principles and the ability to deal with emotions that can grow when conflicts arise (Erman 2009). In such situations, the declarative level of moral development, e.g., to what extent one can claim what should be done and what is right, is not what counts the most; practical abilities are much more important. The fact that someone is very efficiently considering the problem of freedom or democracy is not tantamount to the fact that, in life, this person is guided by the principles that characterize moral reasoning. Moral and democratic competencies are more than conflict resolution techniques or a high level of interpersonal competencies. Such skills are also very useful, but they do not replace what Lind describes as inter-subjective agreement on the commonly accepted ethical basics and empathic understanding of each other for genuine cooperation (Lind 2016). The development of such understood competencies is a problem for the education system in general, regardless of social, cultural, and religious conditions (Lind 2011a).

Overcoming the need to defend one's own position in the discussion in favor of recognizing the rank of counterarguments of someone who represents the opposing position is a great challenge for global and local moral and spiritual education.

### 3. KMDD<sup>®</sup> as a Psycho-Didactic Method

KMDD<sup>®</sup> is a method that supports ethical and moral-democratic education in a way that can be described as a psycho-didactic method (Steć and Kulik 2021). The use of KMDD<sup>®</sup> in educational practice may favor individual mental development. Its characteristic and, at the same time, a distinctive feature is the underlying idea of constructive and discursive learning (DeVries and Zan 1994). The constructiveness of the KMDD<sup>®</sup> method includes the teacher's obligation to prepare an educational story that will be presented to the group of participants, present it, and conduct a KMDD<sup>®</sup> session in which, paradoxically, the teacher's participation is hardly visible (Herring 1997). During the session, the teacher acts as a moderator who ensures compliance with two rules: the ping-pong rule (voting for willing participants from the opposition group) and the prohibition of using ad persona arguments (Lind 2016). Both principles are intended to introduce a peaceful exchange of views based on mutual respect between the participants.

Constructivism is also visible in the chronological nature of each KMDD<sup>®</sup> session (Sjøberg 2010). The dialogical nature of the KMDD<sup>®</sup> method supports the participants' striving to look at the core of the problem and to independently discover fundamental moral principles in the frame of democratic interactions with others (Serin 2018).

Competences can be successfully shaped in a special didactic space, which was developed by Piaget, Kohlberg, and Lind (Piaget 1981; Kohlberg 1964; Lind 2016). To create such a space in a real teaching process, a qualified educator that is specialized in modern and interactive teaching and upbringing methods involving cognitive and emotional abilities, as well as communication skills, is required. The point is to support practical and psychological moral abilities and not only moral normative knowledge about moral or spiritual principles. In this respect, traditional teacher-centered learning methods and academic discourse would not bring the expected results as well as KMDD<sup>®</sup> would (Serin 2018). The KMDD<sup>®</sup> method is one of the few tools that a teacher can use in the practice of supporting the development of students' moral and spiritual competence.

KMDD<sup>®</sup> seems to be one of the best developed *psycho-didactic* educational methods supporting democratic and moral development that also contributes to spiritual development. A psycho-didactic approach to education is based on the idea of the combination and integration of psychological methods, as well as the didactic principles and methodological, pedagogical, and specific thematic knowledge from a certain area (e.g., moral education). The psycho-didactic approach may be simply described as the process of using the psychological methods in the didactics of a particular subject in order to support the personal growth of a student (Gelfman et al. 1997; Steć and Kulik 2021). The psycho-didactic approach is an innovative and interdisciplinary vision of how education can be successfully joined with one's psychological development. In this regard, KMDD<sup>®</sup> seems to meet the requirements for psycho-didactic methods in moral and spiritual education (Steć and Kulik 2021).

KMDD<sup>®</sup> is based not only on a well-established theory but also on many years of practice that confirmed its effectiveness in numerous research programs and the process of a KMDD<sup>®</sup> teachers' certification that was formalized by its founder. It allows one to maintain a good quality of intervention every time a KMDD<sup>®</sup> session is introduced to the audience. Lind developed the course of the model session of KMDD<sup>®</sup>, which is a series of procedures, training, and certification in the field of KMDD<sup>®</sup>.

Every single KMDD<sup>®</sup> session should last 90 min, repeated no more than once, with an interval of 2–6 weeks (Biggs and Colesante 2015). The session should contain all the required phases arranged according to the alternating work rhythm: emotional excitement, rational calm, individual and group work, and oral and written work. This translates into the effectiveness of the method and its psycho-didactic potential.

The first part of each KMDD<sup>®</sup> session includes an oral presentation by the teacher of a short story about a fictional protagonist who has a dilemma to deal with. In this part, the role of the teacher is to increase the attention of the audience. In the second part, the participants read the printed version of the story and take notes. The next step is to clarify whether the story has a problem or is simply a dilemma in the eyes of the audience. If the group does not see any problem in the story presented, there is no point in further discussion. If so, they are divided into groups that are "for" and "against" the right choice made by the protagonist of the presented story. This is accompanied by another division into teams of four developing the strongest arguments within the general division of "for" and "against." The main part of the KMDD<sup>®</sup> is a half-hour discussion based on the two principles mentioned earlier: the ping-pong principle and the principle of excluding ad personam arguments. During the discussion, the volunteer makes notes of the arguments presented by opposing groups. All arguments are presented to the participants afterward. After thirty minutes, the participants again form smaller groups to discuss which arguments from the opposing group are best in their opinion. At this stage, the opposing groups vote for the best counter-argument from the opposing group, which supports the ability to see values in the argument with which they do not sympathize. Each participant can express a positive opinion to members of the opposite group. The next step is a second vote to verify the opinions of those who changed their mind. This is not something that is highly expected, as there is no specific purpose in the discussion since neither winners nor losers are declared; the activity is really about the discussion process itself (Steć 2019). The last part is a group assessment. Here, all participants are asked to present their own thoughts and observations one by one (Bardziński and Szopka 2011). Throughout the session, the moderator or the teacher watches over the length of each stage. It is worth mentioning that the topic of discussion during the KMDD<sup>®</sup> session is a semi-real dilemma, a hypothetical dilemma, similar to the proposal of Kohlberg. The fictionality of each story is based on the lack of connection with the actual personal situation of the participants in the discussion. However, this must be a probable dilemma insofar as it can occur in reality (Lind 2016).

One of the most popular stories concerns a judge who, in an unexpected and extreme situation, must decide whether to permit the torture of someone in order to save others.

The KMDD<sup>®</sup> story can involve religious issues as well, but whether it is noticed this way depends on the individual's religiosity, for example, as in the story about a young girl who has to decide whether to undergo an artificial insemination procedure and give the fetus over for medical research in order to earn money to help her ill parents. This story will be perceived differently by religious and non-religious people, but thanks to KMDD<sup>®</sup>, they can discuss the dilemma with each other with respect and tolerance, which may contribute to spiritual growth, as well as moral growth.

Preparing a good dilemma is a difficult and demanding task for the teacher. The way of presenting it to a group of listeners is also important from the perspective of a teacher. Lind believes that the key ability here is to be able to build dramatic tension via the skillful use of pauses during speaking and to arouse in the listener the ability to identify with the protagonist of the story that is faced with a difficult choice between mutually exclusive moral reasons. They must make a choice, which will involve some hesitation. This choice is finally made and the participants of the discussion must establish whether the choice was right or wrong by voting (Carr 2011). Giving a name to the character makes it unique for every listener. Each participant develops an individual cognitive representation of the protagonist of the discussed dilemma. The story must be intellectually and emotionally stimulating, while the emotions caused by the dilemma cannot interfere with the process of rational argumentation. Balancing the proportions of both aspects also depends on the teacher's involvement. The teacher/moderator must remember to shape the session in such a way that emotions are a supportive factor, not an obstacle to the success of the whole discussion (Steć 2019; Rahman Khan 2020). The dilemma should be short enough to be easily told. Due to the specificity of the process of building dramatic tension when presenting a dilemma, it should not be read. However, its adequacy also depends on the degree of its comprehensibility for recipients, and thus its content should be adjusted to the cognitive-affective abilities of the participants.

Benefits that come directly from participating in KMDD<sup>®</sup> sessions are numerous. This approach to moral competence stimulation proposes the innovative discursive process of supporting moral and democratic competencies. Its psycho-didactic potential is strongly emphasized in its structure and principles, as well as the importance of developing an effective method of evaluating the obtained results. Moreover, KMDD<sup>®</sup> enables respectful discussions on controversial topics, such as religious values, worldviews, and personal spirituality.

#### 4. Moral Competence Test

From its beginning, KMDD<sup>®</sup> was enriched by Lind with the use of a technique to measure its effectiveness (Lind 2008). Lind believed that it was not possible to measure individual morality due to the complex nature of personal morality and the imperfection of the psychological measurement methods. The only thing that may be done in this area is to measure the effectiveness of educational interventions on the basis of a pre-test and post-test results comparison of an *experimental questionnaire* (Lind 1982). Lind introduced this term to describe psychological tools that are based on the idea of using certain skills to achieve certain results. This is in line with the assumption that only an observable change can be measured. In the process of checking to what extent a certain variable influences the process of this change, such tools are indispensable. The same is true regarding establishing the effectiveness of KMDD<sup>®</sup>, which may be considered as a variable that may change the level of moral competence, understood as the ability to judge arguments depending on their real quality and not the fact whether they support one's own opinion. The technique used for this purpose is the *Moral Competence Test* (MCT<sup>®</sup>, formerly known as the *Moral Judgment Test* (MJT), or in the original version, *Moralisches Urteil Test* (MUT)) (Lind and Wakenhut 2010). The MCT<sup>®</sup> tool enables the simultaneous measurement of moral orientation and moral competence. The idea is based on a cognitive-structural and experimental approach to psychological measurement, which means that it refers to an individual pattern of behavior rather than a general tendency that can be easily generalized (Lind 1982, 2008).

The MCT<sup>®</sup> contains two short dilemma stories (“Employee dilemma” and “Dilemma of the doctor”), in which each protagonist faces the need to make a difficult moral choice. Both dilemmas were chosen due to the reference to highly demanding moral principles from the fifth and sixth Kohlberg stages of moral reasoning development (Kohlberg 1964). Each story contains information about the final decision made by the protagonist of the story, just as it is in the KMDD<sup>®</sup> discussion. The task of the participant is to judge how the decision made by the protagonist was right or not right. The participant who is filling out the test must successively confront six different arguments for the decision’s rightness and six different arguments for the decision’s wrongness and judge to what extent they would take each argument into account. Arguments represent the six moral stages distinguished by Kohlberg (Kohlberg 1976). At the same time, the MCT<sup>®</sup> test is subordinate to the idea of three levels of difficulty for the participant: first, they must refer to the arguments “for” and “against,” and not only to say “for” or “against.” Second, the participant must differentiate the arguments according to their moral status. The low moral competence will manifest itself at the level of the easiness of the acceptance of arguments supporting the personally chosen position, regardless of the real value and quality of the given arguments. Third, the participant must differentiate the opposing arguments according to their own evaluation of the protagonist’s behavior, which may be a serious difficulty due to possible cognitive imbalances.

The MCT<sup>®</sup> test is not a tool for assessing individual competencies. It is only a technique for evaluating the effectiveness of the method of stimulating competence. However, it is possible to use the MCT<sup>®</sup> individually to get to know the pattern of responses that are used by each person. The more diverse the pattern of answers is, the more can it be assumed that in the process of assessing the given dilemma, one was looking for the most adequate way of judging each argument rather than only positively judging those arguments that confirm their position. The identically understood moral competence is fostered with KMDD<sup>®</sup>. This makes the MCT<sup>®</sup> the best evaluative tool for KMDD<sup>®</sup> assessment. The MCT<sup>®</sup> also enables comparison between KMDD<sup>®</sup> and other methods and techniques used in moral education practice (Zhang 2013; Lind 2016).

### 5. KMDD<sup>®</sup> and MCT<sup>®</sup> in Research

So far, numerous studies have been carried out with the MCT<sup>®</sup> test, which showed that it is an effective tool with high research potential (Zhang 2013; Steć 2019). Lind’s longitudinal German studies that were undertaken in 1986 were not only consistent with the results concerning the stages of moral development obtained in the original American research of Kohlberg but a positive correlation also occurred between the level of moral competence and the number of years of education (Lind 1986). It was also possible to confirm the positive influence of higher education on the academic level of moral reasoning and moral competence (Pascarella 1991). The mentioned impact occurs regardless of cultural diversity. In her intercultural studies, Marcia Schillinger confirmed the positive correlation between the educational environment and moral competence in Brazil and Germany (Schillinger 2006).

One of the most widely discussed examples of research with the use of the MCT<sup>®</sup> was the long-term research project that was conducted as part of the project funded by *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, covering students from Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Poland. Polish students participated in the study three times during the years 1977–1983. One of the goals was to determine the level of moral competence of the students of those countries. The results showed that, regardless of political ideology, Polish students exhibited the same moral orientations found in students from other Western European countries participating in the research. Nevertheless, in the case of Polish students, during the years 1977–1982, a rapid increase in the level of moral competence was noted, followed by a very sharp decline. At the same time, German students were characterized by a small but stable increase in the level of moral competence. Perhaps this tendency was influenced by the process of democratization taking place in the 1970s, followed by rapid sociopolitical

changes related to the introduction of martial law (Nowak and Lind 2019). The results became the basis for further considerations of Lind on the phenomenon of regression in cognitive-moral development.

The KMDD<sup>®</sup> method is successful both in the area of education and in the area of resocialization, where it is useful for preventing the decline of the level of moral competence among prisoners, which is particularly important in contact-restricted areas, where moral competence decreases very quickly if only a few or no learning opportunities for this important competence exist (Hemmerling 2014). Satisfactory results that confirmed not only the effectiveness but also the durability of the impact of the KMDD<sup>®</sup> method were also maintained in research with the participation of students of pharmacy and dental nursing (Slováčková and Slováček 2007), healthcare students (Nowak et al. 2021), and general medicine nursing students (Martins et al. 2021). The latter were confronted with ethical dilemmas related to theft, euthanasia, and the torture of a terrorist and were asked to evaluate arguments for and against the attitude of the main character: worker, doctor, and judge, respectively. The observed better results of the employee dilemma than the doctor dilemma indicate the need to implement moral content in the curriculum for health care professionals in order to better shape the moral sensitivity to make medical decisions based both on professional expertise and moral competence to achieve an increased humanization of health care.

The KMDD<sup>®</sup> method is also very successfully implemented in the area of inclusive education and anti-discrimination programs at schools (Reinicke 2018). It turns out that an intervention with learning values and adapted sport with the KMDD<sup>®</sup> method increased the moral development of students with intellectual disabilities (Sánchez-Romero et al. 2021). The KMDD<sup>®</sup> method was also used in environmental education programs (Putra et al. 2020; Fasbender and Wachten 2017) and cross-cultural studies (Karadag and Tekel 2020). As mentioned before, the method has not been explored so far to shape religious reasoning or competence, but there are first attempts to implement KMDD<sup>®</sup> to create a model to aid with Muslim community members' moral formation (Yaqin 2021).

## 6. Conclusions

The aim of this article was to present KMDD<sup>®</sup> as a valuable educational and psychodidactic tool that is focused on supporting the development of broadly understood moral and religious-spiritual moral and spiritual competences and supporting general personal and psychological development. In the context of global moral and spiritual crises (Purpel et al. 2004) that affect the mental well-being of individuals and societies (Van Beveren et al. 2020), the idea of supporting moral and spiritual development was put forward by placing the problem of moral, religious, or spiritual education at the center of attention of the scientific community. The best response to moral complexity, confusion, distress, or setbacks (Rushton 2016) is to maintain or restore moral integrity and instill ethical habits in life (Reksiana 2018), which leads to personal development, improvement of interpersonal communication, and the achievement of a common platform of understanding based on universal spiritual and moral values, such as belief, mercy, forgiveness, gratitude, and generosity (Frunza 2017). Introducing morality to the core public action seems beneficial if it results from both the religious model and the model of universal spiritual and moral values that exist in all cultures, religions, and traditions (Eckersley 2007).

Bearing in mind the responsibility of the education system for the moral state of future generations, particular attention should be paid to the spiritual and moral formation of students based on religious and cultural values. Shaping students' moral competences strengthens their attitudes of respect and integration against the emerging forms of discrimination. It also supports high levels of awareness and understanding, as well as caring and commitment toward applying the virtues in everyday life (Van Zyl 2002). Virtues are created by introducing values in everyday practice. The need to support the socio-moral and democratic development of young people speaks for fundamental changes in the design of training programs by implementing proven methods of influence that effectively create

educational experiences, stimulating the development of personal moral and spiritual identity (Collins-Mayo and Dandelion 2010).

The KMDD<sup>®</sup> was originally a method of supporting the development of moral competences. After many years of effective application in international educational practice, it remains an innovative method. The level of theoretical and experimental elaboration of KMDD<sup>®</sup> leaves no doubt as to its psycho-didactic and overall educational value. It seems that the strength that lies in the method itself is accompanied by a set of well-designed theoretical assumptions and the testing method of evaluating the effects of its application. These are just a few arguments for a closer look at the opportunities this method opens up to teachers, psychologists, pedagogues, and researchers.

The position of young people in the education system, as well as the pace of the civilization changes, which are not easy to cope with, present new challenges for teachers. The KMDD<sup>®</sup> can therefore be further implemented successfully into educational practice. It seems that KMDD<sup>®</sup>, one of the most representative psycho-didactic methods, is a valuable proposal for an innovative, comprehensive, and practical model for supporting the development of the moral competences of young people on the way to building a civic and democratic society. The proposal for further research on the KMDD<sup>®</sup> method and the MCT<sup>®</sup> test should include areas of moral competence relations with other personality and identity variables. Research on the influence of the stimulation of moral competence on the development of other psychological functions in the course of the development of the individual has not been conducted so far. It seems that a valuable contribution to the understanding of moral competences in the context of the overall functioning and development processes in the life course of an individual could be supplementary research that is conducted using qualitative methods (e.g., narrative analysis, biographical method). The concept of moral competence, as well as the two-aspect theory of moral action, can also be a starting point for considering the construct (still theoretical) of moral identity, which perhaps is a response to the pressing question about the consistency of reasoning and moral feeling with the actual behavior of the individual. Research in this area could simultaneously provide an answer to the question of how supporting the development of moral competence is important for the overall development of an individual.

Religious and spiritual experience is peculiar to those who consider it centrally important (Huber and Huber 2012). They seek purpose and direction in life, and hence develop a moral orientation. This experience is different from other types of experience. How religion, religiosity, spirituality, and moral development interact throughout the lifecycle remains one of the most important areas of research. Our better understanding of the origins of human morality allows us to address the cognitive, psychophysiological, and motivational underpinnings of moral behavior, as well as their implications for individual task performance and collaboration in social groups. Applying these combined insights deepens our understanding of several pressing social issues, including the motivation to avoid discrimination, conflicts of values and abuse of power, and achieving social equality (Ellemers 2017).

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