

# THE TEACHER AS A MORAL EDUCATOR IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

## THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

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Many teachers balance between transferring values to their students or merely clarifying values in front of their students. The first position, transfer of values, does not offer students the desired room for developing their personal interpretations to values. In the second position, clarification of values, the teacher is seen as just a supervisor of the process of the development of values by the students. Many scholars, and teachers too, are looking for a pedagogical and didactic approach in which they seek to do justice to the students' own development as well as to "propagating" or stimulating the values that are important to themselves. Teachers are also a role model for their students because, during their pedagogical and didactic proceedings, they "live" certain values and skills. Of course, this does not mean that students will acquire these same values. But it is a reality that is held out to the students, that they cannot ignore, or that – to very least – they will have to relate.

In earlier publications, we have shown how teachers interpret the forming of values in education (Veugelers & De Kat, 1999a; 1999b; Veugelers, 2000a; 2000b). But how do students judge the moral task of the teacher? What do they expect of the teacher? In this paper, we present the findings from three studies. Here we present the findings with regard to students from secondary schools and in some cases we will bring them into contrast with similar data from teachers and parents.

First, we will address the question whether students believe that teachers in secondary education should not only transfer knowledge but that they also have a task in their moral development (section 1). Next, we will address three aspects of the pedagogical and didactic strategies of teachers:

- the teachers' pedagogical and didactic strategies with *value laden subject material* (section 2);
- the teachers' pedagogical and didactic strategies with *critical situations (incidents)* (section 3), and
- the teacher's moral behavior as part of the total of their pedagogical and didactic strategies (section 4).

## 1. STUDENTS ON THE MORAL EDUCATIONAL TASK OF THE TEACHER

We investigated the question of how parents, students and teachers in secondary education in the Netherlands think about the moral educational task of the teacher. We investigated goals of moral education at home and at school, the school culture, and the division of moral tasks between school and home. The study modeled on the Delphi Method consisted of three phases: a survey by questionnaire, group interviews and panel discussions. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were supplemented by qualitative data from the group interviews and the panel discussions. An instrument was developed for each of the three Delphi phases. A similar research has been done in primary education by Klaassen & Leeferink (1998). In the first phase we used a written questionnaire and we asked the respondents to give their reaction to critical incidents. First we will mention the results of the questionnaire, in section 3 we give the results of the critical incidents.

The questionnaires for the students were completed at school in the classroom. 571 student questionnaires participated in the study. This part of the questionnaire contains 20 statements that relate to the moral educational task of the teacher and the way the teacher should perform this task. These statements have been drawn from a scale developed by Leeferink (1996). The respondents have to indicate the extent to which they agree with the statements on a scale from 1 to 5. The alternatives vary from complete disagreement to complete agreement. Factor analysis provided a four factor result. The four factors explain 56% of the variation. On the basis of the resulting factor structure, four scales have been constructed:

- *Value transfer*. The items from this scale are related to an approach in which certain values that are important to the teacher become the goal of the students' formative process. The scale contains five items (Cronbach's alpha = .77).
- *Organizing special activities*. This scale is related to the attention to values beyond regular classes, for instance in separate, specially for this goal developed classes or activities organized by the school. The scale contains four items (Cronbach's alpha = .76).
- *Stimulating communication*. The items from this scale are related to the stimulation of communication on values, an approach that aims at teaching the students to participate in a social process in which values are open for discussion. This scale contains four items (Cronbach's alpha = .72).
- *No moral pedagogical task*. This scale reflects the view that the schools' task is exclusively, or almost exclusively, the transfer of knowledge. The scale contains three items (Cronbach's alpha = .47).

With the exception of the last scale, "No pedagogical task", the internal consistencies are sufficient to make statements on the groups of respondents.

### ***Results quantitative research***

Many students, parents, and teachers have some reservations with regard to the moral pedagogical task of the teacher (see Table 1). This conclusion may be drawn from the scores on the scale *No moral pedagogical task* for the teacher. Here, the question is raised explicitly whether education should limit itself to knowledge and should refrain from separate attention to the development of values in the students. 30% of the students feel that teachers do not have a pedagogical task. *Stimulating communication* about values is regarded as the most important by the three groups. Teachers should first and foremost support the students in learning to reflect on

and discuss values. But also the transfer of values is seen as fairly important by parents and teachers, but not that strong by students. Organizing *special activities* is more important to parents than to teachers and students. Consequently, students, parents, and teachers all feel that teachers should pay much attention during their regular classes to learning to reflect on and discuss values.

*Table 1: Students, parents and teachers on the moral educational task of teachers*

	Students	Parents	Teachers	F	Sig
N	553	177	76		
Special activities	2.57+	3.29*	2.79+	41.75	p<0.01
Stimulating communication	3.45+	4.12*	4.25*	82.44	p<0.01
Transfer of values	3.18+	4.00*	3.95*	96.62	p<0.01
No moral educational task	3.18*	2.36+	2.10-	115.61	p<0.01

\* differs significantly of +

+ differs significantly of -

### **Results qualitative research**

In the second Delphi phase (the group interviews) we talked at the 8 schools with 53 students, 22 parents and 32 teachers. In the third Delphi phase we organized panels at three schools. These interviews and panel discussions give a more detailed insight in the view of students, parents and teachers about the moral educational task of the teacher in secondary education. In presenting these data we use again the four factors of the questionnaire.

#### *Why does the teacher not have a moral pedagogical task?*

Students demand from the teacher that he is interested in every student and that he pays attention to the personal circumstances of the student. When students object to the moral pedagogical task of the teacher, this is mainly related to influencing the values and the behavior of the students. Students who feel that teachers do not have a moral pedagogical task, object to the teachers' interference with their personal development. At the same time they themselves expect that the teachers take their personal development into account.

#### *How do students feel about special activities with regard to values?*

Students like to participate in social activities organized by the school and they can very well explain what their educational value for themselves is. Special activities that focus explicitly on the development of specific values and on changing opinions are much less appreciated by the students. Activities focusing on social orientation is better received by the students: "*Activities beyond the classroom allow you to get to know people in different ways and make it easier to communicate.*" Students in vocational education also point out the importance of an orientation on the future profession. But the special activities should not, in the students' opinions, be

explicitly value oriented: *“Reading special books is rather overdoing it. Children do not take that seriously – for example reading a book on nagging. Most will not be interested.”*

One school organizes many value oriented projects. The students question this practice: *“Too often, everybody knows in advance what they’re trying to tell you. It’s always the same story, every year again: do not discriminate, smoking marihuana is bad for you. You don’t listen anymore.”*

#### *Students on value communication*

A lot of students love to discuss various subjects in classes. They look for meaningful knowledge: *“Discussions during regular classes are more important than special projects and transferring values.”* *“There ought to be more time to sit down together and talk about things.”* One student believes talking is more important than reading a book: *“A book does not answer back, does not explain.”* *“Discussion means reflection and talking; I find that important and through discussion one may profit from somebody else’s knowledge.”*

How should teachers react to these discussions? According to the students, teachers should involve themselves actively in the discussion, they should express their own views, but they should also be prepared to bring their own opinions up for discussion. A few examples:

- *“A good teacher joins the discussion and clearly expresses his views. Teacher X has an opinion and expresses it. Then both parties try to understand each other and reach compromises.”*
- *“A teacher should provide his views as questions for discussion by the students.”*

According to students, teachers are not always in the position to start a discussion. A tight study program might be hindrance: *“Sometimes the students want to talk things over, but the teacher flags it down and stays with the lesson. There may not be enough time for it during the lesson, but it would have the right moment for discussion.”* Large numbers of students might also be a hindrance: *“Teachers do not often enter into a discussion because they believe there are too many people involved. With some teachers it is very difficult to express your opinion because everybody tries to interrupt. It ends in total chaos.”* Students also indicate that a safe atmosphere in the classroom influences their possibilities to express views and opinions: *“I believe I’ve got it right, but I do not speak up when there are 20 others students around me that might laugh at me. In junior classes they won’t laugh, but in senior classes they will. Discussions ought to be properly modulated and must be conducted within a fixed group.”*

#### *How do students feel about the transfer of values?*

Students feel that teachers may give their opinions, but they should clearly indicate that it is their opinion that is not necessarily “better” than the students’ opinions: *“They must say: ‘This is the way you could do it’, and not: ‘This is the way you have to do it’.”* *“You’ll have to form your own character and must not copy the teachers’ ideals.”* Students do value that a teacher gives his own opinion, but they should be open to discussion: *“They must have an open mind for our views, they mustn’t enforce things, we have to work things out together. The teacher’s own views can be the start of a discussion.”*

## 2. STUDENTS ON TEACHER'S METHODOLOGY

In another study, we have asked students in a more systematic way how the teacher ought to handle the values that are important to him in value laden subject material.

Most often, teachers will only implicitly show the values they believe to be important for their students. They express them in the content of their instruction, the personal curriculum and the didactic methods (Gudmundsdottir, 1990). However, teachers can work more explicitly on value-stimulation by stimulating certain values quite clearly and overtly. This does not mean that students have to adopt the values the teacher expresses, but due to the balance of power in education, students tend to take these values seriously. Students have to make up their minds about the values their teachers stimulate. In their educational practices, in dealing with the development of values, teachers can also concentrate on teaching cognitive strategies (strategies for critical thinking or moral communication). But even then, teachers will show which values they believe to be important for their students. The skills or cognitive strategies teachers want to teach their students are "colored" by the values they believe to be important.

We distinguish four instruction strategies in teaching value laden topics:

- A The teacher tries not to express his own values
- B The teacher makes explicit which values he/she finds important
- C The teacher stresses differences in values without expressing the values he/she finds important
- D The teacher indicates differences in values, but also expresses the values he/she finds important

How do students think about teachers' strategies? We asked 118 students of three secondary schools which strategies they would prefer and which strategies their teacher really uses (Veugelers, 2000a). The categories were: preference, second, third, don't like:

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <i>Preference</i> | D. The teacher indicates differences in values, but also expresses the values he/she believes to be important ( 3.48 of 4) |
| <i>as second</i>  | C The teacher stresses differences in values without expressing the values he/she believes to be important (3.24 )         |
| <i>as third</i>   | A The teacher tries not to express his own values (1.70)   |
| <i>don't like</i> | B The teacher makes explicit which values he/she believes to be important (1.62)   |

The teachers' practices in their school are, according to the students:

<i>mostly</i>	D	The teacher indicates differences in values, but also expresses the values he/she believes to be important (3.45 of 4)
<i>often</i>	C	The teacher stresses differences in values without expressing the values he/she believes to be important (2.74)
<i>sometimes</i>	B	The teacher makes explicit which values he/she believes to be important (2.28)
<i>hardly ever</i>	A	The teacher tries not to express his own values (1.62)

Students really prefer that teachers indicate differences in values, and they also prefer that teachers express the values they themselves find important. But the second preference given, “without expressing their own values”, is only slightly less often mentioned than the first preference, “with their own values”. We may conclude that students do like teachers to express their own values besides indicating differences in values, but teachers should not stress their opinion too much. When we compare the preference of students with the practice of the teachers, we see that there are similarities. Indicating differences and expressing their own values has the students' preference, but students would prefer showing differences to be more frequent to be the case. Teachers are showing their own values more than students prefer.

### 3. BEHAVIOR OF TEACHERS IN CRITICAL SITUATIONS: INCIDENTS AND VALUE LADEN TOPICS

In section 2, we described the teachers' active strategies with value laden subject material. In their educational practices, teachers often react to the students. Whether and how one should react, usually depends on the situation given. In the research project as described in section 1 we have therefor used several instruments to get information about the moral educational task of the teacher. Analogous to earlier research (De Kat & Roede, 1996), fourteen situations have been described in which a moral conflict is visible. In this research, a distinction was made between two types of situations: situations in which a value laden *incident* takes place and situations in which *subjects are being discussed* that have a clear moral aspect. For these fourteen situations, students and parents can indicate how they feel a teacher should react. The teachers were asked how they would really act in the situation described.

#### ***Value laden incidents***

Situations in which a value laden *incident* takes place. These incidents concern: nagging, jokes about head scarves, displaying a racist poster, a swastika on the blackboard, swearing, making a fool of a fellow student and making jokes about churchgoing.

The respondents could in each case chose from six alternative actions.

For the **value laden incidents** these are:

- *ignore* the incident,
- *refer* the “problem”,
- interfere and indicate *that* this behavior is unacceptable.
- interfere and indicate *why* this behavior is unacceptable,
- interfere and start *a discussion with the students involved*,
- interfere and start *a discussion with the whole class*.

How do students and parents feel that teachers should react to value laden incidents and how do teachers behave in these situations? Table 3 shows the reactions of the three groups of respondents to the seven incidents described by us.

*Table 3: reactions on the value laden incidents*

N	Students	Parents	Teachers
571	180	86	
<i>ignore</i> the incident	24%	5%	3%
<i>refer</i> the “problem”	8%	2%	1%
interfere and indicate <i>that</i> this behavior is unacceptable	21%	12%	15%
interfere and indicate <i>why</i> this behavior is unacceptable	17%	31%	34%
interfere and start <i>a discussion with the students involved</i>	14%	19%	22%
interfere and start <i>a discussion with the whole class</i>	16%	31%	24%

When we compare the students with the parents and the teachers, the category “ignore” stands out. Almost one quarter of all pupils indicate that they feel that teachers should generally ignore these incidents. For parents and teachers these percentages are much lower. This coincides with the finding that students, more often than parents and teachers, believe that teachers have no educational task. After “ignore”, the second most mentioned reaction of students is “indicate that certain behavior is unacceptable”. This clearly shows that students are not enthusiastic about an approach to incidents to which the communication (discussion) of values is central.

A closer look reveals significant differences between the various situations. In three situations, the percentage of students that indicate that the teacher should ignore the incident is far below the average (24%) of all seven incidents. These incidents concern: nagging (6% ignore), jokes about head scarves (11% ignore) and a swastika on the blackboard (11% ignore). The situation in which a fool is being made of a fellow student also scores below average (17% ignore). In three of these four situations, classmates are the victim of the incident. Most students feel that the teacher should interfere in these situations. But how? Most students choose “indicate that the behavior is unacceptable” en a few less choose “indicate why the behavior is unacceptable”.

### ***Value laden topics***

Situations in which *students express opinions* that have a clear moral aspect. These opinions concern: foreigners adapting to our values and norms, enforcing rules in the classroom,

trivializing shop thefts, abuse of social services, growing violence among youth, criticizing a teacher for driving a car and prejudices against political refugees. Students are very outspoken with regard to these themes. How should the teacher react to that?

For the situations in which **value laden topics** are under discussion, six other alternatives have been provided. These are:

- *do nothing*, students have a right to their own opinion, even if it is extreme,
- *transfer* the important values that are related to the situation,
- *explain* several views related to the situation,
- let the students give their *own substantiated view*,
- *discuss* the values concerned in the class *without* the teacher clearly stating his own views,
- *discuss* the values concerned in the class *with* the teacher clearly stating his own views.

The reactions on the discussion situations described by us show similar results as for the incidents. Table 4 is an overview of the answers of students, parents and teachers.

Table 4: reaction on value laden topics

N	Students	Parents	Teachers
	571	180	86
– <i>do nothing</i> , students have a right to their own opinion even if it is extreme	26%	6%	4%
– <i>transfer</i> the important values that are related to the situation	10%	6%	5%
– <i>explain</i> several views related to the situation	20%	15%	7%
– let the students give their <i>own substantiated view</i>	13%	9%	10%
– <i>discuss</i> the values concerned in the class <i>without</i> the teacher clearly stating his own views	17%	32%	17%
– <i>discuss</i> the values concerned in the class <i>with</i> the teacher clearly stating his own views	14%	32%	57%

Again, the percentage of students (26%) that feel that teachers should refrain from action stands out and again we see that these percentages are much lower for parents (6%) and teachers (4%). Among the respondents who feel that teachers ought to react, students, parents and teachers all chose the least for “transfer of values that are important to the teacher” or for “let the students give their own views”. Of the students that feel that teachers should act, most believe that this should go no further than to an explanation of the various views that could be taken with regard to the subject. When a teacher chooses to discuss a subject (an alternative favored by only 31% of the students), he should preferably do that without giving his own opinion (17%). Parents and teachers however have a clear preference for discussing the topics.

When we compare these findings on the teachers’ reactive role with the findings from the previous section in which we investigated the teachers’ active role, we see that students believe

that teachers should be more restrained in their reactive role than in their active role. Teachers, according to students, should not express their own opinions too strongly, but should clarify several positions and organize a discussion. Many students also indicate that teachers should respect the students' personal opinions, even when these are quite extreme. But students also feel that fellow students must not be victimized by this.

#### 4. STUDENT EXPECTATIONS ON TEACHER'S BEHAVIOR: MORAL BEHAVIOR AS PART OF THE IDEAL TEACHER

The ways students regard their teachers has been studied elsewhere (Veugelers & De Kat, 1999c). 105 students from the second year in secondary education were presented with 72 teacher characteristics. Some of these characteristics were drawn from the study "Moral development in secondary education" (Veugelers & De Kat, 1998), others from Compernelle (1987) and Brekelmans & Wubbels (1994). The students were asked to which extent a good teacher should possess certain characteristics and to which extent their own teachers indeed possess them. After completion of the questionnaire, the results were further explored during class discussions. In a third round, the results and recommendations were discussed with the teachers.

The 72 items could be reduced to 10 scales (See Veugelers & De Kat, 1999c). We have arranged these ten scales in order of importance (the maximum score, totally agree, was 4).

*Table 5: the ideal and the actual teacher*

	Ideal	Actual
1. Respect for students	3.73	3.05 (1)
2. Caring	3.65	3.04 (2)
3. Integrity of teacher	3.60	2.68 (5)
4. Teacher is relaxed	3.51	2.63 (7)
5. Didactic qualities	3.45	2.61 (8)
6. Stimulating independence	3.41	2.78 (4)
7. Interested in students	3.29	2.51 (9)
8. Order	3.11	2.86 (3)
9. Consideration for students	3.06	2.23 (10)
10. Place high demands	2.53	2.68 (6)

Important characteristics of "the ideal teacher" are:

1. *Respect for students.* The discussions with the students showed unmistakable that they are very susceptible to equal treatment of all students. The students feel that some teachers treat them too often as fools or as "stupid" in front of their classmates.
2. *Caring.* Students value a sincere interest of teachers very much. It must be noted though that this interest should be limited to school and teaching related subjects.
3. *Integrity.* Insincerity of teachers is easily detected by students. It is important for teachers that they are honest about themselves, even when this implies that become vulnerable – for instance when admitting to mistakes.

4. *Much and well explaining.* Students believe it to be important that teachers in turn provide instruction and explain well and much. Refusal of a teacher to explain a matter over and over, takes motivation away fast.
5. *Keeping order.* The authority of a teacher has an immediate effect on the respect that the students show for him/her. As one of the students said: "When a teacher is unable to keep order, I automatically regard him as a jerk." Students value order in the classroom and they admit that testing the power structure is much fun, especially when teachers are newcomers.
6. *Showing consideration for the students' individuality.* Students appreciate it very much when they are treated as individuals, and not as numbers. A teacher therefor has to take differences between students into account.

Students believe that especially the more pedagogical and moral characteristics like respect, caring and integrity are important. Their teachers do possess these characteristics, but the students believe them to be that important that they could be further improved. Students also demand from their teachers that they behave exemplary in moral and social respects; the teachers must display the behavior and attitudes that they seek to develop in their students. Model behavior of teachers is by the students too regarded as an important part of their pedagogical actions.

Are school and personality characteristics of any influence on the students' judgment? The study comprised four levels of secondary education. Hardly any differences were observed between these four levels with regard to the ideal and the impression of the actual situation. There are also few differences between boys and girls with regard to the ideal teacher.

The teachers can identify with this list and interpret the images that were given as a desire to be taken seriously in education. According to teachers, the students place high demands with regard to their social and moral behavior, order, explaining, interest, and consideration for individuals. The teachers believe that these demands are just, but not easy to fulfill.

## 5. DISCUSSION: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH OF VALUE FORMING EDUCATION

Until recently, there has been a strong contrast between proponents of the transfer of values and proponents of a more cognitive approach with an emphasis on the development of the skills to form one's own values. Recently we see many pleas for a more integrative approach of *moral education* (Watson, Battistich & Solomon, 1997; Oser, 1999; Vedder & Veugelers, 1999; Veugelers & De Kat, 1999a). An approach in which teachers stimulate the development of certain values, but also teach their students the skills to further develop their own values and to communicate on them. An active participation of students in the school culture and a large personal responsibility for the learning process are required for this. We call this value forming education, education that is seen as a process in which values are formed, based on the stimulation of values by the teacher and the personal construction of values by the student.

Scholars and teachers of course often differ in opinion with regard to the values they believe to be important and to the desired possibilities for students to participate. An important question here is how the connection between stimulation of values and working on values communication can be achieved. Here too, the opinions of students about the teacher's pedagogical task must be taken into account.

We found that special activities that really focus on values are not much appreciated by the students because they already know the message. Students are more interested in social activities – and not only in a nice day out and sports, but also in introductory weeks. Social orientation and professional orientation are also appreciated because they are related to the present and future daily lives of the student and because they broaden one's outlook and perspective. A lot of students love to discuss various subjects in class. According to students, teachers should stimulate the communication on values more than they do know. Students look for meaningful knowledge.

Value-free education is non-existent. The teachers' values are reflected by their choice of subject material, their explanations, their behavior, their supervision (Goodlad, Soder & Sirotnik, 1990). According to Berkowitz (1997), Kohlberg too admitted in his *Just Community* approach that teachers propagate moral values and that this is not only acceptable, but inevitable. But the personal values of the teacher are only part of value forming education. Characteristic for the connection of the stimulation of values and teaching students to reflect on values ought to be that much attention is paid to the social context of values and the individual's position within society. A change of perspective could be a powerful didactic resource here. In our study into the ideal teacher, we have also asked students what they would do if they will be teachers.

The values that the school aims for are relatively abstract, which creates room for the teacher's and the student's personal significations. As a person who reflects critically on his own values, the teacher without doubt sets an example. Values are not abstract quantities, but are expressed through views and behavior. Teachers cannot withdraw from showing the values that are important to them. In the cultural policy of the government and the school, teachers are even supposed to stimulate the development of specific values. But modern society expects also more and more that young people make choices of their own accord and that they assume responsibility for these choices, also with regard to values (Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994).

The relation between and the interaction of the stimulation of values by teachers and the development of skills by students to form their own values, is not merely of theoretical interest. As we have seen, the students themselves often struggle with this problem. According to students, teachers ought to show various perspectives and organize a discussion about them more often. But teachers also ought, according to students, to be more restrained in emphasizing the values that they believe to be important.

Many students indicate that teachers ought to respect the students' personal opinions, even when they are extreme. Fellow students must not be victimized by this, says the students. Part of the students (30%) is even more restrained when it comes to the pedagogical task of the teacher. Students who feel that teachers do not have a moral pedagogical task, object to the teachers' interference with their personal development. At the same time they themselves expect that the teachers take their personal development into account.

The importance that students adhere to the teacher setting an example is remarkable. The teacher setting an example means in this context that he or she "teaches what he or she preaches", is a model of good moral reasoning and moral communication, is clear about the values he/she defends, and stimulates students and offers them opportunities for active participation in the school. Students especially value the more pedagogical and moral characteristics like respect, caring and integrity. According to students, the teachers do possess these characteristics, but

because they are seen as being that important, they ought to be further improved. Students also demand that teachers show exemplary behavior in moral and social respects; teachers should display the behavior and the attitudes that they seek to develop in their students. In research on moral education we should look more to the model role of teachers. The work of Purpel (1989), Noddings (1992), Jackson, Boostrom and Hansen (1993), Tappan (1998) and Oser (1999) can be helpful in this research.

In this paper we argue for education where the teachers are consciously and at the same time permanently engaged in the development of identity by students. We are really curious whether, in this type of education, it will be more students or less students who believe that the teacher has no pedagogical task.

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