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Toward a Theory of the Just Community Approach

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This chapter expands upon the concept of Kohlberg’s just community (JC) approach for moral education. It is intended as a follow-up to the material provided by Power and Higgins-D’Alessandro (2008) in their chapter for the first edition of the Handbook of Moral and Character Education. Based upon precursors, experiences and research results, I will discuss suggestions for enlarging the basic idea of a just community with respect to elements of civic, pro-social, systemic, and participation-oriented beliefs. This is followed by accounts of basic functional parts of a JC, a more detailed analysis of resistance to JC schools, accounts of practical examples, and advice on making JC schools work. The final section of the chapter proposes how to expand the theory of just community schools so that moral and social education become the basis for academic learning.


effect of collective moral, civic, and social education

Fritz K. Oser

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Toward a Theory of the Just Community Approach

Enlarging the Basic Idea

“The just community approach has two major aims: (1) to promote students’ moral development, and (2) to transform the moral atmosphere of the school into a moral community” (Power & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2008, p. 231). Although this statement is correct and relates fully to Kohlberg’s conception (see Kohlberg, 1985), it is not fully differentiated and does not include enough of the following: (a) a theory of civic education, (b) a theory of school functioning, (c) a theory of social beliefs and social learning, and (d) a theory of complex morality. Having guided several just community schools in Germany and Switzerland, it seems to me that empowerment of students through the process of building up such a just community (JC) school has implications that go beyond moral development and moral atmosphere. Since the JC approach is a comprehensive enterprise, it includes theoretically and practically more than positive non-indoctrinative morality. It also encompasses systemic and collective dangers, fragilities, and inevitable mistakes—factors mostly not taken into consideration in descriptions of the JC approach. Enlarging the basic concept of Kohlberg’s idea and its implementation during his time may help in...
understanding resistances of many teachers and principals to involving themselves more profoundly into the realization of such an idealistic vision today.

ON THE RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

It is not self-evident that most learning processes within the construction of a JC are often seen as “painful” from students’ points of view once the “newness bias” of the installation of such a school-form is gone. Since learning involves overcoming resistant forces, it becomes immediately apparent that changing attitudes, beliefs, convictions—and even knowledge bases—is often rough going. If we learn that we must change, we like to resist, especially if the goal toward this change is not seen as worthy enough compared to other learning goals such as, for example, building knowledge in computer programming. Here is an illustrative example. Joining about 250 other students between 12 and 15 years of age for a JC meeting, a tall boy in the last year of compulsory schooling said to me:

Dr. Oser, do we have to decide on school issues again? This takes from us so much thinking and accountability work. Look, if you, you alone, decide, that is much easier for us. You are an adult person at the university, and we believe that you do the right thing. We do what you want us to do. Why shall we be concerned about others? We are friendly; we prepare for life; and we will be honest. That is all we need. To be moral doesn’t give you an apprenticeship position later in an important firm. And to learn democracy has no value for this.

This 15-year-old philosopher fully understood what we were doing. He knew that participation means to be responsible and accountable, but after a year of hard work, he did not see the value of it—even worse, he could see the value, but he did not want to be involved in it. We may add an even more gripping example. Althof (1998), who founded and scaffolded many JC schools, experienced the following situation in a teacher training university in which he had created a JC approach a couple of months previously with these young adults. At a meeting that he could not attend because of illness, some students amazingly proposed to give up this whole concept. Although no action was taken subsequently, they won the vote. This was a clear sign that some of these adults understood that, for the system to survive, school reform demands a total engagement: availability, responsibility, and care. And they were well aware of the JC system’s fragility.

I present this rather problematic account because authors are, in general, too enthusiastic about the JC approach; some of them see it as a means for solving a lot of school problems, a technique like “give an I message” (e.g., “I see your point about . . .; however, I believe that, as a group, we feel that your message . . .”) and everything will be solved. Others conceive it as a great hope for a better learning climate, and they feel especially that this could be a chance for learning what a positive democracy could be. However, without destroying these hopes, we distinguish the JC approach primarily as a means for learning what we think is a social good for students or primarily as an endpoint for living in a world that could indeed be a better one than we currently experience in most schools. The JC approach as an endpoint is an imposition for all the participants: for the students, but especially for the teachers and principals. They have to exercise what we call the “presupposition of autonomy” (see the paragraph on the teachers’ role), meaning that teachers have to act as if students already have autonomy in order to develop it—this is hard pedagogical work.
However, before continuing with the case for an expanded theory of the just community approach, I wish to enlarge the context with a history of related endeavors and a history of just community implementations.

**PRECURSORS**

*Pestalozzi*

For Europeans, to speak about the JC approach inevitably invokes a connection with Heinrich Pestalozzi. In the years 1798 and 1799, when French troops entered the so-called old Swiss cantons, soldiers focused particular attention to one of the founding cantons, Schwyz. The result was terrible poverty, broken families, orphans, sicknesses, etc. Pestalozzi received the task from the new central government of Switzerland to care for the lost children of Schwyz, spawning the mythos of Pestalozzi as father of orphans. When he describes the children’s poverty, their hunger, and lack of access to rooms and beds—all within the tension between Catholics and Protestants against a background of occupying French troops (see Pestalozzi, 1799/1965, the letter of Stans)—his discussion amounts to a prescription for how to educate for a humane orientation in difficult times. This experience led him to found a children’s community based upon the core assumption that children’s moral development would emerge from fulfilling the demands of daily living and work.

The daily work element consisted of three stages. The first was to develop a moral mood (a kind of basic trust) through the fulfillment of the fundamental needs of the child. From this core of basic trust, the child then learned to engage in doing the good; to act so that the good becomes habituated. Finally, in the third stage, the child learned about evaluating both the good and the bad. For this latter phase, Pestalozzi introduced ethical constructs, rules, and notions to explain to the children reasons for being good. In this concept the feeling (heart) presupposes the acting (hand), which was followed by reasoning (mind or head). Pestalozzi’s personal connectedness to the children was a kind of educational guarantee for stimulating these processes. Thus, Pestalozzi introduced the radical notion for the time period, that moral education emerged from a quasi-family structure that formed the context within which children experienced the good feelings, and responsibilities for action guided by moral judgment that were the basis of children’s moral growth.

*Makarenko*

In many of my courses, I present the following story—by Anton Makarenko (1938, pp. 124ff.) to teachers and educational psychologists who know about Kohlberg’s JC approach:

There was a young man, a commander and quasi-leader, who was responsible for the entire community. He was engaged in cultural work as a member of a theater group. He was a good worker, and enjoyed the esteem and the respect of all—including me. He was one of the older, neglected young persons that I had discovered. He had already experienced a lot of delinquency and vagabond behavior before coming to us (Makarenko, 1976, p. 124). One day a new radio was stolen; it disappeared from the sleeping room. It belonged to a boy who had done hard work to get the money to
purchase it. The young group leader organized a community meeting and proposed an investigation. Later, one of the other boys found the radio in a hidden theater room, and he and others subsequently took turns observing this place to watch for who would come and use the radio. After a while, it was precisely the boy who served as group commander who entered the room looking for the radio. The observing students thus discovered that it was he who was the thief. In the following community meetings, they decided, after long debates, to dismiss the boy from his post and have him move out of the home. Makarenko, the founder and leader of the home, resisted the dismissal. He called on an upper committee to overrule the students’ decision, proposed other forms of penance for the young offender, and otherwise fought for a different decision. Finally and painfully, however, he had to accept it.

Teachers and researchers that hear this story generally think that it depicts a typical Kohlbergian dilemma from the Bronx JC school or from the Niantic correction JC system. But the story stems from Makarenko’s collective education home. In the story I just omitted words such as “kosomolse,” “communards,” and “tetchiest” that would remind one of the soviet style of collective working colonies for young orphans, street-children, criminal youth groups, and similar outcasts.

Makarenko had, about 50 years earlier than Kohlberg, similar goals and ideas—namely, to educate morally through the building of communities that were self-governing and to develop high moral standards. In his so-called Gorki-colony (1920–1928) and later in the Dzerzinskij community (1927–1935), he tried to build up a system of rules through a special concept of discipline with a strong human face. Makarenko is often misunderstood and dismissed by American readers as a communist. He was, of course, influenced by the ideas of the Russian Revolution, but his writings are about how to build up resilience for poor children and adolescents in wartime and terrible political chaos. His positions are not political cant, but are indeed serious educational reflections.

For him, similar to Durkheim (1961), discipline produces feelings of security and leads to freedom of thinking and doing the right thing. Interestingly, Makarenko developed three stages of internalization of this freedom-producing discipline: stage 1, to ask for its realization and set norms with great conviction and authority; stage 2, to build groups that share this demand and see the advantages of living with a common discipline; and stage 3, to transform the demand for moral norms into a common-sense community value. He described the dangers and pitfalls of each stage, and he posited that the task of the leader is to give, in each decision-making situation, a face of understanding for these weaknesses. Lastly, Makarenko engaged himself in building these communities for helping disadvantaged children and adolescents to survive—quite similar to what Pestalozzi did.

Korczak

One of the most impressive forefathers of the JC approach is Janusz Korczak (1967), the so-called Polish Pestalozzi. With Stepha Wilczynska, he installed a parliamentary form of his orphan home containing between 200 and 300 children from the streets between three and 14 years of age. Korczak’s biography is impressive. He was born into a well-settled Jewish family in Poland. After becoming a well-known medical doctor and participating in World War I on the Russian front, he gave up his medical career to take over a first and then a second home for orphans. Writing under the pseudonym Janusz Korczak, he contributed articles to educational journals and developed the first concept
of children’s rights. Accompanying 300 deported children, he died in the Treblinka concentration camp in 1942. His greatest idea (and its decisive realization) was a kind of JC approach in a very special sense. He installed in his home a parliamentary concept in which all children were fully involved.

The elements of this system were as follows:

- plenary student meetings for deciding on all important life issues of the home;
- the friendship or comrade court to deal with the task of treating children’s and adolescents’ infractions of rules in a fair but decisive way;
- a library with books that also included Korczak’s diary describing the development of each child so that the children could read what he was thinking about them and thus to be able to ask for changes when they felt misinterpreted;
- a blackboard in the entrance hall for information sharing.

The most important component was the plenary assembly mentioned above and the friendship court elected regularly by the full parliament. Since Korczak knew that children could judge other children harshly, he developed a comprehensive body of regulations to stimulate a basic sensitivity for forgiveness. The first 100 rules included elements of forgiveness. All of the subsequent rules were numbered in 100s (200, 300, etc.) to convey the notion that these referred to serious infractions associated with severe punishment and should be invoked rarely—or as in the case of rule 1000 practically never. Let us look at some examples.

Rule 1: The court declares that the complaint against A has been withdrawn.
Rule 30: The court declares that A could not have acted differently.
Rule 67: The court forgives A for the bad thing done without reflection.
Rule 94: The court forgives A because someone imploringly asks for it (a friend or a relative, etc.).

Then come the big and heavy stones.

Rule 100: The court states without forgiveness that A did act negatively.
Rule 600: The court declares that A did act badly. This judgment has to be made public in the house newspaper and on the blackboard.
Rule 1000: The court dismisses A from the home. This judgment has to be published in the newspaper.

All this was a sensitivity process in which the delinquent behaviors that kids and adolescents committed were thoroughly investigated. Korczak (1967) wanted students to become reflective not only about their own behavior but also about the behavior of the others. Korczak used this experience to develop the universal rights for children adopted by the United Nations in 1949. He declared, for example, that the child has a right to keep a secret, a right to personal belongings, a right to be loved, and, especially, a right to full human respect. Human respect had three faces: (a) the right to live in this day and age, (b) the right to be oneself, and (c) the right to one’s own death, which means to take risks, to explore the world, to receive presupposed responsibility for discovering new and challenging situations.
It is quite interesting that Korczak’s home community includes the same elements as Kohlberg’s JC approach. There was a regular community meeting, a fairness committee (friendship court), a preparation group elected by the plenary community, and the possibility of always demanding a plenary get-together (a real JC meeting). The differences are also quite obvious. First, Korczak’s concept of a warm parliamentary interchange is a life concept and not a school form. The children in Korczak’s home lived there for their existence whereas Kohlberg’s JC approach is a structure implanted into the school. In the JC school, children and adolescents return home afterwards; in Korczak’s home, the children leave the parliamentary home for visiting the classical school, outside in the city, which at that time had no democratic roots. Another difference is that Korczak had no developmental theory of growth, but in his famous book *How to Love a Child* (1967), he developed a theory of moral sensibility in the context of norm and rule induction. It is of great historical interest that Lawrence Kohlberg learned about Korczak in 1980, relatively late in his life. In his last chapter of *Essays on Moral Development, Volume One*, he describes Korczak as an example of stage six or even stage seven (Kohlberg, 1981).

**Kibbutz Life**

In several places when Kohlberg introduces us to the JC approach, he refers to the kibbutzim spirit (e.g., in Kohlberg, 1980, 1985; see also Snarey and Samuelson this volume). But a kibbutz, even with its concept of community education, does not fit well into the concept of the JC approach. A kibbutz is a total life-sharing enterprise with the purpose of survival, with special conceptions of early childhood education, with income sharing, and a special work and survival spirit—traits embedded after the 1948 Arab–Israeli War in the growing of the state of Israel.

A JC is a school transformational concept of power sharing with children and adolescents to learn how to become moral, to be socially engaged, work hard, and develop civility. Here, work and money are not shared, but common norms and self-generated rules are. The JC is a playground democracy, a place for learning and simulating a better togetherness, and a change of the norm-genesis process normally done by the teacher alone and now given to the whole community. A kibbutz, on the other hand, consists of a higher degree of existential communitarian sharedness that includes work, child care, religious belief, traditions and signs of passages but with less formal behavioral codes such as those in a school. Nevertheless, the spirit of a kibbutz in its best form can influence our teachers who engage in the JC approach.

**THE JUST COMMUNITY APPROACH: A BRIEF HISTORY**

The first JC schools were founded by L. Kohlberg, E. Wassermann, E. Fenton, D. Speicher-Dubin, and R. Mosher. The Cambridge Cluster School, Scarsdale Alternative School, and Brookline High School (School within a School) were places where the idea first received fruition. The book edited by R. Mosher (1980) *Moral Education* is an important account of these beginnings. While enacting his vision within schools, Kohlberg also chartered the concept of the JC approach in prisons in Niantic and other correctional institutes (Hickey & Scharf, 1980).

The second generation of JC schools guided primarily by Higgins and Power (Power & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2008) continued Kohlberg’s work after his death. Additional JC enterprises emerged that were connected to other reform tasks.
Whereas in the USA some highly committed persons continue practicing the JC approach, more commonly it has been incorporated into other approaches. For instance, the Community of Caring school reform program that initially focused on risk prevention broadened its scope to promoting the development of all students through school culture change and an array of student activities including service learning.

(Oser, Althof, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2008, p. 400)

The European version of the JC emerged in 1984 when Kohlberg and Higgins visited Germany, and three JC schools in Nordrheine-Westfalia were founded by Oser and Lind (Lind, 1987; Lind & Althof, 1992). In the 1990s, Switzerland started several just communities within schools, often connected with other goals like conflict negotiation or civic education (Luterbacher, 2009). In Germany, this has been expressed more recently in efforts at democratic education (Edelstein & Fauser, 2001; see also Edelstein and Krettenauer this volume).

ADDRESSING A PERCEIVED DEFICIT: KOHLBERG’S VISION OF SCHOOLS

The just community approach founded by Kohlberg in the 1970s and 1980s (Kohlberg, 1985) is, as mentioned, an effort to reform a difficult to change system—a whole school. The beginning of such an expansive intention is felt a fundamental deficit of school functioning and also a deficit with respect to the level of moral judgments, prosocial actions, and moral-caring sensibilities of the individual members of such a community. “Our first two efforts at using the Dewey-Piaget democracy and Durkheimian collective moral education, like the kibbutz experiment, focused heavily on remedial moral education for pre-conventional adolescents and young adults” (Kohlberg, 1985, p. 44). The word “remedial” is important: A just community school starts mostly with evidence and stories of such things as students breaking rules, failing to help others, using drugs, hurting peers, being unmotivated to study, etc. These events can be clustered into the realms of morality, community-oriented values, politics, social issues, and systemic issues—each demanding different reworking strategies. These events lead students to a felt disequilibrium with respect to a caring and positive school climate. They feel a missing state of shared community values and deep disappointment regarding a lack of mutual respect between teachers and students and among students themselves. Even if these negative experiences are often not measured through instruments (scales), principals, teachers, school helpers, parents, and often students talk about them, feel them, and indeed become seriously concerned about them. As the philosopher N. Hartmann (1957) states, “Only negatively can humans get a notion of happiness” (p. 141). From a teleological point of view, a JC system is an instrument for overcoming these deficits. From a deontological framing, however, it is of course an educational enterprise with humanistic goals and values (Veugelers, 2011).

Kohlberg’s vision was, nevertheless, not directed at systemic change so much as it was intended to stimulate development within each individual with respect to three fundamental goals, namely:

(a) to develop moral judgment through deliberative discourse whereby the contents are not artificial but real-life or school dilemmas;
(b) to bridge moral judgment and moral agency;
(c) to develop shared norms with a subtle sense of community and central aspects of solidarity.

Although, Kohlberg’s 1985 article “The just community approach to moral education in theory and practice” is a masterful foundation for a new reform stream with respect to changing persons within a school, his analysis presents a limited vision focused solely on moral education. To put it differently, the “just community” approach amounts “solely,” in the view of John Dewey’s conception, as a means for moral education. I would argue that the issue has to be reconsidered under the heading of what we call a comprehensive domain-specific transformation of the person–system relationship.

Kohlberg (1985) begins by making it clear that most psychologists use a one-way concept to transfer psychological theory into praxis, and this way can never be fully functional. He states: “The one-way street model of relating theory to practice rests on what I have called the ‘psychologist’s fallacy’, i.e., to believe that what is important for developmental psychology research is what is important for practitioners in the classroom” (p. 33), and, in his bottom-up approach, he explains why the teacher is not just a facilitator of learning but “an advocate for certain moral content” (advocacy approach). If the teacher shows high respect for the student, this allows a participatory democracy in the classroom and, at the same time, advocates certain values without being indoctrinative. The issue then is how to link justice to a small political community based on equal political rights. The notion of a community and the notion of justice are brought together through the concept of collectivity within a communitarian context. However, this always entails a structure in which the teacher has a double role; namely, to set conditions for participation and to participate (without a pseudo-participatory attitude; see below). The importance of membership, the sense of community, the primary negative sanctions of the group’s criticism, the basic trust and the conflict between the solidarity of friends versus the solidarity toward the community as a whole—these are all taken into newly developed phases of collective norms, stages of collective normative values, stages of a sense of community-valuing, and degrees of collectiveness of norms. Examples from one of the first just community schools, the Scarsdale Alternative School, help clarify aspects of what is called a moral atmosphere, moral courage (civil disobedience), the difference between an immoral behavior such as stealing (which concerns each student) and cheating (which concerns mainly only one student and the respective teachers). What is especially interesting—what happens often in democracies—is that a new rule (e.g., against cheating) is voted in by unanimous agreement, but the enforcement of the new rule is decided upon with extreme controversy. This construction of a moral atmosphere, which is by no means just an emotional wellbeing factor but is instead a content-specific amount of intensity of the collectiveness of norms, is apparent in the justification structures within JC meetings. In fact, this is a Durkheimian concept because of its discipline and socialization orientation (Durkheim, 1961).

Thus, to sum up:

In Just-Community school meetings students, teachers, staff-members and principals come together on a regular basis in order to thoroughly discuss and democratically decide upon issues relevant to life in school—Special community projects
are planned, conflict solutions are generated and rules and policies are established that reflect shared norms and values of the school community.

(Oser et al., 2008, p. 395)

In a parliamentary way, a whole community decides together on: (a) rules that shape their daily school-life; (b) goals for positive togetherness and high solidarity of all members (on issues of a positive school climate and on prosocial engagements in the school); (c) proposed solutions to conflicts, upholding rules, and rule enforcing processes); and (d) special community programs. Participation is at the core of this search for new moral and social learning directions and new school pathways, and, with the belief that in participating in common decision making, students learn to be socially competent first and develop shared norms second (see Figure 12.1).

**A NEW WORLD: THE CORE IDEA OF THE JC APPROACH**

To find out what happens beyond moral developmental or collective norm oriented tendencies in the Kohlbergian sense, we need to analyze the missing dimensions mentioned above. The following account (edited for length) of a JC meeting at a middle-sized Swiss school reveals these.

*Figure 12.1 Example of a Voting Process in a Swiss Just Community Meeting (Photo taken by W. Althof).*
It is Monday, 11 o’clock. More than 300 persons (all the secondary students in grades 7 to 9, all the teachers, all the staff members) come together to decide a very difficult case: Three times the last week, somebody entered the girls’ restrooms, dirtied them terribly, and destroyed whatever could be destroyed, leaving the restrooms smelling awful. In the first meeting, the planning committee presented the case. Many of the female students stood up and expressed feelings of indignation, injustice, and mistrust—sometimes along with some very embarrassing facts. There followed a general discussion in which many hypothesized about who could do such a terrible thing: someone from inside the school or someone from outside the school.

Many of the students wanted to say something about their understanding of the case: for example, “this is certainly a person who is frustrated about the school as a whole”; “this person must be punished harshly”; or “we need a new rule of observation.” One boy offered to let the girls use the boys’ restroom on the first floor until the girls’ restroom was repaired; the boys would use the restroom in the basement. Afterwards, the planning committee presented three solution proposals: first, install a hidden camera so that the “criminal” could be caught; second, students from the upper classes—taking turns—would go through the corridors every 15 minutes with an alarm clock looking for possible perpetrators; and third, there would be a huge flyer in front of the restrooms saying with huge letters, “Don’t do this again. You hurt people.”

Then students formed into small groups in the big hall and intensely discussed the propositions. Some developed propositions such as engaging a policeman or father of one of the students who had time to look at things. Another proposition was just to trust that the wrongdoer, probably an upper classman, would have an insight that this was a misguided approach for getting rid of frustration. Then the students came back to the mean assembly, and a representative of each group argued for one or another solution. After a long discussion, the planning committee proposed progressive solutions in four steps: first a flyer; second a hidden camera; third student control; and fourth police control. After a final serious discussion of pros and cons, the meeting came to an end with a vote. By a tiny majority, the planning committee accepted proposition three—the flyer in front of the restroom.

At the end, the school principal gave a small, convincing talk saying that this school is a “good school,” not only because it has a good climate, good teachers, and wonderful students, but also because this school brings things out in the open and solves problems itself. Afterwards teacher and student groups stood around the main floor of the school and discussed the issue. The teachers were especially involved deeply in self-criticism, fearing that a negative light would be shed on the school. In a teachers’ meeting later in the afternoon, some teachers criticized the solution that was adopted. The principal defended the outcome from the position that to make things open and let the students participate in an open discourse is better than hiding things because the students learn to see what accountability means. Then the principal, a very clever woman, invited a journalist to the school and asked him to write about such a wonderful democratic school where the students take on high responsibility, etc. Only one father, a lawyer, tried to bother the principal afterwards. All in all, after posting the agreed-upon flyer, there was no more dirtying of the girls’ restrooms.

Althof (2008) reports that many teachers and parents—but also principals and educational politicians—ask if it would be necessary to spend so much time and the energy
of so many people to resolve a case like this. He also reports that many parents feared that students cannot really take responsibility for such situations, that they suffer from them, or that the burden would be too high for them. Some teachers also had the opinion that the school principal should regulate such problems. We call this “a regulation syndrome.”

Looking from an educational standpoint, it is obvious that very interesting and intensive learning processes were at stake here. To name some:

- A school-wide organization at a time during the week when everybody has to leave the classroom and to be at this “agora.”
- A case is made public within (and only within) the clear borders of a system so that everybody in the system shares the same knowledge and concerns.
- There is public debate in which everyone can make suggestions, take a stance, and share the indignation.
- There is concern expressed about respectful treatment of girls.
- There is apparently a mixture of argumentation levels or stages that stimulates the next higher stage.
- There is a lobbying mode that consists of convincing others from their own convictions.
- The preparation group has a process employing parliamentary solutions that have to be analyzed and valued, first in small groups and then in full parliament.
- There is voting preparation and a process in which the result is taken seriously, even if “philosopher kings” would never accept this solution.
- Most of the time, the minority voters accept the majority decision, but the majority learns to respect the opinion of the minority.
- Because all members of the school make the decision, responsibility and implementation are shared.
- This leads to what we call “system identity”—important also for workplaces, institutes, and similar organizations.

These elements show that a JC school operates in a concrete situation, in a specific time frame, with a concrete problem to solve, and with a sense of necessity for morally problematic issues. Although these elements are initially described above without having been framed by theory, we can begin by taking them into consideration in order to understand what happens in a more comprehensive manner. We stated that the JC approach is missing (a) a theory of civic education, (b) a theory of school functioning, (c) a theory of social beliefs and social learning, and (d) a theory of complex morality. These would be considered alongside the Kohlberg-introduced functions of stimulating moral development and the enhancement of community-related convictions and social bonding.

THE MISSING ELEMENTS

Civic Education and a View of the Whole School

In the above account of a JC meeting, the political and civic dimensions of a meeting become obvious. On one hand, the democracy becomes visible (one person, one vote). On the other hand, students experience and come to understand the consequences of
public opinion produced by a process (they participate in a public decision-making process, participate in a voting process, and accept and submit themselves to a majority/minority situation). These are civic issues, not primarily moral-domain issues. Questions of freedom to speak while having respect for others, learning political tolerance, and being aware of the power of the preparation group are political issues. In addition, students learn how helpless and impotent we are in the face of heavy and populist arguments, how much we feel misunderstood if we think that someone is lobbying behind our backs, how decisions of the leading group can be manipulated and nondemocratic, and how to be “neutral” in developing and deciding upon a new rule. The learning of politics thus is embedded in the empowerment of each school member, and the whole system to trust the reason and legitimating capacity of each student and teacher.

“Politics” here has several meanings: to influence the power structure of a system, to argue freely, to understand the process of rule genesis, and to decide by voting or to elect freely in a participative process. And “civic” means to participate in a political community. “Certainly such participation entails interaction with the state (school) and its institutions, but it also includes activities undertaken with fellow community members about matters of shared concern” (Rogers, Mediratta, & Shah, 2012, p. 44). Here students learn to understand that a community, besides consisting of shared feelings and atmosphere, is first of all a system of rules and a sharing of ruling (Gutmann, 1987; Moses & Saenz, 2012). Again, this does not touch on morality directly—only indirectly, like every act in human life.

The school-theoretical perspective is completely different. The school, as a system within a bigger, regulative system of a state, has its own basic and educationally justifiable structure. Because the school is totally coercive (a student must learn a given curriculum, must do homework, must behave according to rules, must listen to a teacher, etc.), and even if all its “musts” are subordinate to a positive human respect, this coerciveness cannot be overlooked or even destroyed. Because the functions of every school in the world are (a) to build knowledge, (b) to test and select students according to their competencies, (c) to allocate life resources, and (e) socialize students into the adult life (see Fend, 2007), it is obvious that the basic functions of schools cannot be subordinated to the JC approach. It rather must be taken into a socially supporting body of mutually supporting individuals within this mentioned coercive structure. Kohlberg did not have many sociologically relevant reflections about the school as a system. His idea was that development to higher stages and shared norms were the basic elements for changing a school. We believe that this idea is a very important part of the JC approach, but it is not all. There are two more elements: First, we must consider the conditions for a school-system change toward a JC approach, and, second, we have to ask how students of different ages conceive of their school as a system.

On a first point, consider the work of Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss (2010) titled Leading School Turnaround. It is a top-down concept in which, influenced by the corporate world, the basic goal is to dismiss weak teachers in order to enhance math and reading performances, to control children, and to implement rules and enforce them. In order to prevent schools from failing, turnaround leaders support the high performance of teachers, and try to stimulate the success reflections on their colleagues’ professional skills and knowledge. They model desirable practices; redesign schools according to discipline and respect of others; and buffer staff change across fit-in-criteria. The respective strategies are: building productive relationships, building achievement targets, and
getting funds for evaluation in order to fit the school into the highest national benchmarks. Even without considering competition, single incentives, and sanctions, we find a similar approach in Darling-Hammonds’ concept of educational reform with the elements: standards of assessment, systemic thinking, instructional quality, creation of collegial incentives, and external revisions (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

A different concept is taken in other books like *School Effectiveness for Whom* (Slee, Weiner, & Tomlinson, 1998), and here at least a positive criticism prevails. The editors say in the beginning:

We maintain that while reporting to be inclusive and comprehensive, school effectiveness research is riddled with errors: it is excluding (of children with special needs, black boys, so-called clever girls), it is normative and regulatory (operating mainly within narrow sets of performance indicators), it is bureaucratic and disempowering. It focuses exclusively on the processes and internal constructs of schooling, apparently disconnected from educations’ social end—adulthood. School effectiveness seems to be neither interested nor very effective in preparing children for citizenship, parenthood or work.

(p. 5)

Of course these are two extreme conceptions (one showing a full top-down approach, the other referring to criticism with respect to one-sided reforms), but they are helpful for locating what we mean by carrying out a reform like the JC approach from the bottom up. The self-governing style of a JC school is somehow much more complex, human, and fragile. On one hand, we refer to the empowerment of the children’s embeddedness in a just community that is not only well felt but also oriented to just decision making. This has to do with the parliamentary part of the JC approach. Of course, in the JC schools, effectiveness in academics is also related to the moral and social climate. In an environment where children and adolescents protect each other, learning becomes meaningful and purposeful.

We cannot cite research on how students of different ages conceive of systems like schools, states, firms, etc. From our own research, we know that for an eight-year-old child, the system is seen as the persons in it: The school principal is the system; the teacher and a few kids are the system—thus expressing close relationships or powerful positions. For children of this age, the system is what they see. For an adolescent, the system renders you helpless because they do not understand how and why power is there. Adolescents test the system (for example, by breaking rules) in order get a sense of it, to test the power, and to find limits. Young adults, however, see the system as a necessary instrument to keep control. For them, only through the system can humans guarantee justice, trust, and security. They functionalize the system (see Biedermann & Oser, 2010).

As stated above, there is no developmental research on students’ conceptions of the function of the schools in society. However, our hypothesis is that in a JC school the development with respect to such issues is more successful than in normal state schools.

**A Theory of Social Beliefs and Complex Morality**

The third element in my listing of components missing from accounts of the JC is the lack of a theory of social beliefs and social learning. In every school, these processes are obvious. Students and teachers are interacting, communicating, playing, working, and
often celebrating together. Students are asking for help, looking for friendship, and are keen on being accepted and socially involved. They are involved in daily discourses and conflict management and its respective solutions—all of which is embedded in automated symbolic activities. A JC approach thus cannot exist without understanding these basic social processes. They are inextricably embedded in an already present ocean of billions of interactive actions and reactions. In many studies, Nucci and his group (see Nucci, 2001, 2009; Nucci & Powers this volume) convinced us that the development of concepts about societal convention and social sensitivity are distinct aspects of human development that should be distinguished from the moral domain. Whereas the societal domain and norms of social convention consists of unnecessary duties according to Kant, the moral domain is fixed and much less flexible. In one of our studies, we report that parents discuss moral aspects much less than social aspects or personal issues (see Oser, Hattersley, & Spychiger, 2008). The reason for this rests in the absolute necessity of the fairness norms compared to only a wished-for necessity of social engagement. In the story of a JC meeting presented above, social issues come up when a boy offered the boys’ restroom on one floor of the building. Social aspects are shown with respect to dignity for human intimacy, and, of course, social aspects involve taking the role of others in the given situation.

When we state that we should offer a more complex moral theory, we mean that more than stages of moral judgment should be our concern. We should also attend to the interactions of morality with societal conventions and personal considerations (Nucci, 2001, 2009), and also take into account moral memory, moral sensibility, moral centrality, moral motivation, moral rule enforcement, moral respect, and, thus, well justified moral acts (on this complexity, see Heinrichs, Oser, & Lovat, 2013).

**Functional Conditions: Minimal Elements of a Transparent JC Structure**

The enterprise of building a JC school entails the following steps and conditions. In addition this process requires extensive engagement with outside experts trained in the development of the JC within schools.

**CONVINCING THE STAFF**

The school principal and all the teachers must be convinced of the value and effectiveness of the approach. This requires introductions to theoretical information, and workshops on the model in all its facets. The work of convincing the staff is difficult, but without their compliance there is little reason to attempt engagement in the program. The most difficult part is that teachers have to learn that every negative event is fertile ground for a positive outcome. Without learning from negative events, as the above example of the restrooms illustrates, no progress is possible. We have needed at minimum four days of workshops with teachers and principals before they would agree to participate in forming a JC school. In one case, I convinced the teachers who voted unanimously to adopt the project. However, the principal did not want it in his school, and the project failed. Such rejection is generally attributable to the program requirements for teachers and staff that appear to be impositions upon the existing way the school is run.

Generally the model is initiated and implemented by the principal and the community of teachers and, like a well-organized squall, imposed upon and applied to the students. In other words, the first step is almost never a democratic act.
The basic structure for a JC community is depicted in Figure 12.2. To implement this structure entails an external analysis of the best way of introducing it and a study of the consequences of each step. What is most important is that the system maintains its basic equilibrium and that a lot of coordination is done, structurally and informally.

This central element of the figure contains a community meeting that represents the parliamentary ring for all important decision making. This ring has many necessary elements such as a mix of different student groups, and the physical distribution of teachers such that they do not sit together. There are also some basic rules presented by teachers that establish norms for discussion: for example, not applauding statements of other students, not hurting others by overly criticizing their statements, and listening well to prevent repeating stated positions.

**PREPARATION**

The second central element is the preparation group that also functions as an agenda committee. Its task is to structure the meeting so that every proposition is directed to an action decision to ensure that issues are resolved and that everyone is quickly informed. This is accomplished by insuring that the central problem is visualized (sometimes through a play or a film sequence), that the agenda is transparent, and that the voting procedure is just. Membership on this committee is representative of each class and the group has a short term of office.

![Figure 12.2 Minimal Elements of the JC Approach (source: adapted from Oser & Althof, 1992, p. 365).](image-url)
THE FAIRNESS COMMITTEE

The third central element is called the friendship or fairness committee. Its task is to deal with all cases of discipline and violations of rules. Members of this committee are elected by the community meeting on the basis of their status as persons displaying trust and fairness. Their tasks are to articulate important school problems and refer them to the preparation group, and most importantly to serve as a friendly court when members of the community do not stick to rules and commitments. This committee bridges the judgment–action gap in every domain: social, moral, personal, and civic.

DISCUSSION PROCEDURES

Generally, following a just community plenary meeting, it is highly desirable to share outcomes with involved teachers and elicit any differences in conceptions of action directions taken within the meeting. A mentor of the JC approach would generally frame the discussion within theoretical elements of the developmental educational theories that guide JC structures and activities. It may also be useful to bring in additional theoretical frames. For example, after introducing the concept of helping behavior in different situations, it may be of relevance to discuss some of the following: a theory of social development (Selman, 1980), self-efficacy belief (Bandura, 2000), social purpose (Damon, 2008), moral necessity theory (Oser & Heinzer, 2010), or the learned helplessness syndrome (Seligman, 1975).

In addition to the structural elements just described the JC approach impacts discourse more broadly across the curriculum. Classroom intervention procedures (dilemma and value discussion, moral storytelling, moral sensibility training or other character education approaches, and conflict mediation on the level of students in the classroom) may have a special didactical focus and be measured separately from the JC meetings. The effect of such classroom moral-education work influences the overall JC approach.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Providing information to parents is central to success of the JC school. Parents must come to understand that the JC approach is, on one hand, a goal in itself (to develop moral, social, and civic competences in students) and on the other hand, contributes to a climate for better academic school performance. However, parents are not direct participants in the JC activities within the school. Their role is as supporters or friendly external helpers.

SHARED VALUES, SHARED NORMS

Understanding what happens beyond the classroom to changes within the school at large leads to questions regarding how norms and values are perceived of as components of the JC approach. There are two ways in which this issue is relevant to conceptualizing the impact of the JC school. First, is the impact this approach has on the developmental level of students’ understandings of the norms; and second is the communal basis of norms, the so-called sharedness of norms.

Early in the history of the JC approach Reimer and Power (1980) proposed a series of seven phases of collective norms ranging from an absence of common norms to broad acceptance and commitment to collective norms among students to account for shifts they perceived as resulting from the institution of the JC. These phases representing...
developmental shifts in the collective moral orientation of students were reported to be associated within the Cluster School to such behavioral issues as respect for property, drug usage, and school attendance. Reimer and Power (1980) reported that as with individual moral stage development, most JC clusters stayed within midlevel phases of development (see also Power & Higgins-D’Allesandro, 2008). Thus, without blaming the staff, the teachers, or the principal the authors state:

Community, especially democratic community, represents a social ideal. Few in our culture have grown up or been educated for living in community. We may have a vision of what the ideal should entail, but when we move to realize the vision in a particular social context, we discover that neither vision nor commitment alone can create a community.

And later they state:

As soon as educators move from teaching about values of democratic and communal living to trying to realize these values in a social world, they become involved in developing new patterns of action for which there are few available models in either the students’ or the educators’ experience.

(Reimer & Power, 1980, p. 319)

The authors probably did not see it this way, but what emerged from their work was the creation of a new social psychological paradigm for thinking about school community. If one reviews the literature on the social climate of schools, one finds a series of scales on affective ties to the community: perceived sense of community connectedness (Flanagan, Gallay, Gill, Galleay, & Nti, 2005), sense of happiness (Seligman, 2002), trust in a particular system (Levi & Stocker, 2000), or similar ties. In the Handbook on Educational Psychology of 2008, Götz, Frenzel, and Pekrun (2008) present the social climate as school, class, or educational norm integration with the aspects of (a) social and performance pressure, (b) student centrality, (c) cohesion, and (d) discipline.

In contrast with these affective approaches Reimer and Power dealt with the concrete content of what defines the community—a set of norms that must be accepted internally by the individual and, in addition, must be bought into and accepted by the group as a whole. This concept is quite novel, and it is also less connected to Kohlberg’s construct of formal morality. In this tradition, we find a similar frame to the one Korte (1987) developed from the work of Power. In a more developmental context, stages are related to Kohlberg’s tradition and are interpreted with respect to the group-life and the respective group cohesion. A person at stage 2 does not value group life; a person between stages 2 and 3 sees the group as an organization; a person between stages 3 and 4 values the quality of the relationship in the group and a person at stage 4 values the cohesion of the group and values the group as a unit which takes part in a society.

In sum, one central goal within a JC approach is to develop shared norms and values. The process of its genesis is not an easy thing. The process goes through controversial discussion, important decision making, and, later, reinforcing what is decided in the context of the whole school. Finally, this work has resulted in excellent measurement instruments oriented to content, phases, and stages for the understanding of growth with respect to this goal (see Power & Higgins-D’Allesandro, 2008).
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PARTICIPATION

Discussions of participation usually carry positive connotations because it is believed that participation: (a) reflects a democratic principle, (b) motivates engagement, (c) distributes responsibility, and, finally, (d) produces identification with the respective system and its actions (working, learning, or deciding). A JC is a system in which participation around certain issues is granted but controlled. This is a very important restriction. Even if interpreted positively, it is not the same thing to participate in a JC meeting as it is to participate in common things such as the owning of a house or the running of a firm. Moreover, we tend to be too superficial when speaking about what participation really means. To illustrate, consider the participation involved in voting on an important issue facing a community or nation, such as is done in Switzerland’s direct democracy system. Even here, only a minority of citizens ends up going to the polls most of the time. Can we conclude from this that the majority who did not vote are not participants in a democratic community? Before drawing parallels to the JC, however, it is necessary to make some important differentiations.

In the “playground democracy” of a JC system, students and the plenary meeting can only decide on a few issues that affect all or most of the community. Examples of such issues include: the moral atmosphere of the school, prosocial engagement (e.g., helping, caring, and sharing behaviors), behavior and discipline rules, signs of trust and trustworthiness, distribution of playground use, consequences of immoral and unjust behavior, and issues in a similar vein. Other decisive issues of the school rest in the hand of the principal, the teachers, or the administrators. In normative terms, the more cases of particular issues being discussed and decided upon in a JC meeting, the greater the attractiveness and deeper the shared interest in these issues become.

Oser and Spychiger (2005) and Althof (2008) were among the first to introduce the JC approach into secondary 1 (middle school) and primary classes (third to six grades). From this experience, Althof stressed that student learning occurs through participation experiences that include two necessary elements. The first is that students must be aware that things begin to be much harder after every student-based group decision than if the teacher had made the decision. He states: “The essential work, however, only began with the decision. Potential problems had to be considered like who could be bothered by what?” (Althof, 2008, p. 146). The second learning component accompanying recognition of the responsibility for carrying out the precepts and enduring the consequences of decisions is the actual activity of these participation experiences. Students’ social, political, moral, and civic learning gets stimulated through doing.

As in the case of a national democracy, not all students participate in JC meetings with the same intensity. Relying on Milbrath (1972), we can compare political activity with a Roman cirque in which some persons are gladiators, others organizers, and others rule guardians —yet, most of the people are spectators (see Reichenbach, 2000). Even the persons who refuse to participate are thereby expressing disaffection and are, nonetheless, politically involved. Only the small group of apathetic persons, the ones who never participate in any political discourse whatsoever, are problematic because they hand away decisions to people that do not represent their interests. A few years ago we developed a hierarchy of participatory validity. Figure 12.3 presents its basic features. As shown, full participation with total sharing of responsibility seldom occurs.
In a JC setting, students must accept that although the range of responsibility is small the decisions made have major consequences. This is why taking a full role with responsibilities in such settings is a central issue. In contrast “pseudo-participation” is what students mostly experience in educational settings. Typically, parents say to their children: “Listen, we must talk to each other” or “We must discuss with each other.” These sorts of statements are, in fact, a hidden way of providing parental directives. Thus, in a JC setting the most important consideration is that whatever kind of decision is made through student deliberations (within a framework of fairness) must be honored by the teachers and enacted.

What then is the educational effectiveness of JC participation with respect to transfer beyond the school setting? Does someone who participates in a JC school also participate in community service activities or become actively involved in dealing with civic and political issues? The answer is no. In general, we expect too many positive effects to come from just the fact that someone participates, period. There is no correlation between political activity and activity in a different domain. Biedermann (2006) in his dissertation and my colleagues and I in similar research projects (Oser & Spychiger, 2005) found, for example, that social work activities do not correlate with political activities. (For an alternative perspective see Hart, Matsuba, & Atkins this volume.)
THE TEACHERS’ ROLE

Every JC endeavor begins with an intensive knowledge- and action-based workshop. From there, teachers learn about the function, goals, and methods of the whole approach. They see film vignettes about other schools having been through the same intellectual and educational journey by seeing examples of JC meetings, teacher discussions, what the principals do, and how they engage their schools. Through the workshops, these teachers also learn about the concepts of participation, authenticity, and that, by losing authority, they actually win student respect and esteem. However, the most unfamiliar things that teachers need to know are evidence-based information about (a) the concept of “Development as the Aim of Education” (Kohlberg, 1981), (b) the concept of the process of parliamentary course of a JC meeting, and (c) the reference view of dealing with the negative behavior of students, which means not to measure the results of the processes of a JC prematurely before learning the way in which it is implemented and functions. Teachers thus need two central inputs, namely: 1) to see education as pedagogical presupposition, the most important common vision; and 2) to develop shared collective pedagogical norms among JC colleagues as a necessary reset of their own pedagogical thinking. These two central interventions for teachers are further defined and explained below.

A Pedagogical Presupposition

We call this educational power “trust in advance.” It is a central and archetypical pedagogical practice, treated in many different theoretical concepts such as Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” or Turiel’s “plus 1-convention” or Garz’s (1989) and Aufenanger’s (1989) pedagogical presupposition. It consists in the belief that educators and teachers have to act as if the child or the learner already can do something or knows something or has already experienced something. They do this knowing full well that it is not the case. A good example is a young mother talking to her baby as if it were an adult, knowing that the child cannot speak and does not fully understand what she is saying. Giving responsibility to students in a JC meeting is another example: The student gets power, and we believe and act as if he or she knows how to deal with it. The reason children and adolescents learn or develop higher moral judgment or participate fully is precisely because the teachers do believe and are totally convinced that they can do it. This is of course, psychologically speaking, a form of expectation effect. It works in the sense of a self-fulfilling prophecy, meaning that teachers bring about students’ participation, responsibility, and caring, etc. by presupposing that they have the ability. Not presupposing this results in students without belief in themselves, without motivation, without care, and without responsibility. Although it is perhaps an unwelcomed imposition on teachers, they must learn to presuppose and believe that all of what has to be learned later is possible for the learners. That is, they must trust in advance.

Shared Collective Norms Among JC Colleagues

We have already discussed the notion of shared norms among students within the JC (Power, 1979). A totally different construct refers to what we call “shared norms of teachers.” Wehrlin (2009) looked at what a shared norm of teachers really can be. She found that a shared norm is not just a statistical mean of the acceptance of a rule. It is what we call the intensity of a teacher’s belief—that another teacher holds the same pedagogical
belief and that the respective norm behind the belief is as important to the other teacher as it is to the self. “Shared” means a mechanism of how teachers shape each other’s reasoning about what should be kept as a steering maxim for the school. The beginning of questioning of what we call a shared norm is always a social event that affects every teacher in a school. The professional members of a group demonstrate, through a common judging procedure, that they hold as important the same methods, or the same envisioned results. Wehrlin (2009) compared six teacher teams with respect to the scales “teachers’ social climate,” “teachers’ cooperation,” “felt common professional self-efficacy,” and “professional satisfaction.” She found (a) that schools differ enormously and (b) that technical and content-specific sharedness is significantly higher than educational sharedness. In addition, she demonstrated that the more a school is affected with discipline or learning problems, the higher teachers’ cooperation is. Shared cooperation norms also lead to higher collective self-efficacy, but not to individual self-efficacy. Higher general cooperation norms also lead to higher professional satisfaction. All this is a sign for what Althof and Oser found with respect to teachers’ engagement in a JC project, namely that, even though they work harder and longer workdays, they feel significantly more supported by the principal and by their colleagues, need less formal authority, have more time for informal discussions with students, see more positive relationships among students, show higher trust in students, and have to engage less in conflicts between students.

In summary, besides the theoretical and practical knowledge and all the didactical developmental competences a founding teacher group must have, trust in advance and shared pedagogical norms are core elements for the functioning of a JC school (see also Murrell, Diez, Feinamn-Nemser, & Schussler, 2010).

### SOME RESEARCH RESULTS

Having provided a framework for understanding the JC, let’s turn now to some representative research results. In an initial study, Kohlberg (1985) contrasted three traditional schools (Brookline, Cambridge, Scarsdale) with their JC counterparts. Independent variables were perceived prosocial choice, prosocial behavior, degree of collectiveness, mean stage of collective norms, and mean phase of collective norms. In all these dimensions, the project schools obtained significantly higher scores.

However, a recently completed research report on a secondary 1 (middle school) JS school in Switzerland (see Luterbacher & Oser, 2013) makes it clear that contemporary applications of the JC face a formidable challenge. Schools are less likely to engage for a full three years in such an enterprise. Instead, they tend to treat a JC project as one of many school “reforms” and generally expect immediate, significant change from a few school meetings. The school in our study had only six school meetings a year. However, the teachers, even those very well guided in workshops and discussions, did not wait to observe for long-term educational effects. They expected rapid change and control of all problems of the school (e.g., vandalism, tardiness, boys’ disrespect toward girls). The result was that, from the 17 scales used for measuring student participation, social climate, and personality development such as self-efficacy, belief, and trust in advance, only a few elicited significant change compared with the control group. Thus, we found significant teacher effects on shared values, student effects on a more critical discourse orientation, less group pressure, and more community orientation.
However, there were also negative effects such as attitude toward critical thinking, lack of moral sensitivity, lack of perspective taking, and poor sensitivity toward the justice motive.

We interpret this negative effect to so-called sensibility shock, which refers to the fact that, through pedagogical stimulation, the repeated measure may no longer be valid. For example, if we ask students in a pretest about the amount of participation in school decision making, we will get a score at a middle level. When we introduce the JC approach with many participative decision-making meetings, the students begin to be aware of what real participation means. In this case, they began to estimate their participation possibility as much less intensive. This effect often appears when a new approach is introduced that brings awareness to what is implicitly there but not yet consciously realized.

A third reason for such weak effects is the choice of instruments. Influenced by personality measures of so many large-scale comparison studies like ICCS, TEDs, IGLU, PISA, we forgot the beautiful work of the Kohlberg group in using instruments with much higher-fitting validity. As mentioned in his 1985 article, when Kohlberg compared traditional schools with JC schools, no personality traits were measured, only the frequency of perceived prosocial choice for others, the frequency of predicted prosocial behavior of others, the modal degree of moral collectiveness, the mean stage of collective norms, and a kind of mean-phase of shared norms. These variables captured the intervention more accurately than constructs we included such as constructivism versus instructionism, openness toward reform, or moral courage.

**TOWARD A THEORY OF A JUST COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

Despite a long experience with the JC movement, we still are lacking a “just community theory.” After so many studies and so many reported practical experiences, perhaps we can suggest what is needed to construct one. First, we need a vision of school that is socially, morally, and democratically of high quality. Schools are mostly evaluated and judged by achievement performances, even though this is a secondary consideration for a JC vision. Second, we need an understanding of how children and adolescents perceive systems like schools, and continued research on how they develop morally, politically, socially, and religiously, and the probable conditions for such sensitive changes. Third, more specifically, we need more knowledge about the phases of a JC meeting. Although we have made progress in identifying JC meeting phases and processes they have not been systematically investigated. Research on these variables is central for understanding the JC and its impact. Fourth, we need systematic professional development of the above described competence profiles of the staff and, herein, the development of belief in “trust in advance” and in shared professional norms. Fifth, we need systemic multi-level measurement of all important aspects mentioned in this paper (e.g., elements of justice, civics, morality, strategic and nonstrategic discourse; school-based system elements: participation-oriented caring and prosocial acts on both sides—teachers and students). The moral-atmosphere questionnaire developed by Power and Higgins-D’Alessandro (2008, pp. 241–244) is a first step. However, future work aims for developing a measure for democracy (participation and transformation that is moral, social, and civic) that can be used to capture its quality in any school. This will lead to learning more about an authentic stimulation of the good. There is a lack of measures in many JC fields; for example, there is not yet evidence with respect to the parallelism of changes in the domains within
the JC approach. Since the implementation of a JC is a controlled intervention, we also should measure the positive (or inhibiting) influence of social, moral, and civic growth on academic performances in general. And finally, we should acquire knowledge of how the JC approach in its many facets works as an inclusive power for each single child and each staff member (see Biesta, 2009).

These five areas can form the basis for a theory of a “just community.” In addition, the school administrators and staff being hierarchically organized must learn that growth in morality and caring is a long-term project and that changes in students’ social and moral sensibility means engaging fully in what can be called a bottom-up concept. A JC is not a problem-solving think-tank. Instead, it uses problems and the so-called “social waste” of each school for long-term change and long-term development of its socio-moral climate and management. Teachers must learn that the beginning and ongoing processes of the JC approach are always responses to negative events (Oser & Spychiger, 2005). Janusz Korczak (1967) states it like this: “A child who never stole, lied, did unjust things, misbehaved can never become a moral person”; this is a key to the JC approach. And one day, we may learn even how much of it, in which situations, is necessary. Thus, in a JC school, the negative is the fruitful soil for the growth of civic, caring, and moral persons. At the core of a JC school is the question of how we want to see each other and how we want our school to be, precisely in the face of the negative aspects that have been discussed. Here the turnaround concept is different from that of a classical turnaround school; here developmental moral and social discipline become a basis for the academic learning discipline, and not vice versa. The theory of “development as the aim of a community” implicitly means that knowledge building and immediate growth, like learning mathematics, are not the key motor for change. Development is the result of intensive and often repeated community discourse and the resulting service-learning of students in the school.

Last but not least, we should not forget the contribution the JC approach makes toward students’ development of civility. Because the Kohlberg tradition emphasized movement toward principled morality, the contribution of convention to social life was miscast as an inferior form of morality (see Nucci, 2001, 2009). Civility is the coordination of an appreciation of the role of convention for directing our interactions as members of a particular social group with our moral valuation of persons as worthy of respect. Thus, such things as the use of polite language and the everyday small acts of kindness such as holding the door open for someone or giving up a seat to an elderly person are aspects of social life defined by the conventions of each community, but that nonetheless contribute to the overall morality of social existence. Participation within a JC is Quintessentially an experience in civility.

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