Some time ago Tijmen, a son of one of my brothers, asked me if I had any memories of his grandfather named Pieter Casper Kroon. He had never known him, but he was curious about him because his father had told him about the activities of Pieter Casper during the 2nd world war. Being Tijmen’s eldest uncle, he thought I might know more about his grandfather.

When my father died, forty years ago, I had inherited some of his personal belongings, including a small diary in which he had written some of his thoughts, feelings and commentaries during his few days in hiding from the Nazi German raids. I started reading the diary, but after a few pages I gave it up and put it aside, deciding to continue to read it at a later date. But nothing came of, up till now.

Before handing some documents over to my nephew, I started reading the diary again. I read: “Diary. Written during my underground period in the Great War. To my dear wife and children”. The first day was February 16th, 1943. After a couple of pages I read: "We have lost a war that was imposed upon us. Our country is occupied. Nowadays we live under a reign of terror. We, the Dutch people, wish a democratic government under the much loved Dutch Monarchy, and freedom of speech. A country in which everyone is free to speak his mind.” “Freedom of speech”! It felt as if I was reading these words for the first time. Forty years ago I must have overlooked it. Obviously times have changed.

Nowadays, anno 2016, everyone knows what these words mean and that they matter. Freedom of speech is, according to some people, the most important value of a democracy. I found it remarkable that more than 70 years ago this political value was written down. Did it have the same meaning at that time as it does have today?
I will not give an answer just yet.

I was asked to think about the exhibition named “DemocratieLab” (https://www.prodemos.nl) as a way to clarify democratic values. Both parts of this request, namely ‘clarify’ and ‘democratic values’ call attention. I will discuss the concept ‘democratic values’ first.

Democratic values
This term ‘democratic values’ refers to political values in a constitutional state - a state with self-government formed by the people (named citizens) with equal rights and responsibilities, and subject to self-made laws. One democratic value was mentioned by my father: freedom of speech.

The exhibition here shows that freedom of speech is an important value and not only means that you can freely express your ideas and feelings in speech, but also that you have the freedom to write down your thoughts and opinions and to draw what you want and the freedom to display what you wish without being restricted or controlled by the government.

The value Liberty encompasses more forms of freedom. For example freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom to demonstrate, freedom to present petitions and, in the Netherlands, freedom of education as well.

All these different forms of freedom imply having rights and thanks to all these rights we can arrange our personal lives and pursue our own form of happiness. These different forms of freedom, and therefore rights, constitute the liberal democratic state we live in.

Other core political values of a liberal democracy are Equality, Tolerance and, often forgotten, Solidarity. I will not take a closer look at these values. With one exception, namely Solidarity. Solidarity motivates to smooth out the inequalities, brought about by birth or disease, by establishing different forms of public and special education, organisations of public health such as hospitals and ambulance services, care for the elderly and so on.

Solidarity also motivates to be responsible for a safe living environment, such as the care for an excellent maintenance of our infrastructure (dunes, dykes and roads). To uphold the value Solidarity everyone pays taxes according to one’s financial resources. I think, this value is not a right, nor tolerance, but leads to a duty, namely a duty to pay taxes.
So now I ask you: is a person who knows what these values mean, or who knows the definition of these values able to be a good citizen? I do not think so. But why?

**The role of laws and institutions.**
To implement the liberal democratic values and procedures, laws and institutions are necessary. The most important laws are written up in a constitution. Other laws in civil and criminal codes. They regulate or control people’s behaviour in public. They make it possible to live together with many others in a state.

Democracies have elections also and a Parliament with more than one party. The idea of vesting the executive, legislative and judicial powers of a government in separate divisions is called the principle of the Trias Politica. The exhibition mentions this concept too.

Without some knowledge of these institutions, procedures and some political concepts there is not enough understanding of politics.

This exhibition not only pays attention to the liberal democratic core values but also appeals to the knowledge of the organization of the state.

Without some knowledge of this all, a person is not a good citizen.

But even if he has some political knowledge, he is still not yet a good citizen. Is this person namely willing to put the political values into practice?

To answer these questions we must look at value- or moral education.

**Developing values in children’s lives**
Political values are moral values. And moral education is far more complicated than what visitors are doing in this exhibition. The goal of moral education is more than adopting values in your mind. A moral well educated person not only knows what decency, honesty and justice are, but he (she) also shows these values in his (her) behaviour. To get children to practise values is a more complex process than for example teaching children the capitals of the European countries. More must be done than memorizing words.

I will tell you why.

The concept ‘value’ has three components (Vos, H.M., 1989):

1. A cognitive component. You imagine something, a situation or an activity when the concept tolerance or honesty is used. In a sentence as “That girl is honest” you know, you ‘see’ what honesty means.
2. Moral values have an emotional component too. It feels good when you experience decency or solidarity.

3. Moral values have also a third component. It’s the component of urgency. If, for example, you hear that Bill was honest and you approve Bill’s behavior, you not only applaud his behaviour but you want everyone in that same situation to be honest.

So, when using moral and political value words in our everyday language we not only say what it is, but the appropriate behaviour is also recommended and expected to be done. “Practise what you preach”, we say

Living according to values requires knowledge of these values, the appropriate emotions, and knowing they are meant for everyone and not just for the acting person.

A one hour visit to an exhibition with 42 devices is not enough to become a person living according to values. It’s more than a dessert, but not a meal.

**The good citizen**

I hope you will agree with me when I’m saying: a citizen who can live according to democratic values (a good citizen) not only knows what these political values mean, but he / she also has the appropriate skills and he / she has the appropriate emotions. To rephrase that: these values are not only fixed in his / her mind but are integrated in his / her whole being. Put it simply: he / she disposes of virtues, she shows moral goodness, she is a virtuous citizen.

Can I name some virtues?

Sure! Personal virtues are carefulness, honesty, patience, self-discipline, respect. Political virtues are: the willingness to compromise, respect for the law, self-restraint, sense of duty, the ability to work together, the courage to take initiative and stand up for your own opinion.

A real **politician** must have additional virtues, but that’s another story.

One additional and important point should bear in mind is: good citizenship also requires some non-moral, so-called intellectual virtues (Steutel, J. & Spiecker, B., 2001). Because a living democracy requires exchange of ideas, interaction and deliberation. Intellectual virtues are: knowing what you are talking about, aversion to woolly or obscure language, the need to express your thoughts as clearly as possible,
respect for evidence-based information, the willingness to exchange
arguments and let go of any prejudice. Also moderation in showing
emotion and, not unimportantly, being able to deal with
disappointment.

With all this in mind, you will not be surprised when I state that several
processes are needed to encourage children fully adopt political and
other moral values.

a. Training, exercising, schooling, getting engaged in daily life with
competent moral adults.
b. People giving good examples of virtues as courage, justice,
tolerance etc.
c. Gradually increasing opportunities to participate in any aspiring
democracy where ideas and convictions can be exchanged.
d. Experiencing moral dilemmas and questions of conscience.
e. Accepting advice and corrections in an environment where it is
allowed to make mistakes. Educating children is doing things
together!

At schools: well-organized learning processes in the vicinity of competent
and well-qualified teachers; in other words: experts in steering
discussions in the right direction and having detailed knowledge of
democratic institutions (Kroon, 2014. In particular chapters 6 and 7).

**Clarifying values**

In this exhibition, a lot of attention is given to the process of exploring
values. Visitors are confronted with controversial issues and are
challenged to think about them and take a stand. Visitors work in pairs.
This gives them the chance to deliberate. With the help of the interactive
method visitors play an active role in this process.

With the pedagogic necessities in mind, mentioned above, we can
establish that during a visit to the exhibition the political values are only
clarified, indeed.

What happens, namely, according to the questions and assignments each
visitor has to reply? He or she must

1. Keep in mind something of a definition of the questioned value or
the law or institution and act accordingly (cognitive component);
2. Be aware of the emotions he is feeling; (emotional component)
3. Decide for herself or after contact with her partner or others what her conclusions are and how to act at the device or write down on the tablet.
4. Assess the effects of his behaviour.
5. If necessary, think again.

**The certificate**

You know: after their visit to the exhibition the students receive a detailed personalised report at home with feedback concerning their convictions and conclusions. This is very much appreciated. This report is based on the annotations made on a tablet during the visit to the “Democratielab”.

Two examples:

1. It ascertains when the visitor has been inconsistent. For example: a student says to be a strong advocate of freedom of religion, but would like to ban burka’s from public areas.
2. The convictions are checked against the democratic rules and procedures. A student who likes it to participate in hard actions receives the feedback that it is against the law to be destructive.

The great value of the report is that student’s convictions are commented on, so they can reflect on them and discuss them with parents, friends and at school with teachers.

Visitors can also create their own election poster by answering questions and making a picture through an interactive display with the webcam. When ready, the visitor will receive a high quality poster in their email box.

**Does a visit to the exhibition need to start from scratch?**

I think our answer can be “No”. Three arguments.

1. The visitors (adolescents) already have an understanding of their personal values. They possess the personal virtues to a greater or lesser extent: decency, self-control, helpfulness or charity, honesty and some elements of the virtue justice. These virtues are not political virtues, but surely moral virtues. So they understand what it means to be a moral person.
2. Due to the level of psychological development of adolescents, the influence of friends, classmates and media, the students already have the concept of being part of a broader community than family or municipality. So they already have some understanding of living in a community with political dimensions. Powerful arguments are found in the psycho-analytical oriented but still relevant studies of
Erik Erikson: *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (1968) and *Childhood and Society* (1963) and in the research results of the well-known developmental psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (Kohlberg, L., 1985). His diagram of moral development with stages and levels is commonly known by teachers and educational councillors.

3. The most important reason is that daily visitors are mostly students in the age between 14 – 18 and all have had, we may hope, a certain amount of citizenship education (how minor it may be). Therefore, there will be some knowledge and also perhaps some conversational skills.

**The effects of a visit to the Lab**

On the website of ProDemos you can read the goals of the ‘DemocratieLab’:

- Expanding knowledge of democracy, laws and politics.
- Investigating one’s own democratic behaviour.
- Discovering one’s own views on these subjects.

Recent research results were published last year (Verbeek, 2015). 778 Students of all forms of secondary schools participated three components of democratic citizenship were tested. The variables are

1. The behaviour of visitors in relation to the questions on election-intention, supporting a petition, etc.
2. The relevant attitude towards democracy, rules of law etc.
3. Knowledge of political institutions and rules.

The design of the research method and analytical strategy are described in a report you can find on the Website of ProDemos. See [https://www.prodemos.nl/Media/Files/Rapport-effecten-Democratielab](https://www.prodemos.nl/Media/Files/Rapport-effecten-Democratielab). You can also find on the Website the results of the test. (The report is sadly only in Dutch?)

Some results are: a visit to the exhibition has in general a positive effect on the components mentioned above. A majority of the students found the visit interesting and enjoyed themselves.

I feel the need to say that these results were possibly influenced by the cheerful mood visitors were in, due to the school trip to The Hague and may therefore have some short term effects. But it is obvious that a visit to the exhibition contributes to the development of citizenship. It clarifies concepts and character traits taught at school. Unfortunately
1. It must be concluded that nowadays schools are doing a lot concerning citizenship education but school bound evaluation of the effects is missing. Citizenship education is mandatory by law, but non-committal.

2. Secondly, service learning activities are an important educational intervention to foster citizenship. It is believed that this type of experience helps young people to learn social skills, norms of behaviour, to pursue social activity and to develop social trust. Many studies have found strong relationship between service learning and social outcomes. (Kahne, Crow & Lee, 2013). Unfortunately, since this school year, social teaching practice as part of citizenship education is no longer required in the Dutch schools.

3. A third alarming point is that at pre-vocational schools (vmbo) and senior secondary vocational schools (mbo) many teachers do not have the necessary qualifications to teach citizenship education. So many students do not grow in their knowledge and beliefs and stay stuck in the beliefs of friends or parents.

At the end of my personal story at the start of this lecture, I posed a question whether my father would have had the same understanding of the concept of freedom of speech in his time as many people have now. I’m sure he didn’t. He would always have taken the feelings of others into account. What effect his words would have had on them. He would never have wanted to hurt anyone else’s feelings. This was for him a clear matter of decency.

**Worries**

Does the Lab contribute to the development of citizenship? I’m sure it does. But sometimes I’m afraid that a visit to the exhibition, or even citizenship education in general, is not strong enough to resist the cunning activities in our political community trying to weaken our democratic life. When you call our Parliament a fake Parliament, you are undermining the trust in an important legislative institution. I am also worried that the liberal democratic state is not immune to the moral, cultural and economic problems of postmodern society. Terror, the undeniable climate crisis, the problem of the growing numbers of refugees, and the acknowledgement that other people living elsewhere also have a right for prosperity put pressure on our political values and rules. Is our democratic system able to grasp and remedy these emerging problems? And lastly, a public debate requires virtuous citizens, virtuous in many ways. They also have
to have intellectual virtues. In a society, where it is normal to show your feelings and where some people having much trouble to restrain their emotions, a rational debate is under pressure. Sometimes I feel uneasy about the future of democracy. Is this political system able to manage the problems citizens are confronted with anno 2016 and to steer homo sapiens sapiens in the direction of a just and sustainable world (Wilson, 2014, pp. 141-142)?

References


