

Teachers' Professional Ethics

# Moral Development and Citizenship Education

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# Teachers' Professional Ethics

*Theoretical Frameworks and Empirical Research  
from Finland*

By

Kirsi Tirri and Elina Kuusisto



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# Contents

Preface VII

List of Figures and Tables x

- 1 Introduction 1
- 2 Teaching as an Ethical Profession 5
  - 1 Development of Professional Ethics in Recent Decades 5
  - 2 Ethical Frameworks in Professional Ethics 7
  - 3 Teachers' Role in Supporting Student Development 11
  - 4 Teachers' Commitment to the Profession 13
  - 5 Questions to Reflect on by Yourself or with Your Peers 14
- 3 Ethical Expertise in Teaching 16
  - 1 The Development of Ethical Expertise 16
  - 2 The Teacher as a Distributor of Justice 19
  - 3 The Teacher as an Ethical Decision-Maker 21
  - 4 The Teacher as an Ethical Discussant 22
  - 5 Questions to Reflect on by Yourself or with Your Peers 25
- 4 Ethical Sensitivity in Teaching 27
  - 1 Caring in Teachers' Professional Ethics 27
  - 2 What Is Ethical Sensitivity? 28
  - 3 Ethical Sensitivity in Identifying and Solving Moral Dilemmas in Schools 33
  - 4 Questions to Reflect on by Yourself or with Your Peers 42
- 5 The Purposeful Teacher 44
  - 1 Purpose in Teacher's Professional Ethics 44
  - 2 Teachers' Purposes 45
  - 3 Purposeful Teaching 50
  - 4 Students' Purposes 57
  - 5 Questions to Reflect on by Yourself or with Your Peers 62
- 6 From Teachers' Implicit Beliefs to Ethical Actions 64
  - 1 Teachers' Reflection on Their Beliefs and Actions 64
  - 2 Implications of Teachers' Implicit Beliefs in Moral Education 66

3	Manifestations of Teacher's Implicit Beliefs in Teaching – The Case of Anne	69
4	Promoting Equal Opportunities with a Growth Mindset Pedagogy	73
5	Questions to Reflect on by Yourself or with Your Peers	77
7	<b>Building Moral Communities in Schools</b>	79
	<b>Appendix: Ethical Code of Finnish Teachers</b>	83
	<b>References</b>	86
	<b>Index</b>	97

# Preface

We have written this research-based book on teachers' professional ethics to increase understanding of the moral nature of the teaching profession. The book is intended for international readers who want to learn the theoretical frameworks that guide teachers' ethics and that help them address concrete challenges in their everyday work. Many international scholars have identified Finland as an exemplar country in education and teacher education. However, in recent years, our country has faced increasing challenges in education, mostly in issues related to equality and equity. These issues have impacted teachers' ethical thinking and conduct, and we have taken them into account in our discussion. Scholars and teachers from different countries can use this book to widen their understanding of teacher ethics and the Finnish educational system.

Finnish education is research-based, which means that in Finland university teachers research what they teach and teach what they research. Kirsi Tirri is a Professor of Education at the University of Helsinki, and she teaches a basic course in school pedagogy each year to 800 pre-service teachers training to work in fields ranging from early education to adult education. She also leads the School Pedagogy Research Group, which includes docents, post-doctoral researchers, and doctoral and master's students.

Docent Elina Kuusisto has been Kirsi Tirri's master's and doctoral student and is now a senior member of the School Pedagogy Research Group. She is also a lecturer at Tampere University. In this book, we present our group's main research findings related to teachers' work and ethics. As early as 1996–1999, the Academy of Finland funded Kirsi Tirri's research on moral dilemmas in schools, and this project produced important publications that have been cited widely and are also referenced in this book. We built another project, Teachers' Moral Competence in Pedagogical Encounters (MoCo) based on these research findings and developed a Finnish teaching module for the European Union Erasmus project Education for Democratic Intercultural Citizenship (EDIC+), funded for the years 2016–2019. This module is offered every second year to international students in the University of Helsinki's master's programme Changing Education. In this module, our teaching concentrates on three important factors that affect teachers' moral behavior: teachers' ethical sensitivity, purposeful teaching, and teachers' implicit beliefs (mind-sets) (Kuusisto & Tirri, 2019).

Kirsi Tirri was a visiting scholar at the Center on Adolescence at Stanford University, directed by Professor William Damon, between 2007 and 2016.

During this period, we adapted his concept of purpose to our studies on teachers and students. We also participated in the project *How Service-learning Influences Youth Purpose around the World*, led by Research Associate Professor Seana Moran and funded by the John Templeton foundation for the years 2014–2017. As a result, the article-based doctoral dissertations of two of our students, Niina Manninen (2019) and Nasibeh Hedayati (2019), included articles that addressed the purposes of social service workers and Iranian secondary school students. We also developed the concept of purposeful teaching (Tirri, Moran, & Mariano, 2016) and the purposeful teacher (Tirri, 2018) as goals of teacher education and ethical teaching.

Kirsi Tirri was a research director at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies during the years 2017–2019. During that time, she designed the Copernicus-project *Changing Mindsets about Learning: Connecting Psychological, Educational, and Neuroscientific Evidence*. Professor Carol Dweck, from Stanford University, is the Academic Advisor of this project, and we have applied her mindset theory to our multidisciplinary studies on teaching and learning. Junfeng Zhang (2020) compared the mindsets of Chinese and Finnish students and teachers in her doctoral dissertation, and Cristiana Levinthal (2022) has explored the mindsets of Portuguese and Finnish parents related to their children's learning. Teachers' implicit beliefs (mindsets) influence their ethics and teaching behavior, and it is important to reveal and change those beliefs that are unethical or discriminate against students.

In this book we discuss teachers' professional ethics using both theoretical and empirical approaches. We provide examples of concrete moral dilemmas in teaching that can be more effectively navigated with the rational principles and guidelines that philosophies of different ethical frameworks can provide. We argue that teachers require ethical skills, especially *ethical sensitivity*, in order to select the most beneficial course of action concerning diverse students in inclusive education. Moreover, they should be *purposeful* in their profession to develop the motivation and resilience to continue their demanding but fulfilling work with long-term goals. Moreover, they should acknowledge their *implicit beliefs and possible stereotypes* to be able to provide equal learning opportunities to their students and to build democratic moral communities in their schools. In this book, ethical sensitivity, purposeful teaching, and incremental beliefs concerning learning are seen as important prerequisites for teachers' professional ethics. We discuss these aspects with examples from our empirical studies in Finnish schools.

The book can also be used in different countries as a self-study teacher-education course book. For this purpose, we have added questions for readers to reflect upon after each chapter to help them process the different concepts

and research findings presented in the book. To provide comparative perspectives on the topics discussed, we compare the case of Finnish education with examples from different countries.

We would like to thank our previous publishers, especially the *Journal of Moral Education*, for publishing our articles from 1999 until the present day (Tirri, 1999b; Husu & Tirri, 2001; Malin, Tirri, & Liauw, 2015; Hedayati, Kuusisto, Gholami, & Tirri, 2017c; Manninen, Kuusisto, & Tirri, 2018; Rissanen, Kuusisto, Hanhimäki, & Tirri, 2018; Ronkainen, Kuusisto, Eisenschmidt, & Tirri, 2021). Moreover, we would like to thank the Brill book series *Moral Development and Citizenship Education* and the series editors Fritz Oser and Wiel Veugelers for publishing our books (Tirri, 2008; Tirri & Nokelainen, 2011; Kuusisto, Ubani, Nokelainen, & Toom, 2021). In addition, Gaudeamus Helsinki University Press has published our book on teachers' ethics in Finnish (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2019), and we would like to thank the Publishing Director, Leena Kaakinen, for her valuable collaboration. Feedback from Helsinki University Press has also helped us to improve the manuscript of this book. We are grateful for the anonymous three experts who provided valuable suggestions for improvement in their referee comments of our first draft of the manuscript. We would also like to thank Wiel Veugelers and John Bennett for their comments and support in the final modifications of the book.

We dedicate this book to Fritz Oser, the first editor of the series *Moral Development and Citizenship Education*. His research work on teachers' ethos and moral education has had an important influence on our thinking and teaching. We hope that this book can continue Fritz's legacy and honor him as a great scholar and wonderful human being.

# Figures and Tables

## Figures

- 1 Dimensions of the teachers' ethos model (adapted from Oser, 1991, p. 202). 21
- 2 Roundtable discussion in school. 23
- 3 Ethical sensitivity among Finnish, Estonian and Iranian teachers. 32
- 4 Self- and beyond-the-self orientations among Finnish teachers. 49
- 5 Didactic triangle (see Herbart, 1835; Kansanen & Meri, 1999; Tirri & Kuusisto, 2016b; Toom, 2006). 52
- 6 Teaching purpose evaluated by Finnish and Iranian teachers. 54
- 7 A didactical model of purposeful teaching in teacher education (adapted from Toom et al., 2015; Tirri & Kuusisto, 2016b). 56
- 8 Purpose profiles of Finnish students (means are standardized z-values, since two instruments contained a scale of 1–7 and one 1–5). 58
- 9 The most important purpose among Finnish, US and Brazilian young people. 61
- 10 Means of purpose orientations among Finnish, US, and Brazilian youth. 62
- 11 The stages in Bloom's taxonomy (from Bloom et al., 1956). 74

## Tables

- 1 Comenius' Oath (Trade Union of Education in Finland, 2017). 14
- 2 Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ESSQ). 29
- 3 Cultural dimensions of Finland, Estonia and Iran. 31
- 4 Moral conflicts in Iranian schools (from Hedayati et al., 2019, p. 6). 34
- 5 Parents' perspectives on how teachers can support the parent-teacher partnership (from Levinthal et al., 2021, p. 8). 37
- 6 Categories of current challenges identified by Finnish and Estonian principals (from Tirri et al., 2021, p. 6). 39
- 7 Teachers' purpose profiles. 46
- 8 Finnish pre- and in-service teachers' purposes according to their written statements (from Kuusisto & Tirri, 2021, p. 5). 47
- 9 Teachers' perceptions on how teaching manifests in their life purposes (from Kuusisto & Tirri, 2021, p. 8). 50
- 10 Purpose profiles in relation to actualization and beyond-the-self aspects of purpose (from Moran 2009, p. 147). 58

- 11 Implications of teachers' mindsets for teaching morally and teaching morality  
(from Rissanen et al., 2018b, p. 66). 68
- 12 Mindsets manifested in Anne's teaching. 70
- 13 Growth mindset pedagogy (from Rissanen et al., 2019, p. 206). 73

