Moral Education for High Ability Learners

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Holistic Education

- Holistic view to education: development of the whole person
- Life-long learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, learning to live together (UNESCO 1996, 85-97)
- Finland has always been among the top three European countries in math, science and reading
Four Components of Morality (Bebeau et al., 1999)

- Moral judgment
- Moral sensitivity
- Moral motivation
- Moral character
Morality and Giftedness

• The most widely used assessment of moral reasoning is the Defining Issues Test (DIT) (Rest, 1988) that calculates a “P” score for “Principled morality”
• A moderate but consistent positive correlation has been found between moral reasoning and IQ scores
• Gifted adolescents as a group score higher than their peers in moral judgment (Narvaez 1993)
• The high achievers can have an average to high moral judgment scores
• Gifted students identify interpersonal situations as examples of moral issues (Colangelo, 1982, Tirri, 1996)
• Gifted students have qualitative differences in their moral thinking (Tirri & Pehkonen, 2002)
Moral Sensitivity

• Reading and expressing emotions
• Taking the perspective of others
• Caring by connecting to others
• Working with interpersonal and group differences
• Preventing social bias
• Generating interpretations and options
• Identifying the consequences of actions and options

(Narvaez, 2001)
Moral Sensitivity

• In a Finnish study, 7-9th grade students (N=249) evaluated themselves with Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ESSQ) (Tirri & Nokelainen, 2007)
• Gifted Students estimated their ethical sensitivity skills higher than average ability students
• Females estimated their ethical sensitivity skills higher than males
• The items in the questionnaire measure caring ethics with emotional and social intelligence
• In earlier Finnish studies both sixth-and ninthgrade girls were shown to be more care-oriented in their moral orientation than their same age male peers who were clearly justice-oriented (Tirri, 2003)
A Cross-cultural Study of Pre-adolescents’ Moral, Religious and Spiritual Questions (Tirri et al. 2005)

- The participants were 975 fifth- and sixth-grade elementary school students from Finland, USA, Hong Kong and Bahrain
- Gifted students asked more scientific and moral questions than their average-ability peers
- Average-ability students asked more everyday life questions than their gifted peers
Gifted Students and the Future (Tirri & Nokelainen, 2007)

• The participants are 316 Finnish three to sixth (10 - 12 years) and seventh and ninth (13 - 15 years) grade elementary school students

• The total number of females in the sample is 180 (56.9%) and males 136 (43.1%)

• All the participants are students who attend a special school for academically gifted students
Method: Procedure

• All the students were asked to write approximately 20 questions they would like to ask someone about the future
• Students were asked to answer the questions by their teachers during class time in 2002 (third to sixth grade students, ages from 10 to 12 years) and 2005 (seventh and ninth grade students, ages 13 and 15 years)
• Students questions were coded into five main categories: scientific concerns, everyday life concerns, moral concerns, spiritual concerns, and religious concerns
Results: Grade (3 - 6 vs. 7 / 9)

• Results showed that younger students presented more moral questions \((M = 2.28, SD = 2.24)\) than older students \((M = 0.57, SD = 1.42)\), \(F(1, 304) = 106.75, p < .001;\) partial \(\eta^2 = .26.\)

• Older students presented more spiritual questions \((M = 1.51, SD = 1.52)\) than younger ones \((M = 0.65, SD = 1.12)\), \(F(1, 304) = 34.19, p < .001;\) partial \(\eta^2 = .10.\)

• There was no difference in the number of religious questions presented
Conclusions

• The amount of spiritual questions increase while the amount of moral questions decrease from preadolescence to adolescence
• In both age groups girls ask more religious questions than boys
• The struggle for a sense of significance and purpose of life is greatest during adolescence
• Teachers and educators should discuss moral, spiritual and religious questions with students during adolescence
The moral reasoning and scientific argumentation of gifted adolescents (Tirri & Pehkonen 2002)

- Gifted students (N=31) who participated in the gifted program at the University of Helsinki
- The Raven Test (SMP)
- The Defining Issues Test (DIT)
- Essays on moral dilemmas in science
- Interviews on the principles used to solve these problems
Alex’s argumentation

- Studying graves provides knowledge of the past
- Studying in graves is important
- The graves must be studied
- Knowledge is more important than the preservation of graves
- Emotional bondage is present
- Mankind is more important than an individual
- The future generations treat scientists unfairly
- Studying graves is not respected
- The former archeologists are accused of using the wrong methods
- The methods are improving all the time
- The future generations have to be informed about the standards and the methods used
Tina’s argumentation

Archeological research disturbs the peace in the grave

because

usually the graves should not be studied

so

since

The study may hurt somebody’s feelings

because

The grave is holy

so

We should negotiate contracts, laws and rules on how to conduct archeological studies in graves

because

Sometimes the graves have to be studied

so

unless

We should negotiate contracts, laws and rules on how to conduct archeological studies in graves

because

The grave is recent

because

The grave is holy

since

The study may hurt somebody’s feelings

because

Studying graves provides knowledge of the past

since

The knowledge is new and valuable

because

C

D

W

B

R

Q

D

W
Beliefs and values of successful scientists
(Koro-Ljungberg & Tirri 2002)

• High ability Finnish researchers in the academia (N=16)
• Interviews in which the professional and personal lives of these individuals were discussed
• Ethical analysis of the data (concepts of justice and care)
• Scientists’ narratives revealed that various ethical orientations sometimes work together and sometimes conflict with one another
• Ethical orientations of justice and care were insufficient to explain the essence of moral orientations among the scientists studied
Ethic of empowerment

- Empowering self as a source of moral arguments and actions
- Values and beliefs connected to the moral practices of enable, situated selves
- Describes values and beliefs related to academic motivation, self-image, and academic work culture
  - Values of independence
  - Belief in internal voices
  - Belief in goal orientation
Implications to Education

• Persons of good character have better developed skills in four areas: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral action

• Teachers should guide their students to discuss:
  • Better and worse interpretations of the moral issues discussed (moral sensitivity)
  • Better and worse justifications for actions (moral judgment)
  • Expectations for behavior in particular contexts, for example, “the good citizen” (moral identity)
  • Indicators to judge courage, persistence, and follow through (moral character)