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The implications of teachers' implicit theories for moral education: A case study from Finland

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ABSTRACT

Implicit theories concerning the malleability of human qualities are known to have a powerful impact on motivation and learning, but their role in moral education is an under-researched topic. In this qualitative case study, we examined the impact of implicit theories on four Finnish teachers' practices of teaching morally and in teaching morality. The data include preliminary and stimulated recall interviews (STR) as well as classroom observations. Our results demonstrate the multiple ways in which teachers' implicit beliefs are communicated to students and influence teacher's interpretations and endeavors to educate the ethical capabilities of students. The study provides evidence for the claim that implicit theories are an important construct which has been missing from the moral education literature. Directions for future research are suggested.

KEYWORDS

Implicit theories; moral education; teachers; stimulated recall interviews (STR); Finland

Introduction

Teachers' moral professionalism

Teaching is a moral profession (see for example, Sanger, 2008; Sockett, 1993). It is a vocation that demands both a deep personal commitment and clear, rational principles. In many European countries, such as Finland, education is intended to support the development of the whole person rather than merely the human cognitive domain. This type of education acknowledges the importance of the social and affective domains in students' development, including emotional and moral concerns. Students benefit both socially and academically when supported in a caring classroom and school environment (Noddings, 1992; Tirri & Husu, 2006).

Moral professionalism refers to the quality of educators' professional practices (Sockett, 1993), which are judged by professional standards and become evident in the educators' moral practices and roles in the everyday life of schools (Hanhimäki, 2011). The moral dimension of teaching has been discussed under various themes and typologies of skill sets for moral professional teachers have been formulated. Typically, these include orientations to moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, moral behavior, as well as teachers'

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professional ethics and values (Bebeau, Rest, & Narvaez, 1999; Narvaez, 2007; Rest, 1983; Tirri, Toom, & Husu, 2013). One way of making sense of the different spheres of moral education, as suggested by Fenstermacher, Osguthorpe, and Sanger (2009), is to distinguish between *teaching morally* and *teaching morality*. Teaching morally refers to the morality of teachers' conduct; it pertains to modeling morally valuable behavior for the students and resembles teachers' *moral ethos* (see for example, Gholami & Husu, 2010). Teaching morality refers to efforts to provide students with the means for developing ethical capabilities. Despite the partial overlapping of these categories, this distinction is an analytically useful device and is used in this study. The basic assumption is that morally professional teachers need competencies related both to their character and to their conduct if they are to promote their students' holistic development (Tirri, 2011; Tirri, Husu, & Kansanen, 1999).

There have also been debates over whether teachers' moral professionalism should be analyzed and developed with a focus on moral principles and their application or whether a better approach would be to focus on practices of 'good moral reasoning' and pay attention to the intuitive processes of moral judgment (Coombs, 1998). It is known that quick and intuitive processing of social information in practical settings—such as the classroom— influences the process of making moral judgments (Greene & Haidt, 2002). These intuitions are often culturally bound (Vauclair, Wilson, & Fischer, 2014) and have roots in personal life histories (Van Manen, 1994); therefore, they also reflect the individual's belief systems. We agree with the notions of Sanger and Osguthorpe (2005, 2011) on the centrality of teacher beliefs in the development of teachers' moral professionalism—a view based on constructivist understanding of teacher learning. Sanger and Osguthorpe (2011) call for empirical research to identify teacher beliefs that are particularly relevant for the moral matters of teaching. In this article we present empirical evidence for the implications of a particular set of core beliefs which have proved to be highly influential on learning, motivation, and well-being, but have previously been discussed very little in the field of moral education, namely, implicit beliefs concerning the malleability of human qualities.

Teachers' implicit theories

Dweck's (2000, 2006) idea of implicit theories (also called mindsets) is concerned with the implicit beliefs individuals hold about basic human qualities. People with an incremental theory (a growth mindset) believe that intelligence, personality and abilities can be developed. People with an entity theory (a fixed mindset) believe that these basic qualities are static and unalterable. The powerful impact of implicit theories on learning and motivation are well-known (see for example, Dweck, 2000). Studies have shown that entity theorists emphasize performance goals ('looking smart,' 'proving their abilities'), whereas incremental theorists emphasize learning goals ('becoming smart,' 'improving abilities') (Dweck, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Furthermore, an entity theory is associated with having a negative attitude to effort, as great effort and failure are interpreted as indicating lack of ability, whereas an incremental theory is associated with an understanding of failure as a learning opportunity. Accordingly, an entity theory creates helpless behavior patterns, since it leads to avoidance of challenges and low levels of persistence. Thus, students with an incremental theory have higher achievements during challenging school transitions and their completion rates in demanding school courses are greater (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Implicit theories are quite stable, yet they can be

altered by educational interventions (Blackwell et al., 2007; Dweck, 2012; Yeager & Dweck, 2012; Yeager, Trzesniewski, Tirri, Nokelainen, & Dweck, 2011).

Implicit theories, however, do not act alone; they are connected to a network of other specifiable beliefs, which form structured meaning systems that direct the way in which people understand themselves and others and give meaning to their social experiences (Molden & Dweck, 2006; Plaks, Levy, & Dweck, 2009). For example, incremental theorists are found to interpret human behavior in terms of context-sensitive psychological processes and situational factors, whereas entity theorists have a tendency toward dispositional attribution and emphasize deep-seated, cross-situational traits as the key causes of behavior (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong 1995; Molden & Dweck, 2006). These tendencies also have implications for moral ethos and conduct. Since entity theorists tend to believe in a fixed reality with a rigid moral order, they regard fulfilling duties and striving for justice as fundamental to morality. By contrast, incremental theorists, who tend to believe in a malleable social moral reality tend to focus on improving the wrongdoer rather than carrying out punishments in order to achieve justice (Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997; Plaks et al., 2009). Thus, the assumption can be made that, if a teacher is inclined to entity theory, his/her endeavors to *teach morally* are channeled by these tendencies, which can also be described as features of duty-based morality (see Dworkin, 1978) and by a professional moral ethos primarily concerned with the concern for professional responsibilities (see Gholami & Husu, 2010). Likewise, the ethos of an incremental theorist teacher is presumably inclined towards taking responsibility for students' personal development, meeting individual student needs and preserving individual rights—tendencies related to a rights-based morality (Dworkin, 1978).

Furthermore, since we also know that implicit theories influence how teachers interpret social information in the classroom as well as the pedagogical choices they make and that they continuously become communicated to the students (Rattan, Good, and Dweck, 2012; Rissanen, Kuusisto, Hanhimäki, & Tirri, 2016), we also assume that teachers' implicit theories influence their endeavors to *teach morality*. Subtle cues communicated to students can affect the development of students' implicit theories, which then affects the development of their ethical capabilities. For example, different attribution styles connected to implicit theories determine whether anger is directed toward a person (entity theorists) or a situation (incremental theory); thus, incremental theory fosters adaptive conflict resolution strategies, such as forgiveness and voicing concerns and diminishes such things as desire for revenge (Chiu et al., 1997; Kammrath & Dweck, 2006; Loeb & Dweck, 1994). Implicit theories also affect goal choice in morally challenging situations; entity theory increases the tendency for ego-defensive action choices, such as lying, and incremental theory promotes honesty (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). Furthermore, since incremental theories are known to prevent helplessness responses and promote persistence after academic failures, there are good reasons to suspect that the same applies to ethical failures and that it is easier for children with incremental beliefs about personality to remain engaged with the moral domain even after ethical setbacks (Yeager, 2008). In short, it is of utmost importance for teaching morality, whether or not the teacher and the students all actually believe that ethical capabilities can be changed.

The assumptions summarized below in Table 1 are provided on the basis of previous literature and concern the implications of teachers' implicit theories for teaching morally

Table 1. Implications of teachers’ implicit theories for teaching morally and teaching morality: assumptions based on previous literature.

	Tendencies related to teachers’ entity theory	Tendencies related to teachers’ incremental theory
Professional moral ethos of teachers (‘Teaching morally’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fulfilling professional responsibilities and norms• Striving for justice• Duty-based morality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taking responsibility for students’ personal development• Meeting individual needs and preserving individual rights• Rights-based morality
Educating students’ ethical capabilities (‘Teaching morality’)	<p>Fostering students’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• entity beliefs about morality• dispositional attributions of moral offenses• maladaptive and ego-defensive courses of action when facing moral offenses and challenges• helplessness responses to moral growth	<p>Fostering students’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• incremental beliefs about morality• situational attributions of moral offenses• adaptive courses of action when facing moral conflicts and challenges• motivation for moral growth

and teaching morality. These assumptions will guide the empirical observations in this qualitative case study.

Finnish context

In Finland, the ethical role of teachers has changed from being religious and moral examples to being principled professionals with academic university education, beginning from the 1970s. Decentralization of curricula and the principles of ethics for teachers published in 1998 by the Trade Union of Education have further strengthened the autonomous professional role of teachers in Finland. Finnish teachers typically view themselves as responsible professionals whose task is to teach the basic knowledge of their subject, but they also consider themselves responsible for the holistic education of their students, including the social and affective domains (Tirri, 2014). Previous research on the role of the professional teacher indicates that teachers need more education in the moral domain (Hanhimäki & Tirri, 2009).

The Finnish school system is comprised of pre-school education (up to the age of six), basic education (nine years of comprehensive school, with an optional tenth year), upper secondary-level education (upper secondary school and vocational education) and higher education. At the lower level of basic education (grades 1 to 6), teaching is generally given by a class teacher. Teachers at the higher level (grades 7 to 10) and upper secondary schools are specialized in their respective subjects. All teachers in basic education in Finland have a master’s degree, which indicates the high level of academic competence among Finnish teachers. Teachers are trusted and respected (Sahlberg, 2011). High-quality teacher education has been acknowledged as one of the factors behind the excellent results Finnish students have achieved since 2000 on the Programme for International Student Assessment tests (PISA).

Another reason for Finland’s success in international comparisons is the Finnish government’s principle of ‘equal opportunity and high-quality education for all.’ Education is free at all levels and the government’s financial support of public-sector educational institutions is strong: the vast majority of schools are public schools. Since the 1970s, the main principle of Finnish education has been to maintain equality, which is manifested in taking care of the weakest students, such as children with learning difficulties (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013;

Uljens & Nyman, 2013). Another principle is that teaching methods should be chosen in a way that considers students' individual characteristics, needs and interests. These principles reflect a promotional sphere of education based on a malleable view of students' qualities and individual assessment. Nevertheless, the predominant sphere in the Finnish school system is still restrictive, with intelligence and competencies perceived to be fairly stable qualities that can be measured objectively by means of grades and tests (Räty, Kasanen, Kiiskinen, Nykky, & Atjonen, 2004). In day-to-day work, the promotional and the restrictive seem to be regularly intertwined (Kärkkäinen, 2011). Studies of Finnish teachers' implicit theories show that teachers mainly have an incremental theory of giftedness (Laine, Kuusisto, & Tirri, 2016). Furthermore, Finnish teachers seem to regard the academic competence of poorly achieving students as malleable, but have more fixed views of the stability of high-achievers' competence (Kärkkäinen, 2011; Kärkkäinen & Räty, 2010).

Method

Participants

The participants in this case study were four Finnish subject teachers whose students came from diverse socio-economic, cultural and academic backgrounds. An important criterion for the selection of these particular teachers was the opportunity for the researchers to learn from them (Stake, 2000): the teachers were all experienced and eager to share their ideas. They were also motivated in their work and had between nine and 19 years of teaching experience.

Sally (each of the teachers was assigned a pseudonym) was originally a language teacher, but had also qualified as a special education teacher. She was teaching all subjects to a small group of low-achieving students in the ninth grade. Her students had previously studied in normal classes, but in their last year of comprehensive school, they were assigned to this smaller group. Kate was a language teacher of English and French in an upper secondary school. In the preliminary interview both Kate and Sally expressed strong ideas about 'educational optimism,' which reflected their dominant incremental theory. Jack was a subject teacher of mathematics and ICT, and we mainly observed him teaching mathematics to ninth graders. In the preliminary interview, Jack's general tendency toward a dominant entity theory became apparent. Patsy was teaching 'Finnish as a second language' to students in grades 1–9. The classes she taught were small, usually having three to 15 students. Patsy's mindset showed considerable situational variation in the preliminary interview and during the observations.

Measures and procedure

These four teachers were chosen from a survey measuring Finnish teachers' ($N = 463$) implicit theories using Carol Dweck's mindset inventory (Dweck, 2000, 2006; Laine et al., 2016). The sample item for the scale was 'Your giftedness is something very basic about you that you can't change very much.' The scale was dichotomous; after reversing two scales, means close to 0 indicated an entity view of giftedness, while 1 indicated an incremental view. The means of the teachers were: Sally ($M = 1$), Kate ($M = .75$), Jack ($M = .25$) and Patsy ($M = .25$).

The data include preliminary interviews with the teachers in which they were asked questions related to their backgrounds, current job and professional aims. We observed each teacher during approximately 15 lessons, of which we videotaped 10 with Sally, 10 with Kate, six with Jack and nine with Patsy. We endeavored to get as much from each teacher as was possible during the research period, but had to respect individual teachers' schedules and wishes: this is why the number of videotapes and interviews conducted among the teachers varies. There were also stimulated recall interviews (STR) following the days on which we videotaped the lessons (five STR interviews with Sally and three with each of the other teachers). The observations were also verbally recorded by means of intensive field notes. STRs are directed to the past: when interviewees view past actions with the video recordings used to stimulate their memory, they are able to remember their past thoughts with greater validity (Tochon, 2009). After every videotaped lesson, we watched the tape and, with the help of written notes, identified critical incidents. According to Flanagan (1953), this technique is essential when the aim is to collect certain important facts related to well-defined situations: it has already proved to be a valuable tool in studies analyzing ethical tensions in education (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). In this study, the critical incidents were moments in which teachers appeared to be interpreting their students' behavior, learning, or achievement, and acting according to these interpretations. In the STR interview, we watched the critical incidents with the teachers (28 critical incidents with Sally, 52 with Kate, 22 with Jack and 21 with Patsy) and asked them about their thoughts and feelings during these moments and the reasons for their actions. In addition, the teachers were given an opportunity to reflect freely on the observed lessons. We identified a greater number of critical incidents in the lessons of incremental theorist teachers; this indicates they interpreted student behavior and reacted to it in a more explicit manner.

The preliminary interviews and STRs were transcribed. First, we inductively coded and categorized teachers' understandings of the teaching-studying-learning processes by using the preliminary interviews as primary data. After that, a more deductive analysis process was conducted, through which we identified the implications of teachers' implicit theories for their pedagogical thinking and practice. Our purpose was not only to determine whether the tendencies described in the previous literature would appear in our data, but also to examine the varieties and situational differences in the teachers' meaning making and thinking. The reliability of the analysis is enhanced by the fact that the data were reviewed and interpreted by multiple researchers, as well as by the use of multiple data sources.

Research design

This study was conducted at two Finnish comprehensive schools and one upper secondary school during the spring of 2014. The study is part of a mixed-methods project investigating teachers' implicit beliefs concerning the malleability of academic abilities. In the qualitative phase of the project, the implications of teacher's implicit theories for moral education became apparent, and a sub-study focusing on them was planned. In the present sub-study, our research questions were: What are the implications of teachers' implicit theories for moral education? In particular, what are the implications for *teaching morally* and *teaching morality*?

Results

Implications of teachers' implicit theories for teaching morally

In some respects, each of the teachers in our study exemplified the holistic orientation typical of Finnish teachers (Tirri, 2014) in that they believed that, besides teaching the subject matter, it is also the teacher's job to nurture the students and help them face the future. However, their different implicit theories seemed to be reflected in their professional moral ethos. Sally and Kate, the teachers who exhibited a dominant incremental theory, took a great deal of responsibility for their students' personal development. In general, their incremental interpretation of social-moral reality as dynamic and malleable allowed for an orientation toward supporting changes (see Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997). Their strong beliefs in their own ability to promote the moral progress of their students and even the whole of society seemed to be the most important motivators for their work:

I think what actually motivates me the most in teaching languages is that, in the end, the aim of learning languages is that there would be no wars, no hatred, because language helps you to come closer to other human beings who do not share your culture. (Kate, preliminary interview)

Both teachers believed that, when students come from difficult backgrounds, the school and the teacher should take even more responsibility for them. Their moral ethos seemed to flow from the ideals of treating individual students in a way that respects their rights and promotes their moral growth, reflecting moral conceptions connected to rights-based morality (Chiu et al., 1997). This ethos is enabled by beliefs in the significance of individual and group-psychological processes as tenets of learning and development, typical of incremental theorists (see for example, Molden, Plaks, & Dweck, 2006). In the following quote, Sally reflects on a situation where a student has refused to participate in group work during one lesson:

I was thinking like ... the way you are allowed to be a part of a group. That do you always have to be that social and in a good mood in order to feel that you are a part of a group? As a teacher, too often I think that everybody has to participate actively. ... If somebody is in a bad mood and not feeling social enough to have the energy to do those things, I guess they should have the right to be a part of that group even while not participating that much. Of course, it is problematic if a student refuses to do what he is supposed to do, but maybe as a teacher I should figure out another way for him to participate. ... If you think how it would feel if you were in a really bad mood and you should play and sing and things like that, you would really not want to do that. (Sally, STR interview, critical incident 26)

Whereas in the STR interviews Sally and Kate evaluated their practices of teaching morally in terms of being able to steer these processes and meet the students' individual needs in the classroom, Jack concentrated on analyzing his practices of teaching morally in terms of fulfilling his duties—following the curriculum, implementing the rules of the school in his classroom, achieving justice through punishments and assessing the students correctly. For example, when Jack was asked 'What kind of teacher are you?' in the preliminary interview, he answered by explaining how he never let the students pass the courses 'through mercy'—for him, strictness of assessment was among the most important professional moral virtues.

While the actions and reflections of Sally, Kate and Jack in many ways proved the relevance of the assumptions concerning the implications of implicit theories for teachers' moral ethos (Table 1), Patsy seemed to have more a unstable and ambiguous moral ethos. She had

an entity view of giftedness, but more belief in the malleability of personality and ethical capabilities. Patsy was very much involved with her students and sometimes referred to herself as a ‘social worker,’ yet her conscience constantly bothered her because she believed she was not fulfilling her professional responsibilities, for instance, not following the curriculum strictly or giving individual students more freedom than allowed according to the school rules. Her own understanding of the grounds for teaching morally seemed to be in conflict with the school ethos wherein morality was apparently understood in terms of following norms and regulations. The school culture repressed Patsy’s emerging incremental ideals on morality and made her constantly feel unsure about her choices. The research process and deep reflections during the STR interviews seemed to make her conscious of the conflicts she experienced and actually led her to seek a job at another school.

Implications of teachers’ implicit theories for teaching morality

The teachers’ implicit theories, or in other words their beliefs in the possibility of moral growth in their students, were communicated to the students in many ways. When their students faced ethical failures—for example, when they misbehaved or came to the lessons late, Kate and Sally often made them find the reasons for their failures outside their personal qualities, thereby illustrating an incremental view about morality. Furthermore, the most obvious feature that Kate and Sally shared was persistence. In their view, implementing punishments and striving for justice were not the only parts of their job as moral educators: they tirelessly demanded change in their students’ behavior and, by communicating their high expectations for the development of ethical capabilities, they left no room for helpless behavior patterns. In the classroom, Kate could be somewhat harsher than Sally, and was also quite outspoken about her dissatisfaction with her students’ actions. However, she thought the students’ actions could be strictly controlled and judged, without actually judging the students themselves:

Kate talks to a student who has come in late to the lesson for the second time in a row:

So is there a problem with your alarm clock? This is the second time you show up late. If the reason is, I’m sorry but I assume the reason is that you’re on a computer too late in the evening, so cut it out. I mean come on, it is the middle of the day already. I woke up at six today and so have many others here, so I will send a message to your parents about this; they have to know about this. (Kate, critical incident 41)

In the STR interview Kate reflected on the situation:

Well, that was a bit mean of me, but I think it’s not that bad that I say these things, because it’s not the result of your appearance, but what you do or don’t do. That’s what I criticize. I don’t even know the families of these students, like, your brother was terrible and I’ve taught your mother and she was terrible too, always late. ... I know people have heard these things, that you will never achieve anything because your dad didn’t either. ... I would never fall for that kind of thinking. (Kate, STR interview)

Furthermore, the teachers’ incremental beliefs were communicated and actualized in their rather determined ways of trusting the students. Trust and forgiveness were central conflict resolution strategies, particularly for Sally. According to Yeager (2008, p. 74), the incremental theory allows for an attributional style that construes the causes of bullying as an interaction between personal qualities and the situation. As soon as one can attribute causes to the situation, new worlds of conflict resolution strategies become opened. Changing one’s own actions, changing social systems, empathizing with the bully’s construal of the situation and even forgiveness become plausible ways to fix the problem.

These incremental strategies were clearly demonstrated in Sally's practices, as shown in the following example related to resolving a case of bullying:

Sally talks about a girl who has been bullied in the school for years. The girl started in Sally's class together with other students who had been members of the group that had bullied her. Sally talks about how she dealt with this situation during a field trip.

Sally: At the beginning of the fall we had a field trip, which made me very nervous, because I did not know these students very well at the time. This girl stayed close to me all the time, and I encouraged her to join the others, but she did not have the courage. She started to cry and said that she was afraid they would reject her. So, I asked what she would think if I went over and explained this to the other students; she gave me her permission, and I told everyone that she had been bullied harshly. Now she's afraid to be around you, that you will say something mean to her. They talked for a while about who else had been bullied and what it feels like, and then they decided to go and ask the girl to come with them, and told her they did not intend to bully her. The girls asked her to play football with them, and since then it has been okay; the group made her feel like she fits in.

Researcher: It's quite amazing that you have enough trust in these students that you weren't afraid they'd refuse to collaborate with you on this.

Sally: Yes, I can trust them. ... But I needed to be sure. I could not know that beforehand, but when I saw their reaction I was so relieved; I realized that this is the place where this girl's situation will get better. ... I know in this group there are students who have been involved in bullying her, but since they began in this new class and the atmosphere that we have, it [the bullying] ended instantly. There have not even been mean looks or anything like that. I would have seen them if there were—not a single one. (Sally, STR interview, critical incident 11)

Instead of labeling people as bullies or punishing them, Sally resolved the situation based on closely monitoring the students, creating a safe atmosphere for everyone, trusting the students and believing in their ability to change—an approach that proved to be effective. And her situational attribution was also communicated to the students. Showing trust, avoiding judging the students and avoiding labeling were also central ideals for Kate:

I need to try to understand and to be flexible. My principle is that I don't always expect the worst: if they tell me something, I try to believe it if there is no evidence pointing in another direction. I know some colleagues always assume that they [the students] are lying, but somehow I would like to see the good in the students, because it easily becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. But at the same time I try to stay alert if there is something that seems suspicious. (Kate, preliminary interview)

Thus, Kate's and Sally's practices were likely to support students' situational attributions, belief in the possibility of moral growth and adaptive courses of action (see Table 1). However, Jack's low belief in students being able to develop ethical capabilities was communicated to them in his low expectations and his use of labeling language, e.g., referring to some students in the classroom as "late arrivers." His tendency of giving up on the students also induced helpless responses:

So they are like ... as long as they sometimes come to the lessons and do something... it's typical for them to arrive twenty minutes late, but I have only given them their tasks then. And it's like. ... I can't do anything about it; it's their own choice. (Jack, STR interview, critical incident 13)

Since entity theorists attribute moral violations to unchanging character traits, they tend to consider judgment and punishment necessary to control behavior (Chiu et al., 1997). Implementing consistent consequences for moral violations was important for Jack; however, Jack had labeled some students ‘lost causes,’ and had almost completely given up trying to control them. Even though Jack cared about his students and their personal development, he considered it very unlikely that he as a teacher could influence students’ moral behavior:

Let’s say ... it is very difficult to aim at the personal development of the students. Mostly, we try to keep them under some kind of control. At this phase, in upper comprehensive school, it is not possible to teach manners that much anymore; I cannot regard that as my responsibility anymore, whether they wear hats in the classroom, spit on the streets, wait on traffic lights, stay quiet in the classroom ... even though in my lessons, of course, I take care of that. But it’s like ... their behavior, they have already learned it, and you cannot change it anymore. (Jack, preliminary interview)

Jack’s understanding of students’ moral development here mostly relates to the students’ ability to follow the rules and norms.

Patsy, on the other hand, did not give her students negative labels, but rather tried to encourage them by praising their good traits and communicating positive judgments of their personal qualities. She seemed to have decided to see only the good in her students:

My students are a kind of marginal group: I only teach students with an immigrant background ... so I have beautiful, nice and friendly, and somehow ... endearing students. I mean, I have the nicest students in the school. (Patsy, preliminary interview)

It is evident that negative or labeling feedback of personal qualities might influence students’ motivation for personal growth, but studies have also demonstrated how praising the qualities of students, which entity theory teachers have a greater tendency to do (Jonsson, Beach, Korp, & Erlandson, 2012), also has negative effects on student perseverance in the face of challenges and setbacks (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). The same applies to teacher’s practices of comforting rather than encouraging the students (Rattan et al., 2012). Thus, Patsy’s practices of praising and comforting probably communicated her entity beliefs to the students. Her strong emotional involvement and sensitivity combined with her entity beliefs which occasionally took over also caused frustration and experiences of helplessness, as demonstrated by the following quotation:

Patsy reflects on her discussion with a student, an immigrant boy who Patsy has encouraged by saying that she could see him as a film director one day:

Patsy: He is such an artistically talented boy, he shapes all these amazing things and has such good spatial perception; he has made movies with his friend here ...

Researcher: So why do you think you wanted to tell the boy about this movie?

Patsy: [starts crying] I’m sorry ... oh, this is embarrassing ... but he is such a smart and talented boy.

Researcher: And you wanted to encourage him by telling about that director? [whose name resembles the boy’s name]

Patsy: Yes ... yes ... because I think this boy could become anything. He is so talented. He has an amazing imagination ...

Researcher: So what do you think, what should you do with this boy in school? What can you do as a teacher?

Patsy: I think we should ... keep him under control. ... if we could have expectations but not expect too much ... and if we could support him ... and believe in him.
(Patsy, STR interview, critical incident 8)

The boy occasionally misbehaved at school, and Patsy was afraid that he would lose his opportunities as a result; however, her way of dealing with the situation by trying to encourage the student by praising his personal qualities rather than demanding an improvement in his behavior reflects her entity beliefs and could have unintended negative consequences for the boy's motivation for moral growth.

Discussion

This study provided further evidence for Yeager's (2008) claim that an important construct has been missing from the list of moral concepts relevant to moral education: implicit theories. We investigated the implications of teachers' implicit theories for practices of teaching morality and teaching morally. On the basis of previous literature, we assumed that teachers inclined to incremental theory could also be inclined to a moral ethos centered around taking responsibility for students' personal development, meeting their individual needs and preserving individual rights. In our data we did find strong evidence for these tendencies. Also, our data showed that the ways in which entity theory can be related to professional moral ethos centered around the fulfillment of responsibilities and striving for justice. These moral ethoses, which we conceptualized as teachers' different interpretations of what *teaching morally* should indicate, are actualized in the classroom in multiple ways and provide a model for students for what comprises morality and moral growth.

In addition to this modeling function, the moral ethos of teachers is linked to different practices of *teaching morality* or, in other words, teachers' endeavors to support the development of students' ethical capabilities. Teachers' implicit theories are communicated to the students, for instance, through their reactions to the students' ethical failures, which is likely to influence the implicit beliefs of the students and shape their motivation for moral growth (Dweck, 2000). The question of whether a teacher seeks an explanation for a student's behavior in fixed qualities or puts emphasis on contextual factors appears to have a significant impact on the teacher's persistence in steering the development of students' ethical growth, with an understandable tendency of entity theory teachers to give up on the students. We found our teachers with incremental theory leanings to be more inclined to trust the students, not predict their future behavior on the basis of their previous actions, and help them find explanations other than personal qualities for their failures.

However, while one of our entity theory teachers was oriented toward controlling student behavior through punishment and strict assessment, and he also commonly labeled the students, there was much more situational variation in the practices of the other teacher, who held entity beliefs. Moreover, her case allowed us to conclude that, while implicit theories and the moral ethos related to them are often analyzed and discussed as individually-held orientations, they can also be implemented in the wider community culture. Furthermore, when an individual teacher's implicit beliefs and understanding of morality contradict what is cultivated in the school culture, a teacher can become exhausted, frustrated and confused in her job.

Teachers' conduct should be governed by principles of professional ethics. However, the way ethical principles are translated into lived pedagogical practice is a matter of a teacher's intuitive decision-making influenced by explicit and implicit beliefs, as well as the teacher's

concern for consequences. However, the moral consequences of their actions are often unknown to the teachers themselves (Tirri et al., 2013). On the basis of previous literature as well as the results of this study, we claim that making teachers aware of their implicit theories, how they communicate these to students, and the possible consequences for students' beliefs about and motivation for moral growth is an important part of developing teachers' moral professionalism. Entity beliefs concerning personality can be linked, for example, to depression and problems in relationships (Yeager et al., 2011), which further highlights the centrality of implicit theories for the moral consequences of teachers' practices. Perseverance is based on an incremental view of intelligence and is known to boost academic learning (e.g., Blackwell et al., 2007). However, similar perseverance is needed when facing difficulties in other fields of personal development. Therefore, if the purpose of a school is to support the holistic development of its students, then persistence of both students and teachers in developing the students' personal and moral qualities should be supported.

In teacher education, this can be done, for example, by teaching about implicit theories and familiarizing the students with the research literature demonstrating the counter-intuitive effects of such things as praising personal qualities and giving comforting feedback (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Rattan et al., 2012). Making teacher beliefs and their implications explicit entails giving teachers more control over what they are doing (Sanger, 2008 in Tirri et al., 2013). However, we should aim further than just raising awareness. It is known that entity beliefs are detrimental, and, according to current knowledge about the malleability of the brain, such beliefs are not true; this is why they should be changed. Interventions have successfully been used to promote incremental beliefs in students. The main feature of such interventions has been to teach students about the potential of the brain to change and reorganize when people learn and practice new ways of thinking (Blackwell et al., 2007; Dweck, 2012; Yeager & Dweck, 2012; Yeager et al., 2011). There are good reasons to consider developing interventions with focuses other than academic learning and to teach about the malleability of the personality and moral behavior. The effects of brief interventions in students' academic achievement have proven to be powerful and relatively long lasting (Paunesku, 2013). The next step is to develop interventions for teachers.

The evidence presented in this study of the relevance of the assumptions concerning the implications of teachers' implicit theories is only an initial step, but it is convincing enough to justify the claim that this topic merits more research. More wide-range and systematic research is needed on: (1) how teachers' implicit beliefs concerning ethical capabilities affect their communication and practices in the classroom; and (2) what impact these interaction and action patterns have on students' motivation for moral growth.

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