

Ethical Sensitivity of Finnish and Estonian Teachers

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The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' ethical sensitivity in Finland (N=255) and Estonia (N=412). The survey included the quantitative *Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire* and a qualitative open-ended question about successful teaching. In order to capture its essential characteristics, ethical sensitivity was examined using a four-factor structure. Triangulated data indicated that *Caring by connecting to others* was the most essential dimension of ethical sensitivity among both Finnish and Estonian teachers. By contrast, *Reading ethical issues* was the lowest rated and least mentioned dimension of ethical sensitivity. Approximately 30 percent of teachers from both countries did not perceive ethical sensitivity to be part of successful teaching. The results indicate the need for moral education to help teachers gain a more holistic understanding of the moral nature of teaching and recognize and visualize solutions for moral dilemmas in school communities.

Keywords: teacher, ethical sensitivity, teaching morally, teacher's professional ethics, Finland, Estonia

Introduction

Ethical sensitivity in teaching

The purpose of this research is to explore the ethical sensitivity of Finnish and Estonian teachers as an important dimension of their professional ethics. The current guidelines for teachers in many countries emphasize the role of ethical sensitivity in both teacher education and moral education in schools (Tirri, 2019). In this study, we adopt a mixed methods approach to studying teachers' ethical sensitivity. We continue our research with the *Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire* (ESSQ, Gholami et al., 2015; Tirri & Nokelainen, 2011) by investigating two countries that are highly ranked in terms

of students' academic achievement (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2018a, 2018b) and have ethical codes for teachers. In addition to this quantitative questionnaire, we also invited teachers to describe successful teaching in their own words by answering an open-ended question in the same survey. We argue that successful teaching always includes ethical sensitivity, for example, caring by connecting to students and colleagues, and taking account of the perspective of families with different cultural backgrounds. Teachers' professional ethics also include role modelling (Sanderse, 2013). Simultaneously, teachers should help students improve their moral reasoning (Jagger, 2011) as well as promote students' wellbeing (Edling & Frelin, 2016). Fenstermacher et al. (2009) developed the concepts of teaching morality and teaching morally to emphasize the moral nature of teaching. According to Osguthorpe (2019), teaching 'morality is to engage in moral development, teaching someone else to be good, righteous, virtuous, or caring.' In turn, teaching morally refers to teachers' moral behavior in pedagogical encounters and reflects their moral ethos (Rissanen et al., 2018). Osguthorpe (2019) states that 'teaching morally can be described as teaching practice that aligns with what is good, right, virtuous, and caring. In this way, the activities of teaching are informed by what is moral.' In this framework, successful teaching always should be of both a pedagogically and morally high standard, including ethical sensitiveness. Ethical sensitivity is required to identify and solve the current moral dilemmas in schools. Nevertheless, earlier research has shown that teachers lack skills in this domain (Jackson et al., 1993; Tirri, 1999, 2019).

Previous research on teachers' ethical sensitivity has received some degree of criticism, especially regarding the instruments by which it has been assessed (Maxwell et al., 2020). According to You et al. (2011) there are as many as 19 different instruments for measuring ethical sensitivity; however, none specifically assess ethical

sensitivity in teaching. As a consequence, Tirri and Nokelainen (2011) developed the ESSQ. According to Maxwell et al. (2020), existing measures of ethical sensitivity can be divided into two different forms: recognition tests and self-report tests. Recognition tests subjects to identify possible ethical issues in a scenario from a list of preset items (Fedele, 2004). According to You et al. (2011), these so called tick-box methods are quick and convenient to use for researchers; however, real-life situations cannot be solved in a similar manner with clear answers and options. In turn, in self-report tests like the ESSQ, participants evaluate claims on a five-point Likert-scale. Such tests, too, are nonetheless prone to potential flaws. For example, they might be inaccurate and vulnerable to social desirability, deception, or impression-formation effects (You et al., 2011); therefore, instruments should be carefully crafted and constantly validated.

Narvaez (2001; Narvaez & Endicott, 2009) has operationalized ethical sensitivity into seven skills: (1) Reading and expressing emotions, (2) Taking the perspective of others, (3) Caring by connecting to others, (4) Working with interpersonal and group differences, (5) Preventing social bias, (6) Generating interpretations and options, and (7) Identifying the consequences of actions and options. These ethical sensitivity skills are required for individuals to reach their full potential and live a cooperative life with others. This operationalization was used by Tirri and Nokelainen (2011) when they created the ESSQ.

In turn, Gholami et al. (2015) identified a four-factor structure of ethical sensitivity in their validation of the ESSQ among Finnish (N=864) and Iranian (N=556) teachers. These factors capture the essential aspects of ethical sensitivity in teaching: *Caring by connecting to others*, *Taking the perspective of others*, *Reading ethical issues*, and *Identifying the consequences of actions and options*. The results of their study showed that *Caring by connecting to others* was considered the core element of ethical

sensitivity in both countries, indicating that in this respect ethical sensitivity may be constant across cultures. The essential difference between Finnish and Iranian teachers, however, was that *Taking the perspective of others* had no significant effect on *Caring by connecting to others* among Iranian teachers, while a statistically significant correlation was found among Finnish teachers. In addition, *Reading ethical issues* was the lowest dimension for Finnish teachers and was also statistically significantly lower than for Iranian teachers (Gholami et al., 2015), indicating that Finnish teachers do not feel confident about recognizing moral issues in their work.

This study utilizes the four-factor ESSQ structure identified by Gholami et al. (2015) to investigate and compare the ethical sensitivity of teachers in two educationally high achieving neighboring countries: Finland and Estonia. This study tests and validates the four-factor ESSQ structure by triangulating the quantitative findings with qualitative data related to successful teaching.

Teachers' professional ethics in Finland and Estonia

The education systems in Finland and Estonia contain many similarities. In both countries, compulsory education consists of nine years basic education with two levels: elementary school (grades 1 to 6) and lower secondary school (grades 7 to 9). After completing their basic education, students can continue either in academic upper secondary school (grades I-III in Finland, grades 10 to 12 in Estonia) or enter vocational education. Generally, class teachers teach in elementary school, while specialized subject teachers teach in lower and upper secondary school. In both Finland and Estonia, teachers are university educated and graduate with a Master's degree. Moreover, in Finland and Estonia, the national curriculum guides the teaching (Estonian Government, 2011; Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). Furthermore, both

Finnish and Estonian teachers enjoy considerable autonomy in shaping their teaching within the framework of national and local curricula (Erss et al., 2016).

However, it should be noted that despite their similarities, the two countries' distinct histories have influenced their educational systems and practices. Both countries established their educational systems prior to independence: Finland under Swedish and Russia rule, Estonia while under the rule of Germany, Sweden, and then Russia. Finland and Estonia became independent in 1917 and 1918, respectively. However, during the Second world war, Finland retained its independence, while Estonia became part of the Soviet Union.

In Finland, major changes in educational policy occurred in the early 1970s. Sahlberg (2021) has identified three key elements in this process. First, Finland created a vision of good public education and established a common commitment to work towards it. Second, Finland accepted external advice but adopted only those ideas that were appropriate to the Finnish context, while respecting and embracing Finnish culture. Thirdly, Finland systematically developed the working conditions of teachers and principals. The ethos of Finnish society, 'equal opportunities and high-quality education for all,' can be considered the guiding principle of the Finnish educational system (Tirri, 2014). Other elements include creativity, innovation and teachers' professional autonomy (Sahlberg, 2021). Over time, the ethical role of the Finnish teacher has changed from that of a religious and moral exemplar to that of an educational professional with moral competence in pedagogical encounters (Tirri, 2014). Finland provides high quality and prestigious teacher education, and teachers have enjoyed a higher status than in most other advanced liberal democracies (Simola, 2005).

In turn, Estonia's history under the Soviet Union shaped its entire society and educational practices. Under Soviet occupation, Estonia's education system was forcibly reorganized to make it compatible with Soviet totalitarian and centralized principles of education. The Soviet era affected Estonian educators' understanding of the principles, content, and organization of general education (Krull & Trasberg, 2006). Although, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, several radical administrative and legislative changes were introduced in the education sector, teachers' attitudes and readiness to adopt these changes might not have changed at the same pace. Thus, it is essential to recognize Estonia's history and its influence on teachers' thinking and behavior (Tuul et al., 2011). During the early years of its regained independence in the 1990s, the Estonian government emphasized liberalization of the entire system and the weakening of governmental control over educational affairs. The first practical steps focused on a national curriculum design underlining democratization and human values in education (Heidmets et al, 2011).

The popularity of teacher education and teachers' societal status and salary have differed in Finland and Estonia. For instance, training and working as a teacher is more respected and valued in Finland than in Estonia (OECD, 2020). Moreover, Finnish teachers have traditionally been encouraged to practice autonomy and professional ethics more freely. Nevertheless, in both countries, teachers' work is currently guided by ethical principles and values (Estonian Teachers Union, 2005; Trade Union of Education in Finland, 2010). In 1998, Finland became the first Nordic country to publish ethical principles for teachers (Tirri, 2019), while in Estonia teachers' ethical principles were established in 2005. In both countries, teacher ethics are guided by the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the countries' constitutions and educational legislation emphasizing human dignity, truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, and

freedom in teachers' ethical values (Estonian Teachers Union, 2005; Trade Union of Education in Finland, 2010).

In addition to ethical principles, the Finnish and Estonian national curricula emphasize development of the whole person, including the importance of students' holistic education and wellbeing (Estonian Government, 2014; Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). This holistic perspective towards education could be one of the reasons for the two countries' success in international comparative studies (OECD, 2018a, 2018b). This type of education acknowledges the importance of social and affective domains in students' development and includes their moral and emotional concerns, indicating a holistic school pedagogy (Tirri, 2011; Tuul et al., 2011).

As the moral dimension is important in teachers' work, the aim of this research is to explore the ethical sensitivity of Finnish and Estonian teachers. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do teachers in Finland and Estonia rate their ethical sensitivity in teaching?
2. How is ethical sensitivity included in teachers' perspectives on successful teaching?
3. What are the similarities and differences between Finnish and Estonian teachers in their ethical sensitivity?

Methods

This study employed a mixed method approach combining both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2015). We first investigated Finnish and Estonian teachers' ethical sensitivity with the quantitative ESSQ-instrument and tested the SEM-model created earlier by Gholami et al. (2015) on the basis of that same instrument. We then explored teachers' open-ended answers related to successful teaching and analyzed how ethical sensitivity was included in their views. Finally, we combined the

quantitative and qualitative findings to reveal how ethical sensitivity is seen as part of teaching in Finland and Estonia.

Participants

In this study, the data were gathered from first grade to ninth grade schoolteachers. A non-probability sample (n= 667) was collected during autumn 2019 and spring 2020 from Finland (n=255) and Estonia (n=412). In both countries, the majority of teachers were females and the mean age was around 47 (Table 1). Participants were class teachers (n=161), subject teachers (n=352), and special education teachers teaching students with learning difficulties (n=154). The majority of Estonian teachers were subject teachers (see Table 1).

Table 1. Finnish and Estonian teachers' background

	Finnish n=255 (%)	Estonian n=412 (%)	Total n=667 (%)
Age	M SD 45 (10.59) Min 25, max 71	M SD 48 (12.67) Min 21, max 79	M SD 47 (11.95) Min 21, max 79
Gender	Female (%) 192 (75)	Female (%) 370 (90%)	Female (%) 562 (84%)
Educational background			
Class teacher (Master's degree in educational sciences)	93 (36%)	68 (17%)	161 (24%)
Subject teacher (Master's degree in their subject)	94 (36%)	258 (62%)	352 (52%)
Special education teacher (Master's degree or intermediate studies in special education)	69 (27%)	85 (22%)	154 (23%)

Procedure

In Finland ethical consent was sought from municipalities, principals, and teachers, while, in Estonia, ethical consent was given by principals and teachers. Finnish and Estonian principals were contacted by email to inquire about their interest in participating in the research. Ninety-one principals in Finland and 48 principals in Estonia forwarded the invitation to their teachers for voluntary participation. After a

week or two, we asked the principals to send a reminder. Teachers answered an online questionnaire created with Qualtrics-software. Altogether, 757 teachers opened the survey, but 90 survey responses contained significant missing data and were thus excluded from our analyses.

Measures

The Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire (ESSQ, Tirri & Nokelainen, 2011) was used to investigate teachers' self-rated ethical sensitivity. In the original questionnaire, participants were asked to evaluate 28 items on a Likert scale of 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). However, based on Gholami et al.'s (2015) findings, our analyses utilized the four-factor structure with 16 items. The items, means, standard deviations and alpha values can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. The four-factor structure and items of the ESSQ

Dimensions and items	Finland Mean (SD)	Estonia Mean (SD)	In total
Caring by connecting to others ($\alpha_{\text{Fin}}=.777$; $\alpha_{\text{Est}}=.757$)	4.36 (.524)	4.33 (.540)	4.34 (.53)
-I am concerned about the wellbeing of my partners.	4.07 (.748)	4.47 (.662)	
-I take care of the wellbeing of others and try to improve it.	4.43 (.600)	4.24 (.727)	
-In conflict situations I do my best to take actions that aim at maintaining good personal relationships.	4.48 (.650)	4.21 (.727)	
-I try to have good contacts with all the people I am working with.	4.47 (.704)	4.42 (.723)	
Taking the perspective of others ($\alpha_{\text{Fin}}=.810$; $\alpha_{\text{Est}}=.761$)	4.32 (.569)	4.07 (.617)	4.17 (.61)
-I am able to cooperate with people who do not share my opinions on what is right and what is wrong.	4.34 (.706)	4.05 (.754)	
-I tolerate different ethical views in my surroundings.	4.25 (.710)	4.11 (.799)	
-I think it is good that my closest friends think in different ways.	4.29 (.807)	3.91 (.928)	
-I also get along with people who do not agree with me.	4.42 (.617)	4.22 (.739)	
Reading ethical issues ($\alpha_{\text{Fin}}=.742$; $\alpha_{\text{Est}}=.822$)	3.82 (.664)	3.98 (.682)	3.92 (.68)
-I notice that there are ethical issues involved in human interaction.	4.30 (.463)	4.30 (.763)	
-I see a lot of ethical problems around me.	3.70 (.998)	4.02 (.922)	
-I am aware of the ethical issues I face at school.	4.08 (.809)	4.16 (.781)	
-I am better than other people in recognizing new and current ethical problems.	3.18 (.899)	3.43 (.904)	
Identifying the consequences of actions and options ($\alpha_{\text{Fin}}=.782$; $\alpha_{\text{Est}}=.786$)	4.20 (.562)	4.23 (.584)	4.22 (.58)
-I contemplate the consequences of my actions in making ethical decisions.	4.35 (.655)	4.29 (.766)	
-I consider different alternatives when aiming at the best possible solution to an ethically problematic situation.	4.34 (.696)	4.44 (.674)	

-I am able to create many alternative ways to act when I face ethical problems in my life.	3.85 (.813)	3.96 (.810)
-When I am working on ethical problems. I consider the impact of my decisions on other people.	4.27 (.710)	4.26 (.676)

Even though one item of the ESSQ includes the word ‘school,’ the four-factor structure of ethical sensitivity is not specific to teaching and, instead, measures ethical sensitivity on a general level. Consequently, qualitative data were gathered to investigate how ethical sensitivity appears in the context of successful teaching. The qualitative data were gathered with an open-ended question: ‘What factors contribute to successful teaching?’ The qualitative data included 489 answers from 185 Finnish teachers and 304 Estonian teachers. A total of 166 teachers ($n_{\text{Fin}}=56$, $n_{\text{Est}}=110$) failed to answer the question. The data consisted of relatively short written descriptions ranging from a few words to a maximum seven sentences. For example, one teacher (F) described the factors of successful teaching with one word: “interaction,” while another teacher’s (F216) answer was more descriptive: ‘A secure atmosphere, content knowledge, various methods, motivation, encountering the student as an individual, experience.’ Our mixed-method approach thus provided comprehensive, in-depth knowledge of teachers’ ethical sensitivity.

Data analyses

Quantitative data analysis was conducted following Gholami et al.’s (2015) four-factor structure. The differences between Finnish and Estonian teachers’ self-rated ethical sensitivity were studied with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Teachers’ answers from the *Ethical Sensitivity Scale Questionnaire* were researched in SPSS with ANOVA. Structural equation modelling (SEM) of the Finnish and Estonian teachers’ ethical sensitivity was conducted using Mplus 8 software (Munthèn &

Munthèn, 1998–2012). Since the ESSQ variables were not normally distributed, in SEM they were treated as categorical variables in Mplus. Participants whose answers were detected as outliers were deleted from the data. Consequently, modeling was performed on a total of 609 answers from 237 Finnish teachers and 372 Estonian teachers. Grouping was utilized to create a twin model for Finnish and Estonian data. We tested the model built by Gholami et al. (2015) in which *Caring by connecting to others* was found to be the core dimension of ethical sensitivity in both countries.

Deductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) was then performed utilizing the four-factors of ethical sensitivity as a deductive analytical framework (Gholami et al., 2015). The unit of analysis was a statement reflecting the dimensions of ethical sensitivity in teachers' answers. The analysis was conducted in Excel. When several units referring to the same dimension were identified, the dimension was nevertheless marked only once, in other words with the number one. In turn, if one answer included units from several dimensions, all dimensions were marked separately. The following example answer of successful teaching included three dimensions of ethical sensitivity: **Caring by connecting to others, (marked in bold)**, *Taking the perspective of others, (in italics)*, and identification of the consequences of actions and options (underlined):

A teacher's ability to recognize the significance of one's own actions, to be aware of the consequences of actions and the readiness to change actions. The teacher's ability to understand and interpret other people, interaction skills, and ability to settle into someone's position. (F12)

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative analysis, the first and third author together analyzed 50 percent of all the open-ended answers to find a consensus in the coding scheme. After arriving at a consensus and discussing disagreements, they coded the units of analysis into four dimensions of

ethical sensitivity. Finally, the whole research team negotiated and double checked the analysis.

The results of the qualitative content analysis were also analyzed in SPSS with crosstabulation and the Chi square test to investigate differences in the four dimensions of ethical sensitivity between Finnish and Estonian teachers and their background variables (age, gender, educational background, see Table 1).

Results

Finnish and Estonian teachers' ethical sensitivity in ESSQ

The results presented in Table 2 show that ethical sensitivity among Finnish and Estonian teachers was generally high. *Caring by connecting to others* was the highest dimension of ethical sensitivity in both countries. *Taking the perspective of others* was the second highest dimension of ethical sensitivity in Finland ($M=4.32$, $SD= .569$) and the second lowest dimension in Estonia ($M= 4.07$, $SD= .617$). Moreover, Finnish teachers scored statistically significantly higher than Estonian teachers in *Taking the perspective of others* ($F(1)=27.47$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.040$). *Reading ethical issues* was the lowest dimension of ethical sensitivity in total ($M= 3.92$, $SD=.68$). However, Estonian teachers ($M=3.98$; $SD=.682$) scored statistically significantly higher than Finnish teachers ($M=3.82$; $SD=.664$) in this dimension ($F(1)=8.418$, $p<.01$, $\eta_p^2=.013$). Finally, *Identifying the consequences of actions and options* was the second highest dimension of ethical sensitivity in total ($M=4.22$, $SD=.58$). No statistically significant difference between Finnish and Estonian teachers was found in this dimension.

Structural Equation Modeling of ethical sensitivity among Finnish and Estonian teachers

In line with Gholami et al.'s (2015) study, we utilized *Caring by connecting to others* (CCO), *Taking the perspective of others* (TPO), and *Identifying consequences of actions and options* (ICAO) as endogenous, dependent variables in our structural modeling. The dimension, *Reading ethical issues* (REI) was treated as exogenous, independent variable (Byrne, 2012). The model examines how the independent (REI) and dependent variables (TPO, ICAO) predict and influence the core dimension, *Caring by connecting to others*. As Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate, the Finnish and Estonian models were similar both to each other and to the Finnish model in the earlier study (Gholami et al., 2015). The indicators of the goodness-of-fit suggested a relatively good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Chi square was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 6707.148$, $df = 240$, $p < .001$), which is not surprising since chi-square is highly sensitive to sample size and number of variables (Byrne, 2012). The root mean squared error of approximation (*RMSEA*) was close to .06 (*RMSEA* = .068 with a 90 percent confidence interval of .061 and .075), and the standardized root mean squared residual (*SRMR*) was less than the cutoff point of .08 (*SRMR* = .060) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In addition, *incremental fit measurers* were close to .95 (*CFI* = .948, *TLI* = .948) which is considered as an indicator of a good fit.

ICAO had a significant direct effect on CCO ($\beta_{Fin} = 0.52$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{Est} = 0.45$, $p < .001$), as did TPO ($\beta_{Fin} = 0.28$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{Est} = 0.22$, $p < .001$). In turn, REI had an indirect effect on CCO through mediating ICAO ($\beta_{Fin} = 0.55$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{Est} = 0.36$, $p < .001$) and TPO ($\beta_{Fin} = 0.21$, $p < .01$; $\beta_{Est} = 0.16$, $p < .01$). TPO also demonstrated an indirect effect on CCO through ICAO ($\beta_{Fin} = 0.22$, $p < .01$; $\beta_{Est} = 0.35$, $p < .01$). In both the Finnish and Estonian models, variables of CCO ($R^2_{Fin} = 0.44$; $R^2_{Est} = 0.44$) and ICAO ($R^2_{Fin} = 0.40$; $R^2_{Est} = 0.30$) explained the strong amount of variance, while TPO demonstrated poor variance ($R^2_{Fin} = 0.05$; $R^2_{Est} = 0.04$). The twin models show Finnish and Estonian teachers seemed to understand the construct of ethical sensitivity in a similar way.

-----Figure 1 approximately here-----

-----Figure 2 approximately here-----

Ethical sensitivity in successful teaching

The next step of the research focused on the inclusion of ethical sensitivity in teachers' perspectives on successful teaching. Seventy percent of teachers understood ethical sensitivity to be part of successful teaching. By contrast, a third of the teachers did not see an ethical dimension in successful teaching, since from 139 descriptions ($n_{Fin}=55$, 30%, $n_{Est}=84$, 28%) did not include any dimensions of ethical sensitivity.

Table 3. Dimensions of ethical sensitivity in teacher's written descriptions of successful teaching by frequency and country

Ethical sensitivity dimensions	FIN f	EST f	In total f
Caring by connecting to others (CCO)	120 (65%)	152 (50%)	272 (56%)
Taking the perspective of others (TPO)	26 (14%)	94 (31%)	120 (25%)
Reading ethical issues (REI)	8 (4%)	6 (2%)	12 (2%)
Identifying the consequences of actions and options (ICAO)	31 (17%)	52 (17%)	83 (18%)
	185 (100 %)	304 (100 %)	489 (100 %)

Table 3 shows that 489 descriptions ($f_{Fin}= 185$, $f_{Est}=304$) were related to ethical sensitivity in the teachers answers, approximately one to three statements per teacher.

Caring by connecting to others was identified as teachers' ability to create good interaction with students, to listen, and to care for students' needs. *Caring by connecting to others* was the most commonly identified dimension in teachers' written descriptions about successful teaching, since 120 (65%) Finnish and 152 (50%) Estonian teachers

mentioned issues related to *Caring by connecting to others*. Here, teachers emphasized the importance of pedagogical relationships. They wanted to 'build good contacts with students' (E150) and to 'establish a good interaction with students [because it] is a great foundation for all schoolwork' (F465). This was related to understanding student needs and helping students set learning goals, since 'the most important thing is to meet the person, listen and set goals. Good interaction skills' (F637).

Both Finnish and Estonian teachers explicitly mentioned the word empathy. However, while Estonian teachers mentioned the word 56 times, Finnish teachers mentioned it only 11 times.

Taking the perspectives of others was identified as a teacher's ability to understand different viewpoints and consider students' opinions. *Taking the perspective of others* was the second largest dimension of ethical sensitivity, with 26 (14%) Finnish and 94 (31%) Estonian teachers mentioning issues related to it. Descriptions of successful teaching portrayed the dimension of *Taking the perspectives of others* as, for example, the teacher's 'ability to collaborate and listen to the opinions of others' (F4) and to 'take the student's opinion into account' (E562) by 'finding common ground with her students' (E41). Moreover, teachers mentioned the importance of understanding and accepting diverse opinions and perspectives. They used words like 'tolerance' (E48), 'open mind' (E57, E138) and 'openness' (E171, 173), since [teachers need] 'an ability to understand students from different starting points' (F21) and 'an ability to settle into another person's position' (F12).

Reading ethical issues was identified as teachers' ability to recognize, read and reflect on situations in the classroom. *Reading ethical issues* was the least mentioned dimension in teachers' responses, with only 8 (4%) Finnish and 6 (2%) Estonian teachers mentioning issues related to it. Recognizing ethical issues in teaching was

evident when teachers wrote about 'situational sensitivity' (F436), 'pedagogical sensitivity' (F323), 'identification of situations' (F344) and the 'ability to notice [ethical issues]' (E272).

Identifying the consequences of actions and options was seen as teachers' ability to create alternative ways to act in teaching situations when aiming for the best possible solution for learning. *Identifying the consequences of actions and options* was the third largest dimension of ethical sensitivity, since the answers of 31 (17%) Finnish teachers and 52 (17%) Estonian teachers fell into this category. Acknowledgment of the different ways students learn and their special needs allows teachers to consider different solutions to facilitate their students' learning. For example, one teacher stated that "the teacher knows her students' tendencies and provides appropriate stimuli for them (F1)," while another referred to "the ability to create and choose the suitable learning environment and – methods" (E254). Moreover, *Identifying the consequences of actions and options* was also seen in teachers' adaptability and flexibility in supporting students' learning.

Similarities and differences between Finnish and Estonian teachers' ethical sensitivity

To triangulate the quantitative and qualitative results, we collated the findings from the ESSQ and written answers in Table 4. In both datasets and in both countries, *Caring by connecting to others* was the most prominent dimension of ethical sensitivity. This was also evident in the SEM-models, which highlighted *Caring by connecting to others* as the main aspect of ethical sensitivity in teaching. In the ESSQ, but not in the written answers, differences connected to gender and educational background were found in the dimension of *Caring by connecting to others*. Female teachers scored statistically

significantly higher in *Caring by connecting to others* ($F(1)= 17.296, p<.001, \eta_p^2=.026$) than male teachers in both countries. Moreover, a comparison of teachers' educational background (class teachers, subject teachers, and 'other', i.e., mainly special education teachers) revealed that, in the Finnish data, 'other' teachers scored statistically significantly higher in *Caring by connecting to others* ($F(2)= 3.220, p<.05, \eta_p^2=.026$) than subject teachers. Moreover, in their written answers, Finnish teachers scored statistically significantly higher in *Caring by connecting to others* ($\chi^2(1)=6.612, p<.05$) than Estonian teachers.

Table 4. Ethical sensitivity as a function of Finnish and Estonian teachers' age, gender, and educational background

	ESSQ FIN&EST f(dt), η_p^2	ESSQ FIN f(dt), η_p^2	ESSQ EST f(dt), η_p^2	Written answers FIN&EST χ^2 (df)	Written answers FIN χ^2 (df)	Written answers EST χ^2 (df)
CCO	.391(1), .001			6.612 (1)* Fin		
Age	.0107(2), .000	.450(2), .004	.297(2), .001	.359 (2)	.209(2)	1.756(2)
Gender	17.296(1), .026*** Female	15.590(1), .061*** Female	4.431(1), .011* Female	2.147 (1)	1.909(1)	2.049(1)
Education	5.115(2), .016** Subject- Other	3.220(2), .026* Subject- Other	2.186(1), .011	.599 (2)	.005(2)	.020(2)
TPO	27.47(1),.040*** Fin			17.115(1)** Est		
Age	.338(2), .001	2.002(2), .016	1.633(2),.008	.236 (2)	.451(2)	.216(2)
Gender	.658(2), .001	2.386(1),.010	1.209(1), .003	.167 (1)	.702(1)	.025(1)
Education	1.831(2), .006	.823(2), .007	.129(2), .001	.381 (2)	2.314(2)	3.811(2)
REI	8.418(1), .013** Est			2.166(1)		
Age	2.483(2), .008	.852(2), .007	2.845(2), .015	3.388 (2)	3.200(2)	1.127 (2)
Gender	4.363(2), .007* Female	2.882(1), .012	.108(1), .000	.000 (1)	.380(1)	.304(1)
Education	.693 (2), .002	.429(2), .004	1.284(2), .007	2.777(2)	2.051 (2)	1.495(2)
ICAO	.451(1), .001			.031(1)		
Age	.207(2), .001	1.402(2), .012	.077(2), .000	3.925(2)	1.919(2)	3.349(2)
Gender	5.820(2), .009	3.706(1), .015	1.590(1), .004	.801(1)	.056(1)	2.491(1)
Education	2.122(2), .007	2.464(2), .020	.727(2), .004	2.801(2)	3.212(2)	.402(2)

*** $p<.001$, ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$

Age= 21–41, 42–55, 56–79

Gender=Female, Male

Education= Class teacher, Subject teacher, Other (i.e., special education teacher)

We also found statically significant differences between Finnish and Estonian teachers in relation to *Taking the perspective of others* and *Reading ethical issues*. In the ESSQ, Finnish teachers scored statistically significantly higher in *Taking the perspective of others* but lower in *Reading ethical issues* than their Estonian counterparts. However, in their written answers, Estonian teachers were more likely, to a statistically significant degree, to mention segments related to *Taking the perspective of others*. By contrast, in teachers' written answers, no statistically significant differences were found in *Reading ethical issues*. Finally, no statistically significant effect was found for age, gender, or educational background on *Identifying the consequences of actions and options* in either the ESSQ or the written answers. Moreover, no statistically significant age-related differences were found in any of the four dimensions in either of the data sets.

Discussion

Ethical sensitivity has been seen as an important basis for teacher's professional work. The aim of teacher education in Finland and Estonia is to educate ethical professionals who master both the pedagogical and moral dimensions of teaching. Thus, successful teaching in these countries includes a strong moral ethos to promote the holistic development of students.

The present study examined the similarities and differences in Finnish and Estonian teachers' ethical sensitivity by triangulating quantitative and qualitative datasets. Our study was founded on previous research that used the ESSQ-instrument to identify four key dimensions of ethical sensitivity, including culture-invariant and culture-dependent factors, among Finnish and Iranian teachers. We validated the four-factor model with new Finnish data and data from a neighboring country with an equally successful PISA-score: Estonia.

The first main finding of our study was that Finnish and Estonian teachers seemed to understand the construct of ethical sensitivity similarly. Based on both the quantitative and qualitative results, *Caring by connecting to others* was found to be the core dimension of ethical sensitivity in teaching in both countries. This means that teachers participating in the study were concerned about the wellbeing of others, aimed to maintain good relationships, and enjoyed good contact colleagues and students. The same result was reported previously with Finnish and Iranian teachers (Gholami et al., 2015). In our study, compared to their male peers, female Finnish and Estonian teachers rated themselves as more sensitive, which aligns with previous studies (Gholami et al., 2015; You et al., 2011). Moreover, compared to Finnish subject teachers, Finnish special education teachers rated themselves as more sensitive in this dimension. The previous Finnish study also found that subject teachers, especially math and science teachers, scored lower than others in *Caring by connecting to others* (Kuusisto et al., 2012). Moreover, *Identifying the consequences of actions and options* and *Taking the perspective of others* had significant direct effects on *Caring by connecting to others* and an indirect effect through *Identifying the consequences of actions and options*. In explicit ethical sensitivity, Finnish teachers scored higher in *Taking the perspective of others* than Estonian teachers, but, in the context of successful teaching, Estonian teachers emphasized this dimension more, while Finnish teachers highlighted *Caring by connecting to others*. The present study demonstrates the centrality of caring for others in teachers' professional ethics and successful teaching – a finding in line with earlier studies (Noddings, 2001). Our results indicate that teachers in Finland and Estonia have internalized the caring nature of the teaching profession in relation to colleagues and students.

The second main finding of the study was that both Finnish and Estonian teachers rated themselves the lowest in *Reading ethical issues*, which means that they do not consider this dimension one of their strengths in human interaction at school. Nonetheless, the mean of the factor was still rather high. Thus, while it was not valued as highly as *Caring by connecting to others*, it was still an important aspect of ethical sensitivity for our participants. Similar kinds of challenges in identifying moral dilemmas among Finnish teachers were also identified as early as the 1990s by Tirri (1999). Moreover, newly emerging ethical dilemmas in society and the increasing need to balance between all parties in a diverse society while fostering social cohesion and trust directly impact education and teachers' work (OECD, 2019). Rapid changes in society challenge teachers and could cause uncertainty in recognizing ethical issues.

Moreover, while we focused on analyzing the inclusion of ethical sensitivity in teachers' perspectives on successful teaching, it should be noted that 30 percent of teachers in both countries failed to mention ethical sensitivity in their descriptions. This finding is in the line with previous assumptions and indicates that a substantial number of teachers have not entirely adopted a moral approach to teaching and that there is a need to help teachers recognize and reflect on ethical issues in a school context and perceive teaching as a moral activity (Fenstermacher et al., 2009; Osguthorpe, 2019).

The study nevertheless contains certain limitations. First, the data were based on solely on teachers' self-evaluations and short written descriptions, which might not reveal the full picture. Such data could be complemented with interviews or classroom observations to provide deeper insights into and greater face validity for teachers' ethical sensitivity in real teaching contexts. In our future research, we intend to utilize these methods with those teachers willing to continue with our research team. In

addition, more research is required on the moral nature of teaching and ethical sensitivity conducted with multiple methods in various cultures.

This study provides new knowledge about teachers' perspectives on the moral nature of teaching and especially ethical sensitivity. Our multi-cultural and multi-lingual research team was able to analyze data in both the Finnish and Estonian languages. Previous studies have primarily researched teachers' ethical sensitivity with quantitative measures instead of mixed-method approaches. Therefore, our research design of investigating teachers' ethical sensitivity through direct quantitative data and indirect qualitative data represents an innovative approach. The purpose of utilizing different research methods to study ethical sensitivity was to reveal potential differences in the way concepts can be understood in different cultures (Estonia and Finland).

The study findings indicate that ethical sensitivity is quite similar in both countries. This result can be explained by the closeness of Finnish and Estonian culture and the consequent lack of divergent culture-dependent dimensions (Gholami et al., 2015). The domains of ethical sensitivity operationalized in the questionnaire were derived from theory; thus, teachers could not conceptualize the meanings themselves. Consequently, an open-ended question on successful teaching allowed us to investigate the concept of ethical sensitivity indirectly. This is one explanation for the differences found between the quantitative and qualitative data. Nevertheless, this mixed method design and the triangulation of different kinds of datasets revealed that ethical sensitivity is mostly understood as *Caring by connecting to others*. By contrast, teachers had failed to internalize other dimensions, such as *Taking the perspectives of others*, *Reading ethical issues* and *Identifying the consequences of actions and options*, equally well, particularly in relation to successful teaching. Consequently, teachers should be

taught these dimensions in order for them to understand their meaning in the context of teaching. In sum, the results indicate the increasing necessity of moral education in teacher education programs.

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