

# *Issues of Moral Development and Education in Gifted and Talented Youth*

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## **Abstract**

*Morality is a complex, multifaceted aspect of being human. Moral development and moral education are increasingly being discussed by educators, psychologists, counselors, and parents. This paper aims to provide a literature review (books, research paper and gray literature) regarding issues of Morality Development and Education in Gifted and Talented youths. The objective was understanding of moral development in gifted youth and teaching strategies which foster the educational needs in moral issues of gifted students. There is a dearth of empirical research regarding moral development of the gifted. It is known from earlier empirical research that intelligence tends to correlate with high levels of moral reasoning and that gifted individuals tend to grapple with moral issues at an earlier age and more often with more intensity than their peers. However, the relationship between intelligence and morality is a very complex one and needs more detailed study. The results of some studies reveal that there are qualitative differences in the moral reasoning of gifted youths. Hence, high intellectual ability does not predict mature*

*moral judgment. Research regarding teaching strategies address the traditional approach involving teachers explicitly advocating virtues, separate classes on moral and ethical behavior or educational programs for social and moral abilities enhancement in selected groups of gifted adolescents. Furthermore, research indicates that we need to be able to recognize the moral concerns of children and provide appropriate guidance and feedback, nurturing moral growth. Therefore, we should help the gifted to reach moral excellence together with excellence in specific domains. Recommendations include educational programs for social and moral abilities enhancement in selected groups of gifted youths.*

**Keywords:** *moral issues, development, gifted, talented, education*

## **Introduction**

Morality is a complex, multifaceted aspect of being human. Within the realm of morality itself, there are further differences. Moral development and moral education are increasingly being discussed by educators, psychologists, counselors, and parents. In this paper, we examined the origins of moral thought, theories about moral development and moral reasoning, and the imperfect link between moral thought and moral action. With respect to moral thought, we explored whether gifted children have qualitatively different ways of thinking about what is right and wrong.

There is a dearth of empirical research regarding moral development of the gifted. Mainly scholars of the field tried to answer those questions: Is a morally developed person one who feels strongly about moral issues...or understands moral issues...or acts ethically when dealing with other people? It is known from earlier empirical research that intelligence tends to correlate with high levels of moral reasoning. Gifted individuals tend to grapple with moral issues at an earlier age than their peers, more often and with greater intensity.

However, the relationship between intelligence and morality is a very complex one and needs more detailed study. The results of some studies reveal that there are qualitative differences in the moral reasoning of gifted adolescents. Hence, high intellectual ability does not predict mature moral judgment. Being gifted or creative imposes a special moral responsibility on an individual. Those of extraordinary ability can use their gifts and talents for good or ill so exceptional intelligence, talents, and creativity represent opportunities for both improvement and corrosion of the human condition.

We need to be able to recognize the moral concerns of children and provide appropriate guidance and feedback. Teachers and educators should nurture the

moral growth. Therefore, we should help the gifted to reach moral excellence together with excellence in specific domains.

## **Definitions of giftedness and talent**

What do we mean when we say that a child or an adolescent is “gifted”? This term was once limited to people such as those in Terman’s longitudinal study with IQs of 140 or higher; others have defined “gifted” as those with an IQ of 130 or higher. However, recent definitions of giftedness have been broadened to include not only a high IQ, but also singular talents in particular areas such as music, art, literature, or science (Winner,2000).

Definitions of gifted and talented have many problems. Consequently, there are perhaps 100 definitions of ‘giftedness’ (Freeman, 2008) but there is not yet a wide accepted definition. Winstanley (2006) concluded that because gifted students were a heterogeneous group, it is not possible to have only one comprehensive definition. Additionally, there are different concepts of giftedness across cultures (Phillipson & McCann,2007).

A more widely used definition within the field of gifted education comes from the 1991 meeting of the Columbus Group, and highlights the unique needs of this population:

“Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modification in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally.” (Columbus Group, 1991)

Sternberg and Zhang (1995) have proposed a “pentagonal implicit theory of giftedness”, including five different aspects. The first criterion is that gifted individuals are superior to their peers in some dimension or set of dimensions (excellence criterion). The second criterion is that they must show a high level of an attribute that is rare among their peers (rarity criterion). The third criterion is that the dimension(s) along which the individual is evaluated as superior must lead or potentially lead to productivity (productivity criterion). The fourth criterion is the demonstrability criterion which states that an individual’s superiority in the dimension or dimensions that determine giftedness must be demonstrable through one or more tests or valid assessments. The fifth criterion is the value criterion, i.e., the person must show superior performance on a dimension that is valued by his or her society.

Csikszentmihalyi (1996), has emphasized the importance of context in giftedness. He believes that giftedness is not a personal trait but rather an interaction between an individual and the environment.

Francois Gagné (2000, 2005) has proposed what he refers to as the DMGT model, standing for Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent. Gagne believes that those labeled as gifted have the potential for extraordinary work and that those who are subsequently identified as talented develop their inherent potential for contributions (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2011).

The No Child Left Behind definition states: “The term “gifted and talented,” when used with respect to students, children, or youth, means students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 544)

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) has proposed a new definition of giftedness: “Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. . . . As individuals mature through childhood to adolescence, however, achievement and high levels of motivation in the domain become the primary characteristics of their giftedness. . . . A person’s giftedness should not be confused with the means by which giftedness is observed or assessed. . . . a high IQ score [is] not giftedness; [it] may be a signal that giftedness exists.” (NAGC,2011).

## **Definition of morality**

What is morality? Morality implies a set of internalized principles or ideals that help the individual to distinguish right from wrong and to act on this distinction (Shaffer, 1994). Scholars agree that morality implies a capacity to (1) distinguish right from wrong, (2) act on this distinction, and (3) experience pride in virtuous conduct and guilt or shame over acts that violate one’s standards (Quinn, Houts, & Graesser, 1994; Shaffer, 1994).

Theories of moral development ask why and how individuals come to pursue goals that promote the interests of other people. And those of society in general, rather than only acting in their own narrow self-interests. Most of the foundational work on children’s moral development emphasizes the cognitive component of moral thought and the child’s growing understanding of rules and principles for guiding moral reasoning.

**Jean Piaget's stage theory of moral development:** Piaget argued that moral thought is not a separate cognitive domain with its own patterns of reasoning and developmental course. Instead, he believed that moral development shares the same broad features that he attributed to other areas of cognitive development, including the notion of stages. Thus, according to Piaget, some patterns of moral reasoning are simply unavailable to children until they reach the relevant stage of moral development. Piaget proposed three stages of moral development, roughly corresponding to his stages of preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational thought.

Most of the studies in the area of moral development have been based on the cognitive-developmental theory of Lawrence Kohlberg (e.g., 1969).

**Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development & The Heinz Dilemma:** Lawrence Kohlberg, a student of Piaget's, attempted to extend Piaget's theory of cognition to explain the development of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1981, 1984). To assess changes in moral reasoning, Kohlberg presented children, adolescents, and adults with a number of ethical dilemmas. Kohlberg believed that children construct morality by developing a system of beliefs about concepts like justice and individual rights. He thought that it takes a long time for children to develop accurate beliefs and reasoning patterns about morality and that early on, they confuse moral issues with other issues, such as power, coercion, and authority. This process of discovering which issues are truly moral formed the basis for Kohlberg's model.

One of the criticisms is that Kohlberg's assessment of moral development involves asking people what they think should be done in hypothetical moral dilemmas. What people say they will do and what people actually do when faced with a real dilemma are often two different things.

**Neo-Kohlbergian approach:** According to the neo-Kohlbergian approach of James Rest and his colleagues (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999), moral development and functioning are the result of a conglomeration of cognitive, behavioral, and affective forces that can be represented in four component processes: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character. Rather than thinking of moral development as a step-like procedure as in Kohlberg's theory, neo-Kohlbergians emphasize the more fluid overlapping of ways of thinking about moral issues that characterize individuals as they move from more primitive ways of thinking to more advanced. Finally, neo-Kohlbergians believe that morality is a social construction that reflects the community's experiences, particular institutional arrangements, deliberations, and aspirations that are supported by the community (Gibbs, 2013, based on McInerney & Putwain, 2017).

**Elliot Turiel's domain theory of moral development:** Within domain theory a distinction is drawn between the child's developing concepts of morality, and other domains of social knowledge, such as social convention. According to domain theory, the child's concepts of morality and social convention emerge out of the child's attempts to account for qualitatively differing forms of social experience associated with these two classes of social events. Although developing a sense of morals is a complex process, children appear to be able to have an understanding of morality by the age of five (Helwig & Turiel, 2002).

**Dabrowski Theory of Disintegration:** Yet another complex theory of moral and character development was explored by Kazimierz Dabrowski, and resulted in his philosophy of positive disintegration and asynchrony (Cash, 2009). Based on his studies of sensitive, highly intelligent and creative individuals, Dabrowski identified hypersensitivities in five areas: psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual, and emotional. He termed them overexcitabilities (OE), and concluded that the greater the intensity of the OE, the greater the individual's potential for ethical and compassionate behaviors as an adult (Cash, 2009).

**Other theories.** Some answers emphasize the importance of natural biological processes, others the role of learning and experience: some theoretical positions focus on cognitive growth, others on social and cultural influences.

Coles stated that children's moral character is greatly influenced by their social environment, upbringing, and examples from their parents (Sisk, 2009). He said that the moral character of a child is often developed in the early years, sometimes as young as one year of age. He stressed the internal struggle in the adolescent years as individuals are involved in testing and challenging the value system that they were brought up with, and the formation of their own personal moral system (Sisk, 2009).

Psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2003, 2012) believes that much of our morality is rooted in moral intuitions - "quick gut feelings, or affectively laden intuitions." In this intuitionist view, the mind makes moral judgments as it makes aesthetic judgments—quickly and automatically. Our moral thinking and feeling surely affect our moral talk. But sometimes talk is cheap and emotions are fleeting. Morality involves doing the right thing, and what we do also depends on social influences.

Bebeau (2002) stated that morality is built upon four basic components. These include moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character. The components of moral sensitivity, moral motivation, and moral character have been less studied than the component of moral judgment.

According to Muriel Bebeau (2002), *moral sensitivity* is about the awareness of how our actions affect other people. Thus, without possessing a moral sensitivity it would be difficult to see the kind of moral issues that are involved

in life. However, to respond to a situation in *amoral way*, a person must be able to perceive and interpret vents in a way that leads to *ethical action*. A morally sensitive person notes various situational cues and is able to visualize several alternative actions in response to that situation. He or she draws on many aspects' skills, techniques, and components of interpersonal sensitivity. These include taking the perspective of others (role taking), cultivating empathy for others, and interpreting a situation based on imagining what might happen and who might be affected.

## **Morality and giftedness**

The research and writing of Kohlberg, which links moral and cognitive development, has had a considerable influence on psychologists and educators studying the psycho-social development of the intellectually gifted (Gross, 2004).

Many researchers involved in the field of character and moral development have focused on its link with highly able learners. There is a dearth of empirical research regarding moral development of the gifted. Andreani and Pagnin (1953) provided a comprehensive review of the then-current literature in their article. Gifted and talented students often display high levels of sensitivity, which they may direct to a strong sense of right and wrong and social justice. In the classroom they may have a preoccupation with social, moral, and ethical issues and will often act on their own convictions in these areas.

Overall, studies findings underscore the strong correlation between high levels of intellect and strong moral development, including emotional intensity and sensitivity, compassion for others, and a preoccupation with right and wrong (Cash, 2009). Researchers studying the highly and exceptionally gifted have noted that these children are frequently found to have unusually accelerated levels of moral development(Gross,2004).

We know from earlier empirical research that intelligence tends to correlate with high levels of moral reasoning (Narvaez, 1993; Tirri & Pehkonen, 2002). According to these authors, the gifted are presumed to have a privileged position in the maturation of moral thinking because of their precocious intellectual growth. According to researchers, intellectually gifted children appear to reach a relatively high stage of moral reasoning earlier than their chronological peers. It is important to note at this time the general agreement among previous researchers studying the exceptionally and profoundly gifted (McElwee, 1934; Hollingworth, 1942; Zorbaugh et al., 1951) that these children develop, at an early age, a precocious interest in matters of morality and religion (Gross,2004). Again Sisk (2009) show that gifted children and adults seem to have a unique perception of themselves and

the world that includes heightened idealism and a sense of justice that appear at an early age

Researchers such as Linda Silverman, Michael Piechowski, and Annemarie Roeper have noted that gifted individuals frequently express an interest in humanitarianism, global events, and altruism at an early age; they are in tune with their inner voice that helps them to dialogue and advocate for those in need (Cash, 2009). Gifted individuals tend to grapple with moral issues at an earlier age than their peers and more often and with more intensity. There are many personal accounts by parents, teachers, and researchers of precocious 5- and 6-year-old children who read newspapers and cry over articles depicting man's inhumanity to man, who are disturbed by radio accounts of war, or who become vegetarians as a reaction to killing animals (Cash, 2009). Intellectually gifted children appear to reach a relatively high stage of moral reasoning earlier than their chronological peers (Karnes & Brown, 1981). Using the DIT, Janos & Robinson (1985) also found significantly advanced moral judgement (compared with standards) in older gifted students (up to 18 years old) than their age peers as a group (Pagnin & Andreani, 2000).

However, the relationship between intelligence and morality is a very complex one and needs more detailed study (Tirri & Nokelainen, 2007; Tirri, Nokelainen & Mahkonen, 2009). The results of some studies reveal that there are qualitative differences in the moral reasoning of gifted adolescents. High intellectual ability does not predict mature moral judgment. More even, those of extraordinary ability can use their gifts and talents for good or ill (Tannenbaum, 2000) so exceptional intelligence, talents, and creativity represent opportunities for both improvement and corrosion of the human condition.

Terman's (1925) sample of gifted children showed superior maturity in moral development in choosing socially constructive activities and in rating misbehavior. Terman (1925) reported that, on tests of 'trustworthiness' and 'moral stability', the average child of 9 years of age in his gifted sample scored at levels more usually attained by children aged 14. Thorndike (1940), studying the moral judgement of 50 highly gifted children aged 9-12, found that the levels of moral development exhibited by these children correlated much more closely with their mental ages than with their chronological ages. Hollingworth (1942) noted, in her subjects of IQ 180, a passionate concern for ethical and moral issues, and a deep and unusually mature interest in questions of origin, destiny, and man's relationship with God (Gross, 2004). Janos and Robinson (1985) report on an earlier, unpublished study in which, using the Defining Issues Test (DIT) (Rest, 1979) as a measure of moral judgement, they compared a group of 24 radically accelerated university students aged 11-18, and two groups of gifted high school students who had not been accelerated, with a group of typical university students. All three groups



of intellectually gifted students exhibited significantly higher levels of moral judgement than did the typical undergraduates (Gross,2004).

In the 1980s, Karnes and Brown (1981) made an initial investigation into the moral development of the gifted using Rest's DIT. Their sample included 233 gifted students (9–15 years in age) who were selected for a gifted program. The results of the DIT were compared to the students' performance on a test that measured their intellectual ability (WISC-R). The empirical results of the study showed a positive correlation between the two tests.

Gifted children have emotional intensity and advanced levels of moral judgment, and these two characteristics coupled with their advanced cognitive ability enables them to understand social and moral issues (Sisk, 2009). Several of the research studies on the highly gifted (Burks et al., 1930; Hollingworth,1942; Zorbaugh et al., 1951) have noted that exceptionally gifted children display high standards of truth and morality, and can be overly judgmental towards other children or adults who do not appear to be measuring up to these standards (Gross,2004).

Several studies (Arbuthnot, 1973; Grant et al., 1976; Maccoby, 1980) have found significant correlations between scores on individual or group tests of intelligence and high scores on measures of moral development. While the majority of adults do not progress beyond the second, or conventional, level of moral judgement, Boehm (1962) and Kohlberg (1964) found that intellectually gifted children were able to make complex moral judgements much earlier than their age-peers, while some highly gifted elementary school children functioned at the 'principled', post-conventional level normally attained by fewer than 10 per cent of adults.

However, the data from studies with high-achieving adolescents has indicated that the relationship between apparent academic talent and moral judgment scores is more complex. According to Narvaez's study, high academic competence is necessary for an unusually high P-score, but it does not necessarily predict it. The high achievers can have average to high moral judgment scores, whereas low achievers cannot be high scorers in moral judgment.

Moral development includes other components besides moral judgment as measured by DIT scores. Real-life moral dilemmas also require moral sensitivity and moral motivation (Narvaez,1993). Before an individual can make responsible moral judgments, he or she needs to identify real life moral dilemmas in different contexts. A broad conception of morality requires more than just skill in abstract reasoning. Affective and social factors play a vital role in moral conduct.

The few empirical studies available have contradictory results on the relationship between general intelligence, social competence, and altruism (Abroms,1985). Earlier studies on deviant behavior and crime among the gifted have also shown that there is no necessary relationship between morality and intelligence (Brooks, 1985; Gath, Tennent, & Pidduck, 1970).

According to Andreani and Pagnin (1993), some gifted adolescents tend to neglect their immediate feelings of empathy and common moral inhibitions and focus on logical coherence in their moral judgments. The high level of ability and formal thinking of gifted students might favor intellectual egocentrism and abstraction from both real life and the concrete problems of people. Being gifted or creative imposes a special moral responsibility on an individual.

Characteristics of students gifted in Moral Intelligence based on literature found these elements:

1. Acute moral awareness.
2. Enjoy ethical debates.
3. Have a heightened understanding of moral issues.
4. Show asynchronous moral development.
5. Display moral values in action.
6. Display advanced moral judgment.
7. Have the ability to act on their morality.
8. Have an early sense of right and wrong.
9. Have deep moral systems.
10. Display moral character.

However, they lack the ability to cope with the issues emotionally, and they may feel frustration over not being able to address them. In addition, their advanced level of moral judgment makes them highly critical of injustice and the lack of integrity in individuals and society, which can cause them to become overwhelmed by their knowledge of societal issues and problems, and their inability because of their youth to address them in a meaningful manner (Sisk,2009).

Therefore, we should help the gifted to reach moral excellence together with excellence in specific domains (Andreani & Pagnini,2000).

## **Moral Education and Gifted Students**

This section focuses on the contribution of education to the growth of moral creativity. The influence of formal education on moral judgment development has been the focus of much research in the last 20 years (Derryberry et al., 2005). Dabrowski emphasized the importance of the early identification of these gifted individuals because their asynchronous development (young age vs. advanced development) left them vulnerable; he saw the need for them to receive encouragement and nurturing for their successful development (Cash, 2009).

High cognitive ability and high education are the main contributors to high level of moral judgment: most researches find strongest relations between intelligence (or general cognitive ability) or educational achievement and measures of moral judgement (Pagnin & Andreani, 2000).

Many data were found supporting those assumptions. For instance, years in college are the strongest predictor of moral judgement (Finger, Borduin & Baumstark, 1992); intellectual perspective taking in academic settings accounts for more of the moral judgement variance than does any other factor (Mason & Gibbs, 1993); stages of logical and socio-moral judgement are strongly related to each other (Gibson, 1990). At least, above-average cognitive ability is necessary for higher scores in moral judgement, as higher cognitive achievement ability appears to provide a foundation for higher scores in moral judgment, even if it is not the only element needed (not every high achiever obtains a high score on moral judgement) (Narvaez, 1993); creative gifted give more original solutions to the dilemmas (Andreani & Pagnin, 1993).

Piaget argued that educators should provide students with opportunities to discover morals themselves, rather than simply being indoctrinated with norms. Piaget concluded from his work that schools should concentrate on cooperative decision making and problem solving to nurture moral development (Sisk, 2009).

Kohlberg argued that moral education also requires more than individual reflection, and should include students functioning within a community. The goal of moral education according to Kohlberg is to encourage individuals to move to the next stage of moral development (Sisk, 2009). Kohlberg demonstrated his concept of moral education in schools within-schools in which students participated as community members and sought consensual rather than majority rules. The role of teachers is crucial in the “just community” schools in that they promote rules and norms that reflect a concern for justice and rights in the community, and ultimately enforce the rules (Sisk, 2009). This could be done by emphasizing cooperative decision-making and problem solving, in order to make it possible for them to work out for themselves ethics based on fairness, consideration for others, altruism, loyalty, and the like (Cropley, 2011). The ‘infusion’ approach emphasizes that, rather than simply being an add-on, education offering such experiences should permeate the entire school experience. It is not a competitor with or an ancillary to the acquisition of academic knowledge and skills, but supports this process: responsibility, respect for others, self-control and diligence foster academic learning (Cropley, 2011).

Implications to Education of gifted in moral issues (Tirri, 2011) could be:

- 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)

The traditional approach involved teachers explicitly advocating virtues such as honesty, kindness, patience, or strength, for instance through direct communication of their belief in such virtues, by personal example, and by giving students opportunities of practicing these virtues and rewarding such expression (Cropley,2011). This process was frequently supported by separate classes on moral and ethical behavior, such as religious instruction or civics. A common teaching method for doing this was to present a moral dilemma to students and ask them to work out an appropriate moral course of action. Class discussion would then focus on deviations from justice, fairness, or other moral principles (Cropley,2011).

Coles stressed that children look to parents and teachers for clues on how to behave, as they go about their lives demonstrating in action their assumptions, desires, and values (Sisk,2009). Kidder (2001) said moral courage can be developed using his three principles: being committed to moral principles, being aware of the danger involved in supporting these principles, and being willing to endure the danger.

Sisk and Torrance (2001) advocated helping gifted students to develop a sense of responsibility and awareness of their gifts, and ways to give those gifts back to society to live at a level of moral development that includes a sense of purpose. Educating for moral development has within it the hope of developing the capacity of gifted students to discover what is essential in life; particularly, in their own lives, and in the words of E. Paul Torrance, “to nourish the world.”

Moral education assumes the same possibilities and limits of intellectual education: you can’t develop by simply memorizing norms or by repeating prescribed and positively reinforced actions, but is necessary to develop a broader comprehension of nature of rules, difference of perspectives, relations between different aspects, both through intellectual and social stimuli: this was done in the ‘just community’ approach by Kohlberg and other researchers (Pagnin & Andreani, 2000).

In the meanwhile, other theorists (especially social learning theorists) focused on moral behavior as influenced by reinforcement and modeling procedures (Pagnin & Andreani, 2000) .

On the other hand, we note that findings regarding favorable social adjustment come from studies of moderate rather than extremely gifted children: the most talented are more vulnerable, as they are ‘out of synchrony’ with others (Janos & Robinson, 1985); as Freeman (1985, 1991) notes, highly gifted children are particularly sensitive and reactive to social stimuli they meet, and so are exposed both to most positive, highly intellectually and socially developed experiences, both to negative ones; and their development is inhibited--at any level--without adequate material and psychological conditions (Pagnin & Andreani, 2000). An educational program for social and moral abilities enhancement in selected groups of gifted adolescents was carried out by Pagnin and Zanetti (1997): it was based on exercises of dilemmas discussion, role-taking, social inferences, free expression of personal values, social behavior strategies discussion and dramatized simulation. The outcome of such intervention, analyzed by classic stage scores analysis and by an analysis of verbal expressions and meanings, showed the reaching of higher moral reasoning level (Pagnin & Andreani, 2000).

Pagnin & Andreani (2000) stated that the efficacy of interventions in enhancing levels of moral reasoning is pointed out by many studies (for instance Erikson et al., 1976; Whiteley, 1982; Willging & Dunn, 1982): a good review of them (comprehensive of unpublished dissertations) is in Rest & Thoma, 1986, that conclude the meta-analysis stating that “moral education programs emphasizing dilemma discussion and those emphasizing personality development both produce modest but definite effects.” (Rest & Thoma, 1986, p. 85).

## Conclusions

Educators, counselors, and mentors who work closely with today’s brightest young minds must be aware of the ethical dimensions of high ability because they should be nudging the development of impressive talent toward positive purposes (Ambrose & Cross, 2009).

Overall, research findings underscore the strong correlation between high levels of intellect and strong moral development, including emotional intensity and sensitivity, compassion for others, and a preoccupation with right and wrong, but high intellectual ability does not predict mature moral judgment. Often, they lack the ability to cope with the issues emotionally, and they may feel frustration over not being able to address them.

Therefore, we should help the gifted to reach moral excellence together with excellence in specific domains, through educational programs for improving social and moral abilities.

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