

A Review of *What Is Wisdom and Can It Be Taught? Philosophical, Psychological, and Pedagogical Perspectives*

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Abstract

Book review of *What Is Wisdom and Can It Be Taught? Philosophical, Psychological, and Pedagogical Perspectives*, edited by Eeva K. Kallio and Päivi Tynjälä. While the book is an introductory sketch rather than a comprehensive synthesis, it is a valuable and accessible entry point into wisdom pedagogy and a worthwhile addition to the field.

Keywords: teaching, learning, teaching methods, wisdom model, higher education, pedagogy, learning theories, philosophy, psychology

Canadian post-secondary educators often grapple with the question of whether wisdom can be deliberately taught—either in the classroom or through experiential learning opportunities—or if it emerges through lived experience. In *What is Wisdom and Can It Be Taught? Philosophical, Psychological, and Pedagogical Perspectives* (2025), editors Eeva K. Kallio and Päivi Tynjälä and their collaborators present an answer to this question through a multidimensional framework for understanding and cultivating wisdom. They suggest that students can learn wisdom through a synthesis of philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical practices. The book is divided into two parts: Part I provides philosophical and psychological grounding, and Part II pivots into pedagogical practices and ultimately introduces the authors' proposed Teaching for Wisdom Model (TWM). Spanning 62 pages across eight chapters, the work is a focused, accessible primer to models of wisdom and pedagogical practices that nurture wisdom.

Part I establishes the philosophical and psychological foundation for the authors' proposed model of wisdom acquisition. The authors begin with an introduction to the project and its philosophical and psychological background. They then discuss research questions and study methodology and then analyze selected metamodels in psychology. Part I closes with a critique of previously explored wisdom models and metamodels. While Part I provides a necessary and welcome grounding for the inquiry involving wisdom acquisition, the discussion reads as an accessible survey rather than a deep investigation. This choice is reasonable given the concise format of the book, although readers may find themselves wanting a more rigorous comparative examination of how wisdom is understood across philosophical, psychological, and

pedagogical traditions before delving into models of wisdom. The editors use a qualitative theoretical review methodology to address their central research question, which involves how wisdom can be conceptualized and operationalized as an achievable learning outcome within adult education. They evaluate 15 existing wisdom models and four psychological metamodels. Part I closes with a critique of these frameworks, with the authors arguing that traditional approaches offer fragmentary conceptions that over-rely on static, purely cognitive traits while neglecting emotional and moral dimensions. As a suggestion for further reading with more empirical rigour and to develop a helpful comparative benchmark before moving on to Part II, readers might consider readings that address the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm or Sternberg's Balance Theory.

This title is at its strongest in Part II. Readers will appreciate the thoughtful, well-executed two-phase literature review identifying educational practices for fostering wisdom across the four dimensions from Part I: cognitive, affective-social, ethical-existential, and action. These four structural dimensions form the basis of the authors' Holistic Wisdom Model (HWM), which establishes what wisdom consists of. The TWM then serves as the operational vehicle to deploy this model in a real classroom setting. The educational proposal offered by the authors in Part II demonstrates their expertise, and their argument that wisdom is a capacity that can be taught and developed is compelling and accessible. The TWM that emerges from the review is coherent and offers frameworks for post-secondary educators seeking to incorporate wisdom development into their pedagogy. This framework is at its strongest when applied directly to active pedagogy. Instructors will appreciate the thoughtful, well-executed cross-disciplinary case studies pairing standard technical data analysis with a mandatory guided reflective journal that evaluates the long-term societal and ethical impacts of those technical decisions.

It is here that Kallio and Tynjälä's proposed models of wisdom come fully into focus. They define wisdom as a process of intentional decision-making rather than a fixed personality trait, which they ground in a threefold philosophical framework that views the learner holistically as being embodied, reflective, and contextualized. They conclude that "wisdom is a multidimensional phenomenon including cognitive, affective-social, ethical-existential, and action-related elements" (p. 58) and argue that wisdom can be taught where the whole person, including the socio-emotional and ethical dimensions, is incorporated with cognitive approaches. The proposed TWM integrates theoretical knowledge acquisition with real-world practical applications, experiences, and guided reflective practices for students. By embedding these practical applications directly into course structures, the TWM explicitly addresses the fragmentation critiqued in older frameworks. Rather than separating thought from action, the model ensures that cognitive knowledge is systematically bound to socio-emotional reflection and real-world ethical consequences. The authors argue that the goal of education ought to be the cultivation of wisdom through these diverse dimensions over the entire span of a student's educational journey. This inquiry is interesting and presented in a clear, transparent manner that will benefit readers.

One area for further consideration and development is the structure of the literature review adopted by the authors. Because the review is limited to publications from 2020–2022, philosophical readers may find it too restricted given the breadth of work available regarding the topic of wisdom. Additionally, philosophical arguments tend not to diminish over time, so the

inclusion of older sources might enhance the larger discussion in this text. These are less criticisms than suggestions for how the work may be deepened in the future.

What is Wisdom and Can it be Taught? enters the educational milieu at a time when post-secondary educators are required to navigate an increasingly complex ethical and social environment in universities. The authors' argument that wisdom development belongs across the full span of a student's educational journey—not siloed in philosophy courses or ethical reasoning modules—resonates particularly in contexts where universities are being asked to graduate knowledgeable, thoughtful, reflective, and socially responsible citizens. The HWM and TWM together offer a practical and theoretically grounded framework for educators and curriculum designers interested in taking that mandate seriously. While the book is an introductory sketch rather than a comprehensive synthesis, it is a valuable and accessible entry point into wisdom pedagogy and a worthwhile addition to the field.

References

- Kallio, E. K., & Tynjälä, P. (Eds.). (2025). *What is wisdom and can it be taught? Philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical perspectives*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003602149>