

## **Ethics and Right Livelihood in Further Education**

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At the core of Western culture is the Socratic question about what is the good life for humankind, what is the best way for people to live. A similar concern – about the need to understand and control human emotions and behaviour in the quest to enhance mind/body well-being – is also central to much Eastern philosophy, particularly the Buddhist traditions. What unites these visions is the common ideal of fostering a moral community in which *all* people are treated as we would ideally like *any* person to be treated, along with the insistence that this task is a practical one which can be realised through education.

The pragmatic elements in Western moral philosophy are admirably summed up in Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*, practical moral wisdom aimed at regulating the affairs of humans. In Buddhist practice the concept of *right livelihood* – the ethical commitment to non-harming and respect for all in the conduct of vocations and professions – has a central role to play in achieving the ideal of human flourishing. Moreover, both Eastern and Western practices are in full agreement that this ideal is to be achieved through learning aimed at alleviating ignorance, delusion and destructive emotions in the process of fostering knowledge about the best ways to build harmonious communities.

Such practical concerns are at the heart of the professions, particularly in public service spheres such as teaching, medicine, and social work which are defined by the interaction and relationships between service providers and clients. However, the ethical aspects of teaching – especially in the further education (FE) and university sectors – have, arguably, never received the full and proper attention given to them in other public service spheres. This is quite astonishing given the crucial centrality of ethical (general regulating rules/standards) and moral (fundamental principles of fairness, respect for

persons, justice and the like which underpin the general rules) issues inherent in all learning/teaching encounters.

The affective sphere of professional education and development – that which deals with the moral values, emotions, attitudes and interpersonal aspects of learning/teaching – has, as I have argued forcefully over many years\*, always been neglected in teacher education. The FE sector has witnessed a permanent revolution in policy development over the last two decades, particularly in relation to training and qualifications. In the space of a few years we have moved from a largely unregulated sector where many FE staff were unqualified to a tightly controlled and labyrinthine system of training/qualifications to the current Coalition policy of revoking this framework and de-regulating the sector once again. During the same period an obsession with narrow employability outcomes in the form of skills and competences has unduly influenced all aspects of learning and teaching in the sector.

Almost all of this instrumentalist tinkering has taken place within the cognitive domain, as if the affective dimension concerned with values and emotions had nothing to do with the work of teachers and students. This is a serious omission which should be addressed urgently by FE staff and policy-makers. Learning and teaching are intrinsically moral and emotional activities. Interpersonal relationships with students, the provision of inspirational role models, dealing with emotional issues through learning support, ensuring fairness and equality of treatment are areas of equal importance to planning and delivering lessons. All FE initial and CPD programmes should be as concerned with professional virtues as they are with knowledge and skills. FE teaching can be seen as a form of right livelihood in which moral values define the good practitioner. According to Aristotle we learn to be virtuous by performing virtuous acts, and FE presently stands in need of a lot more of these.

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\*Terry Hyland (2011). *Mindfulness and Learning: Celebrating the Affective Dimension of Education* (Dordrecht, Springer)