

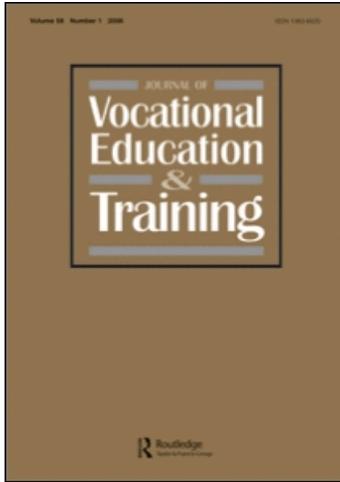
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### Mindfulness, therapy and vocational values: exploring the moral and aesthetic dimensions of vocational education and training

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## **Mindfulness, therapy and vocational values: exploring the moral and aesthetic dimensions of vocational education and training**

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The devaluation and debilitation of education in general and vocational education and training (VET) in particular has been explored and described in recent years by a wide range of critical commentators. Education stands in dire need of therapy, and this paper suggests a therapeutic process for rejuvenating and enhancing VET through attention to the moral and aesthetic values which, arguably, should underpin all genuinely vocational learning. These processes need to counter the claims made by Ecclestone and Hayes about the so-called ‘therapeutic turn’ in education. It is suggested that such claims are exaggerated and mistakenly based on a one-sided intellectualist conception of the educational task. On a more positive note, it is argued that the theory and practice of ‘mindfulness’ – present-moment attention and awareness – can serve to foster moral, social and aesthetic values which can be utilised to enhance and enrich vocational studies at all levels of the system.

**Keywords:** philosophy of VET; vocational and educational guidance; learning in life and work transitions; policy issues; policy analysis

### **Introduction**

In a recent book exploring the links between education and therapy, Smeyers, Smith, and Standish (2007) declare that they are:

interested in ways in which education may itself stand in need of therapy – perhaps through the incorporation of therapeutic approaches but especially, and more importantly, in terms of the need to retrieve education from the current state of its debilitation (4).

The debilitation referred to by such critics is located squarely in recent policy and practice – from school to lifelong learning – by commentators such as Allen and Ainley (2007) and Avis, Fisher, and Simmons (2009) who point to the dangers of arid technicism, performativity, managerialism, and a loss of teacher and student autonomy in an instrumentalist system dominated by skills and competence outcomes linked to narrow skills and employability goals (Hyland 2008). VET, along with other aspects of post-compulsory education and training (PCET) provision in England has been particularly affected by these forces of debilitation.

The history of VET over the last half century has been amply recorded by a number of commentators (Evans 1992; Ainley 1999; Hyland 1999; Winch 2000), and

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can be characterised as a series of tragic narratives – mostly short-lived and inept tinkering with stale and recycled ideas – which have all failed to solve the central problems of VET provision in Britain (Richardson 2007). Writing in 1999, Green observed that:

VET in England and Wales is generally seen as one of the weakest areas of the education system, traditionally suffering from a lack of prestige and coherent planning and organization (13).

In spite of what Keep (2006) has described as a ‘permanent revolution’ (47) in policy initiatives in recent times, the central problems are still with us, no doubt partly because of the strong centralist control of VET in Britain which, as Keep contends, effectively prevents the development of alternative planning and funding systems such as the ones operating in the state partnership models of Continental Europe. From the short-term youth training schemes designed to combat massive youth unemployment in the 1980s, to the new vocationalism based directly on employment needs in the 1990s, to the competence-based programmes and obsession with skills training in more recent times (Ainley 1990, 1999; Allen and Ainley 2007; Hyland and Winch 2007), VET has been in a state of perpetual change fuelled by vain attempts to grapple with the persistence of fundamental flaws in the system.

The recycling continues as the current economic recession and rising levels of youth unemployment result in a return to the welfare to work training schemes introduced as part of the Labour Government’s New Deal policies in the late 1990s (ILO 2010). In Continental Europe the main trends still seemed to be the harmonisation of skill standards (Hyland 2008) and comparisons of VET learning outcomes (CEDEFOP 2010), with little discussion about the fundamental aims, nature and purpose of education in this sphere.

### **Reconstructing VET**

Whitehead (1962) argued that the ‘antithesis between a technical and a liberal education is fallacious’ and that there ‘can be no adequate technical education which is not liberal, and no liberal education which is not technical’ (74). This false dichotomy needs to be challenged in any reconstructed vocationalism by findings ways of breaking down what Dewey (1966) called the ‘antithesis of vocational and cultural education’ based on the false oppositions of ‘labour and leisure, theory and practice, body and mind’ (301). Dewey is the philosopher par excellence of vocational education and his theories emphasise powerfully the value of ‘education which acknowledges the full intellectual and social meaning of a vocation’ (Dewey 1966, 318). The idea of a vocation which ‘signifies any form of continuous activity which renders service to others and engages personal powers on behalf of the accomplishment of results’ is a broad one and provides an ideal vehicle for reconstructing VET. Dewey’s conception includes:

the development of artistic capacity of any kind, of specific scientific ability, of effective citizenship, as well as professional and business occupations, to say nothing of mechanical labour or engagement in gainful pursuits (Dewey 1966, 307).

In addition to this broad Deweyan perspective, a reconstructed programme of VET would ideally satisfy a number of important educational criteria. These would include

the normative values implicit in all meaningful educational activity (Pring 1995) and the moral principles and ethos of inclusive citizenship and social justice which have shaped contemporary approaches to lifelong learning (Aspin 2007). I intend to describe the salient features of a proposed reconstructed conception of VET under the headings of ethical and aesthetic foundations of vocationalism. In the process, I will explore the contributions which mindfulness traditions can make to this process before answering the critics of the so-called ‘therapeutic turn’ in this sphere.

### ***Ethics, morality and vocationalism***

Alongside the historical legacy of vocational education shaped by social stratification and subordination to academic studies there has been a serious neglect of both the ethical (i.e. links with broader social values and networks of interests) and moral (i.e. values fundamental to human flourishing such as justice, trust and truth) foundations of VET. This is really quite surprising given the centrality of preparation for working life in all aspects of the education system from school to university. Jarrett (1991) argues that the ‘single most important goal for a teacher to work towards has to do with the basic attitude towards work’ (206) and similar sentiments inspire Warnock’s (1977) philosophy of education in which ‘work is, and always must be an ingredient of the good life’ such that a ‘life without work would always be less good than a life which contained it’ (144).

The ‘morally impoverished’ (Fish 1993, 10) state of VET can, of course, be directly attributed to the perennial social class and value differences already mentioned in which the inferior status of vocational pursuits has meant that the moral high ground would almost always be occupied by academic education with its association with liberal and classical ideals. Vocational education, on the other hand, has generally been associated with less prestigious, workaday activities which, as a number of commentators have tellingly observed (Ainley 1990; Lewis 1991), always seem to be about ‘other people’s children.’ However, as philosophers of education such as Warnock (1977), White (1997) and Winch (2000) have argued, such links are merely contingent and could just as easily be applied to the vocational side as, indeed, Dewey’s pioneering work amply demonstrated. Pring (1995) sums up the position well in commenting:

‘Liberal’ is contrasted with ‘vocational’ as if the vocational, properly taught, cannot itself be liberating – a way into those forms of knowledge through which a person is freed from ignorance, and opened to new imaginings, new possibilities; the craftsman who finds aesthetic delight in the object of his craft, the technician who sees the science behind the artifact, the reflective teacher making theoretical sense of practice (189).

What needs to be added to such reconciliatory approaches is a more precise definition of vocational work and, more specifically, some account of the crucial differences initially noted and analysed by Arendt (1958) between work as creative endeavour and that linked with labour or toil. Building on Arendt’s arguments, Herbst (1973) identified a number of educationally significant features of the distinction between work and labour. Although the activities have much in common – they both consume time and energy and can be undertaken more or less efficiently – work can be said to possess an element of intrinsic value (when it is integrally related to its end product) whereas labour has an essentially extrinsic or utilitarian worth (as it is typically done for purposes beyond itself) and can, therefore, be more properly described as toil. As he suggests: ‘Labour is hardship...the price we pay for whatever advantages the

rewards of labour will pay' (Herbst 1973, 59). Another way of putting this is that 'work, unlike labour, must have a point which the workman [*sic*] can endorse, and a purpose with which he can associate himself' (61).

Work of some kind is the lot of most humans and the examination of the full implications of the perspectives outlined above should be a part of every person's education. Such discussions also serve to remind us of what Wringe (1991) has referred to as the 'morality of work' which consists in the recognition that:

Work does not have to be sublime or spectacular...to be worthwhile. Many relatively mundane jobs can be challenging and varied, and involve standards of logic, efficiency, integrity, judgement and so on (38).

In a similar vein, Green (1968) argues that the 'meaningfulness of a task lies not in the work but in the worker,' and that 'some people may find even cosmic significance in a task that, to others, would seem mean and inconsequential' (25). The present-moment attention fostered through mindfulness practice has much to offer in reconstructing values in this field, particularly in relation to the exercise of craft skills and the ideals and aesthetics of artisanship (discussed in more detail below). The nature and complexity of craft skills and the work of artisans are highlighted in studies by Ainley (1993) and Sennett (2008) and, examining similar perspectives, Corson (1991) calls for a consideration of work as 'craft...pursued for its own ends...similar to recreational work in having value for its own sake' (171). In order to realise such – essentially Deweyan – ideals in practice, Corson suggests a framework for learning incorporating notions of craftsmanship which would be designed to reinforce the 'values that students see in their work and the significance of that work for themselves and for their society' (Corson 1991, 171–2).

The moral dimensions of VET follow logically from such considerations. Wringe (1991) has written of the 'morality of toil and the division of labour,' a consequence of which is that, since 'toil, regular, serious toil cannot itself be a necessary part of the good life,' the 'facts of human existence are such that the preparedness to undertake it may be regarded as a necessary part of a life that is just' (40). Questions about justice and fairness in relation to work and society necessarily raise fundamental moral issues which are inseparable from the full-blooded reconstruction of VET being proposed. There are certain primary and basic moral principles – Trusted (1987) identifies these as 'trust and benevolence,' and other moral philosophers prefer 'social justice' (Rawls 1972) or the 'equal consideration of interests' (Singer 1982) – which become the 'working principles of society' (Trusted 1987, 114) in that, without them, it is difficult to see how any society or community could function for long. Thus, a certain level of truth-telling, trust in others and consideration of others' needs and interests is indispensable to the operation of any organization or social network, whether this is assembled for economic, cultural or any other purpose. Indeed, during the period of rampant individualism in the 1980s enterprise culture in the UK – when the short-lived 'new vocationalism' criticised above was tried and failed as a means of VET reform (Heelas and Morris 1992) – these basic moral facts had a tendency to be overlooked, ultimately to the detriment of all members of society.

The values of the enterprise culture – and the neo-liberal, so called 'free market' economics of Friedman and the Chicago School which almost destroyed many developing countries in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the South American cone (Klein 2007) and ultimately led to the global financial collapse and recession of recent

times – was incredibly naïve in supposing that the ‘history of Western civilisation is the history of free individuals engaged in intellectual thought’ (Shirley 1991, 154). As Judt (2010) has argued, there is a sense in which all human agency has to be rooted in and realised through networks informed by the social values of trust, honesty, justice and co-operation.

### **Work and literary aesthetics**

Norman (1983) comes close to identifying the aesthetic dimension of work when, employing Marxian concepts, he refers to ‘unalienated’ work as ‘meaningful, creative and self-expressive’ which ‘gives an individual a sense of his or her identity, recognised and confirmed by others’ (175). Warnock (1977) identifies cognate features of work in her notion that ‘all work is effort to make or change things and reduce them to order, and all these efforts are worth making’ (145).

It often seems to be that it is in literature and poetry – rather than in texts on work per se – where this aesthetic dimension of work and craft finds its fullest and most insightful expression and meaning. Seamus Heaney’s poems are wonderfully evocative in this respect; in *Follower* the poet recalls watching his father at work ploughing the fields:

His shoulders globed like a full sail string  
Between the shafts and the furrow.  
The horses strained at his clicking tongue.  
An expert. He would set the wing  
And fit the bright steel-pointed sock.  
The sod rolled over without breaking.

And again in *Thatcher* we have the following lines:

Bespoke for weeks, he turned up some morning  
Unexpectedly, his bicycle slung  
With a light ladder and a bag of knives...  
He shaved and flushed the butts, stitched all together  
Into a shaped honeycomb, a stubble patch,  
And left them gaping at his Midas touch.  
(Heaney 1990, 6,10).

The sheer joy of careful, productive and socially useful work is nowhere better described than in Primo Levi’s novel *The Wrench* (1988) in which the central character, Faussonne, relates stories about his work as a steel rigger on construction sites. One of Faussonne’s workmates reflects:

We agreed then on the good things we had in common. On the advantage of being able to test yourself, not depending on others in the test, reflecting yourself in your work. On the pleasure of seeing your creature grow, beam after beam, bolt after bolt, solid, necessary, symmetrical, suited to its purpose; and when it’s finished you look at it and you think that perhaps it will live longer than you, and perhaps it will be of some use to someone you don’t know, who doesn’t know you (53).

In a similar vein, Tressell in his novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1993) describes the work of painters and decorators in the early years of the twentieth century who – in spite of constant hardship and fear of dismissal – struggle to give meaning to their work by doing the best possible job. One of the more politically

engaged workmen, for example, forced along with his fellow workers to ‘cut corners’ in order to maximize profits for their employer, found that he:

could not scamp the work to the extent that he was ordered to; and so, almost by stealth, he was in the habit of doing it – not properly but as well as he dared. He even went to the length of occasionally buying a few sheets of glass paper with his own money. (162)

Even though we must take account of the realist view that, as Wringe (1991) observes, many kinds of work are ‘not constitutive of the good life and are at best a necessary evil’ (37) and, furthermore, the ethnographic research that indicates young people are often acutely aware of these brute facts about working life (Willis 1977; Shilling 1989), I would still want to argue that a VET programme which did not include the aesthetic dimension would be sadly incomplete. Along with the recent tentative movements in national policy in Britain towards a greater concern with the affective and creative aspects of education (Government Office for Science 2008) – not to mention perennial calls for citizenship education in schools – a reconstructed vocationalism incorporating such elements has never been more necessary.

### **Mindfulness, craft and VET**

The origins of mindfulness are to be found in Buddhist philosophy and practice – traditionally the seventh strand of the eightfold path leading to nirvana and the end of suffering – though the concept is currently attracting widespread attention in a large number of spheres far removed from its natural and original home. In the context of the *Dharma* (literally the fundamental nature of the universe revealed in the Buddhist canon of teachings and precepts [Keown 2005]), mindfulness is of overriding importance.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1999) – the renowned Vietnamese Buddhist teacher and campaigner for world peace and justice – describes mindfulness as being ‘at the heart of the Buddha’s teachings.’ It involves ‘attention to the present moment’ which is ‘inclusive and loving’ and ‘which accepts everything without judging or reacting’ (64). Kabat-Zinn (1990, 1994) and associates have been largely responsible for transforming the original spiritual notion into a powerful and ubiquitous therapeutic tool based on forms of meditation and mindful practices. Mindfulness simply means ‘paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally’ in a way which ‘nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality’. Such practice – whether this involves breathing or walking meditation or giving full non-judgmental attention to everyday activities – can offer a ‘powerful route for getting ourselves unstuck, back in touch with our own wisdom and vitality’ (Kabat-Zinn 1994, 4–5). Such a simple idea has proved astonishingly successful in a vast range of contexts including the treatment of depression, addictions of various kinds, and the promotion of physical and mental health and well-being generally (Williams et al. 2007).

Like any process or activity which is concerned principally with introspection and a focus on inner thoughts and feelings, there seems to be a natural tendency to assign it a limited value because of its apparent passivity and subjective inward-looking character. This stretches credulity. The description of mindfulness by Williams et al. (2007, 48) brings out the active, developmental and educational features of such practice. They note that mindfulness is:

- (1) **intentional** – concerned with cultivating an awareness of present moment reality and the choices available to us
- (2) **experiential** – focussing directly on present moment experience rather than being pre-occupied by abstractions
- (3) **non-judgmental** – it allows us to see things as they are without a mental assignment of critical labels to our thoughts, feelings and perceptions

Mindfulness practice may contribute to the recommended reconstruction of VET by enhancing and reinforcing the aesthetic and craft features of working life. A particularly forceful expression of the links between mindfulness and craft is to be found in Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974) in which the writer connects ideas about work and engineering craft with aesthetic notions and Zen Buddhist principles.

Granger (2006) makes use of Pirsig's ideas to illustrate the educational importance of Dewey's aesthetic notions for both vocational and general education. Pirsig's description of the differences between a 'high quality' and 'low quality' motorcycle shop and the characteristics of a craftsman-like mechanic are quoted by Granger. The 'high quality' mechanic has:

Patience, care and attentiveness to what [he's] doing, but more than this, there's a kind of inner peace of mind...The craftsman isn't ever following a single line of interaction. He's making decisions as he goes along. For that reason he'll be absorbed and attentive to what he's doing even though he doesn't deliberately contrive this. His motions and the machine are in a kind of harmony. (117)

Granger argues that 'attending to things...means reaching out as complete beings to meet the world in a way that brings us closer to it as an equal partner in the full lived situation, and in the concrete and particular here and now' (118).

Such a conception of precise and careful work is on all fours with the non-judgmental present moment awareness at the core of mindfulness, and Granger demonstrates forcefully the value of such notions to educational theory and practice. Such values are also incorporated in Sennett's (2008) comprehensive and painstaking analysis of the nature and significance of craftsmanship in human history. Craftsmen are 'dedicated to good work for its own sake' and all 'craftsmanship is founded on skill developed to a high degree' (20). Such work is inextricably linked to codes of ethics. As Sennett explains:

Craftsmen take pride in skills that mature. This is why simple imitation is not a sustaining satisfaction: the skill has to evolve. The slowness of craft time serves as a source of satisfaction; practice beds in, making the skill one's own. Slow craft time enables the work of reflection and imagination – which the push for quick results cannot. Mature means long; one takes lasting ownership of the skill. (2008, 295)

Such a conception of work rules out the behaviourist, competence-based approach to VET (Hyland 2008), and also demonstrates the crucial importance of the traditional apprenticeship system. Although this system was far from perfect, Vickerstaff's (2007) research on young people who had qualified through this route indicated the valuable socialising and developmental nature of this form of vocational training. As she notes: it 'meant something to be an apprentice: it was an expected, respected and structured path to adulthood' (342) in addition to providing the long-term fostering of

vocational and craft knowledge and skill. It also required the collective effort of ‘family help, community backing and intergenerational support’ (Vickerstaff 2007), factors which the shorter, modern apprenticeships of recent years (Rikowski 1999) have not quite been able to achieve. The concept of apprenticeship – like the traditional idea of craft – brings together long-term knowledge and skill development, ethical practice and social-collective involvement, all factors which are vital to the regeneration of VET at a time when short-termist skill training holds centre stage in the contemporary ‘training market’ (Ainley 2007).

The Buddhist conception of ‘right livelihood’ incorporates many of the core principles of craft and skill development advocated by Dewey, Pirsig, Sennett, and others: precise and careful work, aesthetic and emotional appreciation, ethical procedures and links with the community. As Hanh (1999) reminds us ‘To practice Right Livelihood means to practice Right Mindfulness’ (116). Applying the precepts of mindfulness specifically to working life Hanh (1991) advises us to:

keep your attention focused on the work, be alert and ready to handle ably and intelligently any situation which may arise – this is mindfulness. There is no reason why mindfulness should be different from focusing all one’s attention on one’s work, to be alert and to be using one’s best judgment. During the moment one is consulting, resolving, and dealing with whatever arises, a calm heart and self-control are necessary if one is to obtain good results...If we are not in control of ourselves but instead let our impatience or anger interfere, then our work is no longer of any value. Mindfulness is the miracle by which we master and restore ourselves (Hanh 1991, 14).

Expressing similar sentiments, Sennett (2008) suggests that the history of craftsmanship holds clues to the thrust of human history in general. Echoing many of Dewey’s criticisms of education referred to earlier, he observes:

History has drawn fault lines dividing practice and theory, technique and expression, craftsman and artist, maker and user; modern society suffers from this historical inheritance. But the past life of craft and craftsmen also suggests ways of using tools, organizing bodily movements, thinking about materials that remain alternative, viable proposals about how to conduct life with skill. (11)

Mindfulness is also about conducting life with skill – indeed, the notion of ‘skilful means’ (Keown 2005, 18ff) has a special place in Buddhist ethics and practice – and the development of the central quality of present-moment awareness can assist both in enhancing vocational preparation and in connecting this to all aspects of life in society.

### **Conclusion: VET and therapeutic learning**

A reconstructed programme for VET – foregrounding moral and aesthetic values underpinned by mindfulness practice – has been proposed as a way of remedying some of the persistent flaws and problems of provision in this sphere. How would all this sit with critics of the therapeutic turn?

The arguments about the rise of therapeutic education have been challenged on a number of fronts (Kinman 2008; Hyland 2010). The ‘therapeutic turn’ critics have noted what is a tentative movement towards non-cognitive elements in the curriculum and exaggerated this beyond all recognition. In addition to seriously underestimating the extent to which education in general and VET in particular has been radically impoverished in the last few decades through the standards agenda and the obsession

with narrow skills and competence outcomes, Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) advocate a dangerously one-sided and overly cognitive conception of the educational task. They conclude their book with the claim that ‘what makes humanity is the intellectual and an education based on *cogito ergo sum* not *sentio ergo sum*’ (164, italics in original). Given what has been said above about the importance of moral and aesthetic values, my main argument is that an education which emphasised one element at the expense of the other would be a diminished one since it does not develop the whole person.

Descartes’ infamous *Cogito* has, arguably, been responsible for more philosophical wrong turnings than anything else in Western thought. Ryle (1973) demonstrated how ‘Descartes’ myth’ had resulted in the ‘intellectualist legend’ which wrongly assumed that there was ‘an antithesis between the physical and the mental’ (32), and this led to the false dualisms between mind and body, theory and practice, knowing how and knowing that. Similarly, Searle (1985) criticises the legacy of Descartes on the grounds that it has led to an ‘inherited cultural resistance to treating the conscious mind as a biological phenomenon like any other’ (10). Placing all this in the context of human evolution, Pinker (1997) explains clearly ‘why we have emotions’; he argues that the:

emotions are mechanisms that set the brain’s highest level goals. Once triggered by a propitious moment, an emotion triggers the cascade of goals and sub-goals that we call thinking and acting...no sharp line divides thinking from feeling, nor does thinking necessarily precede feeling or vice versa... (373)

The failure to appreciate the links between thinking and feeling are clearly in evidence in Hayes’s (2003) argument that alongside the ‘triumph of vocationalism’ (whatever this may mean) there has been a ‘triumph of therapeutic education’, a ‘form of prescription for work’ arising out of the ‘changed nexus between work and education’ (54). He goes on to explain that:

The new vocational skills that are required in the workforce are sometimes called ‘emotional’ or ‘aesthetic’ labour. If...students are being trained in personal and social skills as well as in relationships, this is training in emotional labour...[which] requires and receives a personal and wholehearted commitment to workplace values. (54)

I am not sure exactly what Hayes means by ‘workplace values’ here but I would have to say that this account of the emotional and aesthetic aspects of vocational preparation is distorted, misguided and far too pessimistic. As argued above, it is just these features of working life which need to be enhanced and systematically implemented in VET programmes so as to combat the narrow reductionism and instrumentalism which has characterised this field for so long. If we interpret the reference to ‘workplace values’ as providing students with a critical and realistic account of the nature and purpose of work in contemporary society – along with some experience of the different values operating in this sphere and the importance of the emotions in shaping working relationships – then I suggest that discussions of such workplace values are an essential ingredient of vocational preparation.

Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) write about ‘diminished workers and diminished managers’ in the contemporary workplace but – although they go to some lengths to describe the ‘inexorable rise of concerns with “stress” and “bullying” in the workplace over the last decade’ (110) – they fail to sympathise with the growth of counselling

services provided by trades unions to combat this worrying increase in work-related stress and ill health. This seems irrational and illogical and can only be explained in terms of what is clearly a systematic avoidance of and disdain for emotions and feelings in their arguments. Moreover, there is no attempt to link these claims about the diminishment of workers with the impoverishment of VET described earlier or the dominance of individualistic, neo-liberal values which have wreaked havoc in certain spheres of employment. And where are the suggested solutions to these problems in terms of, perhaps, alternative social-collective ways of organizing VET and work arrangements?

After claiming that staff development and appraisal are sometimes used for therapeutic purposes in workplaces – and criticising the Trades Union Congress (TUC) for being overly concerned with the millions of vulnerable workers who are in ‘unsafe, low paid, insecure employment’ (Ecclestone and Hayes 2008, 120) – Ecclestone and Hayes conclude by asserting that:

Workers will not spontaneously arise from the therapy couch that they, together with their unions and managers, have created. Unless there is a challenge to the construction of the idea of human beings as vulnerable and diminished that is being strengthened through therapeutic education, it will be impossible for workers to confront and resist the therapeutic workplace (121).

In the midst of the current recession – described by Chang (2010) as the ‘second-largest economic crisis in history’ (xiii) – it would be perfectly normal for workers to feel vulnerable and stressed in the face of redundancy threats and deteriorating conditions of service. However, staff and unions in schools, colleges and universities – and indeed many workers in other public service sectors and in private industry – would find the charge that they are in some sense diminished both insulting and morally offensive. Critics who use such labels – particularly amidst such *emotive* (yes, that which excites and incenses feelings) language as that urging them to get up from the therapy couch – should perhaps think a bit more carefully before assigning them to people with such casual and apparently blithe generality.

The reconstructed VET programme proposed would acknowledge that feelings and emotions – including stress, alienation, fear and helplessness – are a natural and perhaps unavoidable aspect of working life, and we will achieve nothing by denying this. People in all fields of work will only be able to mount the challenge urged upon them by Ecclestone and Hayes when they come to acknowledge, understand, be with and ultimately transform destructive and negative emotions and channel them into constructive and effective engagement with efforts to enhance conditions of service and all aspects of working life. Mindfulness practice has proved to be very effective in this sphere (Hahn 1999).

In order to change the world it may be necessary to change ourselves. The sort of political engagement which Ecclestone and Hayes seem to be calling for cannot but be a highly emotional business. It is not simply a rational matter of *seeing* certain flaws and problems in aspects of working life; it is a matter of *feeling* what it is like to work under those conditions and being *motivated* to change them. To undertake such a task either for ourselves or (as members of professional associations or trades unions) on behalf of others, we ideally need to *feel passionate* about what we are doing.

Social and political action of this or any other kind is almost never a matter of pure rationality or cognition. Thinking and feeling are inextricably connected in political

and social reform as, indeed, they undeniably are in work and forms of creative expression such as drama, literature and music. There are clear and direct links between reason and passion in the history of social movements. Reddy (2000), for instance, describes how the prime players in the French Revolution – although steeped in the Enlightenment thought of Rousseau and Condorcet – valued emotional intensity as much as intellect. In his study of the Terror during the Revolution, Andress (2005) observes that:

Many educated people in eighteenth-century France believed that a frankly melodramatic acting-out of emotional experiences was ‘authentic’, and the mark of an honest and virtuous character...A radically open-hearted approach to life was widely asserted to be both wholesomely natural and socially desirable. Whole-hearted emotional commitment was quickly translated into revolutionary political commitment. (128)

It is such connections between thinking, feeling and doing which highlight the importance of the reconstructed model of VET which has been proposed. Such an approach foregrounds affective and mindfulness components and places preparation for work fairly and squarely within a framework of social-collective values. Such values – and the moral principles which give them meaning – should be part of every person’s education, especially that concerned with the crucial task of preparing people for the world of work.

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