


Reconstructing Vocational Education and Training for the 21st Century: Mindfulness, Craft, and Values

SAGE Open
 January-March 2014: 1–15
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 DOI: 10.1177/2158244013520610
 sgo.sagepub.com


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Abstract

The unfavorable comparisons between English and European vocational education and training (VET) systems made in the Wolf Report—and indeed in many national reviews of VET in Britain since the Royal Commission on Technical Education reported in 1884—point toward the low status of vocational pursuits in the United Kingdom compared with that in Continental Europe and elsewhere. In the light of these cultural differences, it is unlikely that structural, funding, or curriculum reforms alone will succeed in enhancing VET provision without corresponding changes in the value foundation of vocational studies. The reconstruction of VET requires a re-orientation of its foundational values if the reforms proposed by Wolf and others are to have any chance of lasting success. By the same token—although European and other national systems have their own peculiar problems—the global policy agenda concerned only with cognitive outcomes expressed as behaviorist skills and competences is, arguably, unlikely to meet the key challenges. A reconstructed model of VET needs to foreground the values, craft, and aesthetic features of vocationalism if the perennial problems are to be dealt with adequately. A reconstruction plan is suggested below, informed and inspired by the concept of “mindfulness”—non-judgmental, present-moment attention, and awareness—drawn from Buddhist contemplative traditions. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in areas such as psychology, psychotherapy, medical science, and education have grown exponentially over the last decade or so, and interesting work is now emerging in relation to the value of mindfulness in workplace training.

Keywords

vocational education and training (VET), education theory and practice, education, social sciences, moral/aesthetic education, craft skills, mindfulness and education

Introduction

The history of vocational studies in Britain over the last half century has been amply recorded by a number of commentators (Ainley, 1999; Evans, 1992; Hyland, 1999; Richardson, 2007; Winch, 2000) and can be characterized by 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 vocational education and training (VET) provision. Hyland and Winch (2007) formulated the key problems in terms of the “subordinate status of vocational studies, low employer investment in VET, a relatively low-skilled workforce and the lack of a national, coherent education and training system” (p. 2). What can be added to this in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic meltdown is that all nations are struggling to limit the damage caused by the neo-liberal hegemony on labor market de-regulation and related VET systems which formed part of the cause of the collapse (Pilz, 2012), in addition to implementing remedies to alleviate the huge rise in unemployment—particularly among young people—in all industrialized countries in the last 4 years (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2012).

Writing in 1999, A. 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. (p. 13)

In spite of what Keep (2006) has described as a “permanent revolution” (p. 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

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1990s, to the competence-based programs and obsession with skills training in more recent times (Ainley, 1990, 1999; Allen & Ainley, 2007; Hyland & Winch, 2007), VET has been in a state of perpetual change fueled 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 Labor Government's New Deal policies in the late 1990s (ILO, 2010, 2012). In Continental Europe, the main trends still seem to be the harmonization of skill standards (Hyland, 2008) and comparisons of VET learning outcomes (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2010; Pilz, 2012) with little discussion about the fundamental aims, nature, and purpose of education in this sphere.

Although there is a wide diversity of conditions and challenges driving national VET policy in different countries, comparative policy research has indicated that a number of specific global trends—the reductionist commodification of vocational knowledge in terms of minimalist skills and competence outcomes and a narrow employability agenda—have unduly influenced developments in the United States (Brighouse, 2006; Palmer, 1998), Europe, and Australasia (Ball, 2007; Hayden, Thompson, & Levy, 2007; OECD, 2010). In a recent major collection of international VET studies, the editor, Pilz (2012), observed,

Across the globe, vocational education and training is characterised by a number of over-arching trends, including the increasing use of technology, the growing importance of information and communications systems, and changes to national demographics. At the interface between the education and training system and the world of work, VET faces the challenge of tackling these changes, of making a constructive contribution to solving the problems posed by the transition from education to employment, and of ensuring that the next generation has the skills it—and the economy—needs. (Preface)

The national review of all aspects of VET in England, the Wolf Report (2011) was highly critical of current provision—particularly for 16- to 19-year-olds—declaring that “at least 350,000 get little or no benefit from the post-16 education system” (p. 7). The result is that “many of England's 14-19 year olds do not, at present, progress successfully into either secure employment or higher-level education and training” (Wolf Report, 2011, p. 8). In particular, the research conducted as part of the review concluded that

low-level vocational qualifications, notably NVQs, have, on average, absolutely no significant economic value to the holders unless they are gained as part of a completed apprenticeship. This is especially true if they were gained on a government-financed scheme. (Wolf Report, 2011, p. 150)

Among the many proposals for the improvement of practice, the report recommended the delay of specialization in

terms of vocational/academic tracks until age 16, the enhancement of English and Mathematics teaching for 16- to 19-year-olds, and—in line with European systems of provision—the expansion of high-quality work experience and apprenticeships for young people (Wolf Report, 2011).

However, in terms of the central thesis advocated in this article, the Wolf proposals do not sufficiently address the dearth of attention to non-cognitive educational development in standard VET programs. The uneven and differential positions of vocational/academic pursuits have striking parallels in the generally undervalued and neglected role accorded to affective as against cognitive or mainstream academic/intellectual pursuits. Moreover, the origins of this differential status can be discerned in the very same developments—the Greek conception of liberal education which informed the establishment of compulsory education systems in Britain and, to a lesser extent, in Europe (A. Green, 1990)—responsible for the so-called vocational/academic divide.

Schofield (1972) located the original source of these divisions in the emergence of the idea of a liberal education in Ancient Greece. This form of education came to be associated with “freeing the mind from error” in Plato's distinction between “genuine” knowledge (based on the rational reflection of logic and mathematics) and mere “opinion,” that is, applied knowledge used for specific purposes (pp. 151-152). The former conception, disinterested and objective knowledge, came to be thought of as superior and intrinsically valuable, whereas the latter, instrumental or applied knowledge, came to be associated with more practical and less valued vocational pursuits (Lewis, 1991).

Moreover, such hierarchical divisions were from the outset inextricably linked to social class stratification and an axiology of relative values about educational activities. In the *Republic*, the relative value accorded to the “Forms” of knowledge by Plato is fully realized in the various kinds of education provided for rulers, guardians, and workers in the ideal state (in addition to the distinctions between “bananaic” knowledge, suited to slaves, and knowledge worthy of free citizens). The “foundation myth” of the ideal state suggests that God “added gold to the composition of those of you who are qualified to be rulers. . . . he put silver in the auxiliaries, and iron and bronze in the farmers and the rest” (Plato, 1965 (ed.), p. 160). Similarly, in *The Politics* Aristotle (1962) offered an account of rival educational aims and purposes—essentially valuing disinterested theory above applied practice—which is uncannily similar to the vocational/academic (technical/liberal) discourse which has characterized educational debates since the establishment of state schooling in Britain in the 19th century.

Once such hierarchical and normative distinctions had been made by thinkers, it was almost inevitable that they should come to be connected—through formal systems of education—to social stratification and political power. As Schofield (1972) explained,

The passing of time merely emphasised the distinctions which Plato made. Studies which were valuable in themselves, especially the Classics, became associated with the privileged class or elite in society. They were directly related to the concept of a courtier, a gentleman, a man of affairs, and later the public schools. Liberal education always carried with it a suggestion of privilege and privileged position, of not needing to work for one's living. (pp. 151-152)

The linking of such ideals to classical studies and the public school/university elite in 19th-century Britain (which produced the politically powerful who were to define mass compulsory schooling after 1870) served to bring about a class-dominated, bifurcated curriculum—in which vocational studies were always subordinate to academic pursuits—which bedevils British education to this day. Educational debate at the time was distorted by such irrational prejudice which, as Skilbeck, Connell, Lowe, and Tait (1994) put it, was “compounded by anti-democratic sentiments and arcadian ideals” (p. 160) which, throughout the 20th century, were to stand in the way of the development of a national, unified system of education, in which vocational studies and the preparation for working life had its rightful and proper place.

What seems to underpin the hierarchical divisions in this sphere is not so much the *nature* of knowledge in terms of arts, sciences, or disciplines but whether it is described and viewed as intellectual or theoretical as opposed to being applied or productive. Now, although such epistemological distinctions are challenged by critics who seek to break down the general/vocational studies dichotomy, there can be little doubt that their centrality in Ancient Greek philosophy had played a major part in reinforcing such dualisms in educational systems. In Plato's scheme of education outlined in the *Republic*, “dialectic” (philosophy) is the “crown of the educational process” (Nettleship, 1935, p. 133) as it leads us to the knowledge of the “Forms” which represent the one source of unchanging, eternal truths. Similarly, for Aristotle, practical knowledge was inferior to theoretical knowledge because it involved “choice among relative goods,” whereas theoretical knowledge was linked to “certainty” (Hickman, 1990, pp. 107-108); productive knowledge was even more inferior because it was linked to the “making of things out of contingent matter” (Hickman, 1990, p. 108). It was this distorted conception of knowledge which informed the “gentleman ideal” and the public school ethos of 19th-century England, which provided the original inspiration and model for the development of compulsory schooling after 1870 (Hyland, 1999, 2002).

Applying all this to the current state of affective education, we can see the old divisions and dichotomies at work. Dewey (1966) codified and constantly challenged this curriculum divide in his attempts to break down the “antithesis of vocational and cultural education” based on the false oppositions of “labor and leisure, theory and practice, body

and mind” (p. 306). Affective education, with its links to the subjective “soft” sphere of emotions, feelings, and values, has, arguably, always been considered inferior to the “hard” objective domain of intellectual/academic activity. Best (1998) acknowledged this in his observation that the pervasive influence of Enlightenment culture combined with the rise of science and technology has led to a “relative neglect of the emotions in the mainstream of UK schooling” (p. 80). Moreover, such a neglect characterizes much of schooling in recent times in both the United States (Hart, 2007; Palmer, 1998) and Europe (Lang, 1998; Weare, 2004). Best (1998) is astonished by this lack of attention to the affective, especially “given that our motivations to act are so often (always?) in the realm of feelings, sentiments or passions rather than in the cold, clinical exercise of the intellect” (p. 80).

The unfavorable comparisons between English and European systems made in the Wolf report—and indeed in many national reviews of VET in Britain since the Royal Commission on Technical Education reported in 1884 (Musgrave, 1964)—point toward the low status of vocational pursuits in the United Kingdom compared with that in Continental Europe and elsewhere (Hyland & Winch, 2007). In the light of these cultural differences, it is unlikely that structural, funding, or curriculum reforms alone will succeed in enhancing VET provision without corresponding changes in the value foundation of vocational studies (Hyland, 2002, 2011a). The reconstruction of VET requires a re-orientation of its foundational values if the reforms proposed by Wolf and others are to have any chance of lasting success. By the same token—although European and other national systems have their own peculiar problems—the global policy agenda concerned only with cognitive outcomes expressed as behaviorist skills and competences is, arguably, unlikely to meet the key challenges. Recent theoretical and policy studies have sought to deal with these problems through recommendations for an enhanced affective element in education and training programs (Hyland, 2011b; Park, Lim, Yoon, Huh, & Lee, 2011). A reconstructed model of VET needs to emphasize the values, craft and aesthetic features of vocationalism if the perennial problems are to be dealt with adequately. I suggest such a plan for reconstruction below, informed and inspired by the concept of “mindfulness”—non-judgmental, present-moment attention and awareness—drawn from Buddhist contemplative traditions (Hyland, 2011a).

Mindfulness and Education

Mindfulness is a core concept in Buddhist philosophy and practice—traditionally the seventh strand of the eightfold path leading to nirvana and the end of suffering—and 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” (p. 64). Jon 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, pp. 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 (Baer, 2006). Harris’s (2006) robustly secular notion of such strategies—which are applicable to any everyday activity such as driving, washing dishes, or solving problems, not just to contemplative or meditative practices—describes them in terms of “investigating the nature of consciousness directly through sustained introspection” (p. 209).

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. The description of mindfulness by Williams, Teasdale, Segal, and Kabat-Zinn (2007) 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*—focusing 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

In a similar context, Smith (2002) observed that some sort of “inward turn” is “often (but wrongly) associated with therapy in general” (p. 95). However, mindfulness does seem to be able to deal with such criticisms effectively, particularly when the concept is interpreted within the context

of its original home in Buddhist philosophy and practice. In recent years, there has been a lively debate about the relevance of Buddhist thought to Western psychology and psychotherapy (Segall, 2003), and a consensus seems to have emerged about the commonalities and mutual objectives of the different traditions. Rubin (2003) explained how “Buddhism points toward possibilities for self-awareness, freedom, wisdom and compassion that Western psychology in general, and psychoanalysis in particular, has never mapped” (p. 50). These possibilities are realized in the growing range of therapeutic mindfulness strategies used in health programs (Williams et al., 2007) and in the demonstration of the educational value of mindfulness (Schoeberlein & Sheth, 2009; Siegel, 2007, 2010). The expanding literature on the connections between neuroscientific research and learning (Howard-Jones, 2008) offers considerable support for this general approach.

Neuroscience and Mindfulness

Clear and direct parallels and areas of continuity between the older (Buddhist, contemplative) and the newer (therapeutic, reflective) conceptions of mindfulness are to be located in the mutual emphasis on attending to the activity of the mind with a view to training and transforming consciousness to enhance perception, emotional stability, and general mind/body well-being. It is for this reason that a number of psychologists and psychotherapists (Epstein, 2007) have regarded Buddhism as a form of study of the nature of the mind. Germer (2005) asserted simply that “reading early Buddhist texts will convince the clinician that the Buddha was essentially a psychologist” (p. 13).

What then are the main features of Buddhist psychology? Olendzki (2003) suggested that the Buddhist notion of the human condition is not so very different from contemporary perspectives. In summary this is

An organism, comprised both of physical and mental factors and processes, lives in a dynamic equilibrium with its environment, both shaping and being shaped by that environment as a response to various internal and external sets of conditions. (p. 11)

Mindfulness is central to the mind–body medicine recommended by Kabat-Zinn (1990) and Williams et al. (2007), and the research and literature in this field have been expanding rapidly over the last decade or so. However, we still need to address the question of how and why this mechanism works. How can mindful awareness and practice, for example, enhance learning, help overcome depression and addiction, relieve the pain of cancer sufferers, and serve to galvanize the energies and transform the lives of older people?

A good place to start is with the relationship between mind and brain. As Searle (1985) has observed, minds are caused by brains and brains are realized through minds. In this way, we are moved away from the misconceptions and

dangerous confusions of the Cartesian body/mind dichotomy and led toward a perspective, in which the mind is just another biological phenomenon. To this biological perspective on mind, we might also add the notion of the mind/brain as a product of its social context—constructed through evolution as humans adapted to changing functions and settings—as advocated in different ways by psychologists such as Vygotsky (1986) and Mead (1925).

In a similar way, Siegel (2007) asserted that the brain “is an integrated part of the whole body.” He goes on to elaborate this statement:

Because the mind itself can be viewed as both embodied and relational, our brains actually can be considered the social organ of the body. Our minds connect with one another via neural circuitry in our bodies that is hard-wired to take in others’ signals. (p. 48)

What needs to be added to this is that “attention to the present moment, one aspect of mindfulness, can be directly shaped by our ongoing communication with others, and from the activities in our own brains” (Siegel, 2007, p. 50). Recent neuroscientific work indicates that, on the one hand, neural networks in the brain can be altered by experience and, on the other, that mindfulness practice can help bring about such change. As Doidge (2007) observed, the

idea that the brain can change its own structure and function through thought and activity is . . . the most important alteration in our view of the brain since we first sketched out its basic anatomy and the workings of its basic component, the neuron. (pp. xv-xvi)

He goes on to describe a wide range of cases—from physical ailments to emotional disorders—in which brain changes have been demonstrated to be connected with either cures or improvements in health. All this contributes to the development of what, in recent work, Siegel (2010) has referred to as an all-encompassing “mindsight.”

If we then connect this notion of changing the mind/brain through learning (unlearning and relearning) through experience, we can begin to see the powerful educative aspects of mindfulness-based approaches. Through the standard practices outlined in the literature—attending to the breath, mindful walking or movement or, indeed, any technique which helps us to still the restless and wandering mind and “learn to pay attention to the *experience of paying attention*” (Schoeberlein & Sheth, 2009, p. xii, italics in original)—it is possible to reduce unhelpful rumination and experiential avoidance in our mental lives and, when appropriate, to switch off the automatic pilot for longer and longer periods. Again, the move is from doing to being; as Segal, Williams and Teasdale (2002) put it,

In doing, it is often necessary to compute the future consequences of goal-related activity . . . As a result, in doing mode, the mind

often travels forward to the future or back to the past, and the experience is not one of actually being “here” in the present moment much of the time. By contrast, in being mode, the mind has “nothing to do, nowhere to go” and so processing can be dedicated exclusively to processing moment-by-moment experience. (p. 73)

But the ethical and attitudinal bases of the practice also indicate that mindfulness “is not just about paying *more* attention, but rather about cultivating a *different*, wiser kind of attention” (Williams et al., 2007, p. 99, italics in original). Experiments using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and electroencephalography (EEG) brain scanning have demonstrated clear and direct connections between meditation and changes in the brain, particularly in relation to brain states and different types of emotions (Goleman, 2003). The capacity to generate compassion, lovingkindness, and “introspective skill” (Goleman, 2003, pp. 11-23) in training the mind through meditation has been observed in laboratory experiments with meditators. More specifically, Davidson et al. (2003) found “a shift in the baseline of long-term meditators toward left anterior activation” of the brain, and this left shift was also linked with the enhancement of immune functions of people who had completed the standard mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) courses originally developed by Kabat-Zinn (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

MRI scans of the brain’s prefrontal cortex have connected negative emotions with the right area and positive feelings with the left (Goleman, 2003). Moreover, the “mode of avoidance” (triggered by innate survival instincts) is, as Crane (2009) informed us, also associated with

An increase in activation of the right frontal lobe relative to the left. The other configuration is a mode of approach in which there is movement towards experience and a sense of welcome and openness to it. Approach is associated with an increase in activation on the left frontal lobe relative to the right. (p. 39)

As Siegel (2007) concluded, “mindfulness meditation appears to produce a left shift in frontal activation” and this is what is required in forging new neural pathways to change brain activity. All of this work which connects mindfulness practices and brain neuroplasticity is fascinating and, for practitioners, provides scope for scientific justifications of affective education initiatives.

Reconstructing Vocational Education

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” (p. 74). The false dichotomy between affective and cognitive education has been argued throughout and, in a similar way, a reconstructed vocationalism urgently requires 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” (p. 301). Dewey is the philosopher *par excellence* of vocational education, and his theories emphasize powerfully the value of “education which acknowledges the full intellectual and social meaning of a vocation” (Dewey, 1966, p. 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 (1966) 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. (p. 307)

In addition to this broad Deweyan perspective, a reconstructed program of VET would ideally satisfy a number of important criteria advocated in earlier chapters. These would include the normative values implicit in all meaningful educational activity (Peters, 1966; Pring, 1995), the spirit of criticism characteristic of both rational inquiry and the self-reflective awareness of “mindsight” informed by mindfulness practice (Hyland, 2011; Siegel, 2010), and the moral principles and ethos of inclusive citizenship and social justice which have shaped contemporary approaches to lifelong learning (Aspin, 2007; Ranson, 1998). Employing a broadly similar framework, James (2010) has recently outlined proposals based on 15 principles of educational intervention derived from work in Australian VET contexts for developing vocationalized moral values in workplace settings. Adopting a wider perspective, I intend to describe the salient features of a proposed reconstructed conception of VET under the headings of ethical foundations, aesthetics, and social-collective aspects of vocationalism.

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) argued that the “single most important goal for a teacher to work towards has to do with the basic attitude towards work” (p. 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” (p. 144).

The “morally impoverished” (Fish, 1993, p. 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, and with power and privilege. Vocational education, however, 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, the prestigious, value-laden 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) summed 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. (p. 189)

What needs to be added to such reconciliation approaches is a more precise definition of vocational work and, more specifically, some account of the crucial differences initially noted and analyzed by Arendt (1958) between work as creative endeavor and that linked with labor or toil (Higgins, 2010, demonstrates the importance of Arendt’s work to the analysis of teaching as a vocation and ethical profession). Building on Arendt’s arguments, Herbst (1973) identified a number of educationally significant features of the distinction between work and labor. 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 labor 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, p. 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” (Herbst, 1973, p. 61).

There are echoes here of Marx’s “philosophy of man” which “proclaims man [*sic*] to be the presupposition and the end of all philosophy, all science and all human activity” (Kamenka, 1969, p. 15). It is, consequently, the “alienation” of people from that most basic and definitive of all human activities, work, which is so offensive to Marxist ethics founded on the philosophy of man. Kamenka (1969,

pp. 19-20) outlines four main aspects of the alienation process said to be operating in capitalist states:

- i. man is alienated from the things he produces and his own labor in producing them;
- ii. man is alienated from other men through the competitive character of the economic system based on private property which forces everyone to live at someone else's expense;
- iii. man is alienated from nature which does not confront him as a field for the creative exercise of his powers but as a source of difficulty and drudgery;
- iv. man is alienated from society as the expression of social, collective power.

Kamenka (1969) neatly summarized the Marxist stance in this area in commenting that

Alienation, for Marx then, occurs when man falls into servitude to and dependence upon his own powers or the institutions and goods he has himself created; it is overcome when man makes all his activities free expressions of his nature and full satisfactions of his needs. (p. 19)

Rikowski (1999a) pointed to similar de-humanizing tendencies in the idea of workers becoming “trans-human” in the relentless pursuit—through striving to achieve the multi-skilling and flexibility required by modern post-Fordist economies—of the means of existence. As he explains,

As the capitalisation of humanity deepens and strengthens we become a lifeform which increasingly incorporates the contradictions of capital. Capital assumes a number of forms: value, money, commodity, state and other forms. The capitalisation of humanity implies that, as capital, these forms take on real existence within us and within our everyday lives as human-capital. (ibid., p. 2)

White's (1997) philosophical analysis of these issues leads him to broadly similar—though somewhat less pessimistic—conclusions about the role of work in contemporary life. He begins by noting the difference between “autonomous work,” whose “end product is chosen as a major goal of an autonomous agent,” and “heteronomous work” whose “end product is not chosen as a major goal, but is in some way unavoidable or required of one” (pp. 5-6). Although there is said to be “no sharp line” between heteronomous and autonomous work in practice, it is possible to conceive of a continuum of activities and gradations between the two. Having pointed out the value and benefit of autonomous work which is “self-directed” and has an “end-product of great significance” in the personal lives of those undertaking it, White (1997) moves from idealistic to realistic mode in admitting that

Very few people in the history of the world or, indeed, alive today, have been able to engage in much, if any, autonomous

work. Nearly all work has been heteronomous . . . Some heteronomous work, like all autonomous work, has been of personal significance to the agent . . . [but] even personally non-significant work, undertaken perhaps simply to earn a living, can be very enjoyable. (p. 10)

Such caveats and qualifications are crucial in a field in which, clearly, discussions can never be free of cultural, emotional, and moral prejudices and presuppositions. Indeed, to examine VET in the light of conceptions and perspectives about work in this rigorous fashion illustrates graphically the impossibility of divorcing the cognitive and affective domains in education (Lang, 1998; Weare, 2004). Preparation for work cannot but be of the highest ethical and emotional significance for all stakeholders—learners, teachers, employers, and society as a whole—and VET programs would do well to acknowledge this by incorporating moral/affective elements into mainstream curricula (mindfulness strategies can do much to enhance this process, as argued below).

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. (p. 38)

In a similar vein, T. F. Green (1968) argued 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” (p. 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” (p. 171). To realize 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, pp. 171-172).

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, as “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” (p. 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) identified 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, p. 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 (MacIntrye, 1981). Indeed, during the period of rampant individualism in the 1980s enterprise culture in the United Kingdom—when the short-lived “new vocationalism” criticized above was tried and failed as a means of VET reform (Heelas & Morris, 1992; Lee, Marsden, Rickman, & Dunscombe, 1990)—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—were incredibly naive in supposing that the “history of Western civilisation is the history of free individuals engaged in intellectual thought” (Shirley, 1991, p. 154). The idea of the “unencumbered self” (Sandel, 1992) is largely fictitious as there is a sense, in which all human agency has to be rooted in and realized through networks informed by the social values of trust, honesty, justice, and co-operation. The Buddhist principles of “non-self” and “interbeing,” which are said to flow naturally from mindfulness practice (Hanh, 1999), are underpinned by the very same moral principles.

As Poole (1990) argued, the economic market system itself could not function without the existence of social and moral values, which are themselves of a non-market form and certainly far from being individualistic. A market consisting of purely self-interested individuals—*contra* Friedman and the Chicago School of economics—could not logically reproduce itself as, for such a reproduction of the system to take place,

it would require that purely self-interested individuals enter into a relationship with each other in order to produce, nurture and care for other self-interested individuals just like themselves. To make sense of the apparent sacrifices of self-interest involved here we would at the very least have to assume the existence of goods of a quite different kind to those involved in ordinary market transactions. (pp. 49-50)

The operation of markets, therefore, is entirely dependent upon the inculcation of non-market values of a disinterested, other-regarding kind. In short, it requires the fostering of values which education systems around the world are typically asked to transmit, namely qualities such as honesty, respect for persons, compassion, tolerance, empathy, co-operation, and good citizenship. Such values—and their foundations in morality and the emotions—are as necessary to VET as they are to any other form of education.

VET and Aesthetics

Norman (1983) came 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” (p. 175). Warnock (1977) identified 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” (p. 145). Such aesthetic features are captured in the idea of the “gift of art”—which we have, as Ondaatje (2007) reminded us in quoting Nietzsche, “so that we shall not be destroyed by the truth” (p. 279)—which can lead to an “inner transformation, or deepening of the sense of life through apprehending the work’s meaning” (Papanoutsos, 1978, p. 93). Schopenhauer knew this and, as discussed at the end of chapter 8, saw aesthetic appreciation as a means of escaping the force of the blind and relentless striving of the human will. Many mindfulness teachers and affective educators also recognize the power of the expressive arts and literature as a vehicle for achieving their principal goals.

It often seems to be that it is in the literature and poetry—rather than in texts on VET and work *per se*—where this aesthetic dimension of work and craft finds its fullest and most insightful expression and meaning (Hyland, 2011). Seamus Heaney’s (1990) 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.
(pp. 6, 10)

Of course, it is likely that much work—namely that which is more appropriately described as labor or toil—will never possess such qualities, but the possibilities inherent in this aesthetic perspective for all kinds of work are well worth noting by vocational teachers. Speaking of the autonomous nature of some forms of work, White (1997) alluded to the Aristotelian idea of learning principles through habit and practice. For example, just as “men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre . . . so we also become autonomous by doing autonomous acts” (p. 114). Aristotle also applied to the same principles to learning to be virtuous and just and—in terms of my own chief objectives—we might say that we can come to understand and skillfully manage our mental and emotional lives by mindfully noticing and fully absorbing and being with all our experiences in this sphere. In just the same way, we can learn to appreciate the aesthetic and craftlike features of work by mindfully taking note of them and, following Dewey’s recommendations, seeking to realize and enact them in all our everyday activities and occupations.

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, Faussone, relates stories about his work as a steel rigger on construction sites. One of Faussone’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 and 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. (p. 53)

In a similar vein, Tressell (1993) in his novel, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, described the work of painters and decorators in the early years of the 20th 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 most politically engaged workmen, for example, forced along with his fellow workers to cut corners 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. (p. 162)

Even though we must take account of the realist view that, as Wringle (1991) observed, many kinds of work are “not constitutive of the good life and are at best a necessary evil” (p. 37) and, furthermore, the ethnographic research that indicates young people are often acutely aware of these brute facts about working life (Shilling, 1989; Willis, 1977), I

would still want to argue that a VET program which did not include the aesthetic dimension would be sadly incomplete. Along with the recent tentative movements in national policy in Britain toward 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 (Robinson, 1998; Rooney, 2005), a reconstructed vocationalism incorporating such elements has never been more necessary.

Work, VET, and Social-Collective Values

The moral and aesthetic aspects of preparation for work can be seen to come together to inform the theory and practice of VET by connecting with the notions of studentship and learning careers advocated for post-school provision by Bloomer. Drawing on theories of social and humanistic learning, Bloomer (1997)—using case studies of learners in post-school education—elaborates upon the characteristics of teaching for studentship and learning careers by observing that this perspective

places studentship and personal development in a dynamic, mutually constitutive relationship . . . it also links, dynamically, the formation of personal identity and dispositions to the transformation of social, moral, economic and other conditions . . . It thus has the potential to yield not simply the knowledge that young people “act upon” learning opportunities in the way that they do through studentship, but to generate an understanding of why they do. (p. 154)

Such a conception places the learning of individuals fairly and squarely within the social contexts in which it occurs—including home, family, the workplace, and the wider society—and in this way ensures the foregrounding of networks of social inter-dependence and sense of community, which are especially important in vocational preparation. Echoing mindfulness conceptions in this sphere, Ranson (1998) argued that

There is no solitary learning: we can only create our worlds together. The unfolding agency of the self always grows out of the interaction with others. It is *inescapably a social creation*. (p. 20, italics in original)

Unfortunately, the new vocationalism which prevailed during the enterprise phase of the 1980s and continued (tempered by lip service paid to social inclusion, Hyland, 2002) through the period of the Labor administration in Britain from 1997 to 2010 was underpinned by an individualist ethos, which is still entrenched in educational discourse and practice to the present day. Many years ago, Hargreaves (1982) criticized the U.K. schooling system on the grounds that it was “deeply imbued with a culture of individualism” (p. 87). He went on to identify the main

fault as being “not in the humanistic sentiments and ideals which it enshrines” but in the “repudiation of the nineteenth-century concerns with the social functions of education.” For Hargreaves, the solution to the “most pressing problems of our society” is to be found in the fostering of “active community participation from its members” (Hargreaves, 1982, p. 135). In a similar vein, Langford (1985) has challenged the obsession “with the difference which being educated makes to an individual” (p. 3) and recommended instead a greater concern with the social dimensions of education and schooling. For Langford, to “become educated is to become a member of society and so to have learnt what it is to be and live as a member of that society” (Langford, 1985, p. 181).

Such social-collective conceptions of the enterprise are ideally those which would undergird a reconstructed VET program of the sort being proposed. However, the roots and seeds of individualism go deep—and, indeed, are currently being vigorously watered by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat administration which took office in Britain in May 2010 (White, 2010)—and it is worth looking more closely at its origins to justify the principles I am advocating. The original formulation of individualism—along with an explanation of its perennial attraction as a general doctrine—was traced by Russell (1946, chap. XII) to the Greek Stoics and Cynics, down through the medieval Christian tradition until the ideas found their fullest expression in the work of Descartes, which itself provided a major foundation for the development of political and economic liberalism in the 16th and 17th centuries. Within the liberal tradition, individualistic notions went hand in hand with the growth of capitalist mercantilism (the “pure” nature of which was celebrated by Adam Smith and, in modern times, lauded by neo-liberals such as Hayek and Friedman) and, in political theory, the basic concepts date back to the philosophy of Hobbes and Locke. These notions are encapsulated in the idea of what Macpherson (1964) called “possessive individualism,” which asserts that the “individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society” (p. 263). The obvious appeal of such ideas—derived partly from the apparent commonsensical nature of their expression in simple terms—explains their enduring presence in moral, political, social, economic, political, and educational theories.

Within educational discourse, individualism informs such notions as independent, autonomous, and self-directed learning to which, on one level, nobody would strongly wish to object. Once we begin to move beyond the superficial attractiveness of these rather nebulous and vague concepts of autonomy and independence, however, it can be seen that they have little meaning until they are located within a framework of social values. As Dearden (1972) has argued, by valuing freedom, autonomy, and individual development in education, we do not thereby “mark the eclipse of such other values as truth and morality” (p. 461). Similarly, Lawson

(1998), in qualifying the extremism of “andragogical practices” in adult education which result in misguided attempts to abolish teaching and guidance in favor of independent student learning, points to the weaknesses and dangers of “deontological liberalism.” Eschewing all content in favor of process, such a philosophy is “suited to a society which has no vision” and “produces societies which no longer debate or seek the good” (p. 41).

In his investigation of autonomy within the framework of political and citizenship education, Smith (1997) observed how, particularly in developed industrial societies, “autonomy typically works alongside notions of choice and the market, separating individual persons from their world and from their fellows, the better to render them subject to control” (p. 128). Alluding to the de-humanizing and alienating tendencies of capitalism referred to earlier, Smith (1997) argued that facile and simplistic conceptions of autonomy now threaten

in the name of freedom, to re-shape the emotional lives and identities of young people especially, alienating them from the aesthetic and reflective modes of being in favour of slick versions of evaluation . . . Thus autonomy has become a dangerous ally. Offering, like the goblin in the fairy-tale, to turn the straw of our determined, contingent world into the gold of pure freedom, it threatens in the end to come back and claim the children it promised to save. (p. 128)

Against such excesses, Smith (1997), drawing on the work of Marcuse (1964) and MacIntrye (1981), highlighted theories of politics, morality, and education, which foreground “our increasing sense of the importance of involving others in all of life’s transactions.” In conclusion, he proposes that

Autonomy, then, should not be thought of in terms of an essentially individualistic journey towards an abstract and indeterminate rationality, but as a process involving other people in which reasons are demanded and given in dialectic. And if autonomy means having a degree of control over our lives, then we have to help each other understand the ways in which power is taken from us and exercised over us. (p. 134)

In recent discourse, the social-collective critique of individualism has been carried by the “communitarian” movement, which—stimulated by the work of Rawls (1972) and Sandel (1992)—seeks to describe the limits of political liberalism in modern states. Unfettered liberalism—that is advocated in economics by Friedman and criticized in education by Langford, Lawson, and Smith mentioned above—resulted in the view that individuals have the right to choose and pursue their own values and ends, and that the state merely provides a neutral framework which allows citizens to make such choices. Such conceptions directly parallel the “possessive individualism” of the economic market, which is based on the belief that “all human behaviour is conditioned by the

hedonistic aspirations of each individual wanting to maximize his/her productive capacities” (Shirley, 1991, p. 154).

Alongside the arguments already adduced against unqualified individualism—not least the fact that economic individualism is parasitic upon non-individualistic, collective values—communitarians stress the social dimension of rights, duties, interests, values, and all aspects of human agency. As Arthur (1998) puts it, whereas liberalism is the “politics of rights . . . communitarianism is the politics of the common good” (p. 356). Inspired by the writings of Etzioni (1997) on “popular communitarianism,” Arthur (1998) advocated an agenda founded on the belief and principle that

Neither human existence nor individual liberty can be sustained for long outside the interdependent and overlapping communities to which we all belong. Nor can any community long survive unless its members dedicate some of their attention, energy and resources to shared projects. The exclusive pursuit of private interest erodes the network of social environments on which we all depend, and is destructive of our shared experiment in democratic self-government. For these reasons we hold that the right of individuals cannot long be preserved without a communitarian perspective [which] . . . recognises both individual human dignity and the social dimension of human existence. (pp. 358-359)

Such a communitarian philosophy—alongside the moral and aesthetic value framework outlined earlier—provides a solid foundation for the reconstructed model of VET required to solve the perennial problems in this sphere of education.

Mindfulness, Craft, and VET

Mindfulness practice may contribute to the recommended reconstruction of VET by enhancing and reinforcing the aesthetic, artisanship, and craftsmanship features of working life. Indeed, is in this area of craftsmanship that the connections between Dewey’s pragmatic vocational concerns and the ethical values underpinning mindfulness strategies can be discerned. Jarrett (1991) utilized both pragmatic and ethical perspectives in his exploration of the moral character of dispositions and attitudes to work, and the general features of this perspective were illustrated earlier through literature and poetry. A particularly forceful expression of the links between mindfulness and craft is to be found in Pirsig’s (1974) *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, in which the writer connects ideas about work and engineering craft with aesthetic notions and Zen Buddhist principles. While riding his motorcycle around the United States, Pirsig reflects on the means by which such a remarkable feat of engineering has come about. As he observed,

Precision instruments are designed to achieve an idea; dimensional precision whose perfection is impossible. There is no perfectly shaped part of the motorcycle and never will be, but when you come as close as these instruments take you,

remarkable things happen, and you go flying across the countryside under a power that would be called magic if it were not so completely rational . . . I look at the shapes of the steel now and I see *ideas* . . . I’m working on *concepts*. (p. 102, italics in original)

Granger (2006) made use of Pirsig’s ideas to illustrate the educational importance of Dewey’s aesthetic ideas 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 craftsmanlike 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. (p. 117)

Granger (2006) argued 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” (p. 118).

Such a conception of craftlike 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 into 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” (p. 20). Such work is inextricably linked to codes of ethics. As Sennett (2008) explained,

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. (p. 295)

Such a conception of work rules out the behaviorist, 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 socializing 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” (p. 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, 1999b) 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 center stage in the contemporary “training market” (Ainley, 2007). In this respect, the recent Wolf Report (2011) called for a major overhaul of the VET system in England and an increase in high-quality apprenticeships for young people. Moreover, the conception of apprenticeship as a generic model for VET learning in all spheres is now emerging on global level (Fuller & Unwin, 2011).

The Buddhist conception of “right livelihood,” as already suggested at various points, 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) reminded us “To practice Right Livelihood means to practice Right Mindfulness” (p. 116). Applying the precepts of mindfulness specifically to working life, Hanh (1991) advised 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. (p. 14)

Expressing similar sentiments, Sennett (2008) suggested 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. (Sennett, 2008, p. 11)

Mindfulness is also about conducting life with skill—indeed, the notion of “skilful means” (Keown, 2005, p. 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 (Hyland, 2011).

Work by Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2004) has indicated the importance of emotional intelligence of the kind developed through mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in their investigation of performance levels in global companies such as IBM, British Airways, and Lucent. The conclusions of the research noted clear positive connections between levels of emotional intelligence and higher productivity, and similar findings were recorded in research in Taiwan by Chu (2010). Chaskalson (2011) brought many of these studies together in his investigation of the impact which MBIs based on Kabat-Zinn’s work outlined earlier had in workplace settings. Extrapolating from a wide range of research studies, Chaskalson summarizes the benefits for employees and employers which the standard 8-week (MBSR) course might reasonably be expected to deliver. The key ones are a reduction in participants’ level of stress, higher levels of personal resilience, lower rates of health-related absenteeism, increased concentration and attention span, lower levels of impulsivity, lower levels of psychological distress, including depression and anxiety, and higher levels of well-being and overall work and life satisfaction (pp. 164–165). It is important, however, that these applications of mindfulness are not distorted by the technician and instrumentalist short-term interests of employers and industry, and, to guard against this, it will be crucial to maintain the emphasis suggested by Williams & Kabat-Zinn (2013), which foregrounds the original Buddhist ethical principles which underpin mindfulness-based theory and practice.

Conclusion

A reconstructed program for VET—foregrounding moral, aesthetic, and social-collective 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. The evidence base for the positive benefits of MBIs in general is now quite strong and extensive, and has been well documented. MBIs have been successfully implemented for people with depressive illness in America (Baer, 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2005), Britain (Government Office for Science, 2008; National Institute for Clinical Excellence, 2004), and more widely (Williams et al., 2007), and have also proved effective in the treatment of generalized anxiety disorder and with chronic pain sufferers (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). There is also evidence of effectiveness in the treatment of addictions of various kinds (Baer, 2006; Bowen, Chawla, & Marlatt, 2011) and with cancer sufferers (Bartley, 2012). In addition, the successful use of MBI strategies in educational settings has, in recent years, grown exponentially (Hyland, 2011a) at school level (Burnett, 2009; Schoeberlein & Sheth,

2009), with older adults (Langer, 1993), with university students (Peacock & Harrison, 2009), and in the workplace (Chaskalson, 2011).

Moreover, the learning that takes place through mindfulness practice—as indicated using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) brain scans—indicates the efficacy of practices such as breathing and walking meditation in terms of forging new neural pathways (Gilbert, 2009; Siegel, 2010). What Siegel (2007) called “mindsight”—“a kind of focused attention that allows us to see the internal workings of our own minds” (p. xi)—can be regarded as a generic tool for enhancing clarity, attention, and learning in general. As this form of learning is linked to permanent changes in the brain (Doidge, 2007), it is, arguably, an essential component of all general education programs. Certainly, in terms of vocational learning, it is infinitely more promising than the tragic history of failed strategies and schemes which has bedeviled VET for decades.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

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