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Teaching Values: Ethical and Emotional Attunement through an Educational Humanities Approach

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Teaching is ethically and emotionally demanding. Yet, both of these aspects of practice are often overlooked in educational research and educational development. Therefore, although educational developers are required to teach to particular values, such as the four values explicitly listed in the UK Professional Standards Framework (Higher Education Academy, 2011) or the Staff and Educational Development Association's Professional Development Framework (Staff and Educational Development Association, 2019), there are few resources to support them in doing so. This paper, based on a workshop at the SEDA 2018 conference entitled Values, Emotions, and Professionalism: an Educational Humanities Approach to Supporting Staff in Challenging Times, seeks to address that gap. I begin by taking a critical view of the values statements available in the profession, identifying four main challenges in teaching those values. Then, I suggest an educational humanities. Finally, I illustrate with an example.

Challenges of teaching values

There are four main challenges educational developers face when teaching values. Briefly, *values are not just sets of rules*; we need to look to the underlying principles within prescribed rules of conduct. Yet, teaching someone else's values is ethically fraught because, ultimately, *values are internally generated and held*. If, instead, we focus on developing professionals' own values and identity, we still encounter practical challenges. Two or more

internally held *values can conflict in real life*, creating dilemmas that are not resolved by applying first principles. Internally held values can also *conflict with the external requirements and constraints* of messy professional contexts. I briefly address each of these four challenges in turn here.

From rules to principles

First, values, as written in the UKPSF and (to a lesser extent) the SEDA PDF, are written as prescriptions for behaviour. Teachers in higher education (HE), for example, are supposed to “promote participation in higher education and equality of opportunity for learners” (UKPSF Value 2) and to “continually reflect on practice to develop ourselves, others and processes” (SEDA Value 5). As such, they imply a behavioural approach to teaching ethics, where values are seen as competencies to be acquired and demonstrated. Yet, values are not just sets of behavioural rules or even competencies.

Beneath these standards of behaviour one can discern broader principles, which sit more readily with a virtues-based approach to professionalism, rather than a behavioural approach (Irby and Hamstra, 2016). Principles or virtues common to both the UKPSF and SEDA sets of statements include valuing student learning, diversity and inclusion, and the educators’ own further development through attention to scholarship. If we adopt a virtues-based approach, though, one might expect attention to even broader moral principles or concepts. For example, Macfarlane (2004) found when discussing written case examples of ethical dilemmas, UK university teachers often invoked principles of fairness, care and respect. Macfarlane’s analysis is consistent with most of the literature in moral philosophy and moral psychology, which has also emphasised care and fairness. Recent research has sought to expand the moral domain to five main considerations (Graham, Nosek et al, 2011). Building on that five-factor framework, I recently demonstrated, for example, the importance of issues of respect for authority and tradition versus innovation as a moral concern in

university teaching (Quinlan, 2019). This expansion brings decisions about curricular content and teaching methods into the moral realm.

Disciplines also have their own values embedded within them. For example, humility underpins the UK's bioscience benchmark statement in its emphasis on the tentativeness and potential uses of knowledge (Quinlan, 2016a). If one treats values broadly as a judgment of what is important or "right", most instructional decisions have ethical components. For example, whether one emphasises content knowledge or skills is a value judgment. Whether one chooses a written assignment or an oral presentation is also a value judgment about whether literacy or oracy is more important in that context.

External to internal values

Even if we focus on the values underpinning the statements in these accepted codes of conduct, the prospect of indoctrinating colleagues by requiring evidence that they embrace a set of externally-defined principles, is, itself, ethically fraught. Ironically, the imposition of rules and values developed by others can be seen as going against the very principle of respecting difference, not to mention academic freedom, that we are meant to model. Instead, the development of learners' own critical capacities, voice and authority are *sine qua non* of HE. Thus, an HE educators' imperative is that learners develop their own values or principles for what is important ethically in particular contexts. Insofar as values are a key component of one's identity, a process of values clarification can help to build teachers' sense of identity, which in turn, guides them in interpreting events and making meaning of their work and lives (Akkerman, Meijer 2011; Beauchamp, Thomas 2009).

Conflicts between internally held values

However, one quickly encounters another challenge with this virtues-based approach: principles often conflict in practice. Ethical dilemmas arise when there are conflicts between two or more potentially virtuous courses of action and both options have problems or

obstacles (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2010). For example, teachers at any level may be torn between caring for others (individual students, colleagues) versus following institutional rules, norms and procedures (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2010). Teaching in HE presents different challenges than school-teaching because academics typically enjoy greater autonomy in choosing what to teach (Quinlan, 2019). HE teachers, then, often experience conflicts related to how much to challenge students. While challenging students is valued, HE teachers worry that it may compromise inclusion of all students, dampen students' enthusiasm, or erode students' relationship with them (Scager, Akkerman, Pilot, and Wubbels, 2014).

Conflicts between external mandates and internal values

Finally, although educational developers may be loathe to impose values on colleagues, academics operate within various systems of accountability that impose their own value-laden policies, rules and reward structures. Thus, the UKPSF (Higher Education Academy, 2011) and SEDA-PDF (Staff and Educational Development Association, 2019) are just examples of many kinds of external accountabilities within which university teachers operate and about which educational developers may need to instruct new colleagues. These external demands may or may not be consistent with an individual's personal values: just as dilemmas emerge when there are conflicts between two internally held values, professionals may similarly experience conflicts between internal values and external demands. For example, departments may impose standardised rules regarding extensions on assignments (in the interest of consistency), but a teacher may want to bend those rules to recognise exceptional circumstances (Macfarlane, 2004).

Grappling with the Messiness of Practice through Case Discussions

Given the challenges outlined above, we need to recognise the complexity of practice. Fenwick (2016), who studied professionalism from a socio-material perspective, showed how professionalism is context-sensitive and relative. Professional judgment requires integrating

external and internal values to make decisions in particular situations about the impacts of different courses of action. Fenwick used the term “attunement” to describe the kind of critical sensitivity and awareness that professionals need to work effectively within the messy world of practice. Attunement means using the whole range of senses to read, reframe and respond to the dynamics of practice as they unfold, sometimes in unexpected way (Fenwick, 2016). To attune to these dynamics, she advocates learners practice reading and responding to case studies of real life practice where decision-making defies simple rules. While there is a thirty year tradition of using case studies in teacher education, I propose to take that tradition further in two main ways, as described below.

Attuning Ethical and Emotional Sensitivity

First, I use Fenwick’s (2106) concept of attunement to highlight the *emotional* dimensions of ethical cases. In fact, professionals’ dilemmas can be highly emotional (Rees, Monrouxe and McDonald, 2013; Hargreaves, 1998; Quinlan, 2019). Emotions can serve as signals of our values because emotions are tightly connected with moral purposes (Prinz and Nichols, 2010). We only become passionate about things that we care about, whether that strength of feeling is frustration or anger when we cannot follow our moral compass or excitement and pride when we are able to live our values and see those put into action. Attunement, then, involves building sensitivity to one’s own emotional responses to the dynamics of practice. Our emotions are part of our moral response system and can be used to help clarify one’s values and guide our actions.

An educational humanities approach

To help learners practice reading the emotional dynamics of practice and be prepared to negotiate those in the moment, teaching materials need to resonate emotionally and draw out emotional responses. For this effect, I propose we turn to the arts and humanities, as they have been used to enrich medical education. In medicine, concern about preserving the

humanity, empathy, and moral reasoning of would-be doctors during medical education has, in the past 40 years, spawned the field of medical humanities (Shapiro, Coulehan, Wear, and Montello, 2009). Many medical schools have adopted modules that explore literary and artistic representations of medical practice and the experiences of doctors and patients. The underlying assumption is that the arts and humanities offer ways to support ethical and emotional sensitivity that help sustain caring.

Such courses offer opportunities for future doctors to critically reflect on the profession they are entering, their own development and the kind of doctor they want to be (Shapiro, et al 2009). Through greater attention to narratives, the medical humanities also open up alternative storylines for the profession (Shapiro et al 2009). In medicine, for example, the dominant narrative is that medicine is about “curing” patients, with other outcomes seen as failure. Yet many diseases are chronic or terminal, making a “restitution” narrative unhelpful. Instead, the medical humanities opens up other possibilities. What if, for example, doctors saw illnesses as journeys and their role as guides on that journey? What if their job was, in part, to witness suffering? How would that affect the way in which they interact with patients in chronic pain? Dialogue between the arts and the humanities is particularly important because the arts expose tacit assumptions and stir emotions, while the humanities provide sustained, critical arguments in which those emotions can be subjected to critical reflection to yield new insights (Edgar and Pattison, 2006).

As university teachers are under parallel external pressures and challenges as doctors, teaching approaches from the medical humanities might usefully be brought into educational development.

An Example of an Educational Humanities Approach

In my 2018 SEDA workshop, participants discussed four poems from my book, *How Higher Education Feels* (Quinlan, 2016b), which includes 138 poems about learning or teaching in

HE. The four poems selected for the workshop (The Canon by Joyce Kessel, p. 21; No by Janet McCann, p. 4; Talking Ban, by Bonnie S. Kaplan; Low Level by Penelope Dane, pp 12-13) were all written from a teacher perspective and referenced in a previous analysis of moral concerns of university teachers embedded in emotional episodes (Quinlan, 2019). Many of those can be viewed as ethical dilemmas in which values may conflict.

I have been using these and other poems from the book in discussions with new university teachers to help them attune to teachers' and students' emotions, to read between the lines, to identify values that underpin these dilemmas and, ultimately to read and reframe their own challenging teaching situations. Here I use the poem "Distance Education" by Elizabeth Bradfield (p. 144 Quinlan, 2016b) as an illustration of those discussions.

Distance Education

In Unalakleet and Gambell, my students,
teachers' aides who need this class
to keep their jobs, learn this week that they must care

about the semicolon. More
than their properly punctuated sentences,
I want to read what stories
they tell themselves to make it matter.

I don't know when the murre eggs
are ready for harvest or when
walrus meat tastes best.

Hard to care about the split
infinitive when ice storms,
when past dues, when shore erosion.

I assign homework they don't do
because they had to take kids
away from fathers or because

cloudberries ripened in the bog.
I look at my spreadsheet of work done
and points assigned. The icon for its program
is green as new shoots of pushki. I fail them.

Previously published in *Once Removed* ©Persea Books, 2015. Used with permission of the author and Persea Books.

I typically start by asking colleagues to simply explain what is happening in the poem. Through group discussion, we typically surface multiple interpretations, which is advantageous. First, a single poem offers multiple case studies by varying the assumptions

made in its reading. Second, teachers often don't have all the information and background when interpreting cases in real life, so it is good practice to question assumptions, consider multiple perspectives, and look for multiple interpretations.

I may present additional details from the author's biography or from looking up key words in the poem. For example, the author is a white American woman who currently lives in Massachusetts, but has studied and worked in Alaska. Unalakleet is a city of less than 700 people in remote, western Alaska, with a majority of American Indian/Alaska Natives who speak Inupiaq, an Alaskan Inuit language that is recognised as an official language of that state. The very names of the towns convey foreign-ness, whether we know where they are located or not. The fact that we may not know what murre are (birds, I assume) or pushki (a plant, I assume) is also vital to instilling a sense of distance between the teacher's (and our) context and that of her students. These details highlight the disconnect between the content (English grammar) and students' concerns (day-to-day survival). While this poem presents an extreme case of cultural differences between teacher and students, it can prompt us to reflect on the extent to which we share a culture and values with our students. What are the additional life-loads our students are carrying that interfere with their studies or make their studies seem irrelevant to their lives? What does that mean for our teaching?

We explore the competing values: keeping jobs, learning grammar, feeding families, looking after children, and how those competing values create educational dilemmas. We question what the teacher cares about most. Although she is teaching the semi-colon in a course students need to keep their jobs as teachers' aides, she says she is more interested in, "the stories they tell to themselves to make it matter". What do we care about most in our teaching? Does that match our students' interests and concerns? How do we help students construct stories about how the content and skills we teach matter?

We can notice our feelings as we read the poem. Sadness? Frustration? Hopelessness? We can also look for clues to what we think the teacher feels. Empathy? Guilt? Are there situations we face in our own teaching that evoke these same feelings? How are those feelings connected to our interpretations? How might these situations be reinterpreted, with different consequences for feeling and action?

I also prompt students to step back from the poem to put it into a broader context. The narrator is teaching a curriculum that is mandated for teachers' aides across a whole state, regardless of location. How important is it that teachers' aides and, therefore, schoolchildren in Unalakleet learn correct English grammar? Why? How important is correct English grammar in any of the teaching we do in the variety of subjects we teach? Why? Who does it serve? How? What are the alternatives? We can also question whether there are parts of the curriculum that external bodies require us to teach that we think are difficult to connect to students' immediate lives, needs and goals.

We pay particular attention to the ambiguity built into Bradfield's final sentence. What are the different ways of interpreting "I fail them"? If students have not done the assigned work, they are unlikely to have met the assessment criteria and may be assigned failing marks. Or she may give them passing grades but still fail in helping them reach mandated learning outcomes. Perhaps she is set up to fail because the curricular mandate is not relevant to or sensitive to the cultural context and backgrounds of the students in the first place. Thus she fails to teach them something that will improve their lives and the lives of children in their care. Perhaps the whole education system fails them. Perhaps the whole history of colonialism and American conquest fails them, and education is just an instrument of that system. We can also explore the emotional tone of the final line. Failure is usually emotionally laden in academic contexts. When have we felt the despair or frustration

associated with failing our students? What are the aims that have been thwarted in those moments, and what does that reveal about the values underpinning our practice?

Conclusion

In this piece, I have shown how educational developers can apply an educational humanities approach, borrowed from the medical humanities, to support the teaching of professional values. I have demonstrated how educational developers can probe poems that contain dilemmas to reveal the ethical and emotional demands and conflicts embedded in practice, promoting ethical and emotional attunement. Such discussions enable teachers to practice recognising dilemmas, noticing their emotional responses to the dynamics of practice, questioning assumptions, surfacing alternative interpretations, and, ultimately, opening up alternative courses of action in their own practice.

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