Ethics and Education: The Normative Dimensions of Education

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Credit Rating: 20 credits, SCQF Level 11

Aims
Education is regarded as a practice which is always and necessarily concerned with ethical considerations. These considerations relate to both gaining knowledge and understanding and also to issues of individual, social and political development. This course will address how ethical and evaluative issues are implicated in education and teaching in three significant respects: (i) ethical principles and considerations are constitutive of teaching as a professional practice; (ii) educational aims are themselves ethically contentious; and (iii) teachers in schools are often held responsible for the ethical development of their pupils. The course aims to explore these dimensions of education, teaching and learning in the light of past and present moral and social philosophy and theory.

Teaching
10 x 2.5 hour seminars = 25 hours
Each session will involve some formal presentation of the issues in the form of lecture, guided reading or structured questions. This will be followed by seminar discussion. For the first four weeks the course tutor will be responsible for the formal input, but from the third week course members will be expected to undertake group presentations to facilitate the exploration of particular issues on the basis of prior recommended reading. This approach serves to enhance students’ transferable skills.

Assessment
A single written essay of 4,000 words.

Indicative content
Week 1. Education, ethics and philosophy.
Introduction to philosophical methods and approaches in the course. Questions to be addressed include: What is philosophy? What is a philosophical method? Introduction to key underlying concepts of the course. Questions to be addressed include: What is education? What is ethics? Why is education regarded as an ethical practice?

Week 2. Teaching and learning.
An exploration of the ideas of teaching and learning partly through reflection on metaphors and images of teaching. Questions to be addressed may include:
• What is a teacher? What is a learner?
• Does learning imply teaching? What is the point of teachers? Is being a teacher the same as being a facilitator of learning?
• Is there a pedagogical knowledge, quite aside from subject knowledge? If there is such a knowledge, is it a science? A technology? An art? Or something else?
• Should teachers be moral? Why? Do their characters matter? If so, how?
Weeks 3 and 4. The aims of education.
An exploration of the aims of education, including a discussion of the aims of schooling and the reasons and purposes of university education – and who should pay for it. A consideration of what may be the point of lifelong learning.
Topics to be covered may include:
- Knowledge and intellectual virtue. Moral virtues. Social virtues.
- Why education is always a contested concept: what individuals and society have to gain from education. An exploration of how far what is good for an individual is good for society.
- How far cultural and gender differences imply different ideas of education.
- The point of exams and other assessments.

Weeks 5 and 6. Ethical issues for educators.
An introduction to ethical theories based on the different principles of: happiness, choice, respect for others and justice.
Course members may choose to present issues related to ethics. These may include:
- Rights and responsibilities of children, parents, community, teachers, policy makers.
- Freedom and liberty. Individual autonomy. Freedom to do something and freedom from something, as an issue for education.
- Discipline, control, punishment, authority.
- Self-esteem and respect for others.
- Empowerment.

Weeks 7 and 8. Personal and political development through education.
An introduction to the role of identity within education, including personal, cultural and political identities.
Course members may choose to present issues related to identity. These may include:
- Self as narrative. Identity.
- The educational significance of race, ethnic, gender and sexual identities.
- Becoming what we are not yet. Assessment, creativity and competencies.
- Global citizenship. Cosmopolitanism. Different conceptions of citizenship.

Week 9. Other issues (to be decided in Weeks 4 or 5 in consultation with group members).
Topics may include, for instance: the role of the arts; religion; moral education; comparative philosophies; postmodern values in education; ability and differentiation.

Week 10.
Individual presentations related to the assignment.
Course evaluation.

Some Recommended Course Reading
Dewey, J., (1938) *Experience and Education*, New York: Collier
Mill, J.S. (1861) *Utilitarianism* (there are many different editions in the library.)
Smart, J.J and Williams, Bernard (1973) *Utilitarianism For and Against*, Cambridge University Press