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Moral Judgment: A Template for Learning
by [Steven Reece](#) - Tuesday, November 20, 2012, 08:13 PM

I walk away with several take-a-way items after reading Cooper's book that I believe provide a working template for learning to make moral judgments in life of young adults.

Concern for Others

In making "healthy judgments" about situations and the people involved, I think that the most important consideration is for us as instructors of young people to have concern for others. One of the most prevalent themes that stuck in my mind while reading Cooper was that of having compassion for others and not to be judgmental of them as a person. I believe that this consideration is the most difficult for all of us because we tend not to want to listen to another person's viewpoint but to advance our own.

I believe that we need to teach that we are not always correct in our judgments and that others may have insight that we might be blind to. If I am concerned, I will listen to what another person is saying. If not, I will not listen and I will dismiss them and what they are saying out of hand.

Critical Thinking

If I learn to evaluate what others are saying around me, I will learn critical thinking and be better able to make judgments about what is going on in a particular situation. One useful skill (among many noted) was that of being able "to separate ideas and personalities" instead of "lumping ideas and personalities together" condemning both (Cooper, 2006, p. 38).

Good ideas could be lost if we dismiss them at the source because we do not like a particular person or dismiss them altogether. Students should be able to make a judgment about an idea apart from their own personality or that of another person.

Understanding Pluralism

We live in a diverse world full of different people, ideas and ways to do things; therefore we should not be ethnocentric but open to people and their ideas. We should not be judgmental and discount an idea because it is coming from a person from some other culture or from a different cultural perspective.

Pluralism as an ideology or philosophy demands that every view must be "accepted as legitimate and endorsed as right for the person holding them" (Cooper, 2006, p. 110), which in essence becomes a dogma or just as dogmatic as any other belief system claiming to have the absolute truth.

All perspectives are not the same. The key is to accept a person and allow them to voice their views; listening does not mean that we are endorsing what they are saying or doing. This also means that there are still moral norms and we may still maintain moral convictions and have moral standards

Engaging the Thought Pattern of Students

Perry's study at Harvard University addressed how students thought patterns changed from basically desiring complete certainty about an issue to that of what he called the "crisis of relativism" in which students begin to see that there was "some validity to multiple perspectives" (Cooper, 2006, p. 113). The outcome of relativism was that opinions were placed over evidence and students thought "whatever they wanted," thinking that "all ideas are the same" (Cooper, 2006, pp. 113 - 114). Finally, students began to develop convictions that all ideas were not the same with some ideas being better than others.

I believe that this paradigm offers ethic's teacher a template to teach ethics to young adults leading them down the path of authoritarianism and judgmentalism while allowing them to sort through some difficult issues, addressing multiple viewpoints and thereby enable students to develop their own convictions about ethical issues.

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