



Ethics exercise using the Dilemma Model and ethical analysis

An ethical dilemma has by its' nature an irresolvable conflict inherent in it. This means that there may not be a fully satisfactory solution to the dilemma, which makes the solving of it very difficult. There may not be right or wrong answers, merely different shades of “better” or “worse”, and sometimes it can be impossible to determine the best solution as this will depend on various perspectives and priorities.

Teachers encounter such situations daily in class, and experiences teachers develop strategies for dealing with these situations. Nevertheless, these kinds of situations can be demanding even for an experienced teacher, let alone someone who has barely any practical experience with teaching children and young people.

Therefore, it is important to practice how to handle such situations, and there are theoretical models that may come in handy in situations that require the teacher to act. However, if theoretical models are to be at hand when needed, getting to know what these “tools” can and cannot do, as well as practicing them in advance will be of great help for the new teacher.

This exercise can be used with student teachers to practice recognition and handling of ethical dilemmas in teachers' daily work.

Dilemma Model

Gunnel Colnerud's (2017) five common dilemmas could be used as points of departure:

1. Authority and distance vs. being personal and available.
2. Creating personal and meaningful relations vs. not being too deep or private
3. Seeing all pupils as individuals vs. leading a collective
4. Careful and minute planning of teaching and activities vs. being flexible
5. Prioritising knowledge goals vs. values

In her book, Colnerud provides ample descriptions of these dilemmas along with quotations from teachers that bring the dilemmas vividly to life. If you have access to the book, the quotations can be used as a starting point for picturing real or realistic dilemmas in each of the five areas. If you do not have access to the quotations, you can also come up with examples together with the student teachers. Especially if they have already been on a practicum they can probably bring their own examples.

Groups

Preferably in small groups, students work with the five dilemma areas envisioning real, or realistic situations. Working in smaller groups will make it easier to tackle all dilemma areas as it may still be difficult for the students to cover all areas by themselves. Depending on the time available, students can work with one or several dilemmas.

If describing real experiences involving other people and places, it is important to remind students not to disclose identifiable information but to describe the experience in more general terms.

Ethical analysis

When you have decided on the situation to discuss, you apply ethical analysis to the dilemmas. Ethical analysis involves five steps:

1. <i>Identification of the ethical issue at hand.</i>	Why is the situation problematic? What is it that creates the tension? For instance, why is it problematic to choose between seeing all pupils as individuals vs. leading a collective? What values are compromised by prioritising one perspective over the other?
2. <i>Identification of the stakeholders.</i>	Who have a stake in this issue or for whom is this as relevant question? Why? Who are directly affected by the situation? Are there individuals who are indirectly affected? Are you a stakeholder, too?
3. <i>Recognition of responsibilities and rights of the stakeholders.</i>	What rights do the individuals or groups that you identified in the previous phase (stakeholder identification) have? What responsibilities do they have? What about yourself? Are there regulations, laws or guidelines that could help you to identify rights and responsibilities? What about recommendations or local documents?
4. <i>Recognition of possible courses of action.</i>	Only now are we ready to consider possible courses of action, that is: What should you do? If you directly start to solve the dilemma without a careful analysis of the circumstances, your solution is likely to be less well justified. Now, consider what might be the implications of the actions or solutions you can think of.
5. <i>Recognition of one's own positionality and motives in decision making.</i>	The final question is a reflective question aiming to help us identify how our subjective viewpoint influences our decision-making. After such a reflection, you may wish to reconsider your preferred solution or action through which you hope to handle the dilemma.

As a last step in the exercise, you may wish to reflect together on how the ethical analysis helped you to understand the different sides of the dilemma.

Literature

Colnerud, G. (2017). *Lärarkretsens etik och värdepedagogiska praktik*. Stockholm. Liber.

Mustajoki, H. & Mustajoki, A. (2017). *A New Approach to Research Ethics. Using guided dialogue to strengthen research communities*. Routledge.

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