

# Values dilemmas and ethical issues for open schools



Part I (ethics)

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# Introduction to ethical part

- Overview of the ethics
- Overview of ethical principles related to education and working with children
- Group work: solving real life dilemmas (methodology by Centre for Ethics, University of Tartu, Estonia)



# What is ethics?

- Practical philosophy
  - What is the right thing to do?
  - What is the moral thing to do?
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# Values

- „Values are basic and fundamental beliefs that guide or motivate attitudes or actions.“ (Ethics Sage, 2018)
- „Values in a narrow sense is that which is good, desirable, or worthwhile.“ (Ethics Sage, 2018)
- Education is never values free (Sutrop, 2015).

# Professional ethics and national curriculum

- Teachers professional ethics codes, professional values
- **§ 2. Core values of basic education**
- (3) The values deemed important in the national curriculum derive from the ethical principles specified in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the basic documents of the European Union. **General human values** (honesty, compassion, respect for life, justice, human dignity, respect for self and others) are enshrined as core values, as are **social values** (liberty, democracy, respect for mother tongue and culture, patriotism, cultural diversity, tolerance, environmental sustainability, rule of law, solidarity, responsibility and gender equality). (National curriculum for basic schools, Estonia)

# Dilemmas and values game

- The aim of the game is to highlight ethical issues related to internet and data that teachers in everyday life might encounter.
- The game helps to start noticing the small values-choices we do during every day; helps to facilitate discussion between teachers and school personnel; and to find solutions suitable for the schools.
- The game also highlights different values our choices support, and values that might get left behind unintentionally.

# Dilemmas and values game





# Group work: solving dilemmas



- Groups up to 6 people.
- Dilemma with 6 possible solutions (none of them are perfect).
- Read the dilemma
  - What would you do in this situation (choose option, do not show your team mates your choice).
  - Once everyone in the team has chosen, you reveal your choices.
  - Each member explains their reasoning, team members listen.
  - Discussion follows – what would you as a team decide in this situation?
  - What value does your choice support, what value is left behind?

# Fred and Facebook

- When teacher Merike enters the Grade 6 classroom to give her subject lesson, she finds the whole class gathered around one desk, engaged in a lively discussion. When she shows her interest, the children show her a few pictures of the young history teacher Fred, that the children had found from Facebook.
- Merike finally manages to begin her lesson, but something continues to bother her: she thinks that the pictures that the children were looking were inappropriate for a teacher to post. After the end of the schoolday, she looks up Fred on Facebook, and indeed finds many indecent photographs on his site. The next day the students again poke fun at Fred and Facebook. If you were Merike, what would you do?

# Fred and Facebook

1. I would not interfere in other people`s business; after all, everyone has been young once. The teacher has a right to his private life. Sooner or later the students will get tired of it all.
2. I would talk to Fred about his views of things, and suggest that he set up his Facebook account so that only his friends can see the indecent photographs.
3. With the other teachers we look at the photographs and laugh. After that we turn to Fred and ask him to remove the photographs, since they set a bad example for the students.
4. I do not want to make a big deal of the matter. Therefore I only discuss the problem with a few of the teachers, and then we tell Fred that he should remove the photographs.
5. I go to the school director and ask him/her to deal with the problem.
6. I would go to Fred and ask him to remove the indecent photographs, with the justification that the boundaries of a teacher`s profession also extend to his/her private life.

# False Absence Certificate

- A teacher in a small town school goes to the local shop after school hours, where she sees Mari, one of the students in her class along with her little sister. “Why were you not in school today?” the teacher asks. “I have a doctor`s certificate,” the girl answers, and leaves in a rush. The teacher remembers what was being discussed in the teachers` room earlier that day: Mari`s mother leaves Mari at home when there is no one with whom to leave the little sister, and then obtains an absence certificate from the family doctor. Indeed, Mari has often been absent from school, one day at a time. She has no problems with her studies.

# False Absence Certificate

1. Since Mari has no academic problems, you do nothing. After all, it is the parent who is primarily responsible for a child.
2. I arrange a parent-teacher conference with Mari and her mother and ask permission to include the school social worker in the discussion.
- 3 I go to the family doctor`s office and demand an explanation.
4. I contact Mari`s mother and ask her to explain the situation. I tell her that from now on I will keep a closer eye on Mari`s absences.
5. I ask Mari`s little sister what kind of sickness her older sister has. I say to her that the two of them need to go home immediately, and that Mari should go to bed.
6. I report what happened in the shop to the school board so that they can find out whether the absence certificates are indeed without reason.

# A School Director's Fake Disability

- Teacher Erik and his Grade 7 students are on their way back from the stadium to the school. As they pass the shopping mall next to the school, the teacher and the students notice the school director parking his new car in a disabled person's parking space in the shopping mall parking lot. Both the teacher and the students know that the director does not have a right to park there. The boys say mockingly, "See how the disabled person just arrived?" and the girls are giggling and taking pictures. If you were Erik, what would you do?

# A School Director's Fake Disability

1. I pretend that I did not hear anything that was said and quickly change the subject.
2. I tell the students that making fun of the director is nasty. Clearly the director overlooked the disabled person's parking sign.
3. I tell the children that the next day I would ask the director why he parked this way, and ask him to justify his actions to the students.
4. I follow the director to the shopping mall and ask him to repark his car. I say that he is setting a bad example for the children.
5. I think the boys made a good joke and I do not hide my reaction. With a sense of humour one can always get through situations.
6. I continue to discuss with the students the reasons why other cars should not park in the spots designated for vehicles for disabled people.

# Adapting to an illness

- The mother of a student informs the homeroom teacher, Maria, that her child has been diagnosed with diabetes, and that the child may be under stress as he adjusts to his illness. She also asks the teacher to be discreet about the issue. The boy, who previously had had no problems at school, soon begins getting into conflicts with the other children as well as with subject teachers. Since they have no idea of the situation and do not understand what is going on, the subject teachers accuse the boy of bad behaviour, sloppiness, etc. What suggestions do you have for Maria on how to proceed?

# Adapting to an illness

1. Talk to your colleagues and tell them that the boy is having a rough time, asking them to be more understanding.
2. By all means tell your colleagues about the boy's illness. The mother's request for discretion is not in keeping with the child's interests.
3. Ask the child's parents for permission to discuss the issue with the subject teachers and to find out what the boy's special needs are in connection with his illness.
4. Take each specific problem one at a time and try to find a solution, hoping that things will gradually improve.
5. Ask the boy how he is feeling and what his concerns are. Tell him that you understand him and that you believe he will get stronger as a result of his experience with his illness.
6. Explain to the boy that if the teachers knew about his illness, it would be easier for them to understand him. Ask the boy's permission to talk to the teachers.

# Conclusion and discussion

- What are your reflections of this activity for discussing ethical issues?
- How relatable are these kinds of situations for you?
  - Are there differences between cases happening in technological setting and cases physically happening at school?
- Have you discussed these topics with your colleagues?
- Do you see value in discussing these topics with your students?

# Thank you!

- References

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