M6.2

Analyzing Teachers’ Responses to Ethical Dilemmas

This activity requires that you analyze an ethical dilemma you observed while completing the activity described in handout M6.1, “Identifying Ethical Dilemmas in Teaching.”

To analyze ethical dilemmas in teaching, it has been suggested that teachers should develop the ability to engage in “critical reflection.” This ability depends upon the following six characteristics:

1. **Appreciation for Moral Deliberation.** Teachers should be able to recognize that there are individuals whose interests might conflict, that each of these individual’s interests carries the same initial weight, and that careful deliberation is required to arrive at some justified course of action.

2. **Empathy.** The ability to assume the viewpoints and imagine the feelings of others is one of the hallmarks of moral deliberation.

3. **Interpersonal Skills.** The capacity to interact with others in a sensitive and humane manner is especially important regarding ethical problems.

4. **Knowledge.** Teachers must possess knowledge that allows them to formulate reasonable strategies and anticipate their consequences.

5. **Reasoning.** Teachers must be able to draw conclusions on the basis of the preceding characteristics in order to derive some rule of conduct to apply in an ethical dilemma or to recognize the situation as an instance of their previously derived moral principles.

6. **Courage.** Finally, teachers must have the courage to follow through on the conclusion of their deliberations.

The operation of these six characteristics may be summarized as follows: Appreciation for Moral Deliberation is the fundamental presupposition of moral behavior and decision-making. Empathy and Interpersonal Skills are required to ferret out and articulate the interests and feelings of others. The results of the operation of those characteristics inform beliefs about individuals and are combined with more general Knowledge. Information from all these sources is then used to Reason through to a conclusion. Finally, Courage is required to convert conclusions to actions where difficult circumstances are involved.

In light of these six characteristics, analyze the ethical dilemma you selected from the activity for handout M6.1. For example, what are the conflicting and competing moral interests in the situation? Describe the feelings and viewpoints of those involved in the dilemma. What knowledge or information did the teacher use to resolve the dilemma? What moral principle(s) guided the teacher as he or she reasoned through the situation? What difficulties might the teacher encounter as a result of his or her decision?