

EAD656: Social and Ethical Foundations of Leadership

Week 9, April 9th, 2020

Zoom link: <https://maine.zoom.us/j/212963612>

AGENDA

Don't Hesitate

If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy,
don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty
of lives and whole towns destroyed or about
to be. We are not wise, and not very often
kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still,
life has some possibility left. Perhaps this is
its way of fighting back, that sometimes
something happened better than all the riches
or power in the world. It could be anything,
but very likely you notice it in the instant
when love begins. Anyway, that's often the
case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid
of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb.

— Mary Oliver, *Swan: Poems and Prose*
Poems

5:00 – 5:15: **Check in and announcements**

- How is everyone managing right now?
- Case uploads to folders
- Financial responsibility statement

5:15 – 6:15: **Case discussion “Rocky Choices”** (led by Chris)

Facts of the Case:

Setting: Rivers Elementary School / K-5 Public school in a small suburban district / serves predominantly well-educated, upper income professionals

Characters:

Kate - only child of a lawyer and an art history professor / behaviors started summer before second grade / troubling student who is oppositional / outbursts / now a third grade student

Mr. Thomason - School Principal

Ms. Brown - Kate's third grade teacher (general setting)

Events:

Kate was a child who thrived at Rivers Elementary school as a Kindergarten and First grade student. Kate was on target emotionally, socially, and above grade level academically.

It was the summer prior to second grade where Kate was exhibiting oppositional behavior for reasons no one could identify. In the fall, Kate was disrupting class by yelling and banging her chair. These behaviors put stress on her peers who looked frightened or started to cry.

Kate was evaluated for special services after parents and teachers agreed she needed to be evaluated. Kate's diagnosis remained unclear, but she received an IEP that included full time support that enabled inclusion in her general education second grade class. Kate's behavior continued to interfere with her education and the education of her peers on a regular basis even with the support and accommodations.

Even with an aide and other accommodations, Kate's behavior interfered with her learning and other children's learning on a regular basis. That January, Kate was reassigned to an emotional support classroom. Despite the smaller, therapeutic setting, Kate frequently screamed, cried, kicked, and hit people. Twice she ran out of the school building and straight into the street without looking for oncoming traffic. Often during her outbursts in school, Kate would be placed – or ask to place herself – in the "Think" room which was a form of solitary confinement used to help children contain themselves. Once there, she might collect herself relatively quickly; other times she'd continue her tantrum until she fell asleep. The think room was controversial, many parents and teachers found it as developmentally inappropriate and punitive, and there was talk of legal action to shut it down. Both Kate and her parents were grateful to have a place she could go to when school became overwhelming.

Kate started making significant progress in controlling her emotions and behaviors over the following summer. By late autumn of third grade, she spent part of each day in the regular classroom, and she was fully mainstreamed later that winter, helped by an emotional support teacher. Kate was still often disruptive in class, but seemed to be stabilizing and was starting to catch up academically.

Kate's third grade classmates seemed happy to welcome her back when she was stable. At the same time, many children privately expressed concern about Kate's continued disruptions. Although they had learned that Ms. Brown was not open to accusations that Kate "messes everything up." They did complain to their parents and each other. Some students felt that Kate got too much attention from Ms. Brown, therefore Ms. Brown was not available for their questions or problems.

Other students worried about being kicked or hit, and visibly tensed up whenever Kate was nearby. In a few cases, the children were so concerned about setting Kate off that they seemed to concentrate more on mollifying her than on the subject of the lesson.

In light of these concerns, a group of six parents met with Principal Thomason, these parents expressed concerns about classroom safety and culture. They questioned the academic rigor of a class that was sporadically disrupted, and they questioned whether Ms. Brown was capable of teaching Kate and the other students in class. Mr. Thomason expressed support for Ms. Brown. He also emphasized that Kate was entitled by law to the least restrictive educational setting appropriate for her. At the end of the meeting, a lead parent stated he felt good about this discussion, but he was prepared to "take it to the next level" if there were continued problems.

Mr. Thomason met with Ms. Brown to discuss next steps. Ms. Brown was initially upset about the meeting, frustrated that the parents had bypassed her to go straight to the principal. She also suspected that the parents own concerns were feeding the children's worries.

Mr. Thomason emphasized that he was responsible for all children and their families. He stated “if you see Kate starting to get upset, I want you to ring for help so an adult can escort Kate to the Think Room.” Mr. Thomason instructed “remove Kate from the classroom before she explodes.” He further stated; we can’t afford to let this escalate. No need to get the Superintendent involved.”

Scenario:

The following Monday, Students were working in small groups in class, classifying rocks. Ms. Brown assigned Kate to work in a group with Phillip and Frank. Phillip’s father was the parent who had threatened to take the concerns regarding Kate “to the next level.” The two boys began to squabble over the designation of a rock. Kate squirmed and moved away, as if trying to shield herself from the conflict. She then returned to the table, but again seemed undone by the boys’ vehement disagreement. The boys weren’t misbehaving, they were passionate.

Ms. Brown was initially helping a group across the room. Noting Kate’s increasing distress, she quietly asked if Kate would like to switch groups. She refused, seeming hurt. Ms. Brown then suggested that Phillip and Frank present their debate, and let Kate be the Judge. Kate shook her head, feeling pressure of being in the spotlight.

“Ms. Brown could tell that Kate was close to Breaking down.”

Questions to consider:

The authors pose several questions that could lead to resolution of Kate’s apparent distress: should Ms. Brown continue with her plan to have the boys present their arguments to Kate? Should she preemptively send Kate to the Think Room? Should she move one of the moves out of the small group? Should Ms. Brown change the whole class instruction, scrapping their current lesson plan, possibly diminishing student’s active engagement?

As we have learned about Phronesis, we would like each small group to consider and answer the following three questions as you work towards the ultimate question of, “What would you do?”

1. What are your core values, and how would they influence your decisions in this scenario?
2. Considering your core values, how would your professional experiences support or contradict the decisions your core values were leading your towards?
3. Outside your professional experiences, are you aware of additional research that would impact your decision making in this scenario?
4. What would you do? If you were a school administrator would your decision be different?

6:15 – 6:30: Whole group report out

6:30 – 6:35: Wrap up and announcements