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Ten Moral Dilemmas for Educational Discussions

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A Big “Crush” Case

Ana Marquez is a very hard working and responsible math student at college. She really loves her career and has a lot of ambitions about it. But recently she has gotten some problems in one key course, because the professor is quite handsome and charismatic. She is having difficulties to concentrate on his class, and sometimes she has sit on the front row just to stay close to him...

At first, Ana was worried because she is aware that in some colleges there are rules against affairs between teachers and students, but in hers there is none, perhaps because this college was founded only a few years ago. Then Ana tried to give him some hints of her feelings, but it seems he did not catch any of those clues.

Should Ana confess she likes him a lot, but not as a teacher? Why or why not?

1. Suppose the situation is reversed: It is the teacher who is strongly attracted to Ana. What should he do?
2. If the teacher is a female and the student a young man, would that make any difference?

A New Teen Supermodel?

Since the death of her husband, years ago, Mrs. Meyer has been struggling to raise her three children, but in spite of having two jobs, she is barely meeting their basic needs.

One piece of good news is that her eldest daughter, Sophie, has just been “discovered” by an agent of a reputed French fashion company. He has explained Mrs. Meyer that Sophie’s looks are extraordinary and although she is only 14 years old, he has offered her a \$ 200.000 contract for 2 years.

The problem is that Sophie would have to travel a lot and Mrs. Meyer does not think she is mature enough for that kind of life. She has heard about a number of kids that have got rich and famous at a very early age, and later in life have had very serious difficulties, like drug addiction, depression or troubles with the law. That’s why Mrs. Meyer is quite worried and in doubt about what to do, since without her permission Sophie can’t sign the contract.

What should Mrs. Meyer do? Why?

An Outstanding Candidate

Mr. Mendoza is the Manager of a small commercial company. Today he is interviewing candidates for a salesman job. Six people applied but there is only one position. Among the candidates, Pedro Lopez got the highest scores of them all. He showed he is quite clever, well documented about the product he would have to sell and in the interview gave all the right answers with great confidence.

But Mr. Mendoza is hesitating because Pedro is really short and has a strange and very noticeable birthmark in his face. During the interview it was hard for Mr. Mendoza to avoid staring at this birthmark. He thinks perhaps this is the reason why Pedro hasn't found a job for two years. He is afraid his odd appearance could affect Pedro's performance and the company income.

Should Mr. Mendoza hire Pedro, because of his merits, or should he give the position to some other candidate, not so smart but with a better appearance. Why?

Depilate Yourself or Else!

Jennifer is an outstanding high school student and also a promising gymnast. She usually has very good relations with her teachers and trainers, but now she is having problems with her new trainer, Ms. Gonzalez.

It happens that Jennifer is quite hairy for being a girl, and most of the time she is too busy studying and training for depilating her legs on a daily basis. Yesterday, Ms. Gonzalez told her: “Jennifer, you look like a werewolf, that’s disgusting. Do not come back to training unless you are properly depilated”. Now Jennifer is very upset, because she thinks it is not her fault to be naturally hairy, and Ms. Gonzalez is discriminating her and other female athletes, since nobody has told her male teammates to spend a lot of time and money in hair removal. Besides, she trains in order to be an athlete, not **to be on some beauty pageant** or anything like **that**.

What should Jennifer do? Should she quietly obey Ms. Gonzalez, or should she send a formal complaint to the Head of the public Sports Academy where she has been training? Why?

Electoral Campaign Advices

Eugenio Montes is a promising Central American politician. He is honest, mature, has professional degrees on Law and Finances, and also has a very successful trajectory as public servant in the small province where he was born. Now he is preparing himself for running as presidential candidate. His political party hired for him some international experts on electoral campaigns who, after careful studies, have made several recommendations, the three most important being: 1) Make drastic changes to the physical image of the candidate: choose more elegant clothes, another haircut, and have some esthetic surgery for “refreshing” his face and look younger; 2) Do not mention, in any way, the fact that Eugenio and his wife have decided to divorce. Postpone that decision or the news about it for one-and-a-half year, until the end of the electoral campaign; 3) Also very important, since most of the country’s population is catholic: do not mention, in any way, the fact that Eugenio was baptized as a catholic, but since he was a teen he has lost all interest in religion and now is essentially an atheist. Instead, all the consulted experts recommend him to go to Mass now and then, and to make sure that some journalists take photos of those occasions.

Eugenio does appreciate the efforts of these experts, and as an experienced politician he knows well that in politics you cannot always tell the whole truth... but he also values authenticity and does not want to feel his presidential campaign is full of lies. Which of those recommendations should Eugenio follow, and which ones should he not. Why?

Lady Sobbing in the Subway Station

Pablo is a *caraqueño* student who uses the subway on a daily basis. Today, near one of the station exits, he sees a middle-aged woman leaning against a wall and quietly sobbing. Thinking perhaps the old lady has some medical emergency, Pablo asks her if she is OK. Then the woman tells him she is not in pain, but anguished because her daughter needs urgently a very expensive drug and she has no money for buying it. At first, Pablo is touched by the lady's predicament, who shows him the medical prescription, and he considers the idea of giving her some money. But a moment later Pablo doubts, because he has heard of similar situations in which the seemingly needy person is actually a professional beggar, or even a con artist. He also remembers it is forbidden to give alms inside the subway, but they are only a few meters from the street, and the lady seems genuinely distressed...

What should Pablo do in this situation? Should Pablo help her with some money? Why or why not?

1. If you were in a situation like that, how could you tell if you were dealing with a really needy person or with a scam? What characteristics of the person (age, sex, clothes...) would you take into account?
2. Would it make any difference if Pablo's family were quite rich?
3. Would it make any difference if Pablo were a very religious person and his religion emphasized the values of compassion and helping the poor?
4. In some cities or countries, there are laws against begging in public. Would you support the passing of one such law in your city or country? Why or why not?

Matinee Party

Xavier is a high school student who lives with her mother. He would love to party with his friends, but he has had little chance to do it because her mom always denies him permission. She says that nowadays parties are too dangerous, that there are many drugs and guns out there, and that Xavier should be studying instead, since his grades are not too good. Xavier has tried to reassure her that he won't go to dangerous places or with unknown people, and promised that he will study harder, but she keeps telling him "No, no, no. Don't waste your time trying to change my mind about this. *No. Period.*"

Next Friday most of his classroom will go to a Matinee party and he is invited. He has told his classmates about his mother's attitude, but they have insisted: "Don't be silly, you don't have to tell her because the party will be in the afternoon. She won't know that you skipped a few boring classes". "Are you afraid of your mom?"

On the one hand, Xavier does not like the idea of lying to her mother. On the other hand, he thinks she is not being reasonable about this matter, and it is totally unfair everybody can party and amuse themselves but him. So he is having a hard time figuring out what to do...

What should he do?

Why?

To Hack or Not to Hack...

Mrs. Ruiz is a single mother with two teen children: Tomas, 17 years old, and Angela, 14 years old. Tomas is very well behaved, but Angela not so much.

The problem is that Mrs. Ruiz suspects Angela has a secret boyfriend. Mrs. Ruiz also has read several stories of young girls that have got themselves in serious problems —some have been murdered— because of people they met through the internet or the social networks. So she is quite worried and has demanded Angela to give her the passwords of her social networks, in order to supervise the messages Angela receives. But Angela has plainly refused to do so. She said she has a right to privacy, and she prefers to quit using her smartphone and laptop altogether than to have her mother looking over her shoulder all the time.

Frustrated, because of Angela's attitude and because she herself does not understand much about Facebook, WhatsApp or that kind of thing, Mrs. Ruiz thinks perhaps Tomas, who is very clever and knows a lot about computers, cell phones and applications, could help her to hack Angela's accounts...

Should Tomas help his mother to hack or spy Angela's messages? Why or why not?

Trapped Dog*

On a hot summer day, Pam and her boyfriend are walking through a parking lot when they see a bunch of people arguing around a car. Out of curiosity they get near and learn that there is a dog locked inside the car, that clearly has been there too long, without any fresh air or water. Worried because the dog could die if it does not get help soon, some of the onlookers have tried to find the owner in the nearby stores, to no avail.

Alerted about the problem, two police officers try to open a bit the car windows but when that idea does not work, they explain there is nothing to do except waiting for the owner, because in this particular county there is not any law that would allow them to break the car window for saving a pet. Would the situation involve a baby or another person, any citizen could act immediately, but if somebody damages the car for saving the dog and the owner makes a formal complaint the person responsible would have to be arrested, no matter his or her noble intentions. Then they have to leave in order to attend a more pressing trouble. A few seconds later, somebody says: “That’s nonsense! How can we let this poor dog die suffocated in front of our eyes and do nothing? Lets break a window only a bit, so it can breathe, at least, and then we all get lost, and if asked, nobody heard or saw a thing.”

What should Pam and her boyfriend say or do? Why?

* Loosely based on this news: Arnold, B. (2015, May 12). Army Vet Arrested After Saving Dog From Hot Car. *The Dogington Post* (Website). Available at: dogingtonpost.com

A circumstance mentioned there that may be taken into account somehow in the discussion is the following: Michael Hammons, the veteran that broke the window to save the little dog, served in the Army and suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, causing him “a very strong need to help others, including animals, in the face of danger”.

Would Kill for “Buffalo Wings”

Mrs. Ramirez, a 6th grade teacher, is worried about Patricia, an 11-year-old student. Patricia used to be one of her best pupils, but these days she does not pay attention, and is behaving oddly.

Asked what is going on, Patricia tells Mrs. Ramirez that her dad and mom have recently changed their religion to a modern one, coming from Brazil —called Biosophy. The problem being that Biosophy’s followers are strictly vegetarian, and Patricia does not like vegetables at all. Patricia has told her parents she is willing to follow the rest of the Biosophy practices, like praying or meditation, and she won’t miss eating meat or fish, but she does love eating chicken, so she pleads for an exception. But her parents refuse. They say Patricia has to follow their same religion, and this religion does not allow killing animals for food.

“I’m starving, Mrs. Ramirez —says Patricia—. Please buy me some chicken wings with French fries! I won’t tell anybody. *Please!*”

What should Mrs. Ramirez do? What would you do if you were the teacher in this situation? Why?