

# Quality Education News

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Dear Supporter of Quality Education

## Why the unhappy face?

Not every event at a school has everyone happy and smiling. Prize-Giving ceremonies and Valedictions should be occasions of celebration. So should the announcements of new school councillors, monitors and prefects. Yet one also sees unhappy faces at those events. What's happened?



Sometimes the unhappiness could have something to do with Ethics or rather the allegation of the lack of it. Disgruntled children and parents can make accusations that there's been unfairness in the selection processes. Claims are made that choices have been decided not on the basis of fairness but rather on the biases and prejudices of those making the final choices.

A school striving to make ethically-based choices can help keep the frowning frumpy faces down to a minimum. When a school makes decisions without regard to ethics, the fallout can be dire.

Decision-making should be based on ethics. Sam Atkinson in *The Philosophy Book* (page 341), states that ethics is concerned with questions about how we should live and therefore about the nature of right and wrong. It concerns itself with concepts such as good and bad, ought and ought not, duty and making the honest choices.

No school day is devoid of having to make decisions. Some of those decisions involve making ethical choices. The educator

wanting to be scrupulously fair to children and colleagues will be confronted with ethical challenges. A few examples that might confront a school are:

- The sports coach who in a 'must-win' match against a rival school, has to choose between an outstanding player who occasionally attends practices as against the mediocre player who never misses a single one.
- The teacher is willing to do extra enrichment or remedial lessons with a child in the class but expects a fee.
- The Governing Body has to decide whether or not to recommend an excellent candidate for a teaching post even if that person holds political viewpoints or union membership radically different to those found in the staffroom.
- A selection committee awards the top academic or leadership award to a child whose wealthy parents loudly proclaim that they refuse to pay school fees for 'principles' understood only by them!

When the school has a strong ethical code, there are many winners. The staff have confidence in the leadership. They know that they will be treated with compassion, empathy and integrity. A happy, supportive work environment is created.

Children in an ethically-focussed school will know that there are no favoured or 'royal game' children. Staff are scrupulously fair in dealing with them should they step out of line. The children will be happy (most of the time!) and will be hard-working in such a learning environment.

Parents become a fantastic support base in the wider community. They advertise the school's good name far and wide.

No school can ever claim to always be 100% ethical. There will be those occasional ethical slips. Nevertheless, the quality school welcomes open discussion when there are shortcomings. The school is willing to right wrongs and to make amends.

As for the unhappy faces, their owners often get to realise that the school makes decisions in good faith. When that's understood and appreciated, those unhappy faces are likely to start displaying glimmers of smiles!

Sincerely

Richard Hayward



This newsletter is a social responsibility initiative of SAQI. The newsletter is emailed to educators, private individuals and schools. If you'd like to be put on the mailing list, please contact Mrs Vanessa du Toit on [vanessa@saqi.co.za](mailto:vanessa@saqi.co.za)

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# Ethics for educators



Designing a code of Ethics is good for a school. The code can help prevent potential problems before they happen. It can unite the school community around agreed-on core values when tough decisions need to be made.

Should a school decide to write such a code, all educators need to be part of the process. It shouldn't be a proclamation from on high – no matter how benignly intended – from the principal's office or the senior management team.

Here are the four principles of the Ethics for Educators code designed by the Association of American Educators ([aeteachers.org](http://aeteachers.org)):

## Principle 1: Ethical conduct towards students

The educator strives to deal considerately and justly with every learner. The child is to be protected from conditions that are harmful to health, learning or safety.

In the classroom, facts are to be presented without bias, distortion or prejudice. There's no place, for example, to have 'fake news' about different cultures and political parties when teaching History.

## Principle 2: Ethical performance and practice conduct

The educator continues with their own life-long professional growth. There's a commitment to maintain sound mental health and physical strength so as to be a capable teacher in and out of the classroom. The professional educator complies with written school policies, laws and regulations that are not in conflict with the school code of ethics.

An educator doesn't use, "institutional or professional privileges for personal or partisan advantage." So, for example, a teacher is unlikely to run a business selling stationery and uniforms to students of the same school.

## Principle 3: Ethical conduct towards colleagues

Here the teacher doesn't make false statements about a colleague or the school system. Gossiping is unethical. Confidential information about a colleague remains confidential. Every colleague is to be given just and equitable treatment. There should be no favouritism or 'royal game' in the staffroom.

Educators are not forced to support actions or ideologies that go against their personal beliefs. If, for example, an educator requests to be excused from attending a function because of religious beliefs, the request is to be given due consideration.

## Principle 4: Ethical conduct towards parents and community

The educator strives to communicate to parents all the information that's in their children's interest. There's a willingness to have a cooperative relationship with parents and the wider community. By so doing, the overall aim of providing quality education becomes that much easier.

Ethical educators understand and respect the different cultures and values. Opportunities are given for them to be acknowledged and respected through the various activities held at the school. Respect could be reflected through the school dress code and special Assemblies.



# Ethics is ever-evolving

As a child develops physically and intellectually, so should its' sense of ethical behaviour. A five-year old mightn't take a slab of chocolate left lying on a table because an adult has stressed that it would be wrong. In such a situation, the child's sense of morality is externally controlled. The control comes from an authority figure such as a parent or teacher.

Contrast the response of a twelve-year-old who sees the same slab of chocolate. Yes, the child mightn't take it because of external pressure from an authority figure. Yet, at this age another factor comes into play. The child wants to be regarded in a positive light by others. Good boys and girls don't take what doesn't belong to them. They don't steal.

However, still a further factor could be coming into play. The child doesn't take the chocolate because of an inner sense of what's morally right and wrong. The pressure to do the ethically right thing is intrinsically motivated – from within the child.

Jean Piaget (1896 - 1980), a cognitive theorist, maintained that a child's moral development followed a series of two stages. Lawrence Kohlberg (1927 – 1987) expanded on Piaget's theory and devised a theory consisting of six steps.

Most children reach Step 4 according to Kohlberg's theory. Well-behaved children – according to teachers – usually get to this level.



There will, of course, be those lesser number of children whose ethical code climbs higher. They challenge the *status quo* in a school; they think beyond their own personal preferences and comforts. There's an awareness of the rights of others and the need to make choices that are morally right.

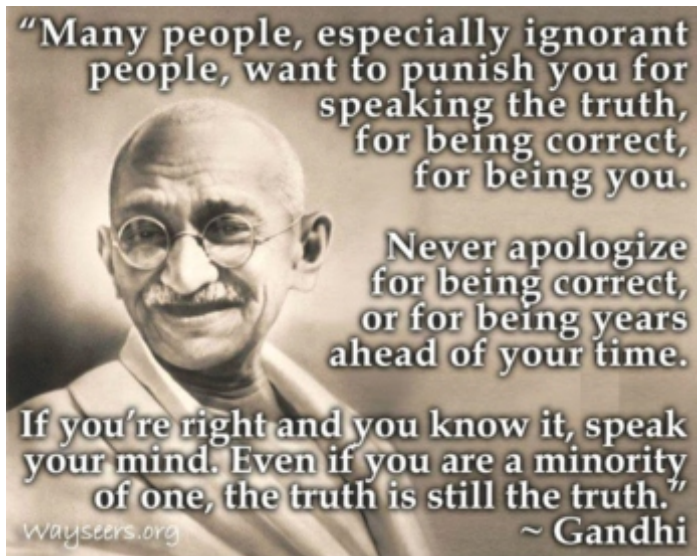
Examples of Steps 5 and 6 have been seen in recent years in South African schools. Students have been speaking out against school uniform codes that don't respect cultural and religious diversity. There have been objections to the teaching of History in biased, selective ways.

Although Kohlberg's theory was directed at children's moral development, it's also applicable to adults. Think of those who carry out instructions that they might disagree with but who don't want to, 'rock the boat'. At education department meetings, how many principals and their deputies ask the education hierarchy uncomfortable questions – the questions that could challenge instructions that are of dubious ethical standards?

Kohlberg's theory reminds us that decisions taken by a child or adult are significantly determined by a personal code of ethics – or lack of one. Our classrooms, schools and education ministries need to welcome 5th and 6th levels of discussion and decision-making.

*All that is required for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.*  
Edmund Burke

# Making ethics the essence



How do we instil ethics in our schools?

Mahatma Gandhi, the man who led India in its' independence struggle against Britain, was a man imbued with ethical behaviour. Gandhi was a role model of moral authority. India's poor and the dispossessed revered him as 'Bapu' (Father). An immortal quote of Gandhi was, “You must be the change you want to see in the world.” Putting ethics into a school starts with everyone personally striving to be ethical.

Ethical behaviour doesn't simply 'just happen' in a classroom and staffroom. Values that are the basis of ethics need to be analysed and taught. Every school Vision and Mission Statement includes Values. Is everyone regularly made aware of them? Do they know how to make them part of their daily lives?

Thirdly, ethics becomes the essence of the decision-making process. Decisions are made not on the basis of what's most convenient nor what would cause the least emotional distress. Decisions are made on the basis of what's fair and honest. Such an approach to decision-making will undoubtedly, at times, cause turmoil.

In teaching ethics, it's important to teach beyond the rules. Too

often people unquestioningly obey rules. Blind obedience to rules creates countries such as Nazi Germany and Communist North Korea.

It's important to understand that certain behaviours are needed for the greater good of all. A simple example is putting paper in the bin. Yes, obeying the rule keeps the school clean. Yet it does more. It not only helps to make the school a pleasant learning environment for the child but also for everyone else in the school.

A fifth suggestion to instil ethics is to do assertiveness training. As Edmund Burke's quote on page 3 states, evil happens when good people do nothing. Learners and educators might not speak out against unethical behaviour because of fear or ridicule.

Jo Hamilton, an educational psychologist, described assertiveness thus:

*Assertiveness is the ability to stand up for yourself and to behave in a way that is in agreement with your thoughts, beliefs and values. Yet at the same time, it's respectful of the other person's thoughts, beliefs and values.*

Whatever our personal position might be in the school system – learner, office-based educator, principal or whatever – we need to feel confident within ourselves and know that we'll be protected when we insist on ethical behaviour.

Just imagine a South African education system where ethics is the essence. Imagine no more buying of teaching posts (payment to be made in cash or head of cattle), corruption, falsifying of qualifications, 'jobs-for-pals' and 'tenderpreneurship'!

## References

Association of American educators undated. *Code of ethics for educators*. <https://www.aaeteachers.org/index.php/about-us/aae-code-of-ethics>

Atkinson, S 2011. *The philosophy book*. London: Dorling Kindersley.

Hamilton, J 2016. *Assertiveness toolbox for children*. Johannesburg: Clockwork Books.

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/teachereducationx92x1/chapter/kohlbergs-stages-of-moral-development/> Kohlberg's stages of moral development.

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## The higher the teacher's EI (Emotional Intelligence), the better the teaching

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SACE: Professional Development points: 5

Of course, being intelligent is important for every teacher and school leader. Yet the most successful educators are emotionally intelligent too. They get on well with children, colleagues and parents. Their classroom management is usually excellent. This workshop looks at what it means to be emotionally intelligent and how to develop it further.