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EDUC 6380
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Week 2 – Assignment #2: The Gay Teacher

Read Case Study 2.1 on page 42 in your text and write a brief paper (about 500 words) responding to the questions below:

1. *What virtues are being exhibited by the principal's decision to try resolution of the issue rather than forcing the teacher to resign or terminating his employment?*

Our textbook mentions many different virtues which we as budding administrators ought to strive for. In this case, I would argue that the principal mentioned in the case study was exhibiting all four mentioned on pages 30 & 31: **prudence**, **justice**, **fortitude** and **temperance** (Rebore, 2001). He exercises **prudence** (or the thoughtful, careful consideration of all the facts and implications) by evaluating the entire situation, talking to all involved, and carefully weighing the options and considering the results. He also pursues **justice** (the search to follow just conduct) by considering all the good that this teacher has done in the community over many years, and not simply caving to overwhelming societal pressure and giving in to conformism. Additionally, his actions demonstrate strength in the face of adversity, and sticking to his principles despite other pressures, and this is an example of **fortitude**, to act courageously despite fears and trepidations. Finally, he exemplifies **temperance** (i.e. moderation in all things) by first not overreacting and joining the “let’s lynch the gay coach!” crowd, and instead considering the fact that even educators are entitled to their own, private lives, and all other evidence has shown this coach / teacher to do an exemplary job while performing his duties.

2. *Explain how this case exemplifies the tension between the classical and modern worldviews?*

The **classical worldview** is that humankind and what we perceive to be right / wrong is eternal and unchanging, whereas the **modern worldview** suggests that people (and their morals) are constantly evolving and changing. This case exemplifies this because the ideas that homosexuality are abomination / evil are ancient ideas that have existed for hundreds of years, and homosexuals have been persecuted just as long. It is only in recent years that the idea that “people’s sexuality shouldn’t define them” has taken root, and has, over the last few decades, been gradually gaining more adherents (an example of a modern worldview, that people and morals evolve). This conflict between philosophies is on full display in this case.

3. *What dimensions of natural law are being exemplified in the principal's behavior?*

The principal knows that **natural law** is not a set law, like chemistry or physics. Instead, he recognizes that, as seen through the modern viewpoint, natural law evolves, through “discourse, research, and reflection on humanity” (p. 47, 2001). That is why he talked to all involved, looked into the facts, and reflected on what he ought to do, before coming to a careful decision, where he sought to do the right thing, as compared with what most convenient / beneficial to himself.

4. *How has contemporary society been affected by the attitudes of past-generations toward people who are gay?*

For many decades, homosexuality was seen as deviant and wrong, and many still feel that way. However, society and morals have certainly changed, especially since the LGBTQ+ community framed the issue as

one of civil rights, and thus have gained much more acceptance in the larger community. However, conservative values still hold a strong grip in many areas, especially the more rural parts of America, as in this case study, which explains how the community reaction would be acceptable, whereas in most urban parts of the country today, such a general reaction would be unthinkable.

Next, apply ONE of the three approaches to making ethical decisions (strict consequentialism, mixed consequentialism, and deontologism) suggested by your text to decide how you would respond to the situation if you were the principal in the Case Study.

1. *Would you support the gay teacher? Why or why not?*

In my humble opinion, the principal here approached this from a deontological perspective, just as I would as well. Like him, I would identify the issue (teacher / coach breaking community cultural norms in a profound manner; conservative community reacting to a private but liberal lifestyle choice of one of their role models in an equally potent way, etc.), get all of the facts, and consider all of the alternatives and the how this matches up with our values as a community / society. I would recognize that while the community may not approve of his sexuality, I would weight that against all the good and honorable things that the coach had accomplished. If his sexuality was not of concern, would they be calling for his head on a pike?

Of course not, and *that* is the issue here. Teachers are role models, of course, but they also deserve to have a life and family outside of school. How and who they decide to do that with are no one else's business, conservative sensibilities notwithstanding. Is it better to run an otherwise exemplary teacher out of town for his sexuality, in order to preserve prudish conservative community values? Or, is it more important to respect the founding American tradition that people have a right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", and give a man his right to privacy? Should we not respect this man, whose right to privacy and due process is also protected by the Bill of Rights, and besides his sexuality, has been a model teacher and coach? The obvious answer is yes, yes we should.

2. *What particular aspects of the approach led you to this decision?*

To me, the fact that the deontological perspective weighs many different options and alternatives against the norms / values held by a society is crucial. There is *always* more than one way to react to a situation, and that reaction can find itself anywhere on a spectrum of being terrible, poor, acceptable, or even admirable. All must be weighed and measured, and the best possible outcome then pursued.

3. *If you were the principal, what would you do next?*

I would make that case first to the superintendent, and do all that I could to help them see the terrible injustice it would be to fire this individual. Whether that worked or not, I would then appeal to the public, and plead vehemently in defense of this man. As Evelyn Beatrice Hall said in 1906, I'd echo her sentiment: "I [may] disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

I would create a presentation that shares all the excellent things that this person has done over the years, and also share sentiments (perhaps from past interviews, articles, etc.) in the past (or from anyone willing to speak up now) that locals had shared in regards to their teacher / coach (i.e. "Coach Smith has been my best mentor over the last several years; I wouldn't have graduated without him"; "Thank you Coach Smith for believing in me when no one else did", etc.).

Finally, I'd mention the elephant in the room: I'd mention that yes, he was seen with another man, and was kissed by him. I'd then suggest that whether or not he was gay wasn't important; we ALL have things that

we like to keep discreet, and then I'd share a few examples of others who have done just that (e.g.: "We all know that someone has kept it a secret as to who the mysterious cook is that conjures up that award-winning first-place chili the last 3 years running; and no one knows, except the local neighbors, who freely mows old man McGee's lawn each week; and what about that meal that your wife made, which was hardly edible, but you choked it down and acted like it was awesome, to spare their feelings?" And so it would go). Once people realize their own hypocrisy, I'd hope that they would make the right decision and call off the lynching. If not, I may end joining Mr. Smith, but frankly, it is the right thing to do, and someone needs to stand up for him. As his boss, that is my responsibility, especially since in every other way, he has apparently been an exemplary employee and role model in the community. I would owe him that much, at least.

Sources:

Rebore, R. W. (2001). *The ethics of educational leadership* (1st ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill Prentice Hall.