

Ethics, Dispositions, and the School Library Media Specialist

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I recently returned from attending a two-day workshop in which we discussed the ethical situation in our present society. As many of us when we return from an especially thought-provoking session, I felt compelled to share some of the discussions and to relate them to us as school librarians and perspective librarians.



“Ethics is defined as the study of standards of right and wrong behavior.” (Institute of Global Ethics, 3.3) All too often decisions must be made when more than one choice seems to be the right thing to do and we find ourselves in a dilemma. For example, a student comes to you and begins telling you about a personal problem. You realize quickly that he or she should be discussing this with the guidance counselor. The student asks you not to say anything to anyone because he/she is going to work out a solution. This is an example of a critical decision you must make. You are in a right versus right dilemma situation, because you feel *it is right for you to talk to the guidance counselor about this serious problem, and tell the truth about what is happening to this student. It is also right to be loyal to the student who trusted you to keep the situation confident.*

What will you do? How will you weight the issues? What WILL you do? The answers to dilemmas are never easy. If they are, the situation is probably not a real dilemma to begin with but rather a clear-cut right versus wrong behavior in which case you would know exactly what to do immediately. Find a quiet spot, somewhere, and begin to think of the critical nature of dilemmas when the decision makers are not the teachers in the classrooms or the libraries, but in our government, be it State, National or Global, whose decisions have far-reaching ramifications.

Ethics, the standards of right and wrong behavior, ethics, making the right choices according to the right standards, is crucial to the *survival of the global society in which we live right now.* It begins with each one of us by right choices we make involving large and small dilemmas we face daily at work, in our homes, in our classes and coursework, and other activities in which we participate. As teachers we model right or wrong behavior to students who are constantly watching us; it's right to pull a student aside to chastise him for inappropriate behavior but very wrong to berate him in front of other students.

Students Honored

Carol Wanyo was selected by SL&IT faculty for the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association Outstanding Student Award.

Mara Dale was selected by the faculty for recognition at the Academic Honors Reception at Mansfield University on April 7, 2008.



Students also are very aware of the times their teachers have to make a choice between two rights. It is these decisions that test the true character of those with whom we interact. For instance, will you allow the student who never misses a test, always does the homework, and participates in class (the model student), to makeup a major test he missed because, this one time without a good reason, he was late for class? What would be your decision? Your policy is that

students may not make up tests unless there is a very good, acceptable, reason for having missed it in the first place. As teachers you have all faced these kinds of dilemmas. What you decide to do about them will leave a lasting impact on your students, your peers, parents and administrators. Your actions tell others much about who you really are.

The second topic I wish to bring to your attention takes the nature of ethical behavior in a slightly different direction. We make decisions according to our core set of values, those things in our lives we consider to be of great worth; honesty, responsibility, respect for others and property, to name just a few. Within the near future our School Library and Information Technology Department plans to initiate a self assessment process the educational world is calling **Disposition Evaluations**. Our Director and Advisors will talk with you about this at a later time.

Dispositions are “a set of beliefs, values, habits and ideals that lead one to act *professionally*,” Acting ethical and professionally is of utmost importance in the library field. You have heard it said, “We are our own worst enemies.” If you chose to be pleasant, firm but fair, possessing the kind of personality that draws others to you; if you are dedicated, honest, speak out and often about your library program, you and your program will prosper and grow more than you ever imagined. Attractive actions bring back to you attractive actions.

I recently read the book, The Secret written by Ronda Bryne. In it the author says over and over, “Happiness attracts happy people, sadness attracts more sadness, and dedication attracts dedicated people to you.” They will become your library advocates, these teachers, administrators, community members, parents and students, and will help you by supporting your efforts because they know they will be the recipients of the benefits you and your programs have to offer. It’s always the right time to gather advocates for your programs.

Works Cited

Bryne, Ronda. The Secret. Beyond Words, New York, 2006.

Institute for Global Ethics. Training Manual for the Ethical Fitness® Seminar. Institute For Global Ethics, Camden, ME, 2006.