Situation Ethics: Analysis Using Consequentialism, Deontology, Virtue Ethics And Care Ethics

During my time at Beetmont State High School I have formed a close bond with fellow teacher Tracy Harris. I look fondly on Ms Harris as she is a highly respected and accomplish teacher and has become a mentor and close friend and genuinely cares for all her students. She is often tutoring students outside of class time, making an effort to ensure all her students are achieving in her class. This work ethic and the way she cares for all her students is something that I would like to implement into my teaching pedagogy and have approached Tracy for some ideas, only to discover that Tracy has given out her personal contact details (email and phone number) as well as her Snapchat to her students. The relationship Ms Harris is cultivating with her students raises a number of ethical concerns, and is causing a great deal of conflict in myself on how to deal with this situation and the best way to proceed. To determine this, I will be analysing the situation using the four ethical perspectives of Consequentialism, Deontology, Virtue Ethics and care Ethics.

The Consequentialist perspective is all above choosing the right action based on the consequences following the actions, as all actions can be considered either right or wrong based on the outcome and to avoid any course of action that would end in a negative outcome (Learning Guide 6, page 2). Within consequentialism, there are three styles or views to the perspective. Egoism bases the evaluation of the consequences of actions based on how it effects the self, Utilitarianism takes into account everyone involved as is generally thought as doing something for the greater good, and Altruism doesn't consider the effect it has on ourselves at all (Learning Guide 6, page 2). When considering the best course of action in relation to the situation with Ms Harris and her students, to look through the lens of a consequentialist means looking at it from the three different angles of egoism, utilitarianism and altruism.

If I was to consider my self-interest through egoism in what actions to take, I would not report Ms Harris or mention her relationship with her students to anyone. Her communication with her students seems mostly innocent, not including the crude meme Dylan sent to her personal email, and is really benefiting the academic achievement and growth of her students. Reporting her would only cause issues for myself as I would potentially lose a close friend and mentor in Tracy, and could negatively impact the relationships I am trying to build with my students.

Taking into account the benefit for the greater good from a utilitarianism stand point, I would come to a similar conclusion. The consequences of reporting Ms Harris regarding her relationships with her students would not only negatively effect my best interest, but would also impact on Ms Harris and her position teaching at Beetmont State High School. Tracy could potentially lose her job, which would not only effect her by removing her source of income, staining her career as a teacher and taking away something that she loves and gives her purpose, but it would also effect her family if she was to be reprimanded due to the financial and emotional strain it would cause. Not only that, but it would also negatively effect Dylan. Thanks to the tutorage of Ms Harris, Dylan is achieving higher grades and is becoming more confident in his academic ability and now has dreams to attend university and become a social worker. If he was to lose Ms Harris as his tutor, it might negatively effect Dylans confidence in his self and

his ability to achieve and cost him his dream of going to university after graduating high school. This could also effect his family from potential emotional distress Dylan might go through.

Another ethical perspective is that of deontology. Deontology says that regardless of the consequences, that if we are bound by rules or regulations that we must take action (Learning Guide 6, page 6). In the Deontology perspective there are two approaches to consider. Duty-based approaches take into consideration the duties , principles, maxims and rules when considering actions to take, where as rights-based approaches only consider the rights of ourselves and the rights of others (Learning Guide 6, page 6). Deontology has tensions with consequentialism because consequentialism focuses on the consequences and outcomes of actions taken, where deontology focuses on the action and whether it is right or wrong in relation to it's approaches and the duties and rights involved in the situation rather then the outcome of the actions.

Duty-based approaches to this situation, would require me to take into consideration the Code of Ethics, the Australian Standards for Teaching as well as School Policy when deciding what actions to take. Following the Code of Ethics I would need to adhere by the first code of Integrity, which involves the creation and maintenance of professional relationships and acting with impartiality, truthfulness and honesty (QCT, 2008). A duty-based approach would also mean that I would need to adhere to the Australian Standards for Teaching and the relevant standards of standard 7.1: Meet codes of ethics and conduct established by regulatory authorities, systems and schools and standard 7.2: Understand the implications of and comply with relevant legislative, administrative, organisational and professional requirements, policies and processes (AITSL, 2013). This would require me to, regardless of my relationship with Tracy and how I personally feel about the situation, to follow school policy and procedure and report her to the school administration and appropriate personnel as I have a duty to follow the rules and principles of the ethics, standards and policies that I am governed by as a teacher.

The third ethical perspective is that of Virtue Ethics. What virtue ethics boils down to, is that we should all strive to be someone of good character and to approach all ethical situations with virtuous intent (Learning Guide 6, page 10). It is the approach where decisions are decided based on virtuous attributes and to avoid vices. The problem with this ethical perspective is that what one person considers to be an important virtue might not be considered a virtue (or considered to be less important) by someone else and therefore can be left open to interpretation. This problem is alleviated in the teaching profession by the Code of Ethics that lists 6 ethical virtues for which teachers need to adhere to and follow. Those virtues are integrity, dignity, respect, responsibility, justice and care (QCT, 2013). Within these virtues, one can argue both for and against the relationships Ms Harris has with her students. The first virtue of integrity states that a teacher needs to create and maintain professional relationships, which in this situation between Ms Harris and her students is not being followed and needs to be addressed. However, Tracy seems to be following the virtue of dignity in the way she treats all her students equitably and gives them all access to her personal contact information to provide academic assistance to them whenever they need it, and also valuing the potential and uniqueness of her students in how she treats them and assists them with their education.

Aristotle says that being one of good character should be the basis for our actions (Learning Guide 6, page 10). That means that from a virtue ethics perspective, I would need to address the situation with Tracy regarding her relationships with her students as it would not be of good character for me to ignore it as it is considered inappropriate for Ms Harris to have personal

relationships with her students outside of class as it goes against the virtues within the code of ethics that she as a teacher needs to abide by. To handle this ethical situation I would need to make sure that any conversation I have with Tracy is of a professional nature, making sure to follow the virtue of justice within the code of ethics as it dictates any ethical claims need to be discussed in a professional and reflective manner.

Care Ethics is the last of the four ethical approaches and it differs from the other more traditional ethical perspectives as it takes into account emotions, empathy and human relationships of those involved in it's approach (Learning Guide 6, page 12). This ethical perspective goes beyond the belief that we are biased and unable to make good moral judgments from interpersonal relationships as care ethics is all about caring for others and that sometimes that extra bit of caring for those close to us or those we are responsible for can actually aid in the making of ethical decisions as oppose to hindering them from bias. Referring back to the teachers code of ethics, the last virtue of the six is that of care. The virtue of care states that we as teachers need to show empathy for and to have a sense of rapport with our students and their families.