

"I also use askitonline.com," interjected Jayne, "but I use it to review the students' knowledge of the previous day's work. They have to answer the questions with their cell phones, and their answers give me instant feedback on whether they have any misconceptions or gaps in their learning. I really like being able to check for understanding when I'm dealing with math concepts that need to be scaffolded."

Before Jayne could provide any more examples, the room erupted with questions and comments coming from every direction.

"What about students who don't have smart phones?"

"What do you do to ensure equity of access?"

"How did you decide when the students could use cell phones and when they couldn't?"

"Wasn't that confusing for them?"

Jayne and Kostas tried to answer all the questions, but they could tell from the general tone that the naysayers were in the majority. As their allotted time drew to a close, they concluded the presentation with their most controversial idea.

"In each class," Jayne reported, "we build in a short break in the middle for students to check for their personal text messages and answer them."

"Are you guys crazy?" blurted out Martha Mays, from the History department. "Why would you give up valuable instructional time in an already overcrowded curriculum to allow your students to text? Don't you realize that you are just pandering to the students? This whole presentation has been for nothing. When the cell phone ban is enforced, you will have to use textbooks to get through your courses just like the rest of us. And by the way, as new hires, you would do well to avoid rocking the boat!"

This last point stopped Kostas and Jayne in their tracks, and as they left the staff room, they looked at each other and wondered if, in fact, they needed to prepare for the inevitable ban no matter how wrong-headed they believed it to be. They agreed to think about it overnight and discuss the matter in the morning, but at this point, neither of them was prepared to jeopardize their new jobs.

## Questions

### The Case

The district has identified five major problems related to students' use of cell phones in schools. Which of these do you think is most contentious and why?

### History

Until recently, the idea of teachers using cell phones as teaching tools was unthinkable. What has happened to account for the greater acceptance of cell phones in the classroom?

## Philosophy

Were Kostas and Jayne courageous or foolhardy in making their presentation to the rest of the staff? Explain.

## Sociology

How might the use of cell phones affect the ability of teachers to exercise authority and manage their classrooms? Why do you think so?

## Implications for Practice

In this case, Jayne and Kostas are reminded that as new hires, they should be more circumspect about what they say and do. As a new teacher, what strategies will you use to teach authentically while not violating school norms or jeopardizing your future?

## Bang! Bang! You're Dead!

Jackie Warner, a Kindergarten teacher at Willow Park Elementary School was talking to Walter, an educational assistant, and Terri, a Grade 3 teacher, as they gathered their materials before the monthly staff meeting.

"Well, I couldn't believe it—it just seems that that kid is always in trouble," Jackie said of Ben, a student in her class. "He walked right up to Martin while they were getting ready to go home and swung his lunch box right into his head! Can you believe it?"

"On purpose?" asked Terri.

"It certainly seemed that way to me," replied Jackie.

Ryan, one of the Grade 6 teachers, who was sitting at the next table, turned his head and started to listen in on the conversation.

"Yes—the little brat," Jackie continued, "I was standing right there, and for no apparent reason he turned around and took a swing. He did it right in front of me!"

"Martin is Bradley's little brother, right?" asked Ryan.

"Yes, do you have Brad in your class this year?" asked Terri.

"Yes, I do—so was Martin hurt?" continued Ryan.

"Well, his head was certainly red—I wouldn't be surprised if he ended up with a nasty bruise," replied Jackie.

"You know how their parents are—you should call his Mom right now to tell her about the incident or you'll hear from her by tomorrow morning. I would bet on it! That woman never misses a chance to criticize what we do," Ryan advised.

"I already did," sighed Jackie.

"Did you call Ben's parents, too?" asked Terri.

"I'm letting the office do that, not that it will help at all," replied Jackie bluntly.

"His parents are the problem," added Walter adamantly. "He's allowed to do whatever he wants at home. You know, just yesterday he was talking about playing *Art of War* with his dad. Think about what he does when he goes home—he plays violent video games!"

"That's so inappropriate," Terri chimed in. "What are his parents thinking of?"

Just then, an announcement came over the intercom directing all staff to make their way to the library for the staff meeting that was about to begin.

"You know, I agree that he may be too young for it—I mean, *my* students are probably still too young for it, but they all play it. Anyway, I doubt that it is the video game that is really the problem. I mean, at least his dad is spending time with him when he goes home, right?" argued Ryan.

"I don't know," replied Terri, "there are boys in my class who play it, too. After recess one day last week, I overheard them talking about how realistic it was when you shoot someone in the head. Isn't that disgusting?"

"Yeah, maybe it is," replied Ryan, "but were they *being* violent or just talking about it?"

"That's not the point!" said Walter. "We didn't have any games like that when I was a kid. They are teaching kids that it's okay to be violent!"

"Look, I agree that what Ben did was wrong. I just think it's too simplistic to say that exposure to video games contributes to violence in young children," Ryan continued. "And besides, we all *did* have games like that when we were kids. Remember? We played cops and robbers and other games where it was expected that at least one child would go home crying."

"Yes, but that was different," said Walter.

"Not the same at all," agreed Terri.

"Sure it was—you made sides and ran around pretending to shoot each other. When you got hit, you acted out the most realistic death you could. When I was a kid we didn't have any video games that were that violent or realistic either, but I had a pretty big collection of toy guns. Was that any better?"

"I can see both sides," acknowledged Jackie, "but you have to admit that playing violent video games at Ben's age is not going to help matters."

"Precisely," agreed Walter. "His parents might as well tell him that what he did was okay!"

"Come on Walter, when we were allowed to play with toy guns we knew that it was just playing. Kids today know the difference between video games and real life," said Ryan. "If you pointed your fingers or a toy gun at someone and said, 'Bang, bang! You're dead!' no one batted an eyelash. Today, teachers see that kind of behaviour and feel pressured to report it as a potential threat—it's just the time in which we're living. If you ask me, we've gone way overboard. No wonder some experts are talking about a whole generation of 'bubble-wrapped kids!'"

"Well, regardless of that, aren't you against violent video games as a matter of principle?" asked Jackie. "After all, you *are* a teacher!"

"I'm not sure how I feel exactly. I just think it's too simplistic to blame video games without more evidence," replied Ryan.

The staff meeting was starting, so Ryan turned his attention back to the agenda. He felt awkward about the exchange that had just occurred and wished that he hadn't got involved. He spent the rest of the staff meeting preoccupied with his colleagues' remarks. He thought about showing them some of the inquiry projects that students in his class had done on their favourite video games so they could see how much educational value they could actually have. He considered sending them the articles he had read on the potential for game-based learning in the classroom. He even thought about telling them that video games were used in a training capacity by the military, but he knew *that* argument would dig him even deeper than he already found himself. His arguments were valid, but with each one he also felt a sense of futility about trying to convince them of his point of view. He knew they weren't really interested in the argument at all—they were just looking for a convenient way to explain behaviour that made everyone uncomfortable.

The next day during a discussion time, Ryan asked his class what they thought about violent video games.

"I had an interesting conversation recently and I was wondering what you think of this topic: Do violent video games make people more violent?"

"Oh—is this going to be like a debate?" blurted out Dylan.

"Maybe," replied Ryan, "I guess it will depend on where the discussion goes."

Terrence raised his hand, "I have a lot of video games that you could say are violent, but I've never been in a fight."

"Thanks, Terrence," replied Ryan. "So if Terrence is right, what might that tell us?"

Another hand went up, "Do you mean that not everyone who plays video games goes out and kills people?"

"Yes, I would say that's obvious, but is that the whole picture? I mean, think about it—might the opposite be true as well?"

Dylan looked confused and asked, "What do you mean by the opposite?"

"What I mean is that not everyone who plays video games acts violently, but do a lot of violent people also play violent video games?" Ryan asked.

Ryan could sense his students mulling over his questions in their minds and trying hard to look at the many sides of the issue, and he was quite encouraged by what he saw. He thought it was ironic that his Grade 6 students were more willing to suspend judgment and to look at various sides of the issue than his colleagues were, and he wondered how that could be the case given the differences in age, experience, and education. This exchange with his students had definitely

piqued his curiosity, and he asked himself if he should pursue this topic with his colleagues when he saw them again or if it was safer in the long run to drop the whole issue. After all, he had to work with these people, and he wanted to maintain good working relations with them.

## Questions

### The Case

Do you agree that playing violent video games at a young age can lead to violent behaviour? Why or why not?

### History

Do you think we, as a society, have become more tolerant of violence as depicted on television and in video games? What evidence would you use to support your position?

### Philosophy

In this case, Ryan assumes that his Grade 6 students are more open-minded than his colleagues. In your opinion, is it truly open-mindedness that his students are exhibiting? Why or why not?

### Sociology

What is it about modern cultural phenomena such as video games that people find so threatening?

### Implications for Practice

As a new teacher, how will you decide when to challenge your colleagues' certainties and when to refrain from doing so?

## A Lapse of Judgment

It was a snowy and overcast Friday morning in March, and all of Pearson High School was abuzz with "Spirit Week" activities, in which students were pitted against the teachers in a series of good-natured competitions, from floor-hockey matches to hot-dog-eating contests. Everyone looked forward to this week each year because it provided such a welcome relief from the seemingly endless winter semester. Many of the events included a fundraising component so that students could help those who were less fortunate.

Today, on the last day of Spirit Week, excitement was mounting for the finals of the dance competition at noon. All week, the students had been outperforming their teachers on most of the contests, so the students knew that the teachers

would be pulling out all of the stops to win. If the teachers came up with the most innovative and crowd-pleasing dance they might even be able to compensate for some of their weaker performances and boost their overall standings for the week. Not only was the dance competition fun, but the winners were allowed to donate the monies that were raised during the week to the charity of their choice. As the time ticked by and noon hour approached, no one could have predicted just how "innovative" a few of the younger teachers would be.

By all accounts, the two youngest teachers, Stephanie Grierson, a Physical Education teacher with two years' experience teaching at the school, and Andrew Pike, a recent graduate hired to teach Physics and Chemistry on a term contract, were well-liked by their students and respected by the rest of the staff. The two had been thrown together as dance partners since all of the other volunteers had already paired up. After students and teachers doing everything from the chicken dance to the hustle and the infamous bump from the 1970s for half an hour, it was Stephanie and Andrew's turn to perform. Much to the surprise of over a hundred students and at least a dozen staff members assembled in the gym, the two teachers began to assume provocative poses and to simulate a lap dance, with Stephanie seated on a chair and Andrew grinding his hips into hers. Keeping in time to the pulsating rhythm of the bass, their dance moves became more and more sexually charged. At one point, Andrew pretended to engage in oral sex and in return, Stephanie pretended to tuck money inside his belt. Giggles quickly tuned to disbelief and then to outright embarrassment and even shock as the two teachers became so completely engrossed in the dance that they were oblivious to the stir they were causing in the gym. Little did they know that the complete dance, almost three and a half minutes' worth, was being caught on a student's cell phone camera. Thanks to YouTube, the entire incident travelled almost instantaneously from the Pearson gym to the Internet and into the homes of millions of viewers on their television screens by suppertime. The two young teachers didn't realize that having a little fun during Spirit Week would provoke a media feeding frenzy that would have serious consequences for the school and their careers.

Almost as soon as Sandy Thatcher, principal of Pearson School, arrived back from a budget meeting at the board office, Vince Boychuk, the vice-principal, intercepted her at the school door. From the look on Vince's ashen face, Sandy knew that something serious had happened in her absence. Out of breath from running to meet her, Vince quickly recounted the events that had happened over the lunch hour while he had been busy trying to get the school's ancient boiler fixed.

Sandy's thoughts immediately shifted to the other teachers in the gym. Why had none of them stepped in before things really got out of hand? Were her teachers reluctant to sanction the unprofessional behaviour of their colleagues or had they simply been too stunned to act as things began to escalate? She wondered