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# Manual on Case Studies

Entrance Examination



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NEW GENERATION PEDAGOGICAL RESEARCH CENTER (NGPRC)

# **Manual on Case Studies**

Preparation for the Entrance Examination of NGPRC

Master of Education in Mentoring  
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## Introduction

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This manual describes one of the major exercises of the entrance examination of the New Generation Pedagogical Research Center. It is primarily written for the candidates who are seeking to join the Mentoring program. Additionally, it might be of interest to people who want to reflect on educational issues, regardless of their career choices.

The test consists of an essay question on a short scenario related to school problems. It can be about events happening in or outside the classroom. Most of them are adapted freely from real situations. Obviously, the reality has been simplified for the purpose of the examination, and no place or people are identifiable. But we take great care of describing plausible issues that educators can face in their real practice.

In 2024, this test is done in English and serves multiple purposes. Among the qualities that we expect from the candidates, we can mention:

- Critical thinking
- Practical sense
- Reactivity
- Understanding of pedagogical issues
- English fluency.

## Description of the Exercise

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The instruction is standardized and reads as follows:

*Read the following scenario carefully and write an essay to identify the causes of the problem and explain how you would solve it, as a school leader. Your essay should be written in English. You are expected to demonstrate critical thinking and clarity.*

The case titles are not displayed in the test papers and are introduced here to make this manual easier to understand. Some cases have been proposed at the actual entrance examination of NGPRC. The session is mentioned in parentheses.

## Most Common Mistakes

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The worst mistake in any essay is to be out of the topic. In a case study, it means not considering the concrete situation described in the scenario and sticking to vague and general statements on education. The exact circumstances of the scenario and all the characters involved must appear in the analysis. If an educator must solve a crisis, we don't expect him to do a vague lecture about responsibilities or the importance of having morality, but to focus on the exact circumstances of

the problem. Out-of-the-topic essays deserve very bad marks, even if the reflection is smart otherwise. The candidate is simply not doing what is required.

Of course, a lack of structure is also a major issue. Whereas we don't expect the candidates to follow a specific format, it is important that the thought is organized. Most importantly, the reader must know where the candidate is heading to and what he is willing to prove. A clear response to the problem at hand is necessary. In a case study, the conclusion would be a course of action.

Besides that, several options are available to structure a case study. The candidates can organize the essay chronologically, based on the sequence of actions that must be undertaken. That structure has the advantage of setting priorities. But other possibilities can be accepted. For instance, they can focus on the respective responsibilities of the characters: children, teachers, principals. Themes such as discipline, professionalism, emotional support, or moral education can also be considered, depending on the scenario.

Naïve solutions will also lower the value of an essay. By this, we mean not seeing the difficulty of the situation and proposing false solutions automatically, for instance just blaming people without considering the difficulty of the situation or without considering the likelihood of the event. Another mistake would be to exonerate the stakeholders from their responsibilities. Neglect is a moral fault, especially when it is committed by educators. We expect nuance and critical thinking in an essay.

Of course, the language is important. It would be too long to list down all the mistakes regarding grammar and spelling. I will make only one remark on style. In general, clarity is the best style. As French author Nicolas Boileau said, « ce que l'on conçoit bien s'énonce clairement, et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément. » What is clearly conceived should be stated clearly and it is easy to find the right words to express it. To improve your style, make shorter sentences. Eliminate unnecessary words. Avoid pleonasm.

## Indicative Grading Scale

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The purpose of the test is to rank the students and select the best. Therefore, the NGPRC can use the entire scale, from 0 to 50, if the performance justifies it. This grading scale is mentioned to elicit the expectations of the jury, but is subject to change, depending on the exact circumstances of the examination, in particular the number of candidates or the nature of the proposed scenario.

20 points: English language (grammar, spelling, vocabulary)

The lowest grades are reserved for incomprehensible sentences. For the best grades, we expect a rich vocabulary, not just correctness.

If the essay is too short, the language is scored accordingly.

## 30 points: content

### **G < 8**

The essay is out of the topic.

OR

The candidate has provided a very short answer.

### **8 < G < 15**

The candidate does answer the question, but the answer is very poorly organized.

OR

There are major flaws in the reasoning. The work contains illogical statements.

OR

There is no practical evidence to support the ideas, the reflection remains vague and general.

### **15 < G < 22**

The candidate has provided a serious answer to the question. There are minor issues with the structure or the precision of the arguments.

OR

The essay is well organized, but the candidate failed to consider some major aspects of the scenario.

OR

The problem is understood in its complexity, but the candidate doesn't propose a suitable solution.

### **22 < G**

The problem is well understood (long- and short- term issues, psychology, responsibilities). AND The position of the candidate is well balanced, taking the point of view of the stakeholders into consideration. The candidate demonstrates critical thinking. AND The essay is clearly organized. Maximum score can be considered, depending on the precision, the originality and the number of the remarks.

## Feedback (2019)

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**Note:** This scenario is adapted from Carolyn Orange, *25 biggest mistakes teachers make*.

My English teacher offered to help students with their papers before they handed them in. As a student eager to do well, I went to her for help. She basically destroyed the essay as well as my self-confidence in my writing. I can still vividly see my introduction crossed out in red. I had spent so long working on it that to see it all rejected. I felt horrible. While she was supposedly trying to help me rewrite it, more of her ideas and words were going down on the paper. I can't remember her exact words, but I know for years afterwards, I had horrible writer's block. It took me several years to accept the idea that I might be a good writer. I still can't put words and sentences down unless I think they are perfect. Additionally, since then, I have never asked a teacher for help with a paper.

### Expected Answer

This was the very first case study proposed at the NGPRC entrance examination, when the exercise was not yet fully defined. It is an extract from a very good book that we recommend for beginning teachers.

Self-esteem is a hotly debated topic in the field of education. And this scenario is a good illustration of its complexity. On the one hand, it is obvious that we need to be honest with the students, and to tell them what to improve in their work. On the other hand, it is clear that too much is too much, and low self-confidence hinders student performance. It is clear from the testimony of the student that the efforts of the teacher were counterproductive. There is no reason to believe that the teacher was ill-intentioned. She probably spent a lot of time reviewing the essay thoroughly.

The teacher and the students should set reasonable objectives together. This is the best way to avoid mistakes. The situation described in this scenario was promising in fact. Most of the time, teachers correct a stack of essays at home and don't have time to discuss with the students. A lot of comments in red ink are expected and students take it relatively well. The main problem is convincing them to read the comments. But that's another issue and in this scenario, the student took the initiative. She should be praised for that because it is not easy to expose oneself to the judgement of someone else.

From the narrative, we don't know what the teacher actually said to her student. But it is clear from the outcome that it was not pleasant. The way we talk can make a huge difference. You don't have to lie to preserve the self-esteem of your students. After all, it was a request for feedback. A normal student would not mind receiving some criticism. But there is a way to do so that doesn't attack the person of the writer but addresses only the weaknesses of the product. It starts with small things, like smiling, showing respect and concerns, looking for both bad and

good points. One cannot overstate the importance of smiling. It is also essential to show confidence in the ability of the student, no matter how much improvement is needed. It is perfectly possible and even necessary to be honest. You can announce from the beginning that the task is objectively difficult and ask the student if he feels ready for the challenge. This prepares the mind for any difficulty and puts some good light on a desirable objective. People can put insane amounts of effort into projects they believe in, as long as they think they can do it.

To make correction more fruitful, it is sensible to use the ideas and suggestions of the student as a starting point, which the teacher in the scenario failed to do. She should have emphasized the good ones and explained how the student could make them work. This requires some imagination from the teacher. She would need to think fast. Obviously, it is more difficult than proposing her own answer to the question. But it is essential if she wants to encourage creativity. As a general rule, you cannot offer freedom to the students and retake it entirely when you see the results. Even better, you can encourage creativity by asking questions to the students to guide them. This will emphasize the thought process that is necessary to build an essay, value their own ideas, and increase their motivation instead of reducing it. That kind of dialog is not always easy to conduct in the classroom, especially when there are a lot of students. It is very sad to lose a great opportunity with a volunteer when it happens.

Perfection should not be a pedagogical objective. Improvement is. The teacher should remember the pedagogical nature of the essay she gives as an assignment. It is nothing more than an exercise whose aim is to improve the skills of the students. We don't really care about the product itself. It will be stored in a binder for a few months, maybe a couple of years and will likely be destroyed in some yearly cleanup. The essay is merely a pretext for learning. As such, it has very little value if it is redone by the teacher, no matter how well written it might be.

The student who wrote this testimony felt overwhelmed with the comments of the teacher. It is clear that people can only process a limited amount of information at a time. The teacher should not talk about everything but keep it manageable. Or, if she feels the need to be thorough in her recommendations, for instance because she wants to be honest and clear, she should at least try to summarize the most important ones, and group them into general recommendations. For instance, there might be 40 spelling mistakes in one page, which is totally discouraging. But if you analyze more closely, those 40 spelling mistakes correspond to only 7 or 8 rules that the student already knows, among which 4 or 5 are really important and recurrent. 4 or 5, that's a manageable objective.

Problems such as the ones described above might go totally unnoticed by the teacher. As we can see, the student didn't ask for help anymore and probably didn't dare to complain either. When we provide feedback or answer questions, it is good practice to check the understanding and to follow up with the student performance. At the very least, ask the student if the answer was satisfactory: "Did I answer your question?" "Was it useful?"



## Exhausted Teacher (2020)

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Ms. Phally is a beginning mathematics teacher. She has been in the school for three months only, but she's already exhausted. She came late this morning and is crying in the faculty room. It appears that her last lesson went particularly bad yesterday.

Dara, a short boy known to be very weak and to have behavioral issues, was caught chatting with another student and copying something from his classmate's notebook. He made a lot of noise in the process.

Furthermore, he hadn't done the punishment (an extra exercise) requested the previous day for another "mischief". Ms. Phally was very angry at him and announced that Dara would receive a zero score on his next test. Dara left the classroom, saying that the punishment was "unfair". A few other students encouraged Dara.

Ms. Phally wasn't able to restore proper order after the incident. She assigned several difficult exercises to the other students and remained silent at her desk until the rest of the hour.

### Expected Answer

There is no unique solution to the problem at hand. The candidates are supposed to show critical thinking. In this case, it means that they understand both points of view. The teachers made mistakes; this is clear. For instance, she uses marks to punish, which is inconsistent with the purpose of an assessment. It creates confusion between the behavior and the academic level of the students and can lead to poor decision making regarding their graduation or the scaffolding that the teacher should provide. However, she had some legitimate concerns, i.e., restoring order and making sure that the homework is done. It is perfectly normal to correct a noisy student. The problem is how to be fair and effective when enforcing school rules.

Ms. Phally has let the situation escalate. She doesn't control anything. Besides, it is possible that she has misunderstood the actions of the student. We don't know for sure why Dara considers the decision "unfair". From the scenario, we can only make hypotheses. One interpretation is that he was copying because he couldn't catch the assignment. Also, the reputation of the student might have caused a bias in the reactions of the teacher and made her overreact. On the other hand, we cannot exclude that Dara is of bad faith and is trying to revert responsibilities. Maybe he's accusing the teacher in order to exonerate himself. That's a common strategy among children, and adults, who are used to breaking the rules. In such a situation, it could be good to ask the student to explain himself at the end of the lesson. A discussion does not preclude the decision of the teacher. She can still punish him if it is deserved. In fact, there are several possible outcomes. Maybe Dara was of good faith and had a somehow legitimate reason for copying, for instance because he didn't hear the instructions. In that case, it becomes an opportunity to educate him about the proper manner to seek help without disturbing the class. We can even consider the possibility for the teacher to apologize if it appears clearly that she had overreacted. In case Dara was playing or committing something wrong, a well-led discussion will expose him

and justify the punishment. There are some techniques to facilitate confessions, such as asking the student if he knows why we have called him. This implies that something was wrong, that we know it and there is no point in denying it. Once he admits that his behavior is disrupting, half of the work is done, and we can discuss the details of the incident, the causes, the way to prevent that in the future, the punishment he deserves and what he can do to fix the damage. Asking questions to Dara about these points is a good strategy to facilitate the acceptance of the decision. If he expresses an opinion about the punishment he deserves, he recognizes implicitly that he deserves a punishment in the first place.

But before considering what Ms. Phally could have done before, it is important to take care of her. She is a young teacher who needs some explanation about classroom management, but she is not necessarily to blame. Since she is crying in a public place, obviously, she needs support first, and she won't listen to any advice before she calms down. It is a kind of emergency that requires immediate action from a mentor or a colleague with a lot of tact. In such circumstances, it is wise to buy time and give her an appointment for the following day. That will give her time to recover, while sending the message that we care about her and that there is a solution. Today, sharing a cup of coffee and listening to her, if she wants to talk, are enough. Solving the problem itself will be done tomorrow with a clear head.

General recommendations are not likely to be effective. Any support should come from a deep analysis of the situation at hand. To avoid damaging her reputation further, it should probably be done through a private discussion first, and through the analysis of her preparation materials, lesson plans, lesson aid etc. Classroom observations might be necessary, but unless it is a common practice in the school (which it should), the students might misinterpret it. If classroom observations are exceptional, they will conclude that there is something wrong with Ms. Phally and that the school principal does not trust her. If it is already normal, however, no one will be surprised, and the negative effects will be neglectable.

We value the candidates who show critical thinking by making hypotheses about the gaps in the proposed scenario. Among those hypotheses, we can consider various questions, that can be a basis for classroom observation:

- Did Ms. Phally provide clear instructions?
- Does she give enough time to the students to catch up when she gives instruction or when they are doing exercises?
- Does she implement teaching strategies that are known to create disorder?
- How does she control her emotions and react to the misbehavior of the students?
- Is the lesson well-prepared and clear?

## Smart and Challenging Student (2021)

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Sophea is a smart and turbulent student, in grade 8. He has regular arguments with Ms. Sreynich, who teaches history, and to a less extent with other teachers. According to him, Ms. Sreynich doesn't know her subject, and he has caught her telling wrong things in her lessons. He also complains that teachers are dismissive when they don't agree with his interpretation of history, calling him "misguided and wrong" and making comments about his young age. Sophea is quite popular among the students but spends a lot of time in the office of the school principal. Recently, his marks have been dropping and he doesn't want to do his homework anymore.

### Expected Answer

The candidates were expected to understand the complexity and the uncertainty of the situation. They are supposed to show critical thinking. It means that they try to understand all the points of view. It also means that they should not be too naïve and believe all the allegations made by the student. Scenarios for case study are generally incomplete or biased, as they are written from a certain point of view, just like any testimony in real life. In such exercises, the candidates should pay attention to expressions such as "according to him". By the way, that's exactly what happens in real life, when a teacher or a mentor is solicited to provide his expertise. He must listen to all the parties before making a decision. To write an essay like this, it is important to make hypotheses to fill the gaps.

It is perfectly possible that Ms. Sreynich lacks the subject knowledge that she's supposed to teach. But it is also possible that Sophea is an overconfident child. Therefore, it is important to have some strategy to collect more information. The first step, obviously, is to check the assertion of Sophea. For instance, the school principal or the mentor can collect information among other teachers or other students. However, that data collection must be done carefully. A school leader should never imply that a teacher is incompetent, especially in front of the students. This would reinforce the problem. A mentor can offer to revise the lesson plan with Ms. Sreynich to increase its acceptance through new teaching methods and avoid similar incidents in the future. This doesn't imply that the content is wrong but will give an opportunity to verify it among other things. Another good practice is to conduct classroom observation. Some teachers might feel uncomfortable with that. In schools where such practice is unusual, it might be perceived as a sign that something is wrong with the teacher. But in schools where it is a routine no specific significance is attached to it. It is important to prepare the classroom observation with Sreynich and ask for her permission. In spite of all the mistakes she can make, she remains the authority in her classroom.

Beyond the analysis of the situation, it is essential that the candidates propose some solution in order to satisfy all the parties. No matter which side is right, if any, there are a few problems that must be addressed. True or false, Ms. Sreynich is getting the reputation of an incompetent teacher. Action must be taken. If Ms. Sreynich does lack knowledge, she must be encouraged to check her information and prepare her lessons more thoroughly. If not, there might be different

reasons for the misinterpretations of the student. For instance, she might rely too much on her authority to have the students believe her, rather than sound evidence. In that case, she can rely more on historical documents to prove her assertions. This would also be a good opportunity to explain to the students how historical knowledge is established and to develop their critical thinking. It might be a lack of confidence that gives the impression that she is not very knowledgeable. In that case, she can work with a mentor or a colleague on postures and voice control. Sometimes, students come with all sorts of ridiculous theories that are difficult to debunk. Having a few strategies to buy time before doing a reality check at home can save the reputation of a teacher, for instance by saying something like: "That's an unusual theory. I don't know any historian who defends that. But I will check. Just in case." However, we need to be careful with that delaying maneuver because it can take an awful amount of time to debunk all the silly things teenagers find on the Internet. Another way is to remind the burden of the proof. Exceptional claims require exceptional proof. The teacher can ask the student to share a link to his sources. If the source is vague, for instance, a discussion on X, it becomes easy to dismiss it as insufficient, and it is a good opportunity to lecture the students about the importance of reliable sources.

In terms of classroom management and discipline, it is a bad move to simply dismiss the challenging remarks of a student. Teachers should be ready, even happy, to be challenged intellectually. Avoiding the debate will not convince the children, but rather reinforce the impression that the teacher feels uncomfortable with the content. Clearly, the situation is going out of control. The popularity of the challenging student is damaging the school climate and polarizing the school between teachers and students. Dismissing the ideas of a student also affects their curiosity negatively and can reduce their willingness to seek help and ask questions when they face difficulties.

On the other side of the conflict, there are some issues with the attitude of Sophea. The fact that he has arguments with other teachers as well suggests that he doesn't have the open mindset and the humility that we expect from a student. We all know how annoying and disrupting a "know-it-all" student can be.

The problem must be handled with tact. Sophea also needs to be remotivated. We don't want him to drop out and we should recognize his intellectual capacities. We should not make quick assumptions about his motivations. Some students challenge the teachers in a very provocative way, for instance to gain popularity, as is suggested in the scenario. Such an attitude should not be tolerated. However, we cannot totally exclude that the behavior is genuine and that Sophea just wants to restore the truth about history. His popularity can be circumstantial. In any case, he must learn how to better interact with teachers and make his remarks in a more respectful way. This doesn't mean that we should forbid any dissenting voices. Students have the right to express their opinion and their cognitive development implies the possibility to ask questions and to doubt unproven assertions. We cannot expect critical thinking, if we suppress criticism. But there is a right way to express disagreement. That right way should be taught to the students. It implies

politeness, genuine questions rather than hidden assertions, discussing facts rather than accusing people, and the ability to suspend one's judgement when there is no time to explore all the facets of a problem. If the teacher decides to move on with the lesson, the student must comply.

At this stage of the crisis, the best course of action is probably to propose mediation between Ms. Sreynich and Sophea, by an adult with enough intellectual authority and tact, for instance a senior teacher with a good reputation. Mediation doesn't mean that the voices of the student and of the teacher are at the same level, but it does mean that the concerns of both parties should be considered. We need some knowledgeable person to explain to the student how to react to uncertain statements. If there is something to change in the attitude of the teacher, it is better to tell her privately and not in front of the student.

## The Unpopular Pranker (2022)

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Veasna is a slow learner who loves to make jokes and pranks. Unfortunately for him, he is not so popular among his classmates, and they give Veasna some nicknames behind his back, saying that he is weird and creepy. Yesterday, during the Khmer lesson, he tried to participate in the discussion, and made a lot of comments, more or less relevant. Eventually, he asked a very naïve question that made his classmates laugh. The teacher, Mr. Rady, who was already annoyed by his constant interventions, dismissed the question by saying that Veasna should buy a computer to replace his missing neurons. The entire class laughed at the joke, and Veasna remained silent for the rest of the lesson. This morning, Veasna didn't show up at school and his mother called the director to say that he was afraid to come back to school.

### Expected Answer

The candidates can propose various answers. There is no unique solution to the problem at hand.

However, the candidates are expected to understand the complexity and the uncertainty of the situation. The candidates are supposed to show critical thinking. It means that they try to understand all the points of view. In this case, it means that they should not only consider the obvious mistake made by the teacher, but also the difficulties posed by a student like Veasna. They should also understand the reactions of the other students, even though those reactions are not acceptable. There are several dimensions in this scenario that good teachers, and mentors, should be aware of.

The first dimension is pedagogical. And it is relatively obvious. It relates to the value of mistakes and questions. The question of a student should never be ridiculed, even if it reflects a lack of knowledge and even if the student has spoken too fast or is annoying. One might make an exception for dilatory questions, but even in this case, there are better solutions than making laugh of the question. The teacher could have said that there was no time for it, without being insulting.

Of course, the approval of the other students is not an excuse for the behavior of the teacher. What he has done can have terrible consequences, not only on Veasna himself, but on all the students. Never make students believe that asking questions is shameful. This would kill critical thinking instantly and durably. Besides, even a “stupid” question can be useful to hear, because it highlights the misunderstandings of the students, and informs the teacher about what might be unclear in his lesson or what prerequisites the students are lacking. There is almost always a reason for the mistakes of the students. A good teacher will try to figure out.

The second dimension is psychological, and it is more subtle. It is important for a teacher to be aware of signs of distress in a student. A child who is not able to stay still or to be serious when necessary is probably hiding a lot of suffering. Jokes and pranks are not signs of happiness. Quite the contrary if they are too common. In this scenario we have a child who is constantly looking for attention, and doesn't get it, at least not as he would like. Veasna's rejection of the school is proof enough that the problem is much deeper than one single incident. His suffering has probably gone undetected for a long time.

On the teacher's side, we can notice the difficulty to control oneself. Veasna is clearly annoying. There is no point denying it. But the teacher should be aware of his own emotions and take action before he is overwhelmed by them, and not react impulsively. He should set rules for Veasna and have a discussion with him before the behavior of the student becomes unbearable.

The last dimension is social, or if you want disciplinary. It's the problem of maintaining order in the classroom, while optimizing the learning conditions for all the students. Obviously, such a task is difficult for the teacher, and it might well be impossible to achieve in some situations. In this case, there is already a grave conflict between Veasna and his classmates. It is already too late to avoid it. What matters is to know whether it can be fixed or not. No matter the causes, a teacher should never let a student be subject to bullying, let alone take part in it. This is a grave professional mistake. Wrongdoers should be corrected, maybe even punished.

The main difficulty is that Veasna is socially awkward and must also improve his behavior. It is the responsibility of the teacher, or the school principal, to educate Veasna about social interactions. They should inform him about what other children want, what he is doing wrong, what he is doing right, and so on. A good place to start is the playground. If possible, educators should make Veasna play with the other children. It is difficult, of course, because they cannot force children to love each other. But they can create opportunities and encourage some children to accept Veasna for a few activities. And inform Veasna on how he should behave during those activities to be accepted by the group, and how he can become a good classmate. Organizing collective games could be a good start.

As for the behavior in the classroom itself, the teacher can set special rules for Veasna. The normal rule of speaking only when authorized is the starting point. But to be effective, the teacher should be ready to tell Veasna to wait, or to let someone else speak first. He's the one who distributes speaking time. With some very active students, it is not always sufficient to just

tell them to stay quiet, because they are very self-centered and desire immediate responses. They simply cannot control themselves. The teacher can try some delaying strategies to acknowledge the demands of the students, while keeping control over the pace of the lesson. For instance, give them a defined number of questions that they can ask during the lesson, to force them to think carefully before asking. Another tip is to agree on a gesture that says: “I’ve seen you, just wait until we are finished.”

From the point of view of a school leader, it is essential to consider the feelings and the interests of all the people involved in the incident. All of them must improve. And some improvements require long-term efforts. As for the emergency, getting Veasna back to school, a mediation between Veasna and Mr. Rady is probably necessary. The school director can facilitate. He should listen to everybody, starting with the teacher. It would be good for the teacher to apologize, but the director should mention that to the teacher privately, before meeting Veasna, because such a demand could undermine the authority of Mr. Rady, if done in front of a student. Then, when they meet Veasna, together or not, the principal should comfort Veasna, but also tell him what to improve, and not give him the impression that he can win against a teacher. This meeting requires a lot of tact.

## Missing Student (First Round 2023)

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Mr. Dara is a contract teacher in primary school. He works in a rural commune with poor material conditions. There is barely enough room to accommodate the 55 students in his class.

This morning, Mr. Dara’s daughter caught a cold and Mr. Dara decided to do some work for a relative in order to make extra money. He didn’t inform the school though and was absent the entire morning. His grade 3 students waited for an hour or two, without any instruction or information. At 10:30 a.m., the school director entered the classroom to tell the few remaining students to “just go back home.” Such a situation is not uncommon in that school and can happen one or two times a week.

Unfortunately, this time, Nika, a shy little girl, got lost on her way home, 4 kilometers away. At 6:00 p.m., her parents called the school to ask for her whereabouts.

### Expected Answer

The candidates can propose various answers. There is no unique solution to the problem at hand. The candidates are expected to understand the different dimensions of the problem and to work toward practical solutions. In this scenario, we are facing a cascade of problems and mistakes. And we must consider both short- and long-term issues.

We’ll value the analyses that set the priorities right. There is an emergency. A child is missing. Any other consideration should be dealt with later. The priority is to find the child. After that, there will be time to consider the responsibilities of the adults involved and to determine who

has made professional mistakes and if disciplinary actions should be taken against them. We can propose various actions to find the child:

- Alerting the competent authorities (police, municipal authorities, any people who can help find her).
- Sending people on the road that she is most likely to have taken.
- Calling the friends of the girl to check if someone knows about her whereabouts.
- Etc.

Someone must also respond to the parents and meet them in person. It is quite obvious that the school director has to be available. However, since he bears a terrible responsibility here, he should probably not meet them alone. Ideally, someone who outranks him should be present as well. Depending on the circumstances, they can meet the parents at school or at their place.

It is essential that someone stays at school and at the girl's house, if she comes back to any of those places. Note that the girl has already been missing for a long time. But since the day is not over, there is a possibility that she has just been waiting at a friend's house.

Cold-blooded action is important. People should look for the girl but not panic. Other people should either take part in the search or go back home. One person should coordinate the search, to make sure that all the participants can share critical information quickly or receive information when it is over. Obviously, when professionals are involved, whoever has started to coordinate it should obey them, but since it is in a rural area, it might take time before a proper rescue team is organized. So, people should not be afraid to take initiatives.

When the girl is found, no matter whether the outcome is joyful or tragic, there are many things to do at the school level. Obviously, Mr. Dara and the school director are at fault, and possibly other staff members as well. In case the girl is safe and sound, a professional investigation should happen. If she is not, the police will be involved, but there are still things that the education (DOE?) office will have to do.

Mr. Dara cannot be held directly accountable for the loss of the girl, since he was not the one who sent her back home. However, he has made terrible professional mistakes, and his lack of professionalism is the root cause of the whole affair. We cannot blame him for taking care of his own daughter. He might have been entitled to a leave of absence. But he cannot be absent without warning, even less to do another job. That, by itself, is punishable, with or without the incident with the missing girl. This will probably mean the termination of his contract for cause.

As for the school director, he is more directly involved in the disappearance of the girl. He should at least have alerted the parents when sending the children back home.

He is also at fault for deeper reasons. In particular, because he has let his school adopt bad habits. Absenteeism has apparently become too common and there is no proper procedure to take care of the children when a teacher is absent. We can also question the fact that no one has intervened before 10:30 a.m. The school director is responsible for checking attendance and



taking disciplinary actions against the teacher. His routine work will go under scrutiny to determine to which extent he has done his job and has failed to take proper measures to ensure the safety of his students. Disciplinary actions against the school director will depend on a lot of factors, including his attitude during the incident and the search for the girl.

Of course, actions should be taken to avoid such situations in the future. A communication channel with the parents should be open to inform them in a timely manner when the school is not able to take care of the children. Obviously, a long-term solution is not easy, since the school is in a rural community with little resources. It is important to understand the circumstances that made the incident possible. No one is to blame for those circumstances. But the usual response is clearly inadequate. To prevent such problems, it is probably necessary to consult with the community and check what kind of resources can be utilized to attend to the children outside the courses.

### Common Mistakes

Surprisingly, many candidates forget the most important problem, that there is a missing student, and the priority is to find her. This illustrates the difficulty in putting oneself in the shoes of others and shifting one's mindset from theoretical to practical considerations. Teachers and students tend to overintellectualize everything and to lose their common sense in the process. This is aggravated by the fact that the scenario is proposed during an examination. Candidates want to please the examiners too much and try to find ready-made answers in their memory, instead of thinking by themselves.

Of course, we can hope that they would have better reactions in real life. But good reactions in real life are largely determined by the way we prepare our minds for possible problems.

## Student Suicide (Second Round 2023)

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Bunnath was a shy boy in grade 9. He had average results at school and would have been pretty much unnoticed if his parents had not sent several letters to the school principal, complaining about two of his classmates, Makara and Rady. According to the parents, Bunnath was facing constant bullying from the two boys: insults, threats, and racket. He was told by other classmates that nobody liked him.

After several months, Bunnath's parents sent another letter to the POE (Provincial Office of Education), threatening to sue the school principal in a court of justice if no action was taken against the boys who intimidated their son. The POE replied that they should show more respect to the school personnel and acknowledge their professionalism. The POE also threatened to file an action in defamation against the parents if they continued to harass the school principal.

This morning, Bunnath killed himself by hanging from a tree behind the school.

## Expected Answer

The candidates can propose various answers. There is no unique solution to the problem at hand.

The candidates are expected to understand the different dimensions of the problem and to work toward some kind of action. In this case, it is too late to do anything for the main protagonist. The tragic outcome of this bullying story cannot be undone. However, there is still a lot to do for the livings.

Obviously, any action will require at the same time a lot of caution and a lot of courage. Caution because any mistake can have huge consequences on the well-being of the relatives of Bunnath and on the reputation of the school. To add more to the complexity of the problem, caring about reputation might be labelled as a lack of empathy, while not caring about it might look irresponsible, if we consider possible repercussions on the other students and on the school climate. In such a case, we must acknowledge the emotions, even our own, but somehow manage to handle them, and not let our emotions drive our actions, especially if we are in a leadership position.

Perhaps the first thing that educators will have to deal with is mourning. Teachers rarely receive any training about how to accompany the sorrows of the children in an extreme situation like that. And it is not certain that a professional approach is always preferable. Relying on professionals too much, such as psychologists, is like avoiding one's responsibility. We are involved as human beings first. One guideline is found in traditions and rites. It's precisely in such circumstances that rites are essential because they provide a course of action for basic things at a time when we are in disarray. Therefore, it is essential that all the community participate in the required rites, in accordance with the wishes of the family. Of course, if the family does not want some members to participate, that wish should be respected, without question. Any effort to seek forgiveness should wait for the right time. Children should be informed of the rites and participate according to their age, but should not be left aside, and certainly not ignored.

The other dimension of the problem is to deal with the causes of the tragedy at both an individual and an institutional level. Many people bear a heavy responsibility in the death of Bunnath. Even the parents of Bunnath will probably have a sense of guilt, regardless of all their efforts. That sense of guilt might not be rational or just, but it is likely to happen.

Obviously, the two bullies will have to answer for their actions against Bunnath. We can argue that they are very likely to be the direct cause of his suicide. It's a very grave case. However, we need to do it with justice and reason, or we will make the situation even worse. The two boys probably deserve a very severe punishment, but we don't want to destroy their lives as well. In any case, the educational and even penal decisions should not be made in a rush. Nor should the boys be submitted to some kind of mob justice. Another suicide would not solve anything.

The school management and the educational team also bear a heavy responsibility, but from the available information, we cannot be sure to which extent. The school principal should probably

be suspended temporarily, as a protective measure. Here, it might be important to clarify that such protective measures are not punishments per se, but just temporary decisions that we make to avoid further problems. Punishments might come later, or not, depending on what the inquiry finds. In any case, regardless of the true responsibilities, those who are involved might have to move, for their own good, because it is difficult to rebuild one's life with such a major blow to one's reputation.

We know from the suicide that the suffering of Bunnath was indeed very serious, and the fact it happened behind the school should probably be interpreted as a message, but we don't know exactly how the events unfolded. They can be more complex than we think. Suicide rarely has a unique cause. Proper investigation is required. The inquiry might reveal a lot of unexpected shortcomings in the school, from a lack of discipline or neglect to something much worse. It will normally be handled by the police, but the school administration must facilitate the process. Since many people in the MOEYS hierarchy are also involved, it is essential that this work and the subsequent decisions regarding the school are entrusted to external authorities of a sufficient level. A special leader should probably be delegated to replace the school director, at least temporarily, possibly the principal of another school in the vicinity, a principal with an excellent reputation. Some teachers would probably be replaced as well.

Press communication might become a problem. Sobriety and decency are key elements of any communication. The decision to release information should be weighed carefully. An excess of transparency could lead to the kind of mob justice that we have mentioned previously. An absence of communication could be seen as a lack of accountability and favor all sorts of rumors.

From an institutional perspective, precautions should be taken to ensure that early warning signals are not dismissed as they have been by the school administration and the POE. This is a tricky problem. Schools lack solutions to deal with bullying or might underestimate the situation for all sorts of reasons. Some students and parents seem to complain about petty problems, or even to be the ones who create their own problems. Teachers are busy or unsecure about their own situation. Teachers who struggle to keep their own authority are at a disadvantage when they must protect their students from bullying. Authorities might lack circumstantial evidence to take proper decisions. Suicidal teenagers are generally the shiest ones and might remain unnoticed until it is too late. The POEs don't have enough human resources to investigate each complaint that parents submit to them. But there are certainly some procedures that can be improved. For instance, making sure that there is some sort of official mail, suggesting a course of action to the parents (bringing it to the police, collecting evidence of the bullying etc.). Obviously, it's at the school level that early warning signals should be interpreted. A revision of the school regulations should be on the agenda, after analyzing the school climate in general. It is not certain, however, that such a revision will be necessary. After all, suicides are rare events that are not always related to a bad learning environment: a couple of bullies and a fragile child might just be enough. But it is certainly a good idea to ask the question.

We will value the analyses that consider the interest of all the parties involved. In such situations, it is easy to forget a lot of people. Beyond those who are directly named in the scenario, there are many people who might suffer from that situation. Other children, friends, teachers. Problems can arise from unexpected places. Everybody deserves to be listened to, should they want to.

### Common mistakes

Some candidates couldn't put their priorities right and made a lot of comments about what should have been done, but almost forgot that the poor Bunnath is dead. Surprisingly, only one candidate thought about attending the funerals. This illustrates the difficulty of putting one's mind into a scenario. It is tempting to ignore the practical problem and revert to general statements we are more familiar with.

Another example, a few candidates mentioned the average academic results of Bunnath. This is a minor detail, when compared to bullying and suicide.

The ability to set proper priorities is a major skill of any school leader.

## “You could do better.”

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Veasna is a serious-looking student. He is rather shy and has only a few good friends. There is nothing noticeable about his behavior. During the parent-teacher conference last week, his Khmer teacher, Mr. Ngoeurn commented on his marks. The parents and the teacher agreed that Veasna was an intelligent boy who could do better. This morning, Mr. Ngoeurn distributed the essay tests that he had just corrected and, as usual, gave a few words of comments to each student to encourage them. He said to Veasna: “Not too bad, but you could do better. You should work harder at home.” Veasna burst into tears.

### Expected Answer

In this scenario, it is clear that the parents and the teacher have misevaluated the situation.

Working hard is a good precept in general. But it can go terribly wrong if expressed without any consideration of the actual situation. We can infer from his tears that Veasna is already doing his best. But his efforts have not been recognized because he has always tried his best and has never complained about his work. It is generally better to avoid making assumptions regarding the efforts or the capacities of a student and to recognize that we simply don't know about his life outside of our classroom. Don't assume the level of efforts by the achieved results.

Educators tend to project a lot of things on children: their expectations, their unrealized dreams, their own abilities. Smart parents can even become toxic in this regard, by imposing unrealistic goals on their children. One should be aware of one's biases in this regard.

Accept that Veasna might have other aspirations than his parents and his teachers. Everybody should be given the opportunity to do long studies if they want to and have the ability. But not

everyone will become a highly recognized scholar or a leader in a major organization. This is not to say that Veasna should give up any dream of social ascension. But that sort of ambition should come from himself, not be imposed on him from above. As a student grows, it is wise to give him more and more choice over his studies, until he becomes fully autonomous in the choice of a career. In the case of Veasna, he should be able to allocate his efforts to some subjects more than others. Of course, Khmer is an important one. But not everybody can be expected to become a professional writer. As long as the marks are decent, and they are, it is counterproductive to submit Veasna to more pressure for that specific domain. It would be better to invite Veasna to choose another subject in which he can excel.

Another dimension of the problem is the way we provide feedback and advice. This scenario describes a very common practice that consists in making individual comments aloud in the classroom. This is counterproductive. It exposes students to public shame for no reason. There is very little chance that it could improve their work, even less their academic performance. Students who get bad marks already know that they must improve. Making it public does not add anything to it and might lead to rejection. Let us be clear. It is important to tell the truth to the students. Preserving their self-esteem should not be done through lies. But it is good manners to express the truth privately, in a way that does not hurt unnecessarily.

Besides, proverbs are popular but rarely useful, especially when they are repeated again and again. Who ignores that hard work is important? Do the parents and Mr. Ngoeurn think they are teaching anything new to Veasna? He already knows that.

The examiners will value the analyses that consider how to fix the problem, and not just those who point the mistakes of Mr. Ngoeurn. Veasna was hurt and is probably discouraged. The first thing, obviously, is to apologize for the harsh word. Mr. Ngoeurn should admit that he didn't understand the situation and should offer to help. He should spend time to discuss with Veasna and listen to the problems that he is facing. This should be genuine listening, with a strong intention to obtain information and make better decisions in the future. For example, the discussion can lead to better and more realistic objectives, that Veasna can achieve without compromising his health. Stress itself might be the main reason for his failures.

The discussion can also lead to various forms of support, for instance, reexplaining some difficult concepts, or providing him with methods to improve the effectiveness of his learning. Many students simply don't know the best practices to improve their memory, and rely on additional efforts and brute force, while a good understanding of how memory works can make it much easier. It would take too much time to detail it here, but there are specialized books that can help teachers and students immensely. Similarly, Veasna could improve the effectiveness of his work by organizing his schedule, preserving his sleeping time, and balancing his activities better. Time management is a skill that teachers should be ready to introduce to their students. We can add more examples, and consider for instance how to take notes, how to control one's emotions etc. The exact nature of the intervention will depend on the diagnosis made through the discussion with Veasna.

## First Periods

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Vannyda is a very shy 12-year-old girl. During the mathematic lesson of Mr. Sophea, she was squirming on her chair, because of her periods. At first, Mr. Sophea told her to stay still. After a few minutes, she resumed her squirming and Mr. Sophea threatened to punish her. Since it was not enough to stop her, he approached and saw some blood under Vannyda's chair. He blushed and hesitated for a few seconds. Then he ordered her with a very strong voice to clean the mess. Vannyda ran out of the classroom.

### Expected Answer

This scenario shows public shaming for something natural. This is very bad. Periods are already difficult and painful for most teenage girls, without adding mean comments from a figure of authority.

Vannyda is very young. It is very understandable that she didn't know how to deal with her periods. That she stained her clothes and her chair should bring her compassion. And most importantly, that incident should have been solved with discretion, and it would have remained minor. On the contrary, the inappropriate reaction of Mr. Sophea has created a problem that Vannyda will remember for a long time. A wise teacher would have authorized her to go to the bathroom much earlier, or even provided some clothes to hide the blood.

The fact that Mr. Sophea is a man can explain why he didn't know how to react. However, he is an adult and should be aware of those female problems. Teachers should be clear about all the issues regarding puberty and sexuality because they will not be able to avoid those questions forever. The difficulty for the teachers is to control their own emotions. It is important for teachers to put their own sentimental and sexual life in order, or at least to have a clear course of action when talking about such issues with their students. Sexuality is a major concern in the life of a teenager and cannot be ignored by the teaching staff.

Mr. Sophea should apologize to Vannyda. There is no escape from that. It should probably be done, discreetly at the end of a lesson, but with the door open to make her feel safe. The incident was a major involuntary blow to her intimacy, even though it was involuntary.

Another thing to consider is to educate Vannyda about that major moment in her life. A female teacher should also talk to her to comfort her and provide her with some basic advice regarding her periods. There is always an experienced colleague that a male teacher can call to help with that sort of things. At least, that colleague should ensure that everything is in order, and that the young adolescent knows clearly what was happening to her. Usually that kind of education is provided within the family, but it does not always come on time, if it does at all. We cannot recommend stepping on the parents' toes. However, it might be necessary to substitute a teacher's voice for theirs if they are not providing the necessary guidance. The fact that the incident happened at school justifies a tactful intervention. Different teachers can do it, depending on their availability and on their communication skills. But remember that the biology

teachers have some sex education in their curriculum, they have relevant material to explain whatever needs to be explained, and that they have some training talking about it. If the school is lucky enough to have a nurse, she would be a very appropriate person for the task, and she can also provide a suitable place.

The discussion with the student will determine who should inform the parents. Some students are comfortable to discuss such things with their parents. Others will prefer the help of a teacher. In any case, the parents should be informed, because they are the ones who will provide periodic protections and any other support that the adolescent girl needs. It is simply better to do it according to her wishes. This should be done simply, without excessive comments. Being factual is the best way to dedramatize the event. She's becoming a woman. There is nothing wrong with that.

If the periods are particularly painful or irregular, the teenager can also be oriented to a doctor.

## Safety in the Chemistry Laboratory

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Mr. Sophea is a chemistry teacher in a rural school. He also teaches mathematics and physics occasionally. Mr. Sophea is known for his dedication to the children. Over the past five years, he has put a lot of energy into organizing a makeshift laboratory for his science lessons. He compensates for the lack of teaching materials and science instruments by recycling all sorts of objects, old waterpipes, plastic bottles, card boxes, and a variety of tools given by generous neighbors.

Working with the poor children of the town is not always easy, because absenteeism is very common, and sometimes those who come behave pretty bad. But on a normal day, his lessons are appreciated, and some students come to school specifically for his chemistry lessons, because it is a subject that he really masters.

Unfortunately, this morning, an incident happened. Mr. Sophea was planning to make his students open a battery to see what is inside. While he was still explaining something about the previous lesson, he heard a big scream. Dara, a student known for causing problems, has cut his hand while trying to open the battery on his table with a knife. The wound is very deep.

### Expected Answer

Just like other scenarios in this manual, this one has several dimensions and should be examined with a very practical mind. The priority is obviously to ensure the safety of all the students. The accident has already happened, and we must act quickly. Finding the root causes and establishing the responsibilities are important, but not a priority.

Dealing with an accident requires some basic steps. Those who are familiar with first aid would be at ease, but those who aren't can still use their common sense to propose solutions. Typically, the first step is to prevent more accidents. It should be done quickly, because we must provide

aid to Dara as soon as possible. The teacher should stop the activity immediately and give instructions to the other students to ensure that no one else will be injured. For instance, the students should be instructed to remain at their respective places and not gather randomly around Dara. A few of them should be ordered to pack any dangerous materials according to the rules, while the teacher or any competent person takes care of Dara.

While they are providing first aid to Dara, a reliable student should alert the appropriate people: security services (119) and the school principal. If it is necessary to call an ambulance, the student should provide the correct information: number and age of the victim, location, nature of the wound etc. If no ambulance is available, which is probably the case in a rural school, disposition should be made to send Dara to a hospital or a clinic as soon as possible. Time is of the essence.

The kind of first aid to be provided will depend on the training of the available rescuers. But the most urgent thing is to stop the hemorrhage and to calm Dara down.

When all the emergency actions have been taken, we can discuss the responsibilities and how we can avoid such accidents in the future.

The dedication of the teacher is not to be challenged. But he still holds some responsibility for the lack of precautionary measures. Negligence from a teacher's side is reprehensible and can lead to court actions. The responsibilities will be determined by an investigation. Depending on the gravity of the incident and on the possible reactions of Dara's family, the investigation will remain internal to the school or will involve the police. It might determine that Mr. Sophea has done his job. After all, Dara might have disobeyed direct instructions. Or it could lead to various forms of sanctions against the teacher, if it is proven that he has been negligent. In any case, the school has an obligation to investigate. And it should certainly lead to better rules in the chemistry laboratory.

At some point a technical team meeting is necessary to debrief the incident and make decisions for the future. The technical meeting is not the place for blaming, and it is not the responsibility of the colleagues to punish Sophea. It is to establish better procedures for the experiments in the classroom. The objective is of course to ensure a high level of security, while authorizing the experiments necessary for learning. It doesn't mean that we should remove all the cutting tools and all the dangerous reagents from the classroom. Overprotecting children is not a good measure to protect them in the long run. We must train people who are aware of the risks and know how to deal with them. Maintaining teenagers in the ignorance of the risks will just make them clumsier and unable to take action. What matters is to introduce them to the tools at the appropriate age and to teach them the appropriate procedures to mitigate the risks.

Among those procedures we could mention:

- Having more suitable equipment to perform the experiments. The knife was probably not the best possible tool to look inside a battery.
- Removing unnecessary equipment and organizing a clean working environment.



- Drilling the students better before doing experiments. Strong routines and discipline would have prevented the accident. In particular, students should not do anything before obtaining the green light from the teacher, as Dara has done.
- Cancelling the experiment if the students don't behave appropriately. Experiments can become a bargaining chip with the students to ensure discipline. Some students can be excluded from the experiment temporarily, for their own safety.
- Demonstrating the manipulations before letting the students do by themselves. The teacher should show how to cut the battery as safely as possible, if he has a proper method himself.
- Letting the teacher do the most dangerous manipulations by himself, instead of making the students do them. A student-centered pedagogy is not always the wisest one.
- Replacing the experiment with a safer one. It is important to work with a technical team to establish a good list of suitable activities that a teacher can choose from.

## Students in Love

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In Ms. Theory's high school, it is common for teenagers to have romantic relationships. Young couples kiss each other in the alleys and corridors of the school every day. They talk openly about the parties they hold during the weekend and of the sex and alcohol they have on those occasions. From time to time, cleaners discover used condoms in the bathrooms.

Usually, Ms. Theory, who is single and shy, turns a blind eye, when she witnesses "dirty" behaviors between boys and girls. But today, a smart girl in grade 11 asked her for help about a serious problem concerning a "friend", who apparently had had sex with a boy, and there was something particularly wrong with that case. Ms. Theory blushed and hesitated. Before the student could explain the case, she replied: "I'm not paid to solve that kind of problem."

### Expected Answer

The difficulty with this scenario is to be clear about one's own emotional situation before we can educate others. The risk here is to be caught off-guard by the actions and the speeches of students. Obviously, the fact that Ms. Theory is single makes it more difficult for her. She might lack the experience of dealing with such questions or might lack any sexual or romantic experience at all. This can put a teacher in a very uncomfortable position. However, it is something that all high school teachers should expect to happen from time to time and as trustful adults and educators, we have no right to avoid those questions. No matter what you say about morality, and how much you have tried to educate the teenagers under your responsibility, that sort of situation will happen.

Promiscuity between boys and girls can have very serious repercussions on their lives and it is certainly not a good thing to let them have sex at a young age, without at least some reasonable advice.

One aspect to consider is the apparent indirect situation. I'm saying apparent, because the student is talking about a friend. It is possible that she is indeed concerned about a friend, but it is also possible that she's trying a clumsy ruse to talk about herself. In the first case, some precautions should be taken to preserve the anonymity of the friend and her reputation. In the second case, the teacher should probably accept the fiction elaborated by the student. It is difficult to trust a teacher with such matters. The teacher should facilitate the student's speech and treat her with kindness. Maybe in the future she will open her heart further.

In this situation, the first step is to clarify what the student means by "something terribly wrong". Are we talking about unwanted pregnancy, about Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD), about some kind of pornographic recording, or bad rumors that are spreading about her? Obviously, the educational response will not be the same in all cases.

A good second step is to verify the existence of the problem. A girl might be afraid because her periods come a little late. It is wise to do a few tests and check whether there is a pregnancy at all or if it is just a false alarm. That verification can be done discreetly. The teacher can explain how to make basic tests and recommend a discreet doctor before they even inform the parents. If the tests are negative, the whole story will serve as a warning for the girl, without unnecessary drama. If the tests are positive, there will be harder decisions to make. In that case, it would be wise to encourage the student to talk about the boy. After all, she didn't make the "mistake" alone. It might be wise to inform him and make him a part of the solution. It is not always obvious, though. The personality of the partner might be the "terribly wrong" part of the problem. But unless there is a big physical or reputational risk, he has a right to be informed. That right is absolute in the case of STD, because he needs to protect himself and other sexual partners he might have.

Generally speaking, it is reasonable to advise the student to talk to her parents. After all, most parents know what it means to be young, have desires, and even have prewedding intercourse. They might show more understanding than expected. However, in some communities where familial honor is very strict, and religious values very rigid, it can put the girl in danger. When they tell girls not to have sex before marriage, there is a huge difference between those who simply want to protect them from unwanted consequences, and those who want to protect the family's reputation, or worse, who make it an absolute precept, without considering that people are fallible. It is essential that the teacher discusses the situation with the student, for instance by asking a few questions about similar cases within the girl's family or community. Another thing to consider is that the student will probably need help from her family for any solution to her problem. If support cannot be provided by the family, it should be provided by someone else.

Another difficulty for Ms. Theary, once she has managed to control her own emotions and to analyze the situation, is to send an appropriate message. A very strict interdiction of any romantic relationship might make the situation even worse, especially if bad habits have already been adopted in the community and if parental guidance is weak. Making the teenage adventures more clandestine can make them more dangerous as well. The difficulty here is to find a common

moral ground that can be accepted by most of the educators in the community, if not all. Some advice can put the teacher in conflict with the parents of the girl, especially if she has not dared to speak with them and has preferred the teacher as a privileged interlocutor. Obviously, Mrs. Theary should not betray the student's trust, but she doesn't want to betray the parents either, by giving advice that contradict their moral values too much. There is a difficult balance to find. It might not be possible to avoid all the conflicts.

Besides, being in love is not wrong per se, quite the opposite. Sexual morale is not meant to say that sex is bad or dirty by itself, but to acknowledge the fact that it can have terrible psychological, social, and material consequences if it is not lived in the proper way. It's because sex is important and beautiful that we cannot do everything with it. Young men and ladies should be advised to wait for the right conditions to happen and to prepare themselves to assume the consequences of their sexual life. This is not only about preventing STDs or avoiding unwanted pregnancy. Sexual education should not be limited to the use of condoms and contraceptive pills. This would be a purely negative way to talk about sex and would leave little solution in case something unexpected happened. When a teenage girl is pregnant it is not helpful to tell her: "I had warned you!" It is simply counterproductive to blame someone who is already facing the natural consequences of her actions. And it is brutal to present abortion as the only option. What action, what kind of support will open the brightest future? In a crisis, there are always more options than one might think of.

### Comments on the Case

Obviously, a case like this has a lot of ramifications and we cannot expect the candidates to explore all of them in just one hour. In reality, solving such a problem could take many days or weeks, and could involve a lot of people. It is recommended to frame the problem with a few hypotheses.

This scenario is a little bit controversial, especially when it comes to the possibility of abortion and the issue of unwanted pregnancy. But we cannot avoid controversy all the time, no more than educators can avoid dilemmas. Usually, controversies happen when a topic really matters. How could a candidate navigate through a controversy without compromising his chances of passing an examination? It isn't useful to guess what the examiner believes and defend fake opinions to flatter him. There would be a huge probability of making wrong assumptions, and a hypocritical argumentation would be lame anyways. We don't expect candidates to agree with us all the time. What we expect is to find decent, rational, and honest interlocutors, people to whom we can say: "I disagree with you, but you are intelligent, and we can discuss." It implies that your response is somewhat balanced and considers all the facts, without cherry-picking the ones that favor your point of view. All your arguments, even if they might be wrong, should be proposed in good faith. You must understand the complexity of the problem and support your point of view with the best arguments at your disposal.

This case is a good example to demonstrate the limits of a discussion in good faith. Suggesting illegal actions would not be acceptable, for instance proposing late-term abortion, forcing a girl to get an abortion against her will, or hiding the existence of the laws that authorize abortion. A lot of opinions can be expressed, even strong ones, as long as you understand the difficulties for the people involved and keep your criticism constructive. A traditionalist pro-life candidate should not just say that the girl must assume the consequences of her mistakes. Even though there are good reasons to warn against premarital sex, the teenage mother needs help, real concrete help, not scorn, if she wants to keep the baby in good conditions and ensure a happy future for both of them. A pro-choice candidate should not just throw in abortion casually as an easy solution and neglect the dilemmas and doubts that the girl is facing, with a risk of long-term regrets if becoming a mother is one of her aspirations. I personally believe that abortion is inherently wrong as it kills an innocent human being. But I cannot ignore the extreme distress that some women face with unwanted pregnancy, and there might be terrible situations in which it is a lesser evil. It is that kind of nuance that will make opposing opinions acceptable in an essay question and grant you success at the examination, rather than trying to figure out the “right” answer that will please the examiner. The examiners will test your thought process and your skills at analyzing a problem, rather than your final solution.

## Conflict between Teachers

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Mr. Maneth and Mrs. Phally have very different views about pedagogy and very different teaching styles. They don't talk much to each other in the teachers' room, and it is known that they have had strong arguments in the past. Mr. Maneth is a very caring teacher, who praises and encourages his students all the time. Mrs. Phally is more traditional.

Nika is a grade 9 student, very nice and very serious. But she feels very bad this year in the Khmer literature course of Mrs. Phally. Her first monthly test has been catastrophic, and her parents have requested a meeting with Mrs. Phally. “We don't understand. Last year, with Mr. Maneth, she had very good marks. This year, Nika works twice as hard and barely manages to get a passing score.” Mrs. Phally raises her eyebrows and comments dismissively: “Ah! Of course! Mr. Maneth!”

### Expected Answer

There are several dimensions to this story. The first one is how we handle conflicts between teachers. The second one concerns pedagogical approaches and pedagogical freedom. The third one is how you deal with the difficulties of the students.

Regardless of who might be right or wrong, it is unacceptable to behave like Mrs. Phally and undermine the work and the reputation of a colleague with insinuations. With such a behavior she is making their respective work more difficult, because it undermines both the authority of Mr. Maneth and her own credibility. It is sending the message that students should not listen to him. The fact that she does it privately at a teacher-parent conference doesn't change much to

the problem. People talk a lot in a school community, and they are even more prone to gossip when they don't really understand what is at stake. A damaged reputation can be extremely difficult to restore.

Teachers' feuds are also detrimental to the students who are caught in between. Children need consistency. Obviously, Nika doesn't understand the expectations of her teachers, and what she needs to do. At the very least, she should feel confident following the instructions of a teacher without fearing to do wrong. Saying that each teacher has its own requirements and that those requirements must be followed is the easiest way to deal with the problem, as a first step. Of course, it would be even better if the teachers of the same subject could agree on rating scales and basic expectations. This is especially true when they want to implement strict writing conventions. That's why teachers are encouraged to attend regular PLC meetings. Normally each subject has a technical team leader whose role is to facilitate discussions and avoid the kind of situation we see in this scenario.

Different teaching styles are possible, or even necessary, since all teachers are different and even small differences can be significant. It is also a good thing for the students to be confronted with a manageable level of diversity and to learn to adapt. The acquisition of autonomy and critical thinking is a major objective of any sound education, and it is fostered by the experience of diverse points of view. The exact margin of variation that students can handle is to be determined by trial and error. Usually, younger students require more rules and routines, even for very small things such as the way to underline titles and present information on a notebook page, while older students are more autonomous and can adjust better. Again, critical thinking requires that any criticism is demonstrated in a constructive way. Teachers can disagree, even debate, in front of the students, as long as it doesn't concern the students' duties and as long as it is done in the most polite and respectful manner.

At a deeper level, each teaching approach comes with its drawbacks and advantages. One should not judge too fast one way or another. A good mentor should avoid taking sides unnecessarily. In fact, the scenario isn't specific enough to make us judge the respective value of Mrs. Phally's and Mr. Maneth's methods. One could only speculate. It might be that Mr. Maneth is too lax, since his students don't seem to perform well with another teacher. But there is no certainty at this point. Maybe the performance of Nika is not that bad, or not even worse than the performance of Mrs. Phally's students. Some teachers give too much importance to very formal details, without considering the overall intelligence of the reflection papers, thus giving underserved bad marks to students who are not familiar with their codes. A mentor or an external player should be very cautious and check the work of the student by himself.

Mrs. Phally's response to the bad marks of the student is also questionable. It might be necessary to tell the hard truth to students and their parents. But the manner is important. It is important to be tactful and to give them some hope. Pointing a problem without offering a solution is not very pedagogical. At least the teacher should provide some clues. In fact, Mrs. Phally could have provided the clues with comforting words to Nika herself, in the classroom, long before the

parents asked for an appointment. To improve the feedback, we could start with the way the copy is annotated, mentioning good and bad points, using some ideas of the student as a starting point to suggest some improvement etc. In the classroom, she could give time to the students to examine their mistakes and ask questions. She can even request a second draft of their work to give them an opportunity to finish on a success (and to learn from the revision process). There are many ways to turn the mistakes of Nika into a learning experience. Candidates can elaborate on this with their own tips and habits.

### Comments on the Case

Some candidates might be tempted to make an argument for modern vs traditional pedagogy, or vice-versa. It is difficult for an educator to find his way between the numerous pedagogical doctrines that are promoted in the political and mediatic arenas. Debates on education are fierce and most of the time sterile.

School leaders would be wise to express a balanced and reasonable opinion when confronted to those debates. It is not so much saying that everybody is a little wrong or right. But it is important to acknowledge that every method is a trade-off between various constraints and objectives. It is rarely fruitful to say that one is the best, as they are rarely comparable. It is better to say that one is more relevant or suitable in a specific situation.

Constructivists approaches are supposed to foster intelligence more than traditional methods, and to favor deeper learning. But they can be very weak in terms of content knowledge, if teachers are not careful to provide some solid input of information before letting the students discuss ideas or prepare a project. Constructivist approaches are generally time-consuming and can bring interesting but unexpected ideas, which can be detrimental if we are building basic knowledge. Traditional approaches are generally easier to implement with less risk of total failure. A lecture followed by pen and paper exercises might create a boring routine but can be the fastest way to train students with basic skills. Of course, the question is much more complicated than the crude description I've just made. But it is essential for the candidates to consider the complexity of the question.

Besides, we don't know for sure what the respective teaching styles of Mr. Maneth and Mrs. Phally are in the scenario. Traditional is a very ambiguous appellation. And caring is not a method, more like a behavior. They are not necessarily in contradiction with each other. One can be simultaneously caring and traditional. But common perceptions on the students' side tend to create that sort of opposition. And a teacher can be modern in certain aspects and very traditional in others. We cannot just assume that one is necessarily the best without a proper assessment of the practices.

## Student Participation

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Mr. Phirun is an English teacher. He loves his subject and is very dedicated to his job, often bringing extra material to the classroom, such as articles and pictures he has collected on the Internet. Unfortunately, his students don't repay him with the same enthusiasm. They seem apathetic during the lessons, especially during the oral activities.

This morning, Mr. Phirun had very good pictures to show to the class and he tried his best to smile and look engaging. He showed a picture of various objects and asked all the students what we call them in English. The expected answer was "weapons". Unfortunately, nobody even raises their hand to answer. Mr. Phirun tried to encourage them for maybe five minutes, telling them not to be shy, but still, they remained desperately silent.

Discouraged, Mr. Phirun told his students to open their book page 36 and to do an exercise in writing. Mr. Phirun is doing fewer and fewer oral activities.

### Expected Answer

The general setting of the oral activities seems very standard. The teacher asks questions to all the students and expects volunteers to raise their hands and participate spontaneously. In spite of its banality, that setting is flawed. Even if you are not familiar with the didactics of English, you can remember how that sort of lessons looked like when you were a student yourself. Only one student at a time answers the questions of the teacher. Which means that a very small proportion of the students get the opportunity to participate in the discussion. There is a very strong competition for speech turn. Usually, the number of active students is no more than four or five. If this is a routine, most of the children get used to remaining passive in class and don't even try to participate. Eventually, motivation for the subject is lost and it becomes increasingly difficult to reignite. A better approach for oral activities would be collaborative learning or discussion in pairs. At least, this would increase the number of students who can speak at any given time. If there are 30 students in the class, there could be 15 conversations happening simultaneously. That's 15 times more efficient than the current setting. Of course, it is not easy to implement, and there are some trade-offs. But it is clearly worth trying.

The main trade-off is that it becomes a little more difficult to check the quality of the students' speech. Some teachers are afraid of group work because they feel that they are losing control. But if we consider that Mr. Phirun is constantly lowering his expectations because of the low participation, it is still better than the alternative. Besides, there are solutions to assess speaking skills. He could tell students to practice autonomously, and then pick one or two pairs as a sample to repeat the oral activity in front of everybody and ensure that they are on track. Of course, Mr. Phirun can also monitor the class and circulate in the room, just like he would do with writing activities.

Mr. Phirun's problem is aggravated by a poor choice of prompt material and questions. The pictures can look good but are not relevant. We could argue that not all the students will share Mr. Phirun's interest in weapons. But it isn't the point. After all, we will face the same problem with any topic that we choose. Not everybody shares the same interests. And it is not obvious whether we should favor daily life and risk to be boring, or if we should favor more exotic topics with the risk of being irrelevant. Let's just say that a good teacher will vary the topics and avoid anything that will resemble an obsession.

Most importantly, the question was poorly asked. It requested the students to make a wild guess about what was in the teacher's mind. It is difficult to find the proper term for a broad category, like weapons. Either one student already knows the answer, and that is pretty much the end of it. Or the entire class will remain silent. There is almost nothing to discuss and very little information (one word) that the students can provide. It would have been much more interesting to reverse the exercise: mention the category (weapons) and ask the students to provide examples. There is a reasonable chance that some of the students know a few words from video games or movies. And we can expect that different students will be able to provide different examples, thus, sharing knowledge with each other.

Mr. Phirun is wasting his time, he has probably spent some significant effort on the Internet to find a suitable image, to print it and so on. And at the end, the poster is just a lousy pretext to start an activity that does not really require it and fails to kick off. In fact, that starting point is simply not strong enough to trigger the interest of the students. There must be enough content and ambition to keep everybody on board. For the group work that we have suggested above, it is essential that the activity is rich enough for several participants and several minutes of discussion. A good way to ensure a sufficient content would be, for instance, to provide a vocabulary list from the beginning, and let the students prepare the role-play by themselves, using the list as scaffolding. Or if we want to stick to vocabulary for the current session, we can provide the students with a deck of flashcards and make them practice in pairs. We cannot expect students to memorize too many new words in a lesson, but it is possible to introduce 5 to 10 words in addition to the words that they already have in their decks. It takes a few minutes a day to learn the new words and practice the previous ones. The preparation time would not be much bigger than for Mr. Phirun's poster, but the children would get much more from his material. By the way, he could even let the students make their own flashcards. With some practice, it doesn't take more time than writing the same lesson in a notebook.

### Comments on the Case

This scenario illustrates the difficulty of implementing the teaching methodology that we learn at Teacher Training Institutions.

The main mistake with this scenario would be to propose motivational techniques without considering the available information. There are many ways to motivate students, one could even



argue that children are naturally curious. But there are also many ways to destroy their motivation. Sometimes, it is more effective to look at the mistakes rather than promoting a specific method, because we need to ensure that the method is relevant in a specific situation for specific objectives. Bringing additional material to the classroom is a good idea, in theory. But in practice, it might not be as effective as we expect. If we propose to replace those documents with, let's say, educational games, we might face the same problem.

An effective solution depends on a pertinent diagnosis of the situation. Mr. Phirun has made a few obvious mistakes that have a considerable impact. Hopefully, those mistakes can be rectified.

## Out-of-Field Teacher

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Hong is a contract teacher in Mundolkiri. He has already finished three years of mathematics at the university, but because he is poor, he has signed a contract to work in a rural school of the province before obtaining his teacher certificate.

That school is dramatically understaffed and has more than 50 students per class. Furthermore, the school principal couldn't find qualified teachers for every subject. In addition to mathematics, Hong has accepted to provide physics and English lessons, assuring the school principal that "it should be OK". After a week or two, students start to complain that Hong cannot speak English and has punished them for asking questions.

### Expected Answer

Being ignorant is not the same as being incompetent. Students can perfectly understand that their teacher doesn't know everything. What is problematic is his attempt to hide his ignorance.

By being more honest with the school principal, he would have avoided a lot of suffering for himself and for his students. The school principal would have tried another distribution of the subjects. After all, they do need each other. Employers are ready to make concessions and adapt to the candidates' skills to some extent when it is necessary to ensure a service. If he is ready to employ out-of-field teachers, he is probably ready to be flexible on many things. Maybe, it could have been a part-time job, or a compact schedule.

It is important to understand what can lead someone to make such bad decisions. It is clear that Mr. Hong lacks money and might be desperate about getting the job. And the school principal might be desperate about finding a teacher. But obtaining a job that we cannot do properly is never a good idea. Eventually, it will damage a career more seriously than a frank rebuttal. It is also a waste of time, of course. Mr. Hong could have spent that time more productively. It is also a major blow to one's reputation and undermines further attempts at finding new positions. Finally, being an impostor undermines one's personal growth.

However, we should not lose all hope. After all, it's the first professional experience of Mr. Hong. And people make that sort of mistake at the beginning of their career. The school principal should

also be humble in this affair. He is the one who put pressure on Mr. Hong into accepting excessive responsibilities. It is good for him to accept his share in the mistake. This humble approach could open room for further collaboration on a better basis. No matter what decision the school director will make, it is charitable to present it as a learning opportunity for Mr. Hong and have some words about his future. If he keeps Mr. Hong on the payroll, it will be under conditions. If he decides to terminate the contract, it could be done without excessive blame and with some advice for future job applications. In any case, the problem should be addressed with energy as fast as possible, and more importantly as frankly as possible before a young person's mistake turns into a bad habit. Employers don't show the same mansuetude toward a middle-aged worker.

If the director decides to keep Mr. Hong, he must create the conditions for success. In particular, it is necessary to provide Mr. Hong with additional training and support. It is also the principal's responsibility to make sure that Mr. Hong can access appropriate teaching materials. The most important thing, of course, is to reorganize his schedule, and revise his contract to match his real competences.

As a side note, we could also comment on the fact that Mr. Hong has punished students for asking questions. The scenario doesn't provide the verbatim of the incident. Therefore, there is a small possibility that the students tried to frame their teacher and to humiliate him, showing a lack of respect. However, it is much more likely that Mr. Hong just tried to hide his lack of knowledge by refusing to answer questions. It is a very common reaction in that sort of situation. In that case, it doesn't play in favor of the teacher, and gives the impression that his incompetence is very serious. Most teachers are afraid of the questions of their students at some point. There are questions that we are unable to answer. It is normal. A competent teacher would admit it simply. If it doesn't happen too often, students appreciate that sort of honesty, and it adds credibility to whatever else the teacher says. To make the best of a challenging question, the teacher can also promise to search for the answer, if it exists and to provide it during the next lesson.

### Common mistakes

From the candidate's point of view, a likely mistake would be to blame only one side in this incident, either the teacher, who wasn't competent enough, or the school principal, who put him in a difficult situation.

The second mistake would be to fail to propose concrete solutions to the problem at hand. Different options should be examined, because the response of the school is not obvious at all. In real life, a school principal would think carefully before terminating the contract or deciding to keep the teacher. On one hand, the situation is not satisfactory and maybe the damage on the teacher's reputation is too big to expect smooth lessons in that school anymore, even in the subject he's competent for. On the other hand, the school still needs teachers, and Mr. Hong still needs a job. In other places, where job opportunities are not that scarce and where competent personnel are more available, it would probably be a good option to just cancel the contract by

mutual agreement so that both the school and the teacher can resume their respective projects on a better ground. But if the circumstances were better, the problem wouldn't have happened in the first place. Another option is to consider that both the teacher and the school principal have made mistakes and that they can meet halfway. To summarize, a good analysis of a case like this starts with a good understanding of the underlying constraints. Not just the incident, but the problem that caused the incident in the first place and that still needs to be solved.

## They didn't read the book!

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Three months ago, Mrs. Lika told her grade 8 students to read a book for the Khmer literature course. Today is the deadline. As she wants to study the first extract, she finds out that half of the students don't understand what she is talking about. They can't even tell the names of the main characters. Obviously, they haven't read the book. They start complaining that the book is too difficult and provide all sorts of lousy excuses. The book was not available. It was too expensive. They told their parents too late. The other half of the class are able to answer some questions, but it is clear that Mrs. Lika will not be able to do her lesson with only half of the class. She starts to sweat and to stutter, because all her lesson planning is compromised, and she doesn't know what to do for this session. She feels even worse when she thinks of all the time she has spent during the last few weeks preparing for it.

### Expected Answer

Homework is a recurrent problem at school and creates headaches for many teachers. It might sound reasonable to blame students when they don't do it. However, when a majority of them is concerned, we can assume that the fault is not only on their side and that the teacher has made some mistakes. In this case, it is not difficult to spot some of those mistakes, even though the candidates will have to make a few hypotheses about Mrs. Lika's work.

The first mistake is to give too much time to the students. Three months is much more than the students need to read a book. They are very likely to wait for the last minute and to forget. If they start reading immediately, which is very unlikely, they will have forgotten the story before Mrs. Lika starts her lesson. All in all, it is a bad decision on her side. We are not exonerating the students from all responsibility in this affair. Some of them did the assignment, which proves that it was doable. But we need to remember that they are still children and that they should not be expected to handle long-term projects effectively. By the way, a lot of adults would be unable to plan their work for three months. It seems that Mrs. Lika didn't plan enough reminders to help them organize their work. At the very least, she should establish a few milestones during the process. For instance, she should set a deadline for acquiring the book and check if they have done it. She could set another deadline for reading the first chapters, if the book is long. She could also request the students to take notes or to answer simple questions that would force them to pay attention to what they are reading. By thinking about those basic steps, she would have understood that the students don't need as much as three months to read the book. Maybe

they need one week to find the book, two weeks to read it, and one to write an assignment. And that's generous.

Now let's examine the complaints of the students and let's see if there might be other things that Mrs. Lika can improve. The first thing is the availability of the book. It is not an obvious one. Children tend to wait for the last minute before they ask their parents to buy or to borrow the book. We cannot take the students' statement at face value. However, it happens that sometimes a book is in reprint and is not currently available in the bookshop. Good teachers go to the main bookshop in the town to check with the sellers if the book is available, especially if they want a specific edition. This simple precaution avoids a lot of problems. Sellers also appreciate it a lot, because they can anticipate their orders and are assured to sell many copies. It is good for their business. Good salespeople keep in touch with the schools in their vicinity and are able to meet the demand.

The price of the book can be a real problem. But money is not a question to discuss with the children directly. It is a question for the parents. Mrs. Lika should work with the school principal to establish a proper communication channel for that sort of question.

Then, there is the problem of the difficulty. Deciding where to put the bar is not easy for a teacher. We don't know the level of the class, and we don't know how disparate the abilities of the children are. However, the teacher should have some idea about it before she chooses the book. It is a very difficult problem in Cambodia, since a lot of students don't have the basic reading skills that would be expected in secondary school. The root causes of the problem are complex and talking about them would exceed the scope of this case study, maybe even exceed the capacity of the school. It is not surprising that many students leave primary school without knowing how to read, if we consider that there are overcrowded classes with more than 60 students or that many schools must organize morning and afternoon shifts because of a lack of teachers. Anyway, a Khmer teacher like Mrs. Lika should not ignore the problem. Nobody expects her to solve all the deep problems that started with her grade 1 colleagues. But we could expect her to take the level of her students into account and adapt her lesson accordingly.

If she doesn't want to sacrifice the quality of her lesson too much, there are different sorts of scaffolding that she can try to make them read harder books. A good practice is to introduce the book and provide key information about the story to get them started. For instance, she can explain a few things about the historical context that is necessary to understand it. Or she can introduce the main characters and their relationships, so that the students know who is who when they start reading. Such an explanation does not need to be long. It can be done in thirty minutes. In general, it is good to provide some explanation before major assignments and to answer a few questions.

There is another big problem with planning. Teachers should have backup plans. Of course, with proper checking, as we have explained above, she wouldn't need the backup plan. But there are many activities that depend on specific material or on the students' homework. And it is always

a good idea to have something in store for unexpected events. Even if everything is well organized, it might happen that a lot of students are absent one day and that the teacher does not want to waste her big activity with a half-class. In that case, she needs to give something to do to the remaining half-class. It is better to propose some educational activities, rather than just filling the blanks with random games or exercises. For instance, in Khmer, short writing activities are easy to improvise: a simple story, the description of some well-known place etc.

Finally, teachers should consider how much time they allocate to their lesson preparation. What makes Mrs. Lika's situation frustrating is the enormous amount of time that she has invested in the preparation of the failed lesson. By thinking more about the student activities rather than the content of the lesson, she can reduce her preparation time significantly. In effect, teachers can make students work and learn for a long time with relatively simple instructions. By pinpointing what information to look for in the book, she can make the students work by themselves and learn a lot about it, without spending too much time writing her own commentary. Mentoring support can help immensely to develop that sort of teaching strategy and optimize preparation time.

## Pornography

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Mr. Vannak is a good ICT teacher who can do amazing things with a computer. His school has the reputation of being modern and has been equipped with a brand-new ICT lab.

Lately, there have been some problems with a few computers that were infected with viruses. At first, Mr. Dara couldn't identify the cause of the problem. But this morning an embarrassing incident provided the explanation. A group of five boys were caught watching pornography during a lesson. They were sitting together at the most remote working station and it's their laughter that drove the attention of the teacher. Mr. Vannak blushed when he saw the pictures of naked women. Instead of apologizing, the five boys laughed even louder, calling the teacher a "virgin", which happened to be true.

Mr. Vannak got angry at them and screamed with a high-pitched voice. The entire class became uncontrollable.

After the incident a small group of girls asked to meet the school principal and complained about the boys' behavior and the inaction of the teachers (not only Mr. Vannak).

### Expected Answer

Just like other scenarios about sexuality, this one affects the teacher's own emotions. It is not just about solving the problem intellectually. A teacher should be prepared emotionally and morally for that sort of situation. Young teachers should prepare their mind and heart because it will happen at some point. The behavior of the five boys is inexcusable. Let's be clear about that.

They know it and their laughs are a clear sign of it. They are perfectly aware that they are transgressing many rules. Educators should not tolerate it. But they should understand that problems happen and that they must treat them as normal nuisances that are part of their educational role. In fact, educating young males about their sexual behavior might be more important than any lesson in the curriculum, be it a mathematic lesson or an ICT one. Sometimes, teachers must shift their priorities to teach wisdom. If it doesn't happen too often, it should not be a problem for the implementation of the curriculum. Taking ten minutes or even one hour for that is not a waste of time. Anyway, leaving the problem unsolved would create more turmoil and waste even more time, as we can clearly see from the outcome of the scenario. There is nothing wrong with the personal life of Mr. Vannak. It puts him in a difficult position because he has no answer for the students. In fact, he doesn't even need to defend himself. But he has to enforce the rules of the school and morality in general.

So, what sort of response should educators provide to dirty sexual behavior or speech? Sex is a serious matter, and a beautiful one, that deserves respect. Sex brings people their greatest joys or their worst fears, depending on how it is lived. There is a natural curiosity for sex among teenagers. And it is not surprising that they feel the urge to see naked women or sexual intercourse. But mature men don't need to resort to pornography and will not be satisfied with that deformed vision of sexuality. Pornography can also be very degrading, especially for women. And the boys should show more respect to the girls, who are just like their mothers and sisters.

How should it be handled from a disciplinary point of view? As for other sorts of incidents, coldly, calmly, and firmly. The authority of the teacher will be much safer if he manages to keep control of his nerves and presents the problem as something that doesn't impress him at all. The first step is to confirm what the boys have done, and to make them close the litigious website. It's their obedience, or lack of, that will determine the next course of action. If they show clear signs that they understand their mistake, and are ashamed of their behavior, a good private lecture at the end of the lesson might be enough. It is good to reinforce it with a symbolic punishment that they can do discreetly, to make clear that we are serious, for instance writing a short reflection paper about what they have done or about the respect that girls deserve. If they are not compliant enough, their behavior should be notified to the school principal and to their parents for further education. Stronger punishments such as detention can be considered, depending on what is applicable in the school.

Besides that, there are a few issues related to Mr. Vannak's work as a teacher and as an ICT specialist. As a teacher he could probably improve the way he gives instructions and monitor the class to avoid unwanted student activities. A proper seat arrangement would make it easier to monitor the student work. In a well-organized ICT room, the computers are placed so that the teacher can look at the screens easily. Typically, the students face the rim of the room or sit around a central island. The teacher can move around them and know what they are doing pretty much all the time. It is not only a disciplinary trick, but also a way to provide scaffolding and help whoever needs it.

He should also consider clearer objectives for the students and strong activities that don't give too much room for distraction. Students who know clearly what they have to do simply don't have the wish and the opportunity to misbehave. This is easier to say than to do, of course, but tidy lesson plans solve a lot of discipline problems.

The composition of the groups is also something to consider. From the testimony of the girls, we can deduce that the five boys are known for being disruptive. Why are they working together on the same computer? If the teacher is aware of their bad habits, it's inviting troubles. Teachers have a powerful leverage when they assign students to groups. Several strategies can be proposed, but letting students choose by themselves is doable only when the class is calm, and the students are already well-disciplined. Teachers can prepare the seat arrangements in advance.

As an ICT specialist, Mr. Vannak should have taken some precautions to prevent access to unwanted websites. He should be able to install parental control tools. Of course, this severely restricts the navigation possibilities for ICT activities, but well-prepared lessons don't require unrestricted Internet access, since they are focused on specific activities and topics in the first place.

## No Punishment

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Mr. Makara is a new principal at Hun Sen secondary school. He is full of advanced ideas and proposes to run the school without punishments.

The school is an ordinary suburban establishment with students of various economic backgrounds. It has average results at the examinations and has its normal share of problems. The DOE would describe it as pretty much unnoticeable.

One week after the new term a few old-school teachers have requested a meeting and threaten to stop their work if the new policy is not repelled. They have already discussed the issue with many stakeholders and parents are starting to call the office for explanations.

### Expected Answer

Usually, radical pedagogical ideas do not end well, even if they are well-intentioned. It might be because of a logical flaw, because people reject them, or because some conditions are not met. The scenario does not provide a lot of details about Mr. Makara's project. Therefore, the candidates will need to make some hypotheses, without jumping to the conclusions. For instance, we do not know if Mr. Makara has proposed some strategies to replace punishments or if he's just counting on people's kindness. We don't know how he has explained his project to the various stakeholders or failed to do so. What is clear, however, is that Mr. Makara did not obtain the consensus he needed to implement his ideas, or if he had, it was not sincere enough. There is a possibility that the teachers didn't dare to protest during the first meeting when he presented his plan. People don't always know how to react to unexpected ideas, especially when those

ideas seem totally stupid or foreign. The teachers are not betraying Mr. Makara. We cannot really say they are changing their mind. They were probably not able to express their opinions in the first place. The relatively short delay between the beginning of the term and the first protests from the teachers corresponds to the time people need to understand what is at stake and to discuss among themselves. Introducing a radical change in a school requires some serious preparation and a reflection period that Mr. Makara didn't consider. He should have introduced the project as a topic for discussion first and should have given enough time to the teachers to reflect on its advantages and more importantly on its feasibility. Maybe someone would have been able to propose a more balanced approach that would have satisfied everybody.

The intention to reduce educational violence is laudable. And we probably don't want to revert to a harsh system with corporal punishment. By the way, corporal punishment is forbidden by law and is more and more looked upon by society. For sure, the teachers have long-lasting traditions, and the new principal doesn't have the authority to change his team of educators. He must convince them if he wants to make any changes at all, let alone something as big as the disciplinary strategy. But we can assume that most teachers are of goodwill and prefer to teach rather than spending most of their time acting as policemen. It's a matter of feasibility rather than a question of objectives. If there is a credible possibility to reduce violence and punishments, they will accept it.

That generous objective does not suppress the need to ensure order in the classroom or teaching will become impossible. Some of the conditions for reducing the need for punishments are not met at that school. One factor to consider is that the school must accommodate a diverse audience and does not have the right to select its students. Therefore, it must accept children who do not demonstrate the expected behavior. Incidents must be anticipated. Similarly, the school cannot shape student behavior from a very young age. It's a secondary school. The students come with their own habits, and those habits are already quite strong. We are not just talking about politeness and the general manners that are taught by the families, but also about school habits. The students have some expectations about how a teacher should behave, and they might condition their respect for the teachers to the severity of those teachers.

Very few people will believe in the possibility of eliminating violence. They will be happy enough to reduce it and make the school's climate more peaceful. The possibility of punishment should be preserved, even if we intend to make it as low as possible. Some will argue that it is a matter of deterrence, but more importantly, it's a matter of last resort: having a solution, just in case. One cannot exclude that at some point a child who doesn't fit at all must be expelled from school. In case of drug abuse, violence or bullying, we have a duty to protect his classmates. And that duty takes precedence over his right to an education.

Having said so, let's examine some strategies to reduce institutional violence while preserving a decent level of order that is necessary for the lessons to happen. Reducing the need for punishment implies at least two aspects. The first one is to reduce the opportunities for misbehavior, the second one is to replace them with good habits. Idleness is the major reason



for misbehavior. Teachers can be trained to keep momentum in their lesson, and to make that most, if not all, of the students are engaged in classroom activities. Although there is no classroom setting that makes all the students actively engaged all the time, a good combination of individual work, collaborative learning and pair work will maximize the chances. Choosing between the options depends on the kind of activities. Another aspect of occupational strategies is to limit the time allocated to each activity. Finishing the activities before they become boring is pretty much always a good idea. The last one is to provide enough scaffolding to make sure that nobody is out of the game. Scaffolding and monitoring go together quite naturally.

Routines are important strategies to keep students in line and replace bad habits with good ones. They establish a good climate from the beginning. A teacher who has good greeting rites is more likely to start his lesson clearly and to put his students in the correct mindset from the beginning. It is also very useful to have routines to recall the attention of the students. It is normal that student attention plummets at some point during a lesson. There is no need to make it a drama. It takes 30 seconds with a correct procedure to reset the lesson and change activities. What matters is to stop an activity cleanly before starting a new one. Clapping hands or using a conventional phrase are enough. If the teacher says “are you ready?”, the students respond “yes, teacher” and stop anything they are doing without question. No need to blame anyone. A similar procedure can be established just to reduce noise, in case of collaborative learning for instance. Rehearsing the procedure a few times makes it clear and effective. Teachers can establish maybe 4 or 5 similar procedures to deal with daily classroom issues: toilet discipline, establishing work groups, distributing learning materials, choosing respondents for an exercise etc. It does not take much to cover most of the potential incidents and ensures a relatively smooth lesson.

Having taken those precautions, unpredictable incidents should be rare enough. It becomes relatively easy to solve them by classical means: after-class discussions, teacher-parent conferences, sending the disruptive child to the principal’s office etc.

### Comments on the Case

This case allows the candidates to share their tips and teaching habits. The only difficulty is to put them into perspective and link them with the initial scenario.

Another difficulty is to avoid sterile opposition, permissive vs tyrannical education. Instead of thinking in terms of bad and good, it is generally better to think in terms of constraints and objectives. Find a reasonable objective that people can share and think about the obstacles that must be lifted.

Another good way of thinking is to apply the Hanlon razor. Even if some people have bad intentions, it’s almost always a good bet to assume that they want to do good. It is simply more constructive.

## Peer Support

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Dara is a troublesome student, who has just arrived at the school. He is already 14 years old but is still in grade 7. In March he was expelled from his previous school and the school director issued some warnings to his new teachers. Mrs. Vuochnea, however, finds that he is not that bad and wants to give him another chance. She has asked the smartest student in the class, a short and active girl named Lyly to pair with Dara and help him with his Khmer lessons. She hopes that it will facilitate Dara's integration in his new learning environment. After a long discussion, Lyly agrees to try.

### Expected Answer

This scenario is a typical example of a nice and generous idea that can go terribly wrong. This is not to say that it will necessarily fail. But Mrs. Vuochnea should be ready to change her strategy in case it does.

Several factors are worrying in the scenario. It is not a good sign that the teacher needed a long discussion to convince the little girl. Her demand is putting a lot of pressure on Lyly. Mrs. Vuochnea should remember that she is still just a child, despite her cleverness. Peer support should be voluntary, if we want it to be effective and profitable to both students. Also, we don't know if Dara is happy with the plan.

Dara is a boy, much older and stronger than the poor Lyly. He probably has other aspirations than hers. One can expect that he is no longer a child and is facing all the desires, troubles, and uncertainties that adolescents face. Dara might also resent being treated like that and take revenge on that humiliating little girl who is better at school than himself. A better match for peer support could be for instance an older boy who has struggled before managing to improve. In any case, someone who is strong minded in order to resist any potential problem.

It would be prudent to check the nature of the misbehavior that Dara committed in his previous school. Being expelled from a school is very serious and usually it doesn't happen by chance. The project could put Lyly in danger, morally, physically, or at least emotionally. It is absolutely essential that Mrs. Vuochnea checks on Lyly regularly and assures her that she can pull back at any time. If the little girl feels obliged to follow her teacher's orders, she might not dare to tell her that something is wrong.

There is, of course, a possibility that things will be good. After all, if he is protective, he can be like a big brother for Lyly. But that's a best-case scenario that is not very likely to happen.

Even after all the precautions have been taken to prevent a catastrophe, there are still a few things to consider in order to make peer-support efficient. Peer tutoring is not easy, even between good-willing and sane students. For instance, it should be clear to Dara that Lyly is there to help, but not to do the exercises in his stead. Lyly should understand that she can give clues and reexplain the lessons, but that she must be patient and give Dara opportunities to do things

by himself. Tutoring should not happen all the time. There should be activities that Dara does entirely by himself, so that he gets a real opportunity to learn. It will also give some rest to Lyly, who still needs to work, learn, and play for herself, like the little girl that she is. If her tutoring should extend outside the classroom to work on reading books or other assignments, the parents should be informed, and rules should be established to keep the schedules reasonable. Maybe 15 minutes during lunchtime, or during evening study if such a thing exists. Again, Mrs. Vuochnea must remember that they are both young and immature and she cannot expect the same amount of work that she would from college students.

If all the conditions are met, and all the precautions taken, peer-tutoring can be a wonderful learning opportunity for both the tutor and the tutee. And if it fails, Mrs. Vuochnea should apologize to Lyly and take full responsibility for the failure.

### Comments on the Case

This case might be a little more difficult than the others in this book, because it doesn't start with a real incident. Some candidates might be tempted to just comment on the benefits of peer-tutoring without considering warning signals. But educators should be able to anticipate difficulties and dangers, especially when they consider unusual learning approaches.

Candidates should remember that the exercise is supposed to check their critical thinking and be attentive to anything that can go wrong in the proposed scenario. However, it doesn't mean that they should become cynical and see only the worst possible outcome. Where there is risk, there can also be opportunities. What matters is to have a well-balanced analysis of the situation and to suggest relevant precautions.

## Collaborative Learning

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Ms. Leakhena is a modern English teacher and an ardent proponent of collaborative learning. She has noticed that her students like to work in small groups, even though they are a little bit lazy.

Unfortunately, the tables in her classroom are heavy and she takes up to 10 minutes every day to arrange them properly for group discussion. Mr. Huong, a mathematics teacher complains about it and requests her to put the tables back in traditional rows and columns before he enters the classroom. Ms. Leakhena is absolutely convinced that her method is the right one and she has tried repeatedly to persuade her colleague that collaborative learning is the proper way to teach in the 21st century. She has provided documents from the Teacher Education College to support her point of view. So far, she has not been successful, and Mr. Huong opposes his experience to the change that Ms. Leakhena is proposing.

### Expected Answer

The fact that a teaching method is promoted by a Teacher Training Institution or even by the MoEYS doesn't mean that it is always relevant. What can work well in an English class might be totally useless in a mathematics lesson.

Mr. Huong might be a little closed-minded, we don't know for sure, because the scenario doesn't provide much detail. But it does not mean that his experience should be dismissed. Maybe he has already tried to implement collaborative learning and failed. Maybe he has just analyzed the pros and cons of the method for his subject and concluded that a more traditional approach was more effective. Ms. Leakhena should be more diplomatic in her relationship with her colleague. Different teachers have different needs, and she is the one who requests a change. It is therefore her responsibility to make it acceptable to others. Regardless of the efficiency of her methods, she has no authority to force them to adapt. If collaborative learning should be promoted, which is not obvious, it's her responsibility to address the objections of her colleagues properly. This cannot be done with an argument of authority, by just dropping a document in a meeting. She must listen to the challenges that Mr. Huong has faced in previous experiences, understand his concerns and figure out whether or not she can address them. There is a serious probability that she will change her own mind after examining all the factors at play, at least for Mr. Huong's mathematics lessons. There are probably some options that Mr. Huong has not explored yet. And there is no harm in exploring new ways of teaching. But we should not fix what isn't broken, and if Mr. Huong manages to teach mathematics effectively, there is no need to bother him.

Besides, there are some clues in the scenario that suggest that the teaching method of Ms. Leakhena is not as rosy as she thinks. Firstly, the time she spends moving the tables is way too long. One cannot afford to waste 10 minutes in each session. That's almost  $\frac{1}{5}$  of the teaching time. There are more effective ways to organize collaborative learning. Ms. Leakhena should consider whether it is absolutely necessary to move the tables in the first place or if it is enough to just turn a few chairs. She should revise her routines to organize the groups. With a little rehearsal, the students could be in place in 30 seconds.

Another clue that her lesson is not perfect can be found in the attitude of the students. The purpose of collaborative learning is to maximize the number of active students. In the case of oral activities, such as the ones she organizes in her English class, it makes perfect sense to implement that strategy rather than holding a whole-class discussion in which the teacher would talk to only one student at a time. With proper organization, there could be 6 or 7 discussions happening at the same time, instead of one. Or even 15 or 20 discussions, if she opt for role-plays in pairs. Such a strategy would not work as well for the mathematical activities of Mr. Huong, in which all the students are already expected to work at the same time, since they are mostly doing writing exercises.

Collaborative learning does not multiply the number of active students miraculously. In fact, there is a significant risk that some students rely on their classmates to do all the hard work, as suggested by the mention of their laziness. This can explain the popularity of the method as well. Ms. Leakhena should be careful in her assessment of the method. The students like it apparently, but is it for good reasons? Is it because they learn better or because it is fun and not too tiresome? It seems that Ms. Leakhena has a naïve approach of a good method, which means that she's not implementing it to its full potential. It would take a proper assessment through classroom

observations to verify it. A mentor could check whether Ms. Leakhena is using collaborative learning with relevant activities, for instance by checking if there is enough work to do for all the group members. We could also verify that there is a reason to discuss. If the exercises are very straightforward, for instance grammar exercises with only one correct answer, discussing the answers is probably a waste of time. But if the activity requires some creativity or if there are several reasonable opinions on the topic, it might be fruitful to organize collaborative learning. Typically, a role-play or a debate are very suitable, while grammar or reading activities don't offer the same opportunities.

### Comments on the Case

In such a scenario, candidates should not try to guess what the examiners want to read, but they should try to have a balanced point of view and to use their common sense. There is no magic method that works all the time, and even the strongest proponent of an approach would disavow bad and naive implementations. Collaborative learning is good. But it is easy to miss the point and make things worse by being doctrinal about it.