**VICTORIAN CURRICULUM F-10: ETHICAL CAPABILITY**

**ETHICAL PLANNING TOOL**

# Teaching ethical issues – Planning Tool

## What is the tool?

Several learning areas within the [Victorian Curriculum](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/viccurric/ethics/Ethical_issues_7-10_curriculum_map.docx): F-10 either mandate particular ethical issues for study or provide opportunities to teach an ethical issue.

This planning helps identify which Ethical Capability content descriptions need to be taught to students.

The number of Ethical Capability content descriptions to be taught will depend on the nature of the ethical issue, how much time is available, student prior learning and other factors.

This planning tool can be used to help make key decisions that will then influence the final design of the unit of work. It will help to identify where the priority teaching focus will be. A companion student Ethical Issue Reflection tool is also available, which allows the student to track the development in their thinking about an ethical issue as they complete Ethical Capability and other curriculum area teaching and learning activities.

## What is an ethical issue?

An ethical issue arises in situations where there are competing alternatives – where the right thing to do is not clear. An issue has ethical dimensions when actions themselves and/or outcomes can be judged in terms of good, bad, right, wrong, better or worse and in the background is a concern about these kinds of questions: ‘How ought I/we to live?’ ‘What kind of society should we have?’ ‘How should we treat others?’ ‘How should we treat other living things?’ ‘How should we interact with our environment?’

An ethical issue becomes an ethical dilemma when there are conflicts between ways to act, usually involving contravention of an ethical principle/s that is normally held – for example when acting to keep a promise may entail lying and the person normally would not lie.

The context of many learning areas and capabilities within the Victorian Curriculum: F-10 requires engagement with ethical issues. For example, concerns about exploitation could be raised in different learning area contexts – exploitation of people in learning areas such as Economics and Business and exploitation of the environment in learning areas such as Design and Technology and Geography.

## What does engaging with an ethical issue require?

Engaging with an ethical issue requires critical and creative thinking, understanding of the context of the issue, and understanding of ideas from the field of ethics and how to apply these ideas to the context.

## How is this reflected in the Victorian Curriculum?

The Critical and Creative Thinking and Ethical Capability curriculums provide necessary knowledge and skills to evaluate an ethical issue. Knowledge and skills to understand and work with the context of the issue come from other curriculum areas. This is shown in the diagram below:

## An illustrative example:

The Victorian Curriculum: Geography Levels 7-8 includes the study of the issue of water scarcity and ways of overcoming it. Geography will contribute knowledge such as where major regions of water scarcity are located, and other relevant data and information, as well as related skills. Ethical capability will contribute knowledge such as how to determine the ethical significance of a particular concern (that is, how much does it matter?) and to understand why people may disagree on what their ethical obligations area. Critical and creative thinking will help students identify reasoning errors in different arguments.

## What is a good approach to thinking about an ethical issue?

Key aspects typically involved in analysing and evaluating an ethical issue include:

**Part one**: Identifying and the ethical issue and who has responsibility for decision-making and action

**Part two**: Selecting and justifying a response to the issue

**Part three**: Reflection

This way of thinking is reflected in design of this tool and is adapted from a 2011 paper by Sternberg: *Ethics: From thought to action,* Educational Leadership, vol.68, no.6. The Ethical Capability content descriptions support the teaching and learning of this approach.

## Should these parts be undertaken in order?

These three parts could be undertaken in any order and more than once. For example, reflection could occur at the beginning and end of decision-making. Similarly, within each part there are different approaches; for example in part two, identifying a response and then analysing why the ethical principles that underlie it, or the other way around, selecting the ethical principle/s first that then deciding on a response.

## Introducing, practising, deploying and demonstrating – what is the difference?

It is helpful for planning purposes to distinguish between introducing content, practising, deploying and demonstrating.

**Introducing content** means teaching the content description for the first time. Students will learn that knowledge for the first time. For example learning the knowledge required to identify an ethical issue. In this case, students could be taught to look for these kinds of characteristics:

* There are competing alternatives – the right thing to do is not clear.
* The actions themselves and/or outcomes can be judged in terms of good, bad, right, wrong, better or worse; they might involve praise or blame
* Directly or indirectly there is a concern about these kinds of questions: ‘How ought I/we to live?’ ‘What kind of society should we have?’ ‘How should we treat others?’ ‘How should we treat other living things?’ ‘How should we interact with our environment?’

**Practising content** means students undertake activities to learn and become confident with this new knowledge. For example working with a simple story or scenario to identify the ethical issues involved using the characteristics that they learnt in the ‘introducing content’ phase. Here typically activities work with simple scenarios so that students are focusing on understanding the ethics content that they have been taught rather than having to also work hard to understand the scenario.

**Deploying content** means taking the content that they have been introduced to and practised and applying it to a more complex scenario, typically drawn from a learning area context. For example students could practise identifying ethical issues using simple storybooks and deploy their learning to an issue encountered through the History curriculum.

**Demonstrating content knowledge** involves providing evidence of learning that can then be assessed. This could be formative or summative and occur at the introduction, practising and/or deployment.

Introducing, practising, deploying and demonstrating can occur within one unit of work or across more than one unit of work, across one or more levels and one or more learning areas, according to student needs. How this is managed is a planning decision.

This tool concentrates on identifying the teaching and learning from the Ethical Capability curriculum that is necessary to fill a gap in student learning. So it is concerned with the introduction of content. It could also be used to track practising, deploying and demonstrating as the tool is filled out and these classifications applied by the teacher to the planning.

## Do all these parts need to be taught?

In unit planning, certain parts may not be required to be taught at all for a particular issue. This may be for a variety of reasons, for example:

* given time constraints a particular part will not be undertaken, for example reflection;
* certain information will be assumed or already known, for example in part one, what the issue is and who has responsibility for it; or
* students are already at the required Ethical Capability Achievement Standard for undertaking a particular part and can be simply instructed to complete it without any extra teaching

## What should be in place prior to using the planning tool?

Consideration of the following will assist in more efficient and effective use of the planning tool:

1. What are the relevant content descriptions and achievement standard elements from **other learning area/s** that provides the context for the ethical issue? The VCAA Curriculum Planning templates can be used to identify these and to complete step 2 below – see <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/foundation10/viccurriculum/curriculumplanning.aspx>
2. Consider whether the **other necessary student learning** is in place:

* Have students learnt the necessary **critical and creative thinking** content to analyse and evaluate the issue to the desired standard?
* Have students learnt the necessary content from **relevant wider learning areas or other capabilities** in the Victorian Curriculum, for example Science, the Arts, the Humanities, and Intercultural Capability, to engage with this issue?

1. What is the time allocated to studying this issue?

## How can gaps in student learning of Ethical Capability be identified?

Use the table below to identify Ethical Capability content that students need to be taught.

The first column in the table below contains a thorough overview of the overarching questions related to analysing and evaluating an ethical issue. It represents what *could* be taught.

The second column contains diagnostic questions, which will help to identify and focus on gaps in students’ learning, that is, to identify what *should* be taught.

Content descriptions related to each of these questions are found in the Ethical Capability curriculum. This section includes a link to the interactive Ethical Capability curriculum mapping template, where specific content can be targeted for teaching.

## Part one: Identifying an ethical issue and who has responsibility for decision-making and action

The left column identifies what *could* be taught.

There is space to enter *possible* teaching points to then base a final decision on focus points for the unit.

Use the diagnostic questions column at right to make the final decisions on what *should* be taught.

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| --- | --- |
| **Links to the Ethical Capability curriculum intention:** | **Diagnostic questions – deciding which Ethical Capability content descriptions to teach:** |
| * What is the issue? * Why is it an ethical issue? * How significant is this issue and for whom? * Who has responsibility and why? Does it matter what kind of person or group this is? | Do you want students to identify the ethical issue?   * No, they will be given the issue * Yes   Do you want students to be able to justify why it is an ethical issue and its significance?   * No, they will be given this information * Yes   Do you want students to be able to identify and justify who has responsibility for each issue?   * No * Yes   For each Yes:   * Can they do this already without any explicit teaching? * Can they do this to the expected standard? Check the Achievement Standards for Ethical Capability * What do students need to learn? Identify content that needs to be explicitly taught in order for students to undertake **Part one** using the column at left and the Ethical Capability curriculum planning template at : <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/foundation10/viccurriculum/ethics/ethicscmt.aspx> |

## Part two: Selecting and justifying a response to the issue

The left column identifies what *could* be taught.

There is space to enter possible teaching points to then base a final decision on focus points for the unit.

Use the diagnostic questions column at right to make the final decisions on what *should* be taught.

Note the sections below could be done in any order.

Some issues will be more open, with decisions still to be made and outcomes in the future, while others already have had decisions made about them by individuals or groups, and outcomes may be identifiable.

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| --- | --- |
| **Links to the Ethical Capability curriculum intention:** | **Diagnostic questions:** |
| Depending on the issue, consider:  **The nature of a/the response and its outcome:**   * What should be done/was done in this specific case? * What is the expected outcome/what was the outcome?   **Justifying a response:**   * Which principle/s could guide a response? * If response to the issue is open, an ethical principle/s can help to guide decision-making. List relevant principles here that could guide a decision on what action to take. Refer to [list of ethical principles](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/viccurric/ethics/List_of_Ethical_Principles.docx) at and select those relevant to this issue, or construct your own list. * Which specific principle/s should/do underlie the selected response?   Where the student needs to select a response, consider the list of what principle/s could act as a guide to action and identify which should be selected.  If the response has already been decided, analyse what the underlying ethical principle involved is.  **Unpacking each principle:**   * Does it concern consequences that must be taken into account ahead of (or take priority over) duties? * Does it concern a duty that must be undertaken regardless of (or that takes priority over) consequences? * What are the concepts/values involved? * The contestability of each of these points | **Do you want students to select a response/s?**   * No, they will be given the response/s * Yes   **Do you want students to be able to justify the response/s?**   * No * Yes   **Do you want students to be able to evaluate an outcome?**   * No * Yes   **For each Yes:**   * Can they do this already without any explicit teaching? * Can they do this to the expected standard? Check the achievement standards of Ethical Capability * What do students need to learn? Identify content that needs to be explicitly taught in order for students to undertake **Part two** using the column at left and the Ethical Capability curriculum planning template at : <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/foundation10/viccurriculum/ethics/ethicscmt.aspx> |

## Part three: Reflection

The left column identifies what *could* be taught.

There is space to enter possible teaching points to then base a final decision on what focus points for the unit.

Use the diagnostic questions column at right to make the final decisions on what *should* be taught.

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| --- | --- |
| **Links to the Ethical Capability curriculum intention:** | **Diagnostic questions:** |
| * Further factors that influence ethical decision-making and action, for example: * Would it take a person with particular disposition/s (e.g. courageous, compassionate) to do this action? * How are feelings/past experience/conscience influencing decision-making? * Broader/deeper implications arising from a decision/principle (If students do take a position on the ethical issue, you may want to ask them to consider if applying the same reasoning in a different context would commit them to a position they would disagree with. Do they want their decision to apply as a general rule? Or is the decision specific to a particular context or set of circumstances?) * Challenges in managing factors that influence ethical decision-making and action | Do you want students to refer to factors that will influence a judgement about:   * The significance of the issue? * Who has responsibility for the issue? * What could and should be done about the issue?   Do you want students to refer to challenges in managing these factors?   * No * Yes   Do you want students to consider the broader or deeper implications of their principle/position/decision?   * No * Yes   For each Yes:   * Can they do this already without any explicit teaching? * Can they do this to the expected standard? Check the achievement standards of Ethical Capability * What do students need to learn? Identify content that needs to be explicitly taught in order for students to undertake **Part three** using the column at left and the Ethical capability curriculum planning template at : <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/foundation10/viccurriculum/ethics/ethicscmt.aspx> |