



Conduct case study

Maintaining a safe learning environment

Please note

The following case study provides an insight into a recent matter in which the VIT was required to take disciplinary action against a registered teacher.

Names and some details have been changed to protect the identity of the teacher, student and education setting.

This case study is designed to stimulate discussion and debate about what is considered appropriate professional and personal conduct for teachers, as well as appropriate strategies to prevent inappropriate conduct.

Outcomes are not provided, as any case that is investigated by VIT is considered on its individual merits and context. Teachers should use this incident to reflect on their own practice within their specific context.



Scenario

Ms Cole is a VIT registered teacher who teaches physical education in a co-education school in regional Victoria. She attends a celebration of her local football team's recent win, and meets the captain of the football club, who is considered a hero in her community.

She invites the captain to instruct her year 5 class the following afternoon. They settle on a time, but do not have any conversations about what the session should include, nor any limitations, restrictions or special rules that need to be followed when primary school-aged children are playing football.

Ms Cole sits at the school oval boundary with her laptop, catching up on reports that are due, while the captain of the local football club takes the class. Halfway through the lesson, the captain encourages the students to tackle each other. Ms Cole does not hear this instruction from where she is sitting.

It is the last period before the school day finishes; the students become unruly and one of the students is placed in a headlock. The football captain tells the students to stop, but they do not listen, and the student in a headlock appears to lose consciousness and hits their head as they fall to the ground.

Ms Cole is busy writing reports and does not see the headlock or the student fall to the ground, but raises her head when she hears distressed students running towards her. She runs onto the oval and sees the injured student sitting upright. Ms Cole notes the student is complaining of nausea and slurring their speech. The football captain recommends the student sit out for the rest of the session. Ms Cole agrees.

The football captain and Ms Cole physically escort the student off the oval and sit them on the bench next to Ms Cole. Ms Cole continues to work on her laptop, and the football captain continues with the physical education lesson.

At the end of the lesson, the student goes home with their father. The father is not advised of the incident that occurred on the oval.

That evening, the student's health deteriorated. An ambulance is called, and the student is admitted to hospital. Upon admission, the student explains the incident to the hospital staff. Tests are conducted which identify that the student requires emergency surgery. After the surgery, the student spends months recovering before returning to school.

Reflection

As a registered teacher, Ms Cole has a responsibility to take reasonable steps to maintaining a safe learning environment and to protect her students from injury.

Relevant principles (includes but is not limited to)

When reflecting on this case, consider the following aspects of the [Victorian Teaching Profession's Code of Conduct](#).

Principle	Explanation
Principle 1.1 Teachers provide opportunities for all learners to learn	Teachers maintain a safe and challenging learning environment
Principle 1.2 Teachers treat their learners with courtesy and dignity, and promote participation and empowerment	Teachers protect learners from intimidation, embarrassment, humiliation and harm
Principle 1.3 Teachers work within the limits of their professional expertise	Teachers are aware of the role of other professionals and agencies, and know when learners should be referred to them for assistance
Principle 1.6 Teachers maintain a professional relationship with parents / carers	Teachers should communicate and consult with parents / carers in a timely, understandable and sensitive manner
Principle 1.8 Collegiality is an integral part of the work of teachers	Teachers demonstrate collegiality by sharing information to support the teaching, wellbeing and safety of learners
Principle 3.1 Teachers value their professionalism, and set and maintain high standards of competence	Teachers complete their duties in a responsible and thorough manner
Principle 3.2 Teachers are aware of, and comply with, the legal requirements that pertain to their profession	Teachers must comply with the requirements of the principle of negligence, including duty of care

Relevant standards (includes but is not limited to)

When reflecting on this case, consider the following aspects of the [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#).

Principle	Focus area
Professional Practice Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments	4.3 - Manage challenging behaviour by establishing and negotiating clear expectations with students and address discipline issues promptly, fairly and respectfully
	4.4 - Ensure students' wellbeing and safety within school by implementing school and/or system, curriculum and legislative requirements
Professional Engagement Engage professionally with colleagues, parents / carers and community	7.1 - Meet codes of ethics and conduct established by regulatory authorities, systems and schools
	7.2 - Understand the implications of and comply with relevant legislative, administrative, organisational and professional requirements, policies and processes

Considering the above principles and standards, in what ways do you think Ms Cole failed to discharge her obligations

- before the activity?
- during the activity?
- when she became aware of the injury?
- in following up afterwards?

To meet her obligations, Ms Cole should have

- clarified the respective roles and responsibilities of the registered teacher and football captain, including how to manage the response to any critical incidents or medical emergencies and how to manage inappropriate learner behaviour
- clarified the activity that the football captain was to deliver, including explaining and enforcing the modified football rules recommended for young children
- spoken with the students about the activity, risks, expected standards of behaviour and how inappropriate behaviour would be managed and what to do in the event of an emergency
- provided effective supervision during the activity
- sought to understand how the student was injured and the nature of their injuries
- offered first aid assistance to the student and clarified what, if any, first aid had already been provided
- assessed the situation to determine whether the steps taken to manage the injured student were reasonable (e.g. considered calling an ambulance sooner given the nature of the injury and the symptoms being displayed by the learner)
- notified the injured student's parents of the incident and the steps taken in response.

Further information

View the Code of Conduct and further guidance material including case studies, videos, podcasts and professional learning opportunities at www.vit.vic.edu.au/maintain/conduct/codes.