



Ontario
College of
Teachers
Facilitating
a Standards
Professional
Learning Session

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Commitment to Professional Learning

We believe as educators that the acquisition of pedagogical knowledge as educators and our daily work in professional practice are synergistic and dynamic. As we grow in skills and abilities, we are continually challenged to deepen our understanding of educational theory and open ourselves to additional forms of effective practices.

The ethical standards and the standards of practice are the underpinnings of this process. Whether we are beginning teachers who understand standards as principles but with brief experience in practice or experienced teachers engaged in effective practice without formal knowledge of the standards' articulated principles, we all share a "lived" understanding of them.

The standards reflect the profession's commitment to ongoing professional learning. The structure of the standards and the professional learning processes described in them serve as effective sources for enhancing practice.



The aim of this booklet is to build on theoretical understanding of the standards and to enhance professional practice.

Just as the standards have evolved over time, so have the profession's understanding and use of the standards. For example, some directors of education and superintendents throughout the province have promoted different levels of professional learning through periodic and selective forums for reflection on the standards. In some staff meetings, principals and teachers have discussed where and how the standards have been “lived out” in their daily practice.

We invite you to read or reread these principles of practice, consider the questions presented and make connections, contemplating how, when and why the standards can come alive in your work.

Educators are aware of the roles, contexts and personal professional knowledge that impact on living out the standards in practice. Therefore, *Living the Standards* illustrates how the standards are integrated into professional practice throughout the diverse classrooms and school communities in Ontario.

Facilitating Integration of the Standards

The integration of the standards into professional practice and learning are predicated on the following premises:

- A school community is a place of continual transformation; therefore, awareness of new developments in the profession is essential.
- An awareness and understanding of the ethical standards and the standards of practice inform the practices of the of the teaching profession.
- Each school community addresses its needs in specific ways, but within the greater unifying framework of the ethical standards and the standards of practice.
- Examination of the ethical standards and the standards of practice is intended to provide the opportunity for developing leadership skills and greater self-knowledge across the continuum of educators' experience, level of responsibility, school districts, affiliations, faculty experience, collegial and classroom experiences.



Four Steps for Integrating the Standards into Practice

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this professional learning project is to initiate dialogue about the revised standards. Working towards a shared understanding of the standards might take a variety of forms: maintaining portfolios, writing a case, working with the annual school plan. Using the standards as a lens to solve a problem or as a frame of reference will support reflection on professional practice.

Prior to any professional learning activity, it is beneficial to assess levels of awareness and understanding of any particular group with respect to the standards. The following questions may help to determine these levels.

Step 1: Assessing Levels of Awareness

Level of Community Awareness

The initiator of this process may reflect on:

- What is the level of awareness of the ethical standards and standards of practice within the intended group?
- How are the ethical standards and standards of practice reflected in the school community?

Facilitating the Project

At the beginning of the year, an initiator of this process may want to become aware of the values and needs within the community and consciously integrate them into the session. She or he might ask:

- What are our needs in this learning community with respect to the standards?
- What are our goals in working with the standards?
- How will this process impact and improve practice?

During the year, educators should be encouraged to record and/or discuss their present practices, asking of themselves and their school community: “How are we doing?”

Step 2: Reflecting on Our Professional Practice

Accessing Prior Knowledge

A facilitator or initiator of the activity will continue the process by posing these inquiry questions:

- What do teachers already know about being a professional educator?
- What are their values?
- What images do they hold of themselves?

The facilitator asks all participants to brainstorm to identify adjectives that they believe are core values of the teaching profession and create a list.

The facilitator distributes the ethical standards and the standards of practice. The facilitator asks participants to discover how their present core values are reflected in the standards by comparing the list they have just created to the standards.

Once the facilitator has ascertained that there is a co-relation between the educators' standards and values, the next step is to determine the direction most useful to the group present. The facilitator might ask:

- How can we use this knowledge to enhance our practice?
- What is the goal of making those connections?



Step 3: Linking the Standards to Action

Having facilitated a dialogue regarding professional practice, the facilitator aids in identifying an issue relevant to the group discussion and helps to examine the role the standards might play.

The facilitator will provide an opportunity for sharing the various aspects of the discussion with the entire group in order to examine the issues as broadly as possible before a consensus about next steps is taken, prior to the small group discussion.

Individual school communities will respond to specific issues in a way that meets the needs of their particular contexts. The topic (e.g. Responses to bullying) might include:

- developing an action plan
- committing the plan to writing
- recording events and reflecting on patterns of occurrence
- connecting to the standards.

The facilitator might offer prompts such as:

- What are the dimensions of this issue?
- What factors are contributing to the issue?
- How is this issue or practice related to the standards?

Responses might include:

- proposing alternatives or explanations for the issue
- noting actions that might reflect the standards
- considering the benefits or drawbacks of a proposed action
- considering resources or community support.

To support follow-up and an activity that becomes part of the group's daily practice, the facilitator might ask the participants for their input on:

- follow-up meetings
- peer work
- teamwork.

Each individual member and the group as a whole might be asked the following question to evaluate the effectiveness of their work together:

- Has knowledge of the standards influenced the actions of the group?
If so, why? If not, why not?

Step 4: Professional Inquiry

To promote collaborative professional inquiry the group might consider:

- What is the immediate focus of this professional development forum?
- What is the relationship between this activity and our professional practice?

The following steps may guide your inquiry:

- The practical application of the core values embedded in the standards might be identified with a specific relevant issue. A concrete example identified by the group (for example, bullying in the halls or consistency of evaluation across a department) may be provided by the professional development committee or facilitator in advance of the forum, or it may be a topic for discussion among the participants involved in this process.
- The facilitator records brainstorming of all the details surrounding the issue. This process continues until a clear and complete picture emerges of the issue under discussion and the individuals involved in the issue – child, peers, parents, teacher, principal, board trustees, superintendent and mitigating circumstances, context and perspectives.

In small groups of three or four, participants discuss the issue through the lens of the standards. The following prompts might support this timed activity:

- What elements of the standards are reflected in this example under discussion?
- Does the group have consensus about the meaning of the ethical standard of *care* in this context?
- How do the standards guide or offer a path of awareness for the group?
- Which domain of the standards is most applicable to the issue?

Conclusion

Standards-based professional learning sessions provide a starting point to promote understanding and integration of the standards in professional practice.

Along with facilitating a standards professional learning session, the Ontario College of Teachers is pleased to provide you with other written and visual resources in the *Living the Standards*, available on the College web site at www.oct.ca → **Standards**

These inquiry-based resources are teaching tools for you to share with colleagues or for your own professional learning and reflection.

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Teachers continually seek to deepen their understanding of educational theory and to open themselves to best practices.



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