



Ontario
College of
Teachers

Ordre des
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de l'Ontario



BOOKLET TWO

Exploring Ethical Knowledge Through Inquiry



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Introduction

The *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* address the question “What professional values and ethical responsibilities are central to the profession of teaching?” These standards describe the responsibilities all members of the College have as educators. The *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* serve as principles to guide the thinking and action of Ontario teachers. When formulated as questions, the ethical standards can facilitate a process of inquiry into the personal and professional ethics of one’s educational practice.

Purpose

The purpose of this booklet is to deepen understanding of the relationship between the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* and the professional practice of teachers. The booklet presents an inquiry process that guides teachers to reflect upon the ethical principles underlying their own professional practice. A framework for exploring professional ethical knowledge through dialogue with colleagues will extend awareness of the ethical dimensions of teaching.

Inquiry Process

An ethical decision-making process is presented that fosters ethical self-awareness and understanding in this booklet. This process facilitates dialogue and assists educators in identifying and understanding the reasons for their ethical choices. The inquiry experience invites teachers to identify dimensions associated with their ethical thinking and action within a community of colleagues. Engagement in discussions regarding ethical experiences serves to foster in educators a disposition to reflect critically on their own situations, to become aware of internal structures that influence ethical decision-making and to understand the principles and values that guide their actions.

Using dilemmas from practice experienced by educators as catalysts, participants are invited to reflect on their lived experience, to identify their response to ethical dilemmas and to name the values or guiding principles that inform their actions. Through this process, practitioners assess the congruence between their actions and their stated beliefs. Exploring and analyzing beliefs, values and underlying assumptions about professional practice enable teachers to transform their actions and enhance their ability to learn from professional experience.

Use in Professional Context

The process for exploring ethical knowledge presented in this resource was developed by the Ontario College of Teachers in 2001. This framework for ethical decision-making through inquiry and collegial discussion has been used with teachers to foster an understanding of the multiple ways the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* can guide ethical thinking and action.

This dialogic inquiry process has been validated within pre-service teacher education courses, in-service teacher education courses, the Principal's Qualification Program, the Supervisory Officer's Qualification Program, individual school staff meetings and various educational forums.

Members of the teaching profession have identified the following applications of this process for use within their professional teaching contexts:

- as a reflective tool to guide ethical decision making
- as a professional learning process for increasing ethical knowledge
- as a process to increase self-knowledge
- as a community-building process that fosters commitment to ethical principles
- as a vehicle to understand and shape ethical cultures within schools or organizations.

Professional Dialogue

Professional dialogue and reflection can serve to foster development of teachers' personal commitment to the ethical principles that underpin their professional responsibilities as expressed in the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*. These standards help guide the judgements and decisions of teachers.

Discussing ethics on a regular basis within professional contexts raises awareness about ethical issues, provides opportunities to collaboratively examine the ways in which professional communities work from an ethical perspective and enables authentic and diverse experiences from practice to be used as curriculum for ongoing professional learning.

Professional ethical cultures that promote dialogue on ethics and acknowledge the ethical dimensions of teaching support teachers' capacity to make ethical decisions and enhance ethical action.

Reflective Practice through Cases

The use of case experiences from teaching that involve ethical dilemmas or issues can be an effective approach for increasing commitment to ethical principles and extending ethical knowledge.

Case discussions that reveal conflicts in values and dilemmas that have been or might be encountered in practice can be significant in fostering levels of reflection and inquiry that can lead to changes in perspectives, thinking and beliefs.

The case discussion and inquiry process presented in this booklet simultaneously integrate explorations of individual practice, professional contexts and the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*.

This form of professional dialogue promotes group or individual exploration into:

- the values, actions and levels of personal commitment that result in ethical decisions and behaviours
- the influence of school culture, and its impact on the ethical actions and awareness of teachers
- the integration of professional ethical standards with personal ethical frameworks.

Exploring Ethical Knowledge Through Inquiry

Group Discussion Process

Experience	<p>What ethical dilemma or issue has occurred in your professional practice?</p> <p>Present a case experience involving an ethical dilemma or issue from professional practice (see Dilemmas from Practice, page 6, for examples).</p>
Reflection	<p>How would you respond to the ethical dilemma from practice?</p> <p>Reflect on the dilemma experience using the Ethical Decision-Making Framework (page 7). Identify responses to each component of the ethical decision-making process.</p>
Analysis	<p>What are the multiple ways to respond to the dilemma?</p> <p>Inquire into and analyze the responses generated from each component of the Ethical Decision-Making Framework from the viewpoints of the participants.</p>
Principles of Practice	<p>How are the <i>Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession</i> and the <i>Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession</i> demonstrated in the dilemma?</p> <p>Connect the guiding principles of the <i>Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession</i> and the <i>Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession</i> to the thinking, actions and experiences illustrated in the dilemma (pages 4-5). Note any suggestions for growth as well.</p>
Extending Thinking	<p>What have you learned from listening to the multiple perspectives of your colleagues? Have your assumptions been affirmed, challenged or altered as a result of this discussion?</p> <p>Reflect on the Ethical Decision-Making Framework and the collegial discussion to identify new insights.</p>
Synthesis	<p>What understandings emerged regarding ethical thinking, action and decision-making?</p> <p>Integrate and reflect upon concepts, issues and actions that relate to professional practice and the <i>Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession</i> and that have emerged during the group discussion (page 8).</p>

Dilemmas from Practice

The following brief scenarios provide examples of dilemmas that emerged from the experience of educators. You can use or adapt these dilemmas, or generate ethical dilemmas and issues from the experiences of group members as a focus for the discussion and inquiry into ethics.

Experiences as Curriculum for Inquiry

Ethical dilemmas and issues from practice provide authentic experiences for integrating ethical knowledge and understanding through engagement in professional inquiry processes.

Educators encounter ethical dilemmas within their practice on a daily basis.

These dilemmas may emerge in areas such as:

- curriculum planning
- assessment and evaluation
- relationships with others
- special education
- leadership
- policy development.

Example 1

You are newly appointed to your professional position. At a meeting with an educational leader, your supervisor makes what you perceive to be a biased comment. What do you do?

Example 2

You and your colleagues from the intermediate division have agreed that the consequence for not completing assigned homework is an after-school detention the following day. All parents have been notified of this policy. A student informs you that his homework is not completed because he went to a hockey game with his father, whom he rarely sees. What do you do?

Example 3

The past practice in your school has allowed the students to elect the president of their student council. You and a colleague are the staff advisers. During the tabulation of the results, a student whom both you and your colleague perceive as inappropriate for student council president wins the election by three votes. The second-place candidate is perceived by both of you as a better choice for student council president. Your colleague destroys four of the ballots, giving the school council presidency to the runner-up. What do you do?

Ethical Decision-Making Framework

Judgement/ Decision	Principle/Value Guiding Decision	Rationale for Decision	Implication of Decision	Reflections on Ethical Dilemmas of Practice and Action
How would you respond?	What principle or value is guiding your action?	What are the reasons for your action(s)?	What are the possible consequences of your decision or action?	What new insight or understanding have you gained from listening to your colleagues?

(Smith 2001)

Further Inquiry

Inquire further into your own practice by reviewing your responses to each component of the Ethical Decision-Making Framework and reflecting on the following questions.

- What observations can you make about your own actions, principles and reasons for decisions?
- What themes emerge regarding your decision-making?
- Do these observations affirm the educator you are and want to be or invite you to consider changes to your thinking and practice?

Reflecting on Ethical Decision-Making

Please write your answers to these questions.

1. How did using the Ethical Decision-Making Framework foster further awareness of the principles and values that guide your actions?

2. How might you use a framework for ethical decision-making within your own professional context?

3. What impact did this session have on your awareness and understanding of the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*?

4. What insights have you gained about the ethical dimensions of teaching?

The Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession

The *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* represent a vision of professional practice. At the heart of a strong and effective teaching profession is a commitment to students and their learning. Members of the Ontario College of Teachers, in their position of trust, demonstrate responsibility in their relationships with students, parents, guardians, colleagues, educational partners, other professionals, the environment and the public.

The Purposes of the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession are:

- to inspire members to reflect and uphold the honour and dignity of the teaching profession
- to identify the ethical responsibilities and commitments in the teaching profession
- to guide ethical decisions and actions in the teaching profession
- to promote public trust and confidence in the teaching profession.

The Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession are:

Care

The ethical standard of *Care* includes compassion, acceptance, interest and insight for developing students' potential. Members express their commitment to students' well-being and learning through positive influence, professional judgment and empathy in practice.

Trust

The ethical standard of *Trust* embodies fairness, openness and honesty. Members' professional relationships with students, colleagues, parents, guardians and the public are based on trust.

Respect

Intrinsic to the ethical standard of *Respect* is trust and fair-mindedness. Members honour human dignity, emotional wellness and cognitive development. In their professional practice, they model respect for spiritual and cultural values, social justice, confidentiality, freedom, democracy and the environment.

Integrity

Honesty, reliability and moral action are embodied in the ethical standard of *Integrity*. Continual reflection assists members in exercising integrity in their professional commitments and responsibilities.

The Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession

The *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* provide a framework of principles that describes the knowledge, skills and values inherent in Ontario's teaching profession. These standards articulate the goals and aspirations of the profession. These standards convey a collective vision of professionalism that guides the daily practice of members of the Ontario College of Teachers.

The Purposes of the Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession are:

- to inspire a shared vision for the teaching profession
- to identify the values, knowledge and skills that are distinctive to the teaching profession
- to guide the professional judgment and actions of the teaching profession
- to promote a common language that fosters an understanding of what it means to be a member of the teaching profession.

The Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession are:

Commitment to Students and Student Learning

Members are dedicated in their care and commitment to students. They treat students equitably and with respect and are sensitive to factors that influence individual student learning. Members facilitate the development of students as contributing citizens of Canadian society.

Leadership in Learning Communities

Members promote and participate in the creation of collaborative, safe and supportive learning communities. They recognize their shared responsibilities and leadership roles in facilitating student success. Members maintain and uphold the principles of the ethical standards in these learning communities.

Ongoing Professional Learning

Members recognize that a commitment to ongoing professional learning is integral to effective practice and to student learning. Professional practice and self-directed learning are informed by experience, research, collaboration and knowledge.

Professional Knowledge

Members strive to be current in their professional knowledge and recognize its relationship to practice. They understand and reflect on student development, learning theory, pedagogy, curriculum, ethics, educational research and related policies and legislation to inform professional judgment in practice.

Professional Practice

Members apply professional knowledge and experience to promote student learning. They use appropriate pedagogy, assessment and evaluation, resources and technology in planning for and responding to the needs of individual students and learning communities. Members refine their professional practice through ongoing inquiry, dialogue and reflection.

Additional Reading

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