

Strengthening a Vision: A Critical Discourse on the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession

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Reflecting on Professional Practice

Strengthening the Vision: A Discourse on the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession is an inquiry-based resource inspired by the reflective writing of one member of the Ontario teaching profession. This resource has been developed by the Ontario College of Teachers (the College) to foster a deeper examination of ethical professional practice. The reflections contained in this resource were generated by an Ontario educator who was compelled to explore the meaning of the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*.

This educative resource is designed to facilitate critical dialogue and reflection regarding the significance of the ethical standards and to help inform ethical thinking, professional judgment, discussions and actions. Educators may choose to use this resource to support individual and collective professional inquiry, to facilitate ethical pedagogy, as well as to help foster shared cultures of ethical practice.

The critical written discourse included in this resource is intended to serve as a catalyst for critical reflection related to:

- Ethical professionalism.
- Individual philosophies of education.
- Critical pedagogy.
- Emancipatory practice.
- Dialectic approaches to teaching and learning.

Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice

Care, Respect, Trust and Integrity are fundamental to ethical professional practice as identified by both the teaching profession and the Ontario public. The *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a) and *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006b) serve as effective frameworks for further exploring and investigating ethical professional practice. Practitioners are encouraged to reflect on this framework as they explore this resource.

Inquiry-Based Professional Learning
Strengthening the Vision: A Discourse on the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession is comprised of one written reflection on the ethical standards and several professional inquiry invitations.

These invitations are intended to engage educators in shared discussions, explorations and critical analysis regarding the many dimensions associated with ethical professionalism.

Strengthening the Vision: A Critical Discourse on the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*

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According to the Ontario College of Teachers, the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* represents a vision of professional practice (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a). Supported by four ethical principles, it informs and guides educators' pedagogical practices, responsibilities, and relationships within education. Furthermore, the ethical standards presupposes that education is an ethical profession, which must be engaged in by virtuous educators (Campbell, 2000). While it may influence the routine interactions, decisions, and responses of educators, the ethical standards offer an ethical vision for professionalism. The ethical standards not only identify the inherent ethical and social responsibilities within the teaching profession, but they also shape the core identity of a professional educator. They are designed to inspire dialogue among educators to develop the notion that education is an ethical profession. Sources for this dialogue may originate from personal anecdotes, interpretations of legislation, or knowledge from other theoretical frameworks within education. Without this interactive framework, educators' understanding of ethics would default to a realm of subjectivism, limiting their range of ethical and academic responsibilities.

In the particular case of merging with other theoretical frameworks, the ethical standards may provide the foundation to transform an ethical code into a belief system, which is understood and practiced among professional educators. Specifically, when underpinned by the conceptual framework of critical pedagogy, it becomes possible to widen the lenses of the ethical standards, particularly in terms of understanding ethics as an action and incorporating the intellectual tools that will help identify unethical practices within public education. With these added dimensions, educators may become activists within public education and facilitate learning environments, that give rise to critical thinking and social empowerment. Reinforced with dialectical thinking and Freire's conceptualization of love, members' critical consciousness will not only widen the range of ethical reflexivity in education, but also it will enlighten members to the academic and social responsibilities of a diverse, multicultural society.

The educational movement of critical pedagogy is based upon the notion that poor, underprivileged, and/or non-resistant people are essentially oppressed, "inhabiting a world that is rife with contradictions and asymmetries

of power and privilege” (McLaren, 2009, p. 61). The epistemology of critical pedagogy aims to legitimize forms of knowledge outside of positivistic traditions of knowledge and teaching (McLaren, 2009); it expands the scope of traditional knowledge to include social, political, economic, cultural, and historical contexts within education (Giroux, 2009); and it outlines practices to engender emancipatory education. In order to engender this transformation in education, critical pedagogues encourage educators to develop teaching rationales using the principles of dialogical thinking, problem-posing, and critical praxis and to advocate that educators create possibilities for the production and construction of knowledge, respecting the autonomy of the student and promoting empowerment and liberation of minority cultures (Freire, 1998).

The critical consciousness is the conceptual centerpiece of critical pedagogy. Freire (1973) coined the term *conscientização* (or critical conscience), which described a process within learning whereby the oppressed with a culture of silence transform into critical thinkers. *Conscientização* refers to perceiving social, political and economic contradictions, and to taking action against the oppressive elements of reality (Freire, 1970/2000). In theory, the critical consciousness is a process within learning whereby an oppressed culture of silence is transformed into critical thinkers who are able to perceive the social, political and economic contradictions within education (Freire, 1973). This transformation begins with dialectical thinking – a fundamental component of a critical consciousness.

Dialectical thinking is an intellectual process of critical comparison based upon a process of reflective progression inquiry (Malito, 2014). Essentially, it is reflecting upon *What it is?* and *What it should be?* (Kincheloe, 2004). These dialectical questions provided a view of education in terms of locating incomplete systems of thought and inconsistencies within education, especially the understanding of the wider social, political, and economic forces that cause cultural discrimination

and social oppression within schools, which should be democratic sites of self and social empowerment (Giroux, 1988). Supplementary to this process, a critical consciousness is informed by referencing the literature from past critical educators whom have used dialectical inquiry to identify oppression and unethical conditions within education, which is specific to the educational movement of critical pedagogy. However, the critical consciousness within education is only authenticated by love.

Within the context of educators’ professional practice, love is the essential ingredient to develop a critical consciousness in education. To Freire (1970/2000), love was the passionate pursuit of humanization, and the act of teaching toward critical awareness is an act of love, a passion for learning, and the profound love for human beings. Freire (1998) stated,

The task of the teacher, who is also a learner, is both joyful and rigorous. It demands seriousness and scientific, physical, emotional, and affective preparation. It is a task that requires that those who commit themselves to teaching develop a certain love not only for others but also of the very process implied in teaching. It is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving up. In short, it is impossible to teach without a forged, invented, and well-thought-out capacity to love. (p. 3)

Within the framework of critical pedagogy, the concept of love equalizes the relationship between educators and students. According to Freire (1998), teaching should be an act of “lovingness,” not only toward the students, but also toward the very process of education. Specifically, educators must act with honesty, humility, and respect for the student (Freire, 1998). This approach liberates the traditional loveless learning environment in schools and enables educators to become reflective learners as well.

Freire's conceptualization of love offers depth and breadth to the ethical standards, particularly in terms of understanding the range of ethical and academic responsibility to the teaching profession¹. As a professional principle, love is a paradox. Initially, it seems to travel into a deeper realm of subjectivism. However, as a concept, love identifies the core virtue of an educator who is passionate about their vocation, serving the needs of all students. Furthermore, according to Freire (1973), love is the foundation of a critical consciousness. Based upon the supporting literature, love has the potential to be developed as a core principle for the ethical standards, as a) it identifies an epistemological starting point to build a stronger conceptual framework for the teaching profession; b) it engenders a deeper understanding of the process of education; c) it clarifies the expectations and the commitments to students as caring, trusting, and respectful educators. According to McLaren (2007), love is the seed of reflection and dialectical thinking, inspiring emancipatory actions, cultural collaboration, and empowering practices of oppressed subcultures; love disables traditional power structures within education to transform the student/teacher relationship and oppressive pedagogical practices. Also, it liberates the critical praxes of a subculture, having unique histories, rituals, belief systems, and social values. When love becomes a conceptual focal point of the ethical standards, it will strengthen all practices within the teaching profession.

From this conceptual strengthening, educators may transform their vision of ethics with a 'growth mindset', engendering empowerment, liberation, and social justice within public education. Perhaps, educators may dissolve traditional social asymmetries in public education, whereby participants are not excluded, assimilated, or socially oppressed, but encouraged to share their cultural knowledge within their school community. Furthermore, educators may facilitate learning

¹ Perhaps, these ethical principles may be consolidated within the epistemology of critical pedagogy, rather than being commonly understood as a personal construct.

environments where cultural representatives (i.e. students or local cultural bearers) may teach their histories, beliefs, values, and traditions; the action of artistic performance builds understanding (i.e. critical praxis), critical awareness, and love among students, teachers and school leaders. This movement in education is relevant, and the love to liberate oppressed subcultures may inspire further initiatives, both socially and politically, when a critical consciousness is achieved.

Educators may focus this dialectical mindset towards specific subject domains within education. For some subject domains, dialectics are substantial and essential in response to Ontario's rich diversity. Once these diverse and alternative points of view are voiced, it is possible to address some of the ethical issues within public education. In the case of music education, a dialectical mindset may engender discussions on oppression in education. For example, according to Campbell (2004), understanding music is a human experience by listening, reading, and viewing cultural materials and by employing the expertise of local musicians, culture-bearers and scholars; however, traditional music programs in schools have not always been facilitated as such. Many music education programs have been and continue to be facilitated with European musical instruments and musical scores. While the study of music consists of rich historical, religious, and cultural knowledge, traditional music education in schools, both philosophically and pedagogically, continues to be a means for the dominant culture to enculturalize the subdominant culture (Freire, 2000; Dewey, 1964).

Conversely, the study of music must reflect a democratic learning environment, whereby students are not excluded, assimilated, or oppressed, but encouraged to share their musical culture and knowledge within the school community through World Music courses. Cultural representatives (i.e. students or local cultural bearers) may teach their music, expounding on their histories, values, and traditions. The action of musical performance

builds understanding (i.e. musical praxis), critical awareness, and love among students and teachers. Cultural representatives are empowered by their teaching authority and artistic skills (Malito, 2014). For example, local world musicians (i.e. cultural bearers) are known and represented within music programs; university trained music educators are performance proficient in world music; and skilled cultural representatives within music classes become authorities and teachers of their musical culture. This movement in education is relevant, and the love to liberate oppressed subcultures may inspire further initiatives, both socially and politically, when a critical consciousness is achieved.

The *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* is an important step in terms of authenticating education as an ethical profession. With dialectical thinking and ‘Love’ (Friere, 1970/2000) being the conceptual centerpiece, critical pedagogy will be inherent within the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* and the *Foundations of Professional Practice*. While the principles of ‘Care’, ‘Respect’, ‘Trust’, and ‘Integrity’ identify the virtues of an ethical educator who is committed to students’ learning, the ethical standards requires a conceptual infrastructure, which will strengthen members’ understanding of empowering practices and inspire a new vision of public education.

By thinking dialectically and by exploring the paradox of love as a professional virtue, it will ignite members’ hearts and minds to evolve their practices to reflect an ethical profession.

Professional Inquiry

Discuss

1. Discuss the author's view of the purposes of the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*.
2. Discuss Freire's conception of love as a central dimension of ethical teaching and leadership.
3. Discuss how critical consciousness becomes a core dimension of ethical professional practice.
4. Discuss the importance of "democratic learning environments" for realizing a democratized vision of education.

Explore

1. Critically explore the 'theoretical frameworks that currently guide and inform your practice.
2. Explore the relevance of critical pedagogy for ethical teaching and leadership.
3. Explore the meaning of a "dialectical mindset" for ethical professional practice.
4. Inquire into the significance of critical pedagogy for your professional practice.
5. Critically explore how the ethical standards shape the core identity of the professional educator.
6. Explore the significance of Freire's (1970/2000) concept that "Love is the foundation of critical consciousness" for professional praxis.

Identify

1. Identify key insights you gained from this article.
2. Generate questions that emerged from you as a result of reading the article.
3. Identify areas for further inquiry that could be explored by members of the teaching profession.

Appendix I

Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession and Standards of Practice 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.

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.

Respect

Intrinsic to the ethical standard of *Respect* are 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.

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.



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 practices 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.

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.

Leadership in Learning Communities

Members promote and participate in the creation of collaborative, safe and supportive learning communities. They recognize their shared responsibilities and their leadership roles in order to facilitate 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.



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