A Dialogic Construction
of Ethical Standards
for the Teaching Profession

Déirdre Mary Smith
Ontario College of Teachers

Educators' moral conduct and professional identity have gained widespread attention from the teaching profession and from the Canadian public (Fullan, 2003; Manley-Casimir & Piddocke, 1991; Piddocke, Magsino, & Manley-Casimir, 1997). Specifically, educators and academicians have focused on trying to better understand the ethical dimensions of educational practice (Ayers, 2004; Campbell, 2003; Freire, 2005; Giroux, 2005; Haynes, 1998; Langlois, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Smith, 2003, 2004; Smith & Goldblatt, 2009; Starratt, 2004; Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 1998).

Ethical practice resides at the core of the teaching profession in Ontario, Canada, and is based on an agreed-upon set of ethical standards and principles by both the teaching profession and the public. Starratt's (2004) understanding of ethics as the principles, beliefs, assumptions, and values that characterize a moral life shapes this core. The development and ongoing revision of an ethical framework for the Ontario, Canada, teaching profession has been a central mandate of the Ontario College of Teachers (the College) since its inception in 1997. The College was created through legislation that established it as the self-regulatory body for the teaching profession in the province.[1] The Governing Council of the College[2] approved an initial set of ethical standards (Ontario College

Déirdre Mary Smith is manager of Standards of Practice and Education at the Ontario College of Teachers, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Her e-mail address is dsmith@oct.ca

of Teachers, 1999) and made a commitment to review the standards in 2006. These initial standards consisted of a cluster of 12 ethical premises related to ethical teaching practice (see Appendix). The College, which serves approximately 235,000 members of the teaching profession, has been committed to the continuous refinement of the ethical standards.

The purposes for establishing the current *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* were to (a) inspire educators to reflect and uphold the honor and dignity of their vocation; (b) identify ethical responsibilities and commitments in the field; (c) guide ethical decisions and actions in practice; and (d) promote public trust and confidence in the teaching profession (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006b). In this article, the author shares the process and outcomes of Ontario's dialogic approach to identifying ethical standards and principles as part of the evolution of a framework for educators' ethical practice. The questions that guided this dialogic inquiry included:

1. How do the Ontario teaching profession and its public understand the meaning of being an ethical educator?

2. What are the essential ethical standards and principles embodied in the professional ethical practices of Ontario educators?

3. What ethical framework can be collaboratively constructed by the Ontario teaching profession and the public to guide the ethical practices of the Ontario teaching profession?

Organization of the Inquiry Process and Participants

The revision of Ontario's original set of ethical standards began in 2005. This provincial revision process was designed to extend consultation by the Ontario College of Teachers to more members of the teaching profession and the public, beyond the level of participation that had been initiated during the development of the original standards. The author of this article, as a staff member of the College and designated staff support for the College's Standards of Practice and Education Committee, led the province's ethical standards' development and implementation in collaboration with an inquiry team of College staff members. The author began leading the College's work related to ethical standards in 2001.

The construction of Ontario's current core *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a, 2012) was launched with six phases of provincial policy development and implementation. Figure 1 presents the collaborative phases employed in the development and implementation of the ethical standards. Key informants, who included leading international scholars and practitio-

ners with expertise in ethics, teacher education, educational leadership, and professional learning, served as critical guides during all phases of development and implementation. The review phases involved over 10,000 participants and represented a longitudinal, collaborative data collection effort by the College and its public constituencies.

A variety of processes and tools were used for strategic planning and the development of organizational strategies. The strategic planning began with an extensive literature review, interviews with key informants, and an environmental scan. The environmental scan was a process used to collect internal and external information to assist the Ontario College in focusing on long and short term goals of its organization. The scan involved a SWOT analysis of the College's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges [threats]. (See CPS Human Resources, 2007, for an environmental scan model adaptable to education organizations.)

Data were generated from electronic surveys and feedback forms completed by members of the profession, the public, and key informants.

Figure 1
Ethical Standards Collaborative Development and Implementation Phases

PHASE 1	Strategic Planning	• Background and Literature Review • Interviews with Key Informants • Environmental Scan
PHASE 2	Consultation	• Focus Groups • On-Line Surveys • Open Space Technology
PHASE 3	Policy Drafting	• Standards of Practice and Education Committee
PHASE 4	Provincial Validation	• College of Teachers Website • Electronic Distribution • Mail Distribution • Bilingual Regional Forums
PHASE 5	Council Approval and Provincial Release	• Regional Institutes
PHASE 6	Policy Implementation	• On-going Ethical Institutes • Collective Ethical Capacity Building to Enhance Teacher Professionalism • Teacher Education Resource Development and Dissemination

Open space technology consultations (Owen, 2008), focus groups (Ontario College of Teachers, 2005), case studies (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a; Smith, 2004; Goldblatt & Smith, 2004, 2005, and 2006; Smith & Goldblatt 2009), and video conferencing also were used to solicit participation across the highly diverse and geographically large province. As described in detail below, electronic technologies (e-mail, website, on-line survey) and traditional channels such as letter mail and print media were used to invite participation as well as maintain communications and access for participants.

It was essential to employ a dialogic process that enabled widespread participation of contributors to the inquiry, which was designed to serve the public good. Participants involved in the process included teachers, principals, supervisory officers, teacher educators, teacher candidates, parents, secondary school students, school trustees, teacher federations, and various provincial educational organizations and stakeholders. Invitations for involvement were issued in the College's magazine, which is distributed to its members and educational partners. The College website also invited participation throughout all phases of the review and implementation process.

Letters of invitation were sent to all directors of education, deans of education, teacher federations, the Ministry of Education, principal organizations, supervisory officer organizations, community organizations involved in education, provincial parent groups, and all regulatory bodies in Ontario. The College Governing Council members also were encouraged to attend the consultation sessions, as they would ultimately be responsible for approving the final ethical standards and standards of practice policy documents. The level of engagement and leadership in this undertaking exemplified the self-regulation (Karoly, 1993) charge of the College, in action.

Theoretical Constructs

A broad and in-depth literature review in the strategic planning phase provided a scholarly structure for the inquiry. The theoretical constructs that support this inquiry are rooted in the traditions of phenomenology (Buber, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Ricoeur, 1992), narrative (Bruner, 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002; McEwan & Egan, 1995; Witherell & Noddings 1991), case work (Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001; Shulman, 1992; Shulman & Colbert, 1988; Shulman, Whittaker, & Lew, 2002), ethics (Haynes, 1998; Starratt, 2004; Strike & Soltis, 1998), self-study (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004; Hoban, 2004; Loughran & Northfield, 1998), and self-regulation (Karoly, 1993).

Teacher knowledge is both personal and professional (Cole & Knowles, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Phenomenologists (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 2000) analyze and seek to understand the essence of an experience by acknowledging that wisdom and knowledge are founded in the *lived* experience of people. Lived experience is the source of narrative data used in a phenomenological inquiry. Narratives make theory observable in the work of the practitioners that they describe. Teachers' stories are examples of lived experience that reveal the essence of ethical practice.

Dialogic Inquiry Methods

Drawing from the theoretical scholarship that provides a foundation for selecting and organizing the events, instruments, and processes of dialogic inquiry, the College viewed *lived* experience (Heilbrun, 1988) and the wisdom gleaned in actual situations as a significant source of insight about the ethical practices of educators. The College believed that the facilitation of dialogic exchanges (Bakhtin, 1981) would support the identification and construction of collective knowledge, which would lead to the discovery of essential elements of ethical standards and ethical practice. Data collection strategies were planned based on the assumption that teachers "know what teachers need to know" (Carter & Doyle, 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990) and that their lived experience can serve as vital sources of information. The inquiry methods, tools, and results of the data collection that led to the ethical standards are presented in Figure 2.

The variety of dialogic data collection methods enabled various renderings of ethical approaches to teaching to be explored and discussed with diverse groups from both the public and the profession. The combination of inquiry tools ensured that the perspectives and understandings of experience shared through multiple modes were respectfully and authentically captured. The diversity of tools enabled access to and supported the inclusion of a wide range of voices.

Data Reduction and Validation

A large volume of qualitative and quantitative information resulted from the data collection activities and required concerted reduction and validation of the findings. The College staff members' internal inquiry team, English and French external researchers, a bilingual external regional consultant-facilitator, and the College's Standards of Practice and Education Committee engaged in collaborative data analysis. Multiple

layers of analysis were performed to reach a comprehensive understanding and distillation of the numerous data sets and, ultimately, to identify the elements that resulted in a holistic ethical framework.

Data reduction and validation occurred in stages. Each stage consisted of four components: reading strategy, coding mechanisms, analytic lenses, and recording processes. Transcripts of the focus groups, open space reports, questionnaires, written briefs, and discussion records were provided for both individual and group coding and analysis. Recordings of the analytic stages were available to ensure accountability, transparency, and accuracy of the analyses. Detailed reporting of the results of these validation stages are contained in *Data Analysis Reports, Review of the Standards* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006d), which was prepared for the province.

Integration of the Findings

Ethical elements were derived from the content and the dilemmas embedded in the case studies analyzed and written by participants in the dialogic institutes. Cases included ethical dilemmas in which

Figure 2
Ethical Standards Dialogic Data Collection

Dialogic Methods	Tools	Results
Consultation	Interview Guides	Written Reports
Discussion	Ethical Dilemmas Decision Frameworks	Ethical Decision Making Frameworks depicting practitioner responses
Focus Groups	Discussion Questions Audio Tape Transcripts Video Conferencing	25 Groups: • 15 English Language • 9 French Language • 1 First Nations 250 Response Sets 25 Transcripts
Case Analysis	Case Writing Institutes Case Discussion Institutes Video Recording	90 Written Cases 50 Discussion Response Sets 8 Videos (English) 8 Videos (French)
Survey	Questionnaires	800 Respondents
Open Space Technology	Dialogue Groups Topic Generation Charts	80 Written Reports

the individuals encountered decision-making scenarios that confront educators. The individual case dilemmas included a variety of topics: religious intolerance, gender issues, students and families' dealing with challenging issues, negotiating differences in shared classrooms, action research, classroom management strategies, needs of students in an inclusive classroom, implications of student dishonesty, establishing and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries with students, and school policies and politics (Goldblatt & Smith, 2005). Identifying core ethical standards and standards of practice grew out of these collaborative, developmental case institutes.

Four core ethical standards for the teaching profession were distilled from the data sources: care, integrity, respect, and trust. These ethical standards and the standards of practice for the teaching profession are presented in Figure 3.

From the data emerged thematic clusters of ethical principles that congregated around the four core ethical standards with which they were closely aligned. Inextricably related principles were clustered with their relevant core ethical standard, which extended the range and resulted in some overlap of the core standards as indicated by the following groupings (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006a, 2006d):

> • Care: acceptance, compassion, interest in developing students' potential through positive influence, professional judgment, and empathy in practice.

> • Integrity: honesty, reliability, moral action, and continual reflection on professional commitments and responsibilities.

> • Respect: fair-mindedness; honouring human dignity, emotional wellness and cognitive development; modeling respect for spiritual and cultural values, social justice, confidentiality, freedom, democracy, and the environment.

> • Trust: fairness, openness, and honesty in professional relationships with students, colleagues, parents, guardians, and the public.

The Standards of Practice convey a collective vision of professionalism that guides the daily practice of Ontario educators: commitment to students and student learning, leadership in learning communities, ongoing professional learning, professional knowledge, and professional practice (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006c). *The Standards of Practice* evolved simultaneously with the identification and clustering of *The Ethical Standards* and their closely related ethical principles. Embed-

ded within each of the *Standards of Practice* are ethical principles and dimensions. The *Standard of Practice*, *Professional Knowledge,* refers to the ethics as a form of professional knowledge and highlights the importance of the concept of professional judgment, which is paramount to ethical professional practice:

> Members strive to be current in 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 to inform professional judgment in practice" (Ontario College of Teachers, 2012, p. 13).

The other four standards of practice are similarly embedded with ethical principles and concepts (Ontario College of Teachers, 2012).

Figure 3
The Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession. Adapted from "Foundations of Professional Practice" by the Ontario College of Teachers (2012, pp. 8, 12).
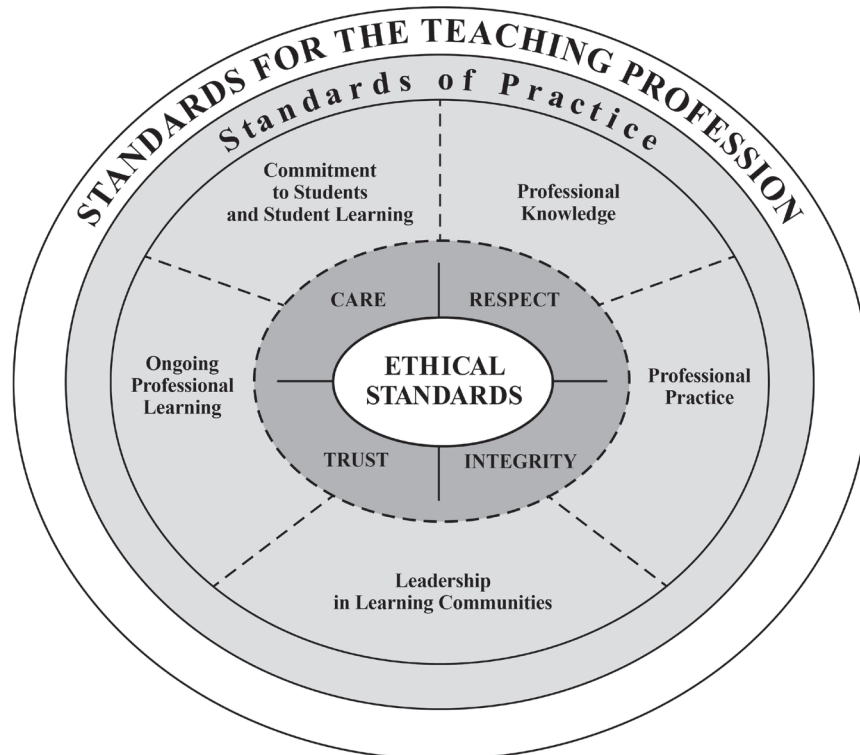
Impact and Significance

This intensive inquiry resulted in an explicit and public model for continuous review and validation of the standards. The perpetuation of *The Ethical Standards*, which are the foundation of initial and continuing teacher education in Ontario, through ongoing examination of ethical practice, is a significant outcome of these efforts. In areas of policy development and reform, *The Ethical Standards* have become an integral part of accreditation requirements outlined in the *Ontario Regulation 347/02, Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs* (Government of Ontario, Canada, 1996). *The Ethical Standards* are also a required component of the additional qualification courses and programs for teachers, as identified in the *Ontario Regulation 176/10, Teachers' Qualifications* (Government of Ontario, Canada, 2011).

The College issued a *Professional Advisory: Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media* to help support teachers' ethical knowledge and practice related to social media and electronic communication (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011). *The Ethical Standards* provided the ethical foundation for this advice. Similar attention to the ethical foundation of teaching continues to emerge in teacher education and by other regulatory bodies for the teaching profession (Teachers Registration Board of South Australia, 2006; The Teaching Council, 2012; Western Australian College of Teaching, 2007).

Another significant outcome of the construction of *The Ethical Standards* was and continues to be the development and dissemination of research tools and pedagogical resources throughout Ontario and the wider education profession. Records of ethical teaching gleaned from the inquiry are being used provincially, nationally, and internationally. Educators and teacher educators have integrated these resources into initial teacher education, graduate teacher education courses, and educational leadership programs. The resources include prototype cases, multimedia kits, and digital narratives as well as guides for reflection. These inquiry-based educative materials support critical reflective practice and are available at the Ontario College of Teachers website, Ethical Standards Resources (hyperlink "http://www.oct.ca/home.aspx" www.oct.ca/home.aspx).

Continuing education related to ethical professional practice is essential for fostering deep ethical thinking and congruent ethical action. Since the release of the *Ethical Standards,* the College has continued to engage the profession and the public in educative processes that have kept dialogue in regard to professional ethical practice moving forward. Educational institutes facilitated by the College have been based on the

premise that ethical practice is informed through ethical consciousness, ethical knowledge, ethical sensitivity, and ethical insight. In an August 2012 institute, examination of educators' ethical inventories and ethical profiles identified inextricably related ethics of critique, justice, and care (Starratt, 2004) that needed further attention. The ethic of critique, in particular, appeared to require significant attention. Critique is the ethical lens that supports inclusion and social justice and concerns issues related to power, privilege, and voice. Critique is essential for equity and justice in teaching and learning and invites further reflection on the need for ethical formation within teacher education and practice (Langlois, 2011). The ethical dimensions of ethical critique, ethical sensitivity, ethical volition, and ethical consciousness are targeted areas of inquiry for subsequent institutes and forums as well as for the development of relevant teacher education resources.

Concluding Thoughts

The Ethical Standards convey to both aspiring and practicing educators in Ontario a professional identity that positions ethics at the core. The College of Teachers' experience offers a process, content model and resources for potentially engaging other school systems, provinces, or states in serious contemplation of their moral roles and associated ethical dimensions in education and society. A participant who represented the teaching profession in the collective dialogic inquiry captured the essence of the process in this reflection:

> These are our ethical standards. These are the standards by which we live. At the end of the day we need to self-reflect. Did the dignity of the learner remain intact? Did the dignity of my colleagues remain intact? Did the dignity of our profession remain intact?

Notes

[1] The creation of this professional, self-regulating body was recommended by the Royal Commission on Learning-For the Love of Learning (Government of Ontario, 1994). Prior to the establishment of the College, the Ministry of Education was responsible for teacher certification in the province. The College website (www.oct.ca) contains the dynamics and scope of its organization.

[2] The 37 members of the College's Governing Council are comprised of 23 teachers elected by the teaching profession and 14 members appointed by the government. The Council is responsible for regulating the teaching profession in the public interest. The Council sets policy direction related to the mandate of the College.

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Appendix

Original Set of Ontario's Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession

Comprising a Cluster of 12 Ethical Premises Related to Ethical Teaching Practice*

- maintain professional relationships with students
- recognize the privileged nature of the relationship that teachers maintain with students
- demonstrate impartial and consistent respect for all students as individuals with distinctive and ongoing learning needs and capacities
- respect confidential information about students unless disclosure is a requirement by law or personal safety is at risk
- develop respect for human dignity, spiritual values, cultural values, freedom, social justice, democracy, and the environment
- work with members of the College and others to create a professional environment that supports the social, physical intellectual, spiritual, cultural, moral, and emotional development of students
- base relationships with parents or guardians in their role as partners in the education of students on mutual respect, trust, and communication
- cooperate with professionals from other agencies in the interest of students and as required by law
- act with integrity, honesty, fairness, and dignity
- respect the confidential nature of information about members of the College obtained in the course of professional practice unless disclosure is required by law or personal safety is at risk
- comply with the Acts and regulations
- advise the appropriate people in a professional manner when policies or practices exist that should be reviewed or revised

* Approved by the Ontario College of Teachers Governing Council, 1999