

Comparing the Organizational Ethics of the Ontario College of Teachers and the Saskatchewan
Professional Teachers Regulatory Board

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Examining Similarities	3
The Formation of Professional Self-Regulating Bodies	6
Conclusion	9
Appendix A	10
Appendix B	12
References	14

Introduction

I am in a unique position because I am officially licensed to teach in publicly funded schools in two jurisdictions within Canada. I was initially registered in Ontario through the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) despite having never taught in Ontario. I still maintain this license just in case I ever move back. I moved provinces 2 months after getting my Ontario license for a full-time permanent teaching job in northern Saskatchewan. I received my teaching license from the Saskatchewan with the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board (SPTRB). I suppose I am professionally and morally obligated to uphold the ethical standards of the teaching profession in both jurisdictions. Honestly, I never reviewed the ethical codes of conduct established by the SPTRB because I assumed they were similar to the OCT. So, I thought that the purpose of this paper was a good opportunity to provide a brief analysis of both codes of ethics with the goal of identifying similarities. Specifically, themes related to student learning, integrity, and professional development that are common to both codes of ethics will be discussed. It should be noted that the differences between the codes of ethics will not be discussed in this paper because I felt that these were insignificant. Both codes of conduct were similar enough in scope and content that discussing differences would be greatly outweighed by their similarities. I will conclude this paper by investigating the reasons why these codes of ethics from different Canadian jurisdictions ultimately came to fruition.

Examining Similarities

One of the most obvious similarities between both codes of ethics is the fact that students and their learning are top priority for each. I would certainly expect this to be the case because, after all, teachers ought to have the best interest of the student(s) in mind. In fact, the OCT (2023) states in their ethical standard that, at its core, strong and effective teaching is the

professional commitment to students and their learning. The SPTRB (2023) indicates 5 ethical standards of practice and the first one listed is centered on the idea that a student-teacher relationship is based upon mutual trust and respect. I imagine that it would be challenging to be an effective teacher if students were not the top priority. I would question the foundational basis for the profession if this were not one of the top priorities because then the whole concepts with respect to this job would be different. Teachers are tasked with providing instruction and it is an incredible (and sometimes impossible) task to shape a young human's mind. Teachers have an impressive amount of influence both academically and personally. It is not unreasonable to suggest that all of us have had one teacher we really liked because we enjoyed their class and/or liked their character. We also had teachers we did not like. Regardless of whether it was positive or negative, we remember them because of their influence. The OCT and SPTRB state that students and their learning ought to be the top priority to ensure we are being the best influence on them. The public is also fully aware of this influence. In some way, shape, or form, teachers are often being discussed in public and in the media. In response to this, both the SPTRB (2023) and the OCT (2023) state that public trust is an important cornerstone of the profession and teachers ought to be conducting themselves in way that is fair, open, and honest. It also reinforces the idea that teachers are role models both online, offline, in school, and outside of school. Parents, students, and the public are always watching.

Both the codes of ethics reviewed for this paper specifically identify integrity as one of the key characteristics that practicing teachers ought to have (OCT, 2023; SPTRB, 2023). I have always found it challenging to define integrity. I feel like I know it when I see it or experience it, but the concept is fleeting otherwise. Someone once shared with me their own definition of it, and they used an example of finding money or wallet in a public area. What would you do with it

if you found it? Would you attempt to return it to the rightful owner? Or, would you keep it, spend it, and pretend it never happened? It was then explained that someone who had a high sense of integrity would attempt to return the money or wallet to the original owner. It is the act of doing the right thing even if nobody is watching. The OCT (2023) defines integrity as honesty, reliability, and someone of high moral character. The SPTRB (2023) describes integrity as the conduct of teachers that reflects favourably upon the profession. I believe that this supports the example that was once explained to me. Having integrity as a teacher means that there is a sense of having the best of intentions and this is done by constantly reflecting on behaviour in and outside of the classroom. This shows a demonstrated effort, commitment, and responsibility to the profession. This relates, again, to public trust and to the reputation of the profession. Parents, students, and taxpayers want to have teachers that have high moral character to do the right thing with the best of intention even if nobody is watching.

Both codes of ethics suggest that teachers ought to actively seek to continuously upgrade their knowledge and skill set to remain current in their practice through professional development opportunities (OCT, 2023; SPTRB, 2023). I believe that this an important component of the teaching profession because as the composition of student demographics change so will their needs. I witnessed this in my first year of teaching. I quickly realized that I was working with students who were significantly below grade levels with respect to literacy and I knew that I did not have the appropriate skill level to manage this. I assumed that my training and personal academic abilities would be enough to get the students through the curriculum which was misguided. I took it upon myself to enrol in additional qualification courses which gave me the appropriate knowledge and skills to adjust my instruction. If I had not done this, then these students would have continued to struggle. I was able to accurately assess their pre-

existing skill level get them working towards their grade level expectations. I saw an immediate improvement in their confidence and motivation to complete the work. As well, because they could complete the work, my classroom management and climate improved since they were focused on tasks they could actually handle.

The Formation of Professional Self-Regulating Bodies

Saskatchewan relied exclusively on the Ministry of Education for certification, registration, and suspension, termination of licenses before the full establishment of the SPTRB in 2015. The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) worked both as an advocate and the disciplinary body for teachers in the province. Clyde (2016) states that the *Registered Teacher's Act* (2015) came into effect due to an independent review that was conducted in 2013. The independent review recommended an independent regulatory board to eliminate conflicts of interest by keeping advocacy and discipline separate. The Regina Leader Post (2014) published a newspaper article that stated the reason the SPTRB had formed was due to the dual role of advocate and discipline that the STF traditionally held. The Saskatoon Star Phoenix investigated some serious offenses allegedly committed by teachers, and they discovered that some teachers who were fired from their school divisions for sexual misconduct and drug taking still had teaching certificates meaning they could still teach in publicly funded classrooms (Leader Post, 2014). It is clear that the STF inherently possessed a conflict of interest by both defending and disciplining teachers, which established a strange precedent in dealing with questionable classroom practices.

The recommendation to form a self-governing College of Teachers in Ontario came from a sweeping report issued by the Royal Commission on Learning that was tasked with reviewing the education system in Ontario in the early 1990s. The report called for several major changes.

Specifically, recommendation number 58 suggested the formation of the College ought to be directly responsible for establishing professional standards, certification of teachers, and accreditation of teacher's education programs (Royal Commission on Learning, 1994). According to Payne (1995), one of the overarching complaints from the report is quality and transparency; many stakeholders feel that these were lacking. Employers and universities complained that graduates of post-secondary programs could not read, write, or spell. Parents complained that teachers were not able to give students the basics that they required. Teachers complained that the curriculum standards and expectations were unclear. Further to this, Dare (1996) states that some teachers were grossly incompetent and moved school boards if things did not work out elsewhere. Previous disciplinary procedures involved the Ministry of Education and teacher federations (unions) which did not hold up to legal scrutiny especially when the two groups did not agree on the outcome. In the decade prior to the date of publication of Dare's (1996) article, only two cases of professional misconduct were made public in Ontario's legal system and both cases were ultimately dropped by judges. At the time, the registrar of the newly formed OCT, Margaret Wilson, anticipated that they would have 50-60 disciplinary cases per year which is significantly higher than the two cases that were dropped. Given this estimation of disciplinary cases, it is clear that newly improved and established checks and balances ought to be a priority for the profession.

Currently, both Saskatchewan and Ontario have been granted the privilege by their respective governments to be self-regulating and self-governing professions. These privileges are embodied in *Ontario College of Teachers Act* (1996) and the *Registered Teachers Act* (2015). Both of these *Acts* hold the laws that govern the professional bodies of the OCT and the SPTRB. It is clear to me that there are similar histories between the OCT and SPTRB with respect to why

they were created. In addition to being on par with other self-regulating professions in their provinces, it appears the major reason that these professional bodies were created was to assist in making the disciplinary investigations process clearer and consistent. Redirecting powers and responsibilities from the government and local unions to separate independent bodies increased quality and transparency while minimizing conflicts of interest. In both provinces, there were blurred lines in disciplinary scenarios. It left the teachers in question relatively unscathed and permitted to continue teaching despite having questionable practices. Previously established protocols and procedures for addressing teacher behaviour was not working and people began to notice.

Given the histories mentioned above, it is difficult to articulate how many actual cases of misconduct were actually taking place and not being addressed prior to the establishment of the OCT and SPTRB because the pre-existing system was unregulated and possessed inherent conflicts of interest. I can imagine that these situations left taxpayers, parents, and students feeling distrusting towards teachers which would ultimately erode the public confidence in the profession. As well, this behavior does not suggest to the public that the student and their learning is top priority for teachers. I believe it suggests that there is a lack of understanding of how teachers can influence their students which can easily erode the desire to learn. It also calls into question whether teachers at that time truly considered the integrity with which the profession demands. It directly relates back to the definitions outlined by both codes of ethics in that questionable behaviour does not favourably support the profession and diminishes the reputation of it. I believe one of the reasons in which the codes of ethics calls for teachers to continuously improve their practices is so that they can reflect upon individual opportunities for growth. If this was not an expectation before these self-regulating bodies formed perhaps

teachers were not adequately addressing their mistakes and gaps in their knowledge. Again, this is concerning because it demonstrates to the public that the people who are tasked with initiating and managing the learning process in students are not willing to do similar work themselves which could call into question whether they are the right person for the job.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to analyse the similarities between the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) and the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board (SPTRB). My assumption before writing this paper was that they would be inherently similar and my assumption was correct. Both codes of ethics establish the ethical standards of practice for the teaching profession within their respective jurisdictions in Canada. The 3 significant themes that were discussed that emerged from this analysis were student learning, integrity, and professional development. All three of these themes have a direct influence on how much trust and confidence is placed in the teaching profession especially during circumstances that involve teacher misconduct and discipline. Interestingly, both self-regulating bodies were formed due to the results from independent reviews and investigations. These investigations indicated that there were major conflicts of interests within disciplinary processes which allowed teachers to continue to teach and supervise students despite questionable practices that may or may not have been known to the public. One goal of these self-regulating bodies was re-assign power and responsibilities to an independent regulatory body that had minimal connection to the government and local unions to maximize transparency and quality. The other goal was to increase public trust and confidence. With the establishment of these self-regulating professional bodies, standards are established to hold teachers accountable not only to their own personal practices but to students, the public and to the entire profession.

Appendix A – SPTRB Standards of Professional Conduct

Registered teachers have a duty to uphold the professional standards and reputation of the teaching profession and to assist in the advancement of its goals, organizations and institutions. Integrity is the fundamental quality of registered teachers.

Integrity is the foundation of the commitment made by registered teachers to learners and to the reputation of the profession.

Public confidence in the teaching profession may be bolstered by professional conduct on the part of registered teachers. Accordingly, the conduct of registered teachers should reflect favorably on the profession and inspire the respect and trust of learners and the community.

Conduct on the part of a registered teacher in either public life or professional practice will reflect upon the integrity of the profession.

Teacher conduct can directly impact public trust.

Registered teachers ensure public trust is upheld by adhering to these standards. Registered teachers are also expected to adhere to all applicable policies and procedures set by their employing school division, the Ministry of Education, the STF, LEADS, or any other professional organization that relates to their work as a registered teacher.

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STANDARDS OF
PROFESSIONAL
CONDUCT



These standards set out the conduct expected of registered teachers in Saskatchewan.

Each standard outlines a principle for behaviour, which allows for context to be built upon. The included indicators are examples of how the standards may be demonstrated. The standards are intended to guide the decisions and judgements of registered teachers and to inform parents, guardians, learners, and the general public of the conduct they can expect from registered teachers.

1. Registered teachers base their relationships with learners on mutual trust and respect.

Registered teachers demonstrate this standard when they:

- ✓ maintain healthy professional expectations that place learners' interests first, both in school and in the community.
- ✓ ensure that all forms of communication with learners are thoughtful, honest and appropriate.
- ✓ honour individual identity and circumstance without prejudice.

2. Registered teachers have regard for the safety and academic, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of learners.

Registered teachers demonstrate this standard when they:

- ✓ take measures to provide and model a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment at school.
- ✓ implement appropriate, consistent, and clearly articulated rules and expectations.
- ✓ provide effective supervision.
- ✓ follow emergency procedures.
- ✓ act as prudent educators who place learners at the forefront of decisions.
- ✓ implement classroom management practices that encourage mutual respect and cooperation.

3. Registered teachers act with honesty and integrity.

Registered teachers demonstrate this standard when they:

- ✓ communicate openly, truthfully and respectfully with all relevant parties while maintaining necessary confidentiality.
- ✓ are responsible for their assessment, evaluation, record keeping, and classroom practices.
- ✓ maintain an accepting classroom that promotes learning for all students.

4. Registered teachers take responsibility for maintaining the quality of their practice.

Registered teachers demonstrate this standard when they:

- ✓ participate in continual self-reflection and professional learning.
- ✓ seek, accept, and provide feedback to improve professional practice.
- ✓ work in a collaborative manner with other members of the learner's support network.

5. Registered teachers uphold public trust and confidence in the education profession.

Registered teachers demonstrate this standard when they:

- ✓ are mindful of their responsibility as a role model in school, in the community, and online.
- ✓ maintain appropriate communication and professional relationships with learners, parents, guardians, colleagues, and other stakeholders.
- ✓ act in a manner that reflects positively on the teaching profession.

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* 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.

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.

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