

# OECS EDUCATION REFORM UNIT (OERU)



## OECS GENERIC TEACHERS' CODE OF ETHICS

*OERU*  
*March 2005*

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*OERU*

*March 2005*

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## PREFACE

Every profession considers the development and application of a Code of Ethics as a means of maintaining acceptable professional standards among its members. In relation to OECS education reform, Pillars for partnership and progress (PPP) identified the institution of fair and effective terms and conditions of service of teachers as a key component of the enhancement of the quality of education. The development of a generic Code of Ethics is one of the initiatives intended to contribute to the commitment of teachers to students and to the profession.

The OERU invited Ministries of Education, and teachers' unions to nominate representatives to collaborate on the preparation of fundamental principles for a generic Code of Ethics. The project built on existing and proposed Codes in OECS countries. The first meeting, held in St. Lucia in November 2003, produced a set of underlying principles for the generic Code. The OERU circulated the draft to all Ministries of Education and teachers' unions for comments. At a second meeting, held in St. Kitts and Nevis in November 2004, participants reviewed the comments and revised the principles, taking into account the OECS Teacher Appraisal Scheme and OECS Guidance and Counsellors Handbook, as well as relevant articles from the Convention of the Rights of the Child. This present edited version of the Code of Ethics represents the agreed position of the second meeting.

The OERU expresses sincere gratitude to Dr. Una Paul, consultant, and the following persons who comprised the working group:

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Dr. Henry Hinds, Curriculum Specialist, OERU, organized the activity, conducted the second meeting and edited the final document. Ms. Deborah Alphonse and Ms. Natasha Deterville (OERU) provided administrative support for the project. Ms. Cleotha Randolph formatted the final document.

The OERU hopes that the generic Code of Ethics will stimulate the growth of teacher professionalism and an awareness of the role of ethical principles in the process of formal education.

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## BACKGROUND

A generic Code of Ethics for teachers in the OECS derives from a background of educational development and research at the sub-regional level and from foundational work within countries. At the sub-regional level the strategy document sets out desirable action that should be taken to improve the quality of teaching and the conditions of teachers. Strategy 57 in *Pillars for Partnership and Progress – OECS Education Reform Strategy: (2000)* states: -

*Enhance the status of the teaching profession by –*

*encouraging and supporting teachers' unions in the sub-region to convene a working group to draft a harmonized Code of Ethics from among existing Codes;*

*encouraging teachers' unions in the sub-region to formally adopt the common Code of Ethics drafted by the working group and to use it both to inspire and discipline their members.*

In partially fulfilling this demand, and also as an outgrowth of the OERU Student Attitude Survey (OECS 1999) and the Teachers' Work Survey (OECS 2000), the OERU took a decision to coordinate the formulation of a Code of Ethics. The OECS Teachers' Work Survey (OECS 2000) produced results that suggested that opportunities for professional development and career advancement of teachers predicted a high commitment to teaching. Also the quality of school administration was related in a positive way to high levels of teacher commitment.

Discussion of these results among educators, teachers' unions and Ministries of Education led to the development of a position paper to Ministers of Education in 2001. Among the recommendations in that paper were the development of a generic teacher appraisal scheme and the harmonization of a Code of Ethics for teachers in the sub-region. The generic Teacher Appraisal Scheme has been developed, piloted and completed, together with guidelines for use. The team of educators who developed the appraisal scheme emphasized that the use of such a scheme should be part of a system of enhancement for the teaching profession in the OECS.

Similarly, a generic Code of Ethics provides a set of guidelines that would underpin teachers' professional action and responsibility. This Code ought to be seen in the context of other proposals, and professional and administrative initiatives that would complement the principles and guidelines developed in this framework. Credit should be given to the collaborative effort that has been brought to the table in the developmental process. The process and product exemplify the critical and constructive way in which teachers' unions and Ministries of Education may integrate ideas and action in the interest of professional development of teachers. Praise should also be extended to the Ministries of Education and unions that have produced organizational and country level Codes that were used in the discussion and formulation of the principles outlined in this document.

## INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

A Teachers' Code of Ethics should have a philosophical base. The concept of the teacher as a moral agent is one of the essential foundations of a Code of Ethics. A second view that forms a base of a Code is the perspective of the school and teaching as part of a social and cultural context in which the teacher is an active participant. The teacher is instrumental in helping to shape change that enhances the quality of the classroom environment and the learning process. The teacher is also part of an organizational web of structure and action that influences the day-to-day as well as the on-going stream of action in schools and their environment.

### Teaching as a moral enterprise

This Code of Ethics takes the position that these two major dimensions of the teacher and teaching are inter-related and function to organize teachers' actions, hopes and aspirations. *Morality refers to the way in which we ought to conduct our lives.* Morality may be conceived in a variety of ways. Three of these are *virtuous person* approach that emphasizes the importance of exemplars/models; the *adherence to duty* approach where one must follow the rules set and do one's duty; and the third approach, *goodness and happiness for the majority*. In this third view the individual has to shoulder the responsibility for acting morally (Noddings 1995). Although usually displayed as an individual choice, morality is best understood in the context of communication with others in a community or wider society (Coulter 2001).

The *virtuous person approach* would argue that teachers ought to be of exemplary character with thoughts and actions worthy of emulation. Because the educational service is in the public domain it may not be easy to prescribe standards of conduct to be present on recruitment, beyond the traditional character reference from notable persons and the police service. The Code, however, does refer to certain exemplary qualities that ought to be present and portrayed. Therefore, there are implications for opportunity to be provided for teachers to be made aware of and to practise good moral principles. Professional development interventions are media through which



virtuous behaviour, such as honesty and integrity, may be made available to teacher inductees and, in some instances, to more experienced teachers.

A Code of Ethics also makes room for moral principles that emphasize obedience to rules and authority and the primacy of duty in the professional setting. For example, students are expected to conform to a number of school codes. In order for students to accept conformity it is necessary that they see teachers themselves being subject to obedience to a set of consensual rules. Important in this perspective is the notion that reason or rationality is brought to bear on the pressure to conform. Teachers, like students, who are involved in a collaborative effort to devise a set of normative behaviours are more likely to subscribe to the norms so developed. The validity of rules lies in their foundation of moral principles and in the likelihood that they will be obeyed. A broad base of cooperation and collaboration is therefore necessary for rule development and adherence.

Third, a Code of Ethics must consider consequences of actions. In this view of morality is the concern with the attempt to attain the greatest good for all people. Conversely, one should strive to avoid causing pain to others. It is clearly seen that, according to this position, teachers have a critical role in promoting a caring relationship between the teacher and the child. Noddings (2001) asserts that caring teachers listen to students, respect their legitimate interests and share their wisdom with their students. She further emphasizes that the “cared-for” must recognize the care given in order for the relationship to be considered a caring one. The caring perspective exemplified by Noddings has been described by Hansen (2001) as the five virtues of teachers: *emphasizing truth in their interaction, demonstrating courage in inducing children to learn, showing high levels of caring in the process of developing people (students), exhibiting fairness as a characteristic of democracy and influencing the intellectual and moral growth.*

One philosopher has equated professional responsibility in teaching with moral competence and responsibility of the teacher in relation to children (Oser 2000). Oser argues that professional action must be informed by a system of moral values in order that positive and negative consequence may be evaluated. In summary, therefore, a

Code of Ethics has a firm foundation in conceptions of morality and serves to induce a teacher to become a moral agent in the context of the school.

### Culture and action in teaching and schools

A second group of considerations that form a foundation for a Code is the view that the school is a social system in which the teacher is an active participant interacting with students, other teachers, the principal, and parents and the community. Teachers usually have the most influence in their own classrooms. The degree to which teachers would participate in school-wide goal-setting and goal-sharing is directly related to the climate of collegiality and collaboration that is present. That is, they would share in a cultural integrity specific to their school.

Gallego et al (2001) suggest that culture (in the school) may be interpreted as an instrumental phenomenon, that is, the selection of worthwhile techniques of teaching and classroom behaviour. Also, culture regulates the actions of persons in the school community. Third, culture directs the development and choice of values and goals. Therefore, if teachers are to be involved in ethical behaviour (for example, planning and teaching lessons that are beneficial to student learning, offering and seeking advice and encouragement, and guiding value choices of students), the entire within-school (cultural) community must be characterized by shared norms and values.

Recent conceptualizations of leadership put forward the position that leadership should be distributed among key nodes or points in the organization (Leithwood & Duke 1999). This perspective suggests that all teachers should have the opportunity to perform leadership roles with the attendant responsibility. Such a practice would help to promote shared meanings and encourage reflective dialogue as part of a community of learners (Marks and Louis 1997). However, the principal, as the legitimate leader of the school organization, has the responsibility to mediate in matters that threaten to impede the lateral (professional) communication flow that supports and sustains the culture.

Apart from sharing in the cultural norms and values and contributing to the life of the school the teacher has major responsibility for students at the classroom level. A central argument of the consequence of this particular role of the teacher is that the teacher derives psychological satisfaction (psychic reward) from being involved in meaningful work. Teacher efficacy refers to the extent that a teacher believes she can influence the quality of learning of students. In turn, the quality of student motivation and performance reinforces the high quality of teacher competence (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy and Hoy 1998).

Teacher efficacy, however, is dependent on the cultivation and maintenance of a professional community developed and nurtured in part by prevailing distributed forms of leadership (Leithwood & Duke 1999). Teachers may need to be persuaded that their conception and practice of efficacy is contingent on collaborative activity, both at grade level and at the school level. Part of the efficacy paradigm may be evident in Hansen's (2001) view of teaching as practice, much in the way that the term is used for lawyers and doctors. In this understanding, teachers come to really know the mind and spirit of young people, and are able to influence the moral and intellectual growth of their students.

### Organization of the Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics addresses five major components of the teacher's professional actions within the school organization. These components are as follows:

*Commitment to student learning*

*Commitment to the teaching profession*

*Relationship with parents, guardians and families*

*Relationship with colleagues*

*Relationship with the community*

Although these categories appear to be distinct conceptually, the nature of teaching and learning and the social relations within schools result in a blurring of boundaries with regard to day to day thought and action.

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### **List of Related Documents Developed by Countries**

Ministry of Education, Culture and Technology – *Proposed dress code for teachers in Antigua and Barbuda*

Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers – *Rights and responsibilities of the teacher*

*A Code of Ethics for teachers...a framework for our profession* - Barbados

Government of the British Virgin Islands Ministry of Education and Culture: *Teachers' Handbook*

Government of the British Virgin Islands: *The draft Education Bill (2003)*

Caribbean Union of Teachers: *Code of Ethics based on Code of Ethics from member countries*

*Code of Ethics for members of the Grenada Teaching Service*

Grenada Union of Teachers: *Grenada Code of Ethics governing members of the teaching profession*

Montserrat Secondary School: *Guidelines for teachers*

Gingerland Primary School, St. Kitts and Nevis: *Staff handbook*

St. Lucia Teachers' Union: *Code of Ethics*

*Collective agreement between the Government of St. Lucia and St. Lucia Teachers' Union for the periods April 1, 1995 to March 31, 1998, and April 1, 1998 to March 31, 2001*

St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union: *Constitution and Code of Ethics*

*Recommendation concerning the status of teachers (adopted by the Special Intergovernmental Conference on the Status of Teachers, 5 October, 1966: UNESCO)*

# **CODE OF ETHICS FOR TEACHERS**

1. A Code of Ethics is a formal framework of ideals that guide and encourage all teachers to strive to achieve these high standards of behaviour.
2. This sub-regional Code of Ethics recognizes the commonalities of the OECS countries and promotes the concept of regional unity and co-operation. It is the result of collaborative efforts of educators who are cognizant of the need for teachers to obtain the necessary support so as to achieve and maintain the highest possible standards in their professional work.

## **I. a Preamble**

3. Teaching is a noble profession. The quality and character of the individual members of the teaching profession influence to a great extent the social, economic, intellectual and moral levels of society. Teachers and administrators must therefore understand fully the critical role they play in the education of the nation. They should also feel a common commitment to education and nation-building while experiencing a common identity as members of the teaching profession.
4. The teaching profession is guided by a set of core values and principles that include:

Commitment to duty;  
Love of children;  
Trust and confidentiality;  
Respect for law and order;  
Accountability; and  
Democracy

5. The Code of Ethics is not in itself a legally binding document. It is intended to be regarded as a set of normative principles instead of a list of prescriptive rules or regulations. Overall it seeks to provide an ethical basis for enhancing the public image of teachers and the teaching profession. It should be recognized, however, that educational regulations, based on the Education Act, may be informed by a Code of Ethics.

## **II Commitment to Student Learning**

6. Teachers are essential to the provision of a good quality education and contribute in no small measure to the academic and vocational success of students. Their commitment to student learning is vital to the educational process. Therefore they shall endeavour to:

### **II a Recognize and respect diversity and inclusiveness among students**

7. Acknowledge the individuality and specific intellectual and psycho-social needs of each student.
8. Provide guidance and encouragement to enable each student to strive to reach his/her full potential.
9. Respect and deal justly and considerately with each student regardless of gender, ethnic origin, physical disability, social or economic status, and political or religious affiliation.

### **II b Focus on choices that affect students' opportunity to learn**

10. Place high value on and demonstrate a commitment to excellence in teaching and learning.
11. Take active steps to reduce the level of student disengagement.
12. Plan all lessons to meet the needs and interest of students.
13. Maintain high standards of professional competence.



14. Endeavor to ensure that students be given the maximum amount of contact time available.
15. Plan and execute school-related activities that meet the needs and interests of all students.
16. Employ appropriate teaching methods that would tend to enhance student learning.
17. Involve students in activities that encourage them to think analytically and creatively.
18. Deal effectively and justly with student discipline in accordance with the Education Act and existing school and classroom codes.

## **II c Establish and maintain a supportive teaching and learning environment**

19. Strive to influence the improvement of teaching and learning facilities and the classroom environment.
20. Contribute to the protection, safety and welfare of students.
21. Promote wholesome student-student and student-teacher relationship, especially mutual respect.
22. Encourage students to respect differences in opinion among their peers.

## **II d Promote student development**

23. Develop in students an appreciation for high standards and a desire to strive for excellence in their various spheres of life.
24. Review with students their assessment and progress, and guide them in setting and achieving meaningful goals.
25. Encourage students in the pursuit life-long learning. .
26. Help students to acquire a wide range of essential social graces and skills.

**II e Recognize the rights of the student**

- 27. Respect the rights of all students as identified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and enshrined in the national Constitution
- 28. Act with dignity, humanity and discretion in their relations with students.
- 29. Protect students from any form of verbal, mental, physical or sexual abuse.
- 30. Safeguard confidential information about students and only disclose such information to authorized personnel for compelling reasons, or if required by law.
- 31. Respect a student's right to withhold confidential information, except to a person authorized to receive it.
- 32. Respect national and professional guidelines for the treatment of students and other persons suffering from HIV/AIDS and other diseases.
- 33. Instil in students a deep respect for an individual's personal and private property.

**II f Provide opportunities for the development of students' self-worth and national and regional pride**

- 34. Provide scope for the development and expansion of independent points of view.
- 35. Foster a spirit of tolerance, a respect for the law and authority, freedom and social justice.
- 36. Encourage a sense of patriotism, national and regional pride.
- 37. Encourage respect for national and regional symbols, such as emblems, songs, anthems and cultural traditions.
- 38. Encourage an appreciation for and demonstration of regional cooperation and unity.
- 39. Encourage the widest possible participation in national and regional activities or events.

### **III.0 Commitment to the teaching profession**

The quality of the teaching profession has direct and indirect influence on the social and cultural fabric of the community, the nation and the region. Also the quality of the teaching profession is also related to the commitment of the professionals who provide the service. Therefore, teachers shall strive to:

#### **III a Maintain highest standards of professional competence and integrity**

40. Place their professional service and position first and not permit other activities to impair the effectiveness of their professional competence.
41. Follow the proper and established channels for obtaining a position, promotion or self-advancement professionally.
42. Speak in terms that ennoble the profession and in this way encourage worthy people to enter it.
43. Be fair in all their judgment, assessment and reports.
44. Be knowledgeable of their legal, professional and administrative rights and responsibilities.
45. Make appropriate use of time granted for professional purposes.
46. Speak and act in such a manner as to be worthy role models for their students.
47. Be punctual and regular in the performance of their duties.
48. Dress in a manner consistent with the dignity and norms of the teaching profession.

#### **III b Strive to be current with relevant knowledge and curriculum practices**

49. Keep up-to-date through continual professional and personal development.
50. Engage actively in community projects that are designed to promote the educational enterprise.

- 51. Participate in a responsible manner in the development and implementation of educational and social development policies.
- 52. Become knowledgeable about current themes, models and practice of curriculum and teaching and student learning.

#### **IV.0 Relationship with Parents, Guardians and Families**

Parents are critical partners in the education of their children. It is essential that teachers commit themselves to working with parents and families in an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual respect, and strive to:

##### **IV a Observe the rights of parents/guardians and promote collaboration**

- 53. Recognize the rights of parents to consultation on the welfare and progress of their children.
- 54. Respect the lawful parental authority in giving advice that should be in the best interest of the child.
- 55. Give accurate information on the academic and vocational performance and behaviour of students when requested by a parent.
- 56. Take every opportunity to acquaint parents on the laws and regulations affecting their child as a student and their role as parents.
- 57. Encourage parents to become actively involved in the education of their children.
- 58. Assist parents to support activities undertaken by the school.
- 59. Make parents aware of the need to protect their children from any form of child labour and any activity that may affect the child's education adversely.

#### **IV b Build mutual trust and respect with parents**

- 60. Know the parents or guardians of their students and maintain professional contact with them in the interest of their students.
- 61. Respect the private nature of the special knowledge about students and their families and use that knowledge only in the students' interests.
- 62. Respect family privacy and maintain an appropriate level of confidentiality.
- 63. Honour trust under which confidential information is exchanged.

#### **IV c Recognize and respect parent's cultural and socioeconomic diversity**

- 64. Act with humanity, dignity and discretion at all times in their relationship with parents, regardless of race, religion, political belief, age, physical characteristics and ancestry or occupation.
- 65. Deal fairly and considerately with each parent.
- 66. In dealing with students display no bias that will suggest a preference for parental socioeconomic status.

### **V.0 Relationship with colleagues**

Teachers in extending due respect to their colleagues' willingness to work together professionally, shall endeavour to:

#### **V a Build an atmosphere of mutual trust among colleagues**

- 67 Refrain from making defamatory remarks concerning another colleague.
- 68 Safeguard confidential information acquired about colleagues professionally, and only disclose such information for compelling professional reasons or if required by law.
- 69 Respect and encourage the confidence of students in other teachers.
- 70 Resolve to share professional knowledge, experience and insights with colleagues in a collegial atmosphere.

- 71 Cooperate with other educators in matters that are in the best interest of students and the school.
- 72 Be prepared to offer advice and assistance particularly to those teachers beginning their career or in training.
- 73 Be responsive to colleagues who seek professional assistance.

## **VI.0 Relationship with the Community**

The achievement of high quality education depends on the commitment of teachers and supportive communities. It is necessary, therefore, for schools to develop the kind of relationships that address the needs and interests of students and also of the wider community.

Teachers therefore shall strive to:

### **VI a Establish and maintain supportive school-community learning environment.**

- 74 Recognize and enrich the participation of the community in the work of the school.
- 75 Seek available community support and resources to improve the learning processes and environment.
- 76 Support the participation of interested community groups and individuals in the policy formulation process at the school level.
- 77 Facilitate the participation of the community in the implementation of educational plans.

### **VI b Recognize and work with support agencies in the community**

- 78 Cooperate with approved agencies or bodies in matters concerning the welfare of students; e.g. counselling services, schools welfare services.
- 79 Participate in community and environmental activities that have a positive impact on the life of the community.

**VI c Engender commitment to civic duty**

- 80 Respect and obey the constitution and existing laws of the country.
- 81 Display appreciation of, and respect for the national and regional symbols of identity and belongingness.
- 82 Appreciate and respect the prevailing norms and values characteristic of their culture. However, opportunity should be provided to evaluate norms and values.
- 83 Help to promote the cultural and social consciousness of the community.

**VII d Relationship with the teachers' unions and professional associations**

Teachers unions are committed to the promotion of education that helps to develop people's capacity to live fulfilled lives. Unions recognize their responsibility in the teaching environment and role in civil society. Teachers' unions are aware also that commitment to me members is professional, educational and industrial and accept that membership in unions carries with it rights and responsibilities.

Teachers shall strive to:

**VII a Recognize and abide by policies and decision of the governing bodies of the Union.**

- 85 Honour their financial commitments to the Union.
- 86 Honour commitment to the Union without compromising the principles and integrity of the teaching profession.
- 87 Be constructive in any criticism, including criticism of the Union.
- 88 Adhere to collective agreements negotiated by the Union.
- 89 Promote change or development from within the organization.
- 90 Lend support to and participate in various activities of the Union.

## **VIII o Relationship with the Employer**

Having regard for the responsibilities inherent in the teaching process and the desire to attain and maintain high ethical standards and a healthy relationship with the Ministry of Education, teachers shall strive to:

### **VIII a Work within the scope and boundaries of education laws and policies**

- 91 Honour agreements made between the union and the employer.
- 92 Be consistent in the execution of school policies and the enforcement of rules and regulations
- 93 Recognize and respect the authority of the school, school boards and Ministry of Education, and seek to influence administrative policies and practices.
- 94 Observe all oral or written agreements arrived at with school administration and Ministry of Education.

### **VIII b Observe General Orders and terms of employment:**

- 95 Use the established channels of communication in dealing with all job-related matters.
- 96 Report to relevant authorities through established channels all matters that have an impact on learning and teaching conditions in the school.
- 97 Be knowledgeable of their legal and administrative rights and responsibilities.
- 98 Respect the provisions of collective contracts and the provisions concerning students' rights.
- 99 Carry out reasonable instructions from administrative personnel and retain the right to clarify instructions through a clearly determined procedure.
- 100 Promote and defend such plans and policies agreed upon by the Union and the school administration and Ministry of Education.



## **IX Conclusion**

Fundamental to any profession is a sense of common values and expectations of and for one another. The teaching profession has in addition a basis in moral authority that is derived from the central social importance of teaching and socializing children. Hence a high level of public respect and confidence is best achieved when teachers themselves establish and maintain a reputation for integrity, competence and commitment. It is in this vein, that the Code of Ethics for teachers articulated in this document embraces the best practices of participating countries across the OECS.

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