

Got Ethics? Concepts, Case Studies & Conundrums in Music Education

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A. Session Description

Every day in the news, we hear of serious breaches of professionalism, violations of ethics, and severe misconducts the result of poor judgment of CEOs, politicians, celebrities, and... yes, even school teachers. No one in the profession can "dodge" or ignore these essential questions:

- What in the world is "The Code" and when was the last time you read yours from the PDE?
- How do ethics inform a teacher's personal and professional actions?
- What does it mean to be a "fiduciary" and "moral exemplar" in the community?
- How do you avoid "stepping in it" to prevent the "slippery slope" of inappropriate student-teacher relationships and other ethical controversies?

Using scenarios of ethical issues in music education, we will empanel a mock "ethics jury" to assess case studies and explore several conundrums discussing the moral "decision-making compass" of music teachers.

B. Targets

Attendees will appraise, critique, differentiate, justify, and internalize knowledge and understanding of:

1. Definitions, philosophy, and practices of teacher ethics, morality, professional standards, responsibilities, and codes of conduct
2. Professional nature of teachers' relationships with students, parents, other professionals, school institutions, and maintenance of appropriate student-teacher boundaries
3. Values set forth in the Pennsylvania Professional Standards and Practices Commission "Code of Professional Practice and Conduct" and introduction to the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification "Model Code of Ethics for Educators"
4. Ethical dilemmas and recommendations for the avoidance of unacceptable appearances and/or actions

C. Clinician

Paul K. Fox earned the degrees of Bachelor of Fine Arts in Music (1977) and Master of Fine Arts in Music Education (1979) from Carnegie-Mellon University, College of Fine Arts.

He retired in June 2013 from 35 years of public-school music teaching and administration. His final job assignment was Performing Arts Curriculum Leader and orchestra/string teacher (grades 5-12) of the Upper St. Clair School District. As a music educator, he also taught choral music (grades 7-12), vocal/general music (grades K-8), elementary band (grade 4), plays/musicals (grades 4-12), and music theory (grades 10-12).

Currently, he is Retired Member Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) and Chair of the PMEA Council for Teacher Training, Recruitment, and Retention. He presents sessions and writes articles and blog-posts about creativity in education, interview techniques and marketing professionalism (for collegiate MEAs/new teachers), and retirement resources for a variety of websites and publications: *MajoringinMusic.com*, *SmartMusic educator blog*, *NAFME eNEWS* and *Music in a Minuet*, *PMEA News*, *Collegiate Communique*, and *Retired Member Network eNEWS*, and <https://paulfox.blog/>.

D. Primary References

1. Article series and blog-site: <https://paulfox.blog/category/ethics/>
2. Pennsylvania's **Code of Professional Practice and Conduct for Educators**: <http://www.pspc.education.pa.gov/Statutes-Regulations-Policies-Forms/Code-of-Professional-Practice-Conduct/Pages/default.aspx>
3. Pennsylvania's **Educator Ethics and Conduct Toolkit** by Dr. Oliver Dreon, Sandi Sheppard, PA State System of Higher Education, and the PA Professional Standards and Practices Commission: <http://www.pspc.education.pa.gov/Promoting-Ethical-Practices-Resources/Ethics-Toolkit/Pages/default.aspx>
4. **Model Code of Ethics for Educators** https://www.nasdtdec.net/page/MCEE_Doc
5. Nebraska Professional Practices Commission: <https://nppc.nebraska.gov/>
6. Lien, Joelle L. (2012). "Ethical Dilemmas of In-Service Music Educators." *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*. Online: http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Lien11_1.pdf
7. American Board: "Social Media Rules for Educators" <https://www.americanboard.org/blog/10-social-media-rules-for-teachers/>

E. “Common Sense” Recommendations

1. Never put anything in email, text, writing, or anywhere on the Internet that can come back to haunt you.
2. Do not engage in gossip about other students or professionals.
3. Avoid unofficial/unsupervised meetings or off-campus personal fraternization with students.
4. Do not transport individual students.
5. Do not share photos or personal information on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.).
6. Avoid physical contact with a student (never touch, hug, hold, push, etc.).
7. In your presence, allow no harassment or language that is of a sexual nature or can be misinterpreted.
8. Do not provide closed-door counseling.
9. Do not give gifts to your students.
10. Report serious medical issues to the authorities (bulimia, abuse, alcohol-use).
11. Report any suspected professional ethics violations of colleagues to administration.

F. Additional Scenarios for Discussion

1. Mr. S is a high school music teacher who has been tutoring Melissa on AP Music Theory after school for several months. Although Melissa’s academic performance has been improving, Melissa’s parents meet with the principal about concerns they have regarding Mr. S’s relationship with Melissa. During their tutoring sessions, Mr. S has given Melissa gift cards as rewards for her academic progress, driven Melissa home after tutoring sessions, and even begun to communicate with Melissa via text messaging during the evenings. While they have no proof of any impropriety, Melissa’s parents are concerned. When the principal meets with the teacher, Mr. S argues that his behavior is not inappropriate and that he is simply offering assistance to a student in need.
2. During lunch, Steven R. often walks around the faculty room giving his female colleagues back massages to help them “relax.” Some of the teachers look visibly uncomfortable with the contact and attempt to avoid his massages.
3. Robert M. was a middle school general music teacher who uses the Internet for instruction when students begin working on their composition projects. Due to the small number of computers in his classroom, Mr. M. allowed one of the students to use his desk computer to complete her work. While using Mr. M’s computer, the student encountered several sexually explicit websites that Mr. M. had bookmarked in his Favorites.
4. Melissa S. is a third-grade general music teacher in a rural school. Near the end of the year, Rodrigo enrolls in her class, even though he cannot speak English. Ms. S. is frustrated because she feels she does not have the training to work with a student like Rodrigo and complains in class that “people shouldn’t come here if they can’t even speak our language.” One of the students complains to her parents about what Ms. S said.
5. In the hallway one day, students from one of your classes stop and ask you what you think of Mr. T. When you ask why this would be important to them, they explain that Mr. T. had gone on a tirade in their class and complained about your ability as a teacher. One of them says that Mr. T. says that you were the worst teacher in the school.
6. An itinerant instrumental music instructor travels from school to school. After leaving Elm elementary school, the teacher travels to Central elementary. A Central teacher has a biological child who attends Elm elementary. Because of recent discipline issues with some of the special education students, the teacher at Central begins to ask the itinerant instructor about the behavior of some of the children at Elm elementary. The itinerant begins to share some of the concerns and specifics about the IEPs of those children who were involved in a recent behavioral incident.
7. Elizabeth L. taught general music at Webster Hills Middle School. In her free time, Ms. L. was also a cheerleader for a local sports team. As a reward for their performance on a recent exam, Ms. L. performed one of her cheerleading routines for her eighth graders in her classroom. Unbeknown to Ms. L, one of the students in the class used his cell phone to videotape the cheerleading routine. The student posted the video online and it drew the attention of district personnel and community members. Several parents were outraged and complained about the suggestive nature of the cheerleading routine.



G. Links for additional follow-up

1. **NAFME Academy Professional Development Videos:** “It’s Essential Not Sexy – Ethics 101 for Educators” and “Resolving Dissonance! Ethical Decision Making in Music Education”
<https://nafme.org/community/elearning/nafme-academy-content/>
2. **Crossing Boundaries: Inappropriate Relationships**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwQyoXy0kns>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PL02yPaO81qEd7LWhJd1yPw0PPHVBMvyPx&v=kgI2OZdz06Q>
3. **Confidentiality of Student Information** [http://www.marion.kyschools.us/docs/Confidentiality of Student Information-handout1.pdf](http://www.marion.kyschools.us/docs/Confidentiality_of_Student_Information_handout1.pdf)
4. **Facebook and Teachers**
5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSuQTwpB5-8>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zU8m-4_CmtU
6. **Educator Ethics**
http://www.sai-iowa.org/Educator_Ethics_ppt_NEW_2017.pptx
7. **Teachers’ Ethical Dilemmas – What Would You Do?**
https://www.redorbit.com/news/education/1141680/teachers_ethical_dilemmas_what_would_you_do/