
~ TRAINING SOLUTIONS ~

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ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO ADULT LEARNERS

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ethical [adj.] - conforming to accepted standards of social or professional behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Over time, there has been considerable discussion and general agreement about what it means to be an ethical teacher of young children. But what does it mean to be an ethical trainer or instructor? As ongoing professional development becomes established, it can be beneficial to think critically about what it means to be an ethical teacher of teachers.

An early childhood trainer or instructor may know the topic and use appropriate adult learning strategies without being an ethical trainer. It is entirely possible to follow the rules of teaching and adult learning without an understanding of the ethical considerations behind the rules. A basic tenet found in the field of research, the "fundamental ethical imperative behind the rules is that researchers [and teachers] seek to do their jobs in a manner that will not cause unjustified harm to anyone" (UM, 2002).

Most trainers in early childhood are trying to act in an ethical way. Through their practice and professional conduct, they seek to prevent harm and promote the good. While there is a range of actions that count as ethical and responsible conduct in early childhood training, it can be helpful to have concrete guidelines and standards to apply to those actions.

Ethical Dilemma. A moral conflict that involves determining appropriate conduct when an individual faces conflicting professional values and responsibilities. ~ Code of Ethics

NAEYC'S CODE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has always been concerned with the ideals and principles used by early childhood teachers to guide their practice. As a result, NAEYC developed the Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment for early childhood practitioners (revised 2005).

The document was developed in recognition "that those who work with young children face many daily decisions that have moral and ethical implications." The document offers "guidelines for responsible behavior and sets forth a common basis for resolving the principal ethical dilemmas encountered in early childhood care and education."

Code of Ethics. Defines the core values of the field and provides guidance for what professionals should do when they encounter conflicting obligations or responsibilities in their work.
~ Code of Ethics

NAEYC'S SUPPLEMENT FOR TRAINERS

The initial code of ethical conduct focused on ethical guidelines for practitioners—individuals who work directly with young children and their families. As opportunities for training and professional development for practitioners grew, it became apparent that there also needed to be ideals and principles to guide the trainers and educators of these practitioners. Thus

the Code of Ethical Conduct: Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators was jointly developed in 2004. The national early childhood organizations that developed the Supplement include NAEYC, the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE), and the American Associate Degree Early Childhood Teacher Educators (ACCESS). It has since been adopted by the National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC).

The Supplement includes an introduction with brief paragraphs describing the purpose, core values, and conceptual framework for the Supplement. It acknowledges that "the primary challenge [for those who teach early childhood teachers] is to find a balance between an obligation to support and nurture adult learners and the obligation to provide caring and competent professionals to work with young children and their families." It plainly embraces the reality that "like those who work with young children, early childhood adult educators are regularly called upon to make decisions of a moral and ethical nature." The core values overriding the document's content are:

~ "To respect the critical role of a knowledgeable, competent, and diverse early childhood care and education workforce in supporting the development and learning of young children."

~ "To base practice on current and accurate knowledge of the fields of early childhood education, child development, adult development and learning, as well as other relevant disciplines."

The bulk of the Supplement delineates relevant ideals and associated principles. The ideals and principles included in the Supplement are "designed to inspire and guide early childhood adult educators toward actions that reflect the field's current understandings of their ethical responsibilities."

The ideals and principles set forth "a conception of early childhood teacher educators' professional responsibilities" and "address arenas of professional relationships." Ideals and principles related to ethical responsibilities and obligations are divided into the following six areas:

1. Ethical responsibilities to adult learners
2. Sites providing practicum experiences
3. Employing institutions of higher learning and agencies that provide training
4. Professional colleagues
5. Children and families
6. Community, society, and the field of early care and education

While you are encouraged to study each section, it is worth initially examining Section 1 in depth. Although all of the areas are undeniably important, the ideals and principles found in Section 1 form the foundation for embracing the rest of the ideals and principles assembled in the document.

As teacher educators fulfill their responsibilities to adult learners, they encounter some unique ethical challenges in the context of a complex network of relationships. ~ Supplement

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES - ADULT LEARNERS

Section 1 of the Supplement—ethical responsibilities to adult learners—provokes deep thinking about the practices expected of an ethical trainer. Section 1 is introduced by the following paragraph.

"Our work is always guided by the core values of the field of early care and education, including our commitment to ensuring the welfare of children. From that perspective we prioritize the unique commitments of early childhood adult educators and acknowledge that our day-to-day responsibilities focus primarily on the professional development of adult learners."

All of the Ideals and Principles from Section 1 are included below. They have been formatted in the style of a self-assessment. The first self-assessment addresses the Ideals and the second self-assessment deals with the Principles. Note: There is not a one-to-

definitions of practices that are required, prohibited, and permitted." The self-assessment can be used to examine the training practices you use when teaching early childhood teachers and compare the results with recommended practice.

~ Instructions

Following is a list of ethical principles addressed in the Supplement. Decide how consistently you use each principle. Principles related directly to academic settings include "not applicable" or N/A as an option.

~ Self-assessment

1.1 I provide learning experiences that are consistent with the best practices for adult learners and that match the needs, learning styles, cultures, and stages of development of adult learners.

consistently occasionally seldom
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1.2 I inform learners of conduct and work expectations, including institutional standards for writing, performance, and intellectual honesty.

consistently occasionally seldom
----->

1.3 I give learners a fair chance to succeed and diverse ways to demonstrate their competence.

consistently occasionally seldom
----->

1.4 I provide additional support for adult learners who have the potential to work effectively with young children but have difficulty meeting [professional development or] academic standards.

consistently occasionally seldom
----->

1.5 I provide additional support and counsel to those who demonstrate academic excellence while having difficulty in meeting standards for classroom practice.

consistently occasionally seldom
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1.6 I inform those seeking training in early childhood education of current economic and social conditions affecting the field so that they may make an educated decision about career choices.

consistently occasionally seldom
----->

1.7 I provide information about disparities between best practice and commonly accepted practice to better prepare students to face ongoing challenges related to their work with children.

consistently occasionally seldom
----->

1.8 I do not place students or allow students to continue in placements that, in the best professional judgment, are not beneficial to children. N/A

consistently occasionally seldom
----->

1.9 When it becomes apparent that a practicum placement is not supporting a student's professional development or is not beneficial to the student or children, every effort is made to move the student to a more appropriate placement. N/A

consistently occasionally seldom
----->

1.10 When it becomes apparent that an adult learner is not able to benefit from my training, class, or program,

I help her/him identify an alternative educational path or goal.

consistently occasionally seldom
----->

1.11 I honor confidentiality, sharing only necessary information about an adult learner, only to those who need to know, and only through appropriate professional channels.

consistently occasionally seldom
----->

1.12 I make it clear at the outset if training involves the sale of products or services from which I stand to gain financially and do this only if the products or services are relevant and serve educational goals.

consistently occasionally seldom
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CONCLUSION

It cannot be denied that a trainer’s conduct has a powerful impact on training participants and ultimately affects their daily practice with young children and families. Trainers who use professional ideals and principles to guide their conduct are more likely to have a positive impact. They are also better prepared to resolve any ethical dilemmas that may arise.

It is now time for you to look back over each self-

assessment, acknowledge your strengths, and identify areas that may need improvement. Perhaps there are ideals you have never even considered or principles you have not yet encountered during your experience as a trainer. To get the most from completing the self-assessments, choose one or two of the ideals or principles to target for further development. Create an action plan listing concrete actions, necessary resources, and projected completion dates. ~

Professional Ethics. The moral commitments of a profession that involves moral reflection that extends and enhances the personal morality practitioners bring to their work, that concern actions of right and wrong in the workplace, and that help individuals resolve moral dilemmas they encounter in their work. ~ Code of Ethics

RESOURCES*

* University of Montana Online Research Ethics Course (2002). May be found at www.umt.edu.

* Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment (revised in 2005) - NAEYC. A joint position statement may be found at www.naeyc.org.

* Code of Ethical Conduct: Supplement for Early Childhood Adult Educators (adopted spring 2004) - NAEYC. The joint position statement may be found at www.naeyc.org.

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If you have stories to share about implementing the ideas described in this issue, please address your comments to your training colleagues at trainerdirectoryexchange@listserv.montana.edu. If you have comments about the topic of this newsletter or ideas for topics to address in future issues, please contact:

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