

Ethics for Music Educators

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PMEA State Webinar/Video Take-Away

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A. Description of Sessions

Johnny Cash sang “I walk the line...” in his love song, but in music education, it is a “fine line” to maintain the standards and appearances of professionalism, morality, and ethical codes of conduct in the school workplace. This two-part video/workshop will share the problems, research, recommendations, and real-time scenarios of ethical issues in music education.

B. Targets

1. Review definitions, philosophy and practices of teacher ethics, morality, professional standards, responsibilities, and codes of conduct
2. Understand the professional nature of teachers’ relationships with students, parents, and other professionals, and appropriate student-teacher boundaries
3. Internalize the values set forth in the PA Code of Professional Practice and Conduct
4. Recognize ethical dilemmas and avoidance of unacceptable appearances/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.

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 (Allegheny County in Western Pennsylvania). 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 maintains an active schedule as Retired Member Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA), Chair of the PMEA Council for Teacher Training, Recruitment, and Retention, Founding Director of the South Hills Junior Orchestra, Steering Committee Representative of the UPPER ST. CLAIR TODAY magazine, Staff Announcer for the Upper St. Clair High School Marching Band, Trustee for the Community Foundation of Upper St. Clair, and Volunteer Escort for the St. Clair Memorial Hospital. In addition, he 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: Edutopia.org, MajoringinMusic.com, NAFME *eNEWS* and *Music in a Minuet*, *PMEA News* and *Retired Member Network eNEWS*, and <https://paulkfoxusc.wordpress.com/>.

D. Primary References

1. Article series and blog-site: <https://paulkfoxusc.wordpress.com/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 http://www.nasdtc.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. "Top Dozen" Essential Questions

1. How do ethics inform a teacher's personal and professional actions?
2. How does the PA Code of Professional Practices and Conduct (and other ethical codes of conduct) communicate standards for appropriate behavior for teachers?
3. What does it mean to be a "moral exemplar" or "role model" in the community?
4. What are the expectations of educators with respect to accumulating either personal or financial gain or advantage through their work in the school system?
5. How can a teacher foster positive, professional relationships with students?
6. How is the appropriate teacher-student boundary defined?
7. What are the professional expectations for working with diverse populations of students, parents and colleagues?
8. What are the professional expectations regarding "electronic" interactions with students?
9. Why and how should teachers control their public "brand" or persona?
10. How does your classroom environment promote respect for student's needs and backgrounds?
11. What are the professional expectations of teachers regarding their relationships with colleagues?
12. How can a teacher foster positive, professional relationships with colleagues, parents, and the community?

F. Sample Scenarios

1. Jane S. was a second-grade teacher who took a sick day to compete in a bikini contest on the Howard Stern show. In addition to appearing in a bikini on the show, Mrs. S. also discussed her sexual relationship with her husband. While she won the contest, she was also forced to resign from her teaching position after school administrators were informed of the incident.
2. Robert M. was a middle school science teacher who uses the Internet for instruction when students begin researching their science fair 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 research. While using Mr. M's computer, the student encountered several sexually explicit sites that Mr. M. had bookmarked in his Favorites. When the student told her parents of the incident, Mr. M. was suspended while a full investigation was conducted.
3. James C. is a middle school music teacher who was arrested for drunk driving. After several months, the teacher goes to court and is convicted of the offense. When the district moves to have Mr. C fired for his conviction, Mr. C argues that this offense has no influence over his ability to instruct his students. Also, the offense happened during the weekend on his private time.
4. Mr. S is a middle school science teacher who has been tutoring Melissa 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.
5. Mrs. K is a high school choral director whose husband recently divorced her. During a lesson one day, Mrs. K breaks down emotionally in front of her class. In an attempt to calm the students, she explains her emotional state to her students and discusses the end of her marriage. After school that day, a male student visits Mrs. K to see if she has recovered. The student explains that his parents are also divorcing and he understands her feelings. The student begins stopping in to see Mrs. K more frequently and the pair begins spending more time outside of class supporting each other. Mrs. K's colleagues start to become suspicious of her relationship with the student and report the teacher's actions to their principal.
6. 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.
7. Rich W. is a high school band director who gives pet names to the female students in his ensembles. He calls them "darling" and "sweetheart" but always refers to the male students by their first name. Some of the female students are upset with Mr. W's pet names and arrange to meet with the principal to discuss their concerns.
8. 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.
9. In the hallway one day, students from one of your classes stop and ask you what you think of Mr. S. When you ask why this would be important to them, they explain that Mr. S. had gone on a tirade in their class and complained about your ability as a teacher. One of them says that Mr. S. says that you were the worst teacher in the school.

