

Acting with Honesty and Integrity

Principal III

Principal's basis

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC - 43 BC) was the first philosopher to talk about the adjective *honestum* and about the abstract noun *honestas*. Both terms appear a number of times in his works. In his text *De Officiis* (On Duties), Cicero suggests that honesty consist in the fulfillment of a moral duty and of certain fundamental virtues, since in Cicero's judgment, everything that is honest arises from one of these 4 parts:

- Subtle discernment of truth (wisdom and prudence)
- Safeguarding the society of men, conceding to each what is their own (justice)
- Greatness and robustness (strength) of a sublime and invincible spirit (fortitude)
- Order and restraint in what is said and done (moderation and temperance)

According to what was stated by Cicero, honesty would correspond to a complex way of being, given that it is manifested in the joint exercise of these virtues. Today our understanding of the concept of honesty seems not to deviate much from what was outlined by Cicero. According to the RAE¹, honest comes to signify: decent or decorous, cautious or modest, reasonable or just, trustworthy or truthful.

In conformity with this, it would seem that honesty consists, mainly, in a sort of commitment to truth, justice and integrity. In this sense, the honest person is the one who not only has the knowledge or awareness with regards to what is true or just, but who has as a habit, to orient their practice through actions directed towards the search for truth and justice and that, in turn, counts with the spirit and strength necessary to defend said upright and honest actions. As such, honesty moves essentially on the plane of action and not only of speech.

The relevance of searching for and committing to truth -essential aspect of the honest person- is key in the professional teaching practice. In a way, because truth provides us with theoretical and practical knowledge that allows us to carry ourselves in the world, to guide our conduct and to make decisions. "Our success or failure in anything we undertake, and

¹ Real Academia Española (s.f.). Honesto, ta. In the Diccionario de la Lengua Española. Retrieved on January 12th, 2022, from <https://dle.rae.es/honesto>

therefore in life in general, depends on whether we guide ourselves by truth or whether we advance in ignorance or basing ourselves in falseness” (Frankfurt, 2013, p.84). But also, because this commitment to knowledge and to truth is transmitted to future generations, making them responsible for the world and for the society they build.

Integrity, for its part, is a concept vastly discussed in the sphere of philosophy. It is an ample concept, which involves guiding our conducting according to a series of values and principles. As such, it can be understood as a personal matter, or else, as a social virtue. In Williams' judgment (1981), who suggests integrity to be a personal affair, it would correspond to the loyalty to the commitments with which people deeply identify themselves, this is, to the commitments that confer identity. From his perspective, whoever shows integrity acts from dispositions and motivations that are deeply his or hers. In this way, the person of integrity is the one who acts in accordance with his or her own life priorities. Integrity as a social virtue, in its turn, emphasizes the link with others. Integrity arises and manifests itself in relationships with others, in a way that involves considering not only what is valuable for oneself, but respecting others' judgment and deliberations (cf. Calhoun, 1995). The person of integrity, in this sense, is the one that -in the context of a community- represents and defends the best judgment for that community. On this same line, Halfon (1989) understands integrity as linked to the search for a morally good life. In his judgment, people of integrity:

“adopt a moral viewpoint that impulses them to be conceptually clear, logically consistent, informed on the relevant empiric evidence and careful when recognizing and pondering the relevant moral considerations. People of integrity impose these restrictions onto themselves, since they are concerned, not only to adopt a moral standing, but also to pursue the commitment to do what is best” (Halfon, 1989, p.37).

In synthesis, integrity can be understood from a personal dimension -as the strength and coherence between convictions, commitments and the person's actions- and from a social dimension, which considers loyalty to certain common values and principles, being able to discern between what is correct and what is not. In both cases integrity implies a serious commitment to beliefs, values, convictions, principles that guide and orient action and that, mainly, search for what is valuable and for goodness.

It is given the nature of the teaching profession and the responsibilities that the job as a teacher involves, that honesty and integrity gain relevance from certain dimensions: on a personal level, on the basis of the students and on the basis of the community. For instance, it is expected for a teacher to be honest and to have integrity regarding his or her training - being a teacher involves a commitment to continuous training-, for that reason it is important for the teacher to be honest regarding what he or she knows and to have integrity when taking action over things he or she does not know. To that extent, he or she becomes responsible for the knowledge and for the information he or she delivers. Honesty and integrity are also expected about the fulfillment of the commitments that he or she has to the students -having as a focal point their learning and development- and to the community.

It is relevant that the teacher is committed to the institution, to the institutional educational project and to the families and parents. This commitment translates into the acknowledgment of belonging and of adherence to a project and it becomes concrete in actions tending towards their attainment. Commitment to families and parents is assumed since teachers are the ones who are going to leave a mark on their children's education. Honesty and integrity are also expected about the decisions that are taken, counting with the evidence to sustain them, and responding in case of error. As such, the teacher's honesty and integrity, translate into a way of being -and not only of doing- that makes him or her commit to his or her own formation, to the educational community and even to the teaching profession. Future teachers “[...] must not only have good results and excellent interpersonal skills, but also a deep personal commitment towards teaching and working in schools” (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011, p.13). In synthesis, honesty and integrity -in the teachers' case-, are central given that it is ultimately in them that their trust and credibility rest.

Relevance of the Principle

Even when the Framework for the Good Teaching of Preschool Education does not refer explicitly to honesty and integrity, it does establish descriptors that point towards performances linked to them. This is evident in the 4 domains, which establish the teacher's commitment to truth, to rectitude, to justice and to principles that orient his or her duty towards what is correct. This is clearly visible in the D domain, which refers to the Professional Commitment and Development. In it are established, for example, the relevance of considering the professional duty, the educational policies in place and the curricular referents of the Preschool Education. This has to do with complying with the regulations, with the established policies and procedures, respecting the frameworks that are considered correct for the children at each level, thus safeguarding what is considered best for them.

Using the children's information responsibly and confidentially (domain D) constitutes a performance linked to integrity, insofar as it implies a way of acting that ponders which are the parameters and the consequences regarding the use of that information to the benefit of those children.

Thus, even if it not explicitly, there are in the Framework for the Good Teaching of Preschool Education clear references to these values.

With regards to the Standards for the Teaching Profession-Framework for Good Teaching, honesty and integrity are also manifested across all 4 of the domains. Nonetheless, domain D, based on Professional Ethics, highlights the 4th article of the teaching Code of Ethics². On

2 Colegio de Profesores de Chile A.G. (2003). *Code of Ethics*. Available on: <https://www.colegiodeprofesores.cl/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Código-de-Ética-2017b.pdf>

this regard the document “underlines the commitment to justice, integrity, trust and respect towards the dignity of all people; the responsibility and honesty in the fulfillment of roles; the loyalty and collaboration with our peers, as the foundation of all relationships, with rationality and the professional teaching practice. The commitment to justice and the value of dignity imply promoting equity, equality and non-discrimination, avoiding favoritism and respecting everybody, while appreciating their contributions. Honesty involves guiding students in the decisions that they must take in life and with regards to their environment. In addition, honesty with ourselves and others implies mutual respect in all communications, along with the disposition to analyze critically the individual and collective work” (Standards for the Teaching Profession-Framework for Good Teaching, p.56). In this way, domain D assumes an explicit commitment to the values or principles addressed in this document. An example of this are the following descriptors: Making decisions based on the profession's ethical consensus and the children's rights in order to protect the best interest of his or her students and the well-being of all the members of the school community, respecting the limits which correspond to his or her professional role, in every interaction with his or her students, families and parents; and complying with the professional norms and responsibilities established in the educational institution where he or she works, for the realization of the committed tasks.

These examples illustrate that the presence of values such as honesty and integrity are not always easily recognizable. Given that these are two broad and complex concepts in their meaning, it is possible to establish diverse performances that, in different ways, point towards them. The fact we do not find the words honesty or integrity in these frameworks does not mean that they are not present in a broader sense. Now, what does it mean in concrete terms to act with honesty and integrity?

How to act with honesty and integrity:

- **Committing to the search and construction of accurate, reliable and up-to-date knowledge:** practicing the teaching profession involves a commitment to knowledge. Whoever teaches a subject not only has to manage his discipline with expertise and be up to date, but ought to maintain a genuine interest for seeking said knowledge. In case the teacher does not know a given content or is not sure about the information that he or she is about to deliver, it is important that he or she can make this visible to whoever is concerned (students, colleagues, leading staff, etc.) and commits him or herself to study or to investigate. In the case of his or her subject, he or she can even invite students to investigate, so as to make visible the fact that knowledge is built together. But this commitment is not only expressed in relation to the disciplinary knowledge of his or her subject but is manifested in an attitude and a commitment to him or herself, to the students and to the community. Committing to knowledge is to search for the necessary information for fair decision making, it is to select information and material from serious and reliable sources, it is to talk with the truth and to recognize ignorance when necessary and, above all, it is to model an attitude of respect and of valuing

knowledge.

- **Acknowledging others' authorship:** the teacher is not only responsible for acknowledging and valuing the work and intellectual, and creative, contributions of others, but also for modeling and encouraging this behavior in his or her students. In this sense, it is not only about a personal attitude (of the teacher), but also about an attitude towards promoting and potentiating in others (students). Using, be it intentionally or unintentionally, others' ideas, work or words without explicitly acknowledging their authorship and making them pass as our own, constitutes plagiarism (a serious disregard for honesty). For that reason, it is relevant that the teacher explicitly acknowledges the sources utilized in their work, citing them. But also, it is relevant that the teacher can acknowledge the students' own ideas, so as to give the students authorship, acknowledging their achievements.
- **Acknowledging mistakes and assuming responsibility for them:** as people, us teachers are always going to make mistakes. In certain occasions those mistakes are going to go unnoticed, but in others they can be visible for our leading staff, peers, parents and/or students. In both cases, whether they are visible or not, what is important is how to respond to those mistakes. Apologizing, if it is necessary, acknowledging the mistake and making ourselves responsible for the consequences (immediate but also consider eventual long-term consequences) constitutes the proper way of responding. Among possible common mistakes are delivering mistaken or inaccurate information, giving different marks to the ones established in the marking criteria, having taken hasty decisions without having all the relevant information regarding the facts, among others. This performance intertwines with other principles, such as, for example, principle 4.
- **Complying with and promoting the establishment's principles and procedures:** an honest and upright teacher governs him or herself by the principles and the regulations established by the institution. Violating any of these principles or norms could threaten the goals of the educational project or the students' formation. But also, an honest and upright teacher has to align him or herself with the establishment's principles and procedures, committing him or herself to the institution, be it by validating, promoting or by justifying (in case it is necessary), its norms and procedures. For that, conviction and adherence to the educational project is required. This involves, however, assuming a non-critical commitment to what has been established, being that as a thoughtful professional, the teacher must be capable of interpreting the context, the needs, and to propose changes that potentiate or support the formation and development of the students and the educational community.
- **Acting consistently and in accordance with what is established in the classroom:** just like it is relevant that the teacher adheres to the institutional norms, it is important that he or she discloses and divulges what the rules or discipline and/or conduct norms are in his or her classroom. Acting in accordance and in a way consistent with said norms allows the students to have a clear understanding of what they can or cannot do. It is

important that the teacher safeguards the delivery, understanding and compliance with the information regarding the norms and the responsibilities established. These norms constitute, in turn, a guide for the teacher to fairly orient his or her behavior, trying to watch over and to safeguard impartiality. It is also important that we act in accordance to and respect the norms or moral code established by or agreed to with the students, making visible the importance of fulfilling the rights and duties and highlighting the importance of harmonious coexistence and of community relationships (meeting the work group obligations and agreements, listening to others, respecting different opinions, etc.).

- **Acting in a timely manner and in accordance with the norms in case of a breach:** in his or her formative role, it is important that the teacher promotes commitment and consideration with regards to the norms. In this way, he or she promotes integrity in his or her students, making it clear that this constitutes a way of being and of acting and that it is not limited to a mere observance of the norms. However, in those cases of a breach of the norms that require a sanction, it is relevant that the teacher acts in conformity to what is established, otherwise the norms lose their meaning. As such, the teacher is responsible for enforcing those norms, but also for acting in a timely fashion and efficiently in case it is necessary. A delayed response could be misinterpreted or even aggravate the problem. It is part of the teaching role to follow up and to accompany the students, in a way such as to orient others and to act in a timely manner. The ideal scenario would be that the formative work with the students diminishes the sanctions.
- **Being clear with regards to the expectations of the course:** explicitly communicating what is to be expected from the students allows them to be clear regarding the teacher's intentions, actions and decisions. Having students know what the purpose that orients the teacher's actions is allows them to foresee or anticipate certain behaviors or reactions, favorable and unfavorable.
- **Maintaining and safeguarding confidentiality in all matters relating to the students:** as teachers, we have access to much information about the students and their families, both personal and academic. The use we give to that information is relevant, given that on many occasions it allows us to make pedagogical decisions and to reorient certain practices. However, the teacher must safeguard the confidentiality of that information, so that this cannot be utilized for purposes that could harm or negatively affect the students and their family environment. On certain occasions the information with which we count could even predispose peers, teachers and the establishment's staff against a given student, generating prejudices, labels or ill-treatment. Talking with others about a student out of context and without a pedagogical motive also constitutes a serious fault. In cases of mistreatment, abuse or sexual harassment, it is indeed important to provide all the information or facts at hand with the purpose of stopping the infringement of the kid's rights. It is worth remembering that the use of students' images and pictures must also be confidential, so that their non-authorized publication

in social media constitutes a serious fault.

- **Checking the information and the facts before acting:** a responsible, honest and upright way of acting is only possible when the teacher has all the details that allow him or her to evaluate the situation and to discern, cautiously, the way of proceeding. Acting without knowing or confirming the information brings with it the risk of making wrong or unfair decisions. It is for that reason that it is important to provide evidence regarding the students' behavior and learning when meeting with other teachers, with the leading staff or in parent meetings.
- **Being aware of their formative role and of their status as a role model:** as has been pointed out, honesty and integrity are values that involve a commitment to truth, justice, rectitude and coherence. Therefore, it is the teacher's duty not only to act with honesty and integrity, but also to promote, from his or her formative role, the commitment to these values, encouraging among his or her students' behaviors and attitudes that reflect honesty and integrity (cf. Ramírez, 2011).
- **Having students as the focus of the development and learning process:** a teacher who is honest and of integrity is aware of the responsibility and the impact of his or her job: As such, faced with the teaching and learning process, he or she puts the students in the limelight, maintaining high expectations and proposing prepared, meaningful, and challenging experiences and classes, in accordance to the kids and students' learning and development process.

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