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Alignment Between the *ProEthica*® Program and the Model Code of Ethics for Educators

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Abstract

In May of 2016, 12 educators from 9 states participated in a study to document explicitly the alignment between the *Model Code of Ethics for Educators* (MCEE) and the *ProEthica*[®] program. *ProEthica* is a professional development program designed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) to help educators and educator candidates develop an understanding of professional ethics and provide guidance in applying professional ethics in practice. The *ProEthica* program includes 6 interactive modules (the first module is an introduction) and was designed to (a) provide an introduction to professional ethics, (b) explore the complexities and competing tensions inherent within the educator's role, and (c) inform decision-making based on professional standards. ETS facilitated a judgment-gathering process to identify which MCEE principles are addressed by the modules that comprise the *ProEthica* program. The combined judgments of the experts determined the alignment of the 5 *ProEthica* program modules to the MCEE principles and their supporting categories. Each of the 5 MCEE principles, as well as the 18 categories under the principles, were judged to be covered by 1 or more of the *ProEthica* program modules. In addition, the video scenarios and written scenarios included in the modules were judged to be realistic, frequently encountered, and important.

Key words: educator professional development, professional ethics

The *Model Code of Ethics for Educators* (MCEE) is designed as a guide for current and future educators to construct the best course of action when faced with ethical dilemmas, providing a basis for educator learning, self-reflection, and self-accountability.¹ The MCEE was developed by a diverse task force consisting of 20 practicing preschool through 12th grade (P-12) educators representing paraprofessionals, teachers, principals, and superintendents. In addition, five individuals representing different state's educator ethics units were also included on the task force. The task force was led by two cofacilitators and one subject matter expert. Members were selected by a nomination process from national professional education organizations. A list of the MCEE's principles and supporting categories is provided in Appendix A. In addition, a list of the national professional education organizations is provided in Appendix B.

In order to familiarize educators and educator candidates with an understanding of professional ethics and provide guidance in applying professional ethics in practice, Educational Testing Service (ETS) developed the *ProEthica* program. The *ProEthica* program is an online, interactive professional development tool that uses realistic scenarios and engaging branching simulations to present the content of professional ethics as well as a safe environment to work through complicated ethical decision-making. The intent is for educators who complete the *ProEthica* program to be familiar with and have knowledge of principles of ethical decision making.

In May 2016, ETS conducted a study to document explicitly the alignment between the *ProEthica* program and the MCEE. This report documents the alignment procedures and results of the study. Therefore, the current study is exploratory in that it examines *ProEthica*'s coverage of the breath of the MCEE.

Overview of the *ProEthica* Program

The *ProEthica* program presents educators and educator candidates with an introduction to ethics in education and the application of professional ethics in decision making. It is composed of a series of interactive modules with real-life scenarios related to educator relationships with students, the school, and the community. The *ProEthica* program includes six online, interactive modules:

- Module 1: Introduction
- Module 2: The Professional Educator
- Module 3: The Professional Educator and the Student
- Module 4: The Professional Educator and the School
- Module 5: The Professional Educator and the Community
- Module 6: Ethical Decision Making for the Professional Educator

Each module, except the first, introductory module, reflects one or more MCEE principles, and interactive tasks reinforce the principles of ethical decision making. (Based on the feedback from the study participants, an additional module focused on technology, digital, and social media was designed and included in a subsequent version of the *ProEthica* program.)

The individualized learning format of the *ProEthica* program provides educators with the opportunity to experience real-life situations, make choices, and think through the possible consequences of their choices. They receive detailed feedback on the choices they make. In the *ProEthica* program, educators are intended to learn how to balance better the often competing obligations and expectations, general obligations under the law, relevant regulations and best practices, and the principles embodied in the MCEE.

Overview of the Model Code of Ethics for Educators

The MCEE was developed by a diverse task force consisting of 20 practicing P-12 educators and five individuals representing their states' educator ethics units. The task force was convened by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) to create a unifying code of ethics for the education profession. Prior to its creation, the MCEE Task Force examined the current research, clearly identified the distinctions between a code of conduct and a code of ethics, and studied codes of ethics from multiple professions. After creating the initial draft, the document was submitted for public comment. The task force reconvened and refined the MCEE to its current form. The MCEE has five principles and 18 supporting categories (see Table 1) as well as 86 standards. The MCEE was unveiled on June 25, 2015, at the Washington Press Club in Washington, DC. The MCEE serves as a guide for future and current educators faced with the complexities of P-12 education. The MCEE establishes standards for ethical best practice, mindfulness, self-reflection, and decision-making, setting the groundwork for self-regulation and self-accountability. The establishment of this professional

code of ethics by educators for educators honors the public trust and upholds the dignity of the profession.²

Table 1. Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE) Structure

Principle number and title		Number of supporting categories
I.	Responsibility to the Profession	3
II.	Responsibility for Professional Competence	3
III.	Responsibility to Students	3
IV.	Responsibility to the School Community	5
V.	Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology	4

Alignment

To evaluate the content validity of the *ProEthica* program for the purpose of providing relevant professional development, evidence should be collected regarding relevance of the domain and alignment *ProEthica* content to the defined domain (Sireci, 1998). The rationale and development process for the MCEE principles provide evidence of the strength of these principles as an accepted definition of educator ethics.³ Therefore, evidence exists to justify the implementation of the current alignment study.

The purpose of this study is to explicitly evaluate the alignment of the *ProEthica* program to the five MCEE principles and the 18 categories to determine which of the MCEE principles and supporting categories are being addressed by the modules that compose the *ProEthica* program. Alignment is typically considered as a component of content validity evidence that supports the intended use of assessments and professional development programs (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 2014, Kane, 2006). A panel of educators was charged with identifying the MCEE principle(s) and supporting categories that the modules directly addressed. The combined judgments of the experts determined the extent of alignment of the MCEE principle(s) and supporting categories to the *ProEthica* program modules.

Procedures

For the current study, we applied processes typically described for the alignment of assessments to standards to the alignment of a professional development tool (the *ProEthica* program) to standards (MCEE). Alignment is a judgment-based process that requires input from a diverse panel of experts who evaluate the degree to which an assessment—or, in this case, a

professional development tool—measures a set of standards. Although there are a variety of ways to conduct alignment studies (e.g., Davis-Becker & Buckendahl, 2013; Martone & Sireci, 2009; Webb, 2007), they typically involve (a) convening a panel of experts with knowledge of the content assessed and the test-taking population, (b) providing the panel with introductory information about the purpose of the study, (c) ensuring that panelists have a full understanding of the assessment and the standards, (d) providing training before the panelists make their alignment judgments, and (e) evaluating the process. We describe the panel of experts and the major steps for the study in the following sections.

Panelists

The multistate alignment panel was composed of 12 educators from nine states (Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, and Texas). All panelists were familiar with the ethical decision-making demands faced by classroom teachers. The majority of panelists were classroom teachers (four panelists) or school/district administrators (four panelists). All the panelists reported being somewhat or very familiar with the MCEE (see Table 2).

Table 2. Panelists Background

Characteristic	<i>N</i>	% ^a
Current position		
Teacher	4	33
Administrator	4	33
Instructional facilitator/coach	2	17
State Department of Education	1	8
Teacher association	1	8
Gender		
Female	8	67
Male	4	33
Race		
White	7	58
Black or African American	5	42
Familiarity with MCEE		
Not familiar	0	0
Somewhat familiar	8	67
Very familiar	4	33

Note. MCEE = *Model Code of Ethics for Educators*.

^a Percentages might not add up to 100% in each category, due to rounding.

Reviewing the *ProEthica* Program

Prior to the study, panelists were provided with a description of the *ProEthica* program and a copy of the *Model Code of Ethics for Educators*. At the beginning of the study, ETS staff described the development of the modules and the administration platform. Then the structure of each module was described for the panel. Panelists worked through Module 2 independently followed by a group discussion of the material, the video scenarios, and written scenario minigames. The discussion focused on engagement level, authenticity of the scenarios as well as the clarity of narrative feedback. This process was repeated for each module.

Panelists' Judgments

The following steps were followed for each module. The panelists first independently completed the module and then the whole panel discussed the content of the module.

Round 1 judgments. For each module the panelists independently judged which MCEE principles and supporting categories were being addressed. The judgment question posed to the panelists was as follows: Does the content of the module explicitly or directly address the statement describing this component of the MCEE principle?

A panelist would indicate yes, somewhat, or no for each of the 18 categories comprising the five MCEE principles.

Round 2 judgments. Following the independent Round 1 judgments, the panel discussed their judgments and the rationales for their judgments. If a panelist wished to change his or her judgment, they could do so (Round 2).

Relevance, importance, and authenticity judgments. Finally, the panelists answered the following questions using a 5-point Likert scale for each video scenario and written scenario minigame included in the module:

- How realistic is the video scenario or written scenario(s)? (1 = not realistic to 5 = very realistic)
- How frequently would a teacher encounter a situation similar to the one portrayed in the video scenario or written scenario(s)? (1 = not at all frequent to 5 = very frequent)
- How important is a teacher's ability to respond to situations similar to the ones portrayed in the video scenario or written scenario(s)? (1 = not at all important to 5 = very important)

Final Evaluations

The panelists completed an evaluation form at the conclusion of the study addressing the quality of the implementation and their certainty with their individual alignment judgments.

Results

Alignment judgments, as well as judgments regarding the video scenarios and written scenarios, are summarized in the following sections.

Alignment Judgments

The results from Round 2 (following panel discussion) are summarized in Table 3. The nature of the current study is exploratory, not confirmatory, given that *ProEthica* was developed prior to the release of the MCEE. The results summarized in Table 3 illustrate the coverage of the MCEE principles/categories across the *ProEthica* modules.

Table 3. Alignment Results

ProEthica module	Number of principles	Principle (category)
Module 2	1	I(B)
Module 3	4	I(A), I(B), II(C), III(A), III(B), III(C), IV(A)
Module 4	4	I(A), I(B), I(C), II(A), II(C), III(A), III(B), IV(B), IV(C), IV(D), IV(E)
Module 5	4	I(A), I(B), I(C), II(A), II(C), III(A), III(B), III(C), IV(A), IV(B), IV(C), IV(E)
Module 6	5	I(A), I(B), I(C), II(A), II(C), III(A), III(B), III(C), IV(A), IV(B), IV(C), IV(D), IV(E), V(A), V(B), V(C), V(D)

Note. Module 1 was not judged by the panelists. The panel's collective judgments were categorized as aligned if two thirds or more of panelists indicated yes.

For Module 2, two thirds of the panel identified one principle/category as being explicitly or directly addressed: *I(B) The professional educator fulfills the obligation to address and attempt to resolve ethical issues*. However, two thirds or more of the panel did indicate yes or somewhat for six additional principles/categories—I(A), II(A), II(C), III(A), III(B), and IV(B).

Module 6 was designed to address the breadth of ethical decision making. For all except one principle/category, II(B), two thirds of the panel identified each principle/category as being explicitly or directly measured. Module 6 was judged to cover the scope of the MCEE.

Finally, one MCEE principle, Principle V: *Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology*, was only judged to be explicitly or directly addressed in Module 6.⁴ Members of the panel discussed the importance of Principle V in today's schools and classrooms and recommended a module specifically focused on technology and digital and social media and the importance of this principle for educators. Following the alignment study, the ETS development team developed a seventh module to explicitly and directly address Principle V.

Scenarios and Minigames

Each module contained a video scenario; Module 3 included two video scenarios. Modules 2, 3, 4, and 5 each contain a minigame with 10–15 written scenarios. The panelists answered the following questions using a 5-point Likert scale for each video scenario and written scenario minigame included in the module:

- How realistic is the video scenario or written scenario(s)? (1 = not realistic to 5 = very realistic)
- How frequently would a teacher encounter a situation similar to the one portrayed in the video scenario or written scenario(s)? (1 = not at all frequent to 5 = very frequent)
- How important is a teacher's ability to respond to situations similar to the ones portrayed in the video scenario or written scenario(s)? (1 = not at all important to 5 = very important)

Figures 1 and 2 summarize the panel's judgments. All video scenarios were seen as realistic (average rating above 4.0 on a 5-point scale), involving situations at least somewhat frequently encountered by teachers (average rating above 3.4 on a 5-point scale), and involving situations that are important for a teacher to know how to respond (average rating above 4.5 on a 5-point

scale). All written scenarios were seen as including situations that were realistic (average rating above 4.5 on a 5-point scale), frequently encountered by teachers (average rating above 4.0 on a 5-point scale), and important for a teacher to know how to respond (average rating above 4.4 on a 5-point scale).

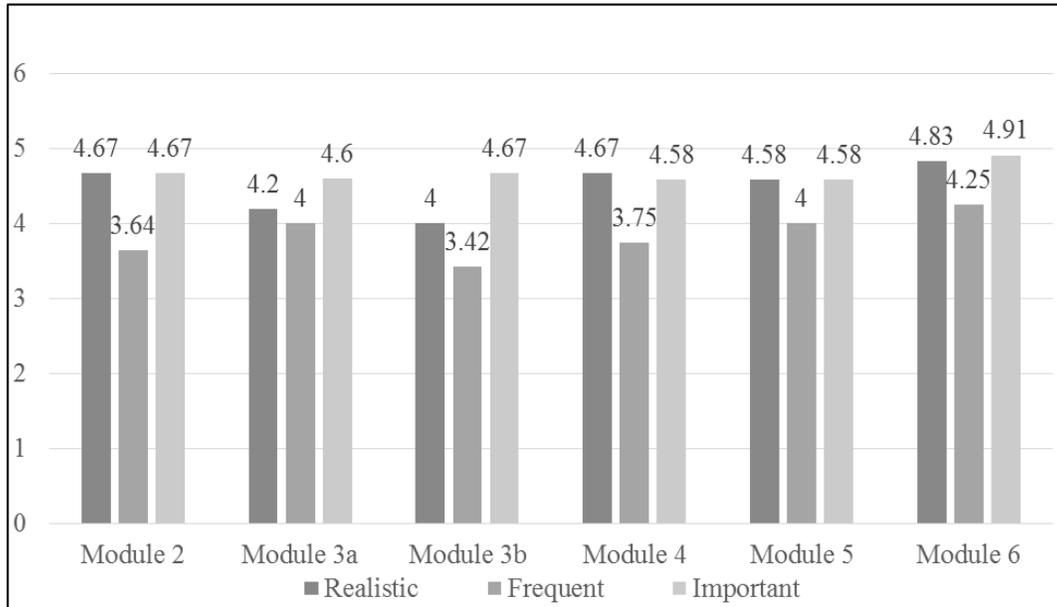


Figure 1. Summary of judgment of the *ProEthica* program video scenarios.

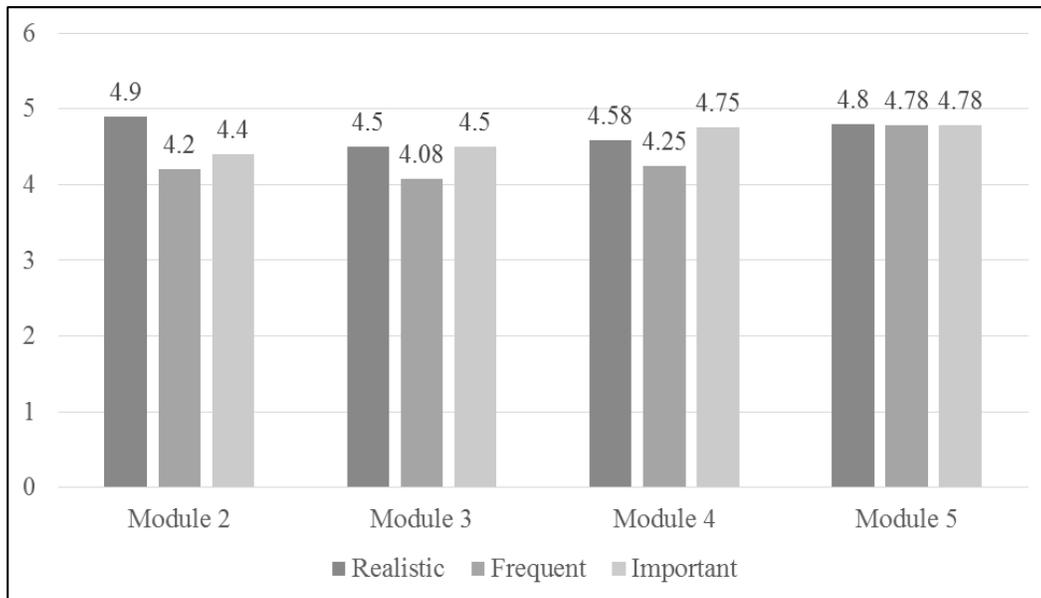


Figure 2. Summary of judgment of the *ProEthica* program written scenarios.

Final Evaluations

It is critical that the panelists are well trained in the methodology and are prepared to make informed judgments. At the conclusion of the alignment study, panelists indicated their level of agreement to three statements regarding the training:

- I understood the purpose of this study.
- The facilitator's instructions and explanations were clear.
- The facilitator's instructions and explanations were easy to follow.

Panelists also answered two statements regarding their familiarity with the *ProEthica* program and the MCEE principles:

- I understood the MCEE principles well enough to make my judgments.
- I understood the *ProEthica* modules well enough to make my judgments.

Finally, the panelists were asked how certain they were with their alignment judgments.

Overall, panelists felt well trained for the judgment exercises; all panelists agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the purpose of the study and that instructions/explanations were clear and easy to follow. All the panelists also agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the MCEE principles and the *ProEthica* program modules well enough to complete their judgments. Finally, all the panelists reported they were certain or very certain of the judgments they made during the study.

Conclusions

ETS designed the *ProEthica* program to serve as an interactive professional development tool to familiarize educators and educator candidates with professional ethics and ethical decision making. The MCEE include five principles, and each principle includes supporting categories. The study described in this report identified the MCEE principle/categories measured by five of the *ProEthica* program modules. Overall, panelists identified each of the 18 principle/categories as being explicitly or directly addressed by one or more of the modules (see Table 3). Also, the panelists judged that the video scenarios and written scenarios included in the modules are realistic, frequently encountered, and important.

During the study, panel members commented on the lack of focused attention on Principle V: *Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology*. The panel agreed that the content of

Principle V was critical for educators and that *ProEthica* should be expanded to include a module focused on technology and digital and social media (as well as addressing technology in Module 6). Based on this feedback, an additional module focused on technology and digital and social media was designed and was included in a subsequent version of the *ProEthica* program.

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Appendix A. *Model Code of Ethics for Educators Principles and Supporting Categories*

From *Model Code of Ethics for Educators (MCEE)*, by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC), 2015, retrieved from https://www.nasdtec.net/page/MCEE_Doc.
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Principle I: Responsibility to the Profession. The professional educator is aware that trust in the profession depends upon a level of professional conduct and responsibility that may be higher than required by law. This entails holding oneself and other educators to the same ethical standards.

- A. The professional educator demonstrates responsibility to oneself as an ethical professional.
- B. The professional educator fulfills the obligation to address and attempt to resolve ethical issues.
- C. The professional educator promotes and advances the profession within and beyond the school community.

Principle II: Responsibility for Professional Competence. The professional educator is committed to the highest levels of professional and ethical practice, including demonstration of the knowledge, skills and dispositions required for professional competence.

- A. The professional educator demonstrates commitment to high standards of practice
- B. The professional educator demonstrates responsible use of data, materials, research and assessment.
- C. The professional educator acts in the best interest of all students.

Principle III: Responsibility to Students. The professional educator has a primary obligation to treat students with dignity and respect. The professional educator promotes the health, safety and well-being of students by establishing and maintaining appropriate verbal, physical, emotional and social boundaries.

- A. The professional educator respects the rights and dignity of students.
- B. The professional educator demonstrates an ethic of care.
- C. The professional educator maintains student trust and confidentiality when interacting with students in a developmentally appropriate manner and within appropriate limits.

Principle IV: Responsibility to the School Community. The professional educator promotes positive relationships and effective interactions, with members of the school community, while maintaining professional boundaries.

- A. The professional educator promotes effective and appropriate relationships with parents/guardians.
- B. The professional educator promotes effective and appropriate relationships with colleagues.
- C. The professional educator promotes effective and appropriate relationships with the community and other stakeholders.
- D. The professional educator promotes effective and appropriate relationships with employers.
- E. The professional educator understands the problematic nature of multiple relationships.

Principle V: Responsible and Ethical Use of Technology. The professional educator considers the impact of consuming, creating, distributing and communicating information through all technologies. The ethical educator is vigilant to ensure appropriate boundaries of time, place and role are maintained when using electronic communication.

- A. The professional educator uses technology in a responsible manner.
- B. The professional educator ensures students' safety and well-being when using technology.
- C. The professional educator maintains confidentiality in the use of technology.
- D. The professional educator promotes the appropriate use of technology in educational settings.

**Appendix B. National Educational Organizations Who Supported the Development of the
*Model Code of Ethics for Educators***

American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE)

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

Association of Teacher Educators (ATE)

Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP)

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)

National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)

National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)

National Education Association (NEA)

National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY)

Notes

¹ http://www.nasdtec.net/resource/collection/7C8FAAA3-65CF-4B6E-B0B4-801DDA91A35F/FRONT_MCEE_Brochure_7.7.17_2.pdf

² http://www.nasdtec.net/resource/collection/7C8FAAA3-65CF-4B6E-B0B4-801DDA91A35F/FRONT_MCEE_Brochure_7.7.17_2.pdf

³ https://www.nasdtec.net/page/MCEE_Rationale

⁴ Parts of Principle V, Categories (A) and (B), were judged to be somewhat addressed in Module 3, but the coverage was not seen as strong.