

Shared Workspaces

Professional and respectful relationships among professionals is not only a necessary ingredient for effective learning and safe workplaces, it is also mandated by governmental, regulatory, and organizational policy. At times, relationships may become strained due to the sharing of classrooms, libraries, as well as other workspaces. It is incumbent upon colleagues to share space equitably and respectfully.

Sharing instructional space within a school is often unavoidable for a number of reasons. School space is at a premium and it is important for members to understand that the teaching area assigned to them may also be assigned to other staff or programs in the school. It is critical that each member using the space establish some ground rules in order to share the space respectfully and avoid conflict.

For example, the homeroom teacher and teachers delivering preparation coverage may have very different perspectives on the issue. The preparation coverage teacher may feel uncomfortable teaching with another colleague in the class, or he/she may feel their presence undermines his/her authority in the classroom. Students may be confused as to who is in charge and they may look to the homeroom teacher for guidance or assistance during the instruction.

Alternatively, the classroom teacher may have planning materials in the classroom or resources such as a dedicated computer he/she needs to use. The member may have medical restrictions limiting him/her from moving materials to another location. Finally, there may not be an alternate appropriate workspace in the school.

Each situation will be unique and therefore a “one size fits all” approach is unlikely to work in many situations. The individuals involved would need to have a professional dialogue to determine what works best for them and come to some mutual agreements on working together, moving forward.

With the implementation of Full-Day Kindergarten and the passing of Bill 10, *The Childcare Modernization Act*, schools are now required to have before and after school programs if there is sufficient demand. In some boards classrooms are leased by third party childcare centres and classrooms are being used for this purpose.

ETFO represents teachers, early childhood educators, education support personnel, and professional support personnel in Ontario schools. The following provision of the ETFO Constitution is directly relevant to the issue of respectful professional relationships, and apply to all ETFO members;

Article VI Code of Professional Conduct

6.1 A member shall:

6.1.8 strive to achieve and maintain a high degree of professionalism and to uphold the honour, dignity, and ethical standards of the teaching profession.

The *Teaching Profession Act* applies to all teachers and other members of the Ontario Teachers Federation. The following provision is contained in a regulation established under the *Teaching Profession Act*:

s.18 (1) a member shall

(a) avoid interfering in an unwarranted manner between other teachers and pupils.

In addition to the rules, regulations and policies listed above, each individual school and school board will likely have its own standards that will apply to the professional relationship between co-workers. Such policies will likely be enforceable as a condition of employment and breach of these policies could lead to discipline.

The College of Early Childhood Educators and the Ontario College of Teachers also have regulations set out to define professional obligations for their members.

In the majority of situations, the issue of sharing workspaces in the school must be resolved by the members involved in the situation. Generally, there needs to be some compromise and an understanding of the needs and perspectives of all parties involved.

If problems arise, how can they be resolved? Consider the following:

1. Talk it out first. If you have a concern, go to your partner directly. Follow the ground rules that you set out.
2. Remember, the purpose is to move forward, make sure you have this goal in mind.
3. Presume positive intentions.
4. Be concise, state your concern, its effect on you and what you wish to change.
5. Listen to the other person's perspective. One person speaks at a time, avoid interrupting.
6. Stay calm despite what the other person may say and avoid personalizing the situation.
7. Be willing to compromise.
8. Conclude the meeting with a specific plan for improved communication and how you will share the workspace.

If ETFO members are having difficulties coming up with a mutually agreeable resolution, they should contact their local office or Professional Relations Services staff. Local presidents or provincial staff may be able to suggest strategies that will help resolve the situation or meet with the members involved to work out a solution.

Further, the following PRS Matters provide advice on resolving conflict and maintaining professional relationships:

- PRS Matters Volume #37 - Dealing with Conflict
- PRS Matters Volume #57 - Maintaining Professional Relationships
- PRS Matters Volume #75 - Building and Maintaining Positive Professional Full-Day Kindergarten Team Relationships

ETFO members must remember that working together, communicating openly, and maintaining mutual respect are key to building and maintaining positive and professional relationships.

For more information, contact Professional Relations Staff at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836 at the provincial office. Also see ETFO's website - Advice for Members.

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