

PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARD #7

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I recently made an heroic trip into our crawl space. My mission was to locate and retrieve every string of white Christmas lights I could find because our local school presentation would be using them to create the “right atmosphere” for the Christmas program. I refer to this excursion as “heroic” because recently a serviceman matter-of-factly reported killing two black widow spiders in our crawl space. Normally this would not be an issue but experience is a great teacher. As I went through the items stored there I came across a small fiberglass case containing a typewriter, circa 1972, that has served our household well, seeing service in the completion of high school papers, assignments for two Bachelors degrees and a Masters degree. It’s a sturdy and efficient machine squeezed into the car for the trip to boarding academy. Sentimental attachments have so far saved it from our many moves and periodic efforts to reduce the surplus items we own. There it sits in the crawl space because we wouldn’t dream of producing a report card or a course overview on that machine any more than we would return to the pre-photocopier era.



This is not a remarkable tale except to illustrate that change is constant and unrelenting. Change, over time sets aside what we once accepted as the standard of performance and effectiveness and replaces it with new tools, methods, standards and expectations. Everywhere we turn we see this reality repeated. The salesman trying to sell me the newest technology in flat panel televisions does not argue its superiority over the first black and white television I watched. Instead he frames his pitch to sell a particular item from among samples of the current technology.

Recently I was reading the “Standards for the Education, Competence and Professional Conduct of Educators in British Columbia” and I stopped when I came to number seven. The title of standard seven is “Educators Engage In Career-long Learning.” This is a reminder that teachers and administrators are committed to professional growth that is focused on development grounded in practical, theoretical and current “best practices” and informed by professional dialogue.

It is this commitment to “career-long learning” that transforms our “professional activity” from what we must take or can get to complete the required hours needed for recertification into something of significance. When we embrace the full implication of “professional growth” activities, we look for ways to challenge and change our professional understanding and practice. That is our focus. Professionally we are not content with our four years of education but are committed to continual renewal that breathes fresh life into our work year after year.

Recently, as I sat in an evaluation post-conference, I was pleased to observe just this kind of professional attitude toward career-long learning. The teacher in that interview told how the family had committed to paying for the annual professional development costs if needed to ensure that s/he was current with best practices. That teacher’s family believed

teaching excellence is dependent upon continual exposure to current professional development. In this case, as you might imagine, this teacher provided daily examples of current “best practices” and quality education in the classroom.

Today’s education acknowledges the contributions of past theorists and practices but, like the black and white television and the typewriter, ongoing change has introduced revised methods and understandings to enhance our students’ learning. We can engage in meaningful and focused professional development that has the potential to transform and energize us or we can avoid change and run the risk of becoming an anachronism.