



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”
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What Does a Commitment to Learning Look Like?

Back in the early 1980’s, when I was still a fairly young educator, I had the opportunity to serve as a member of a visiting team at an area high school as it completed its accreditation process. During the day spent at that school, I recall visiting a particular teacher’s classroom, which was located in a portable...the kind of portable with lots of built in storage. This teacher proudly opened one of the large storage closets and showed those of us on the visiting team 180 pull out drawers, each with a different set of dittos for each day of the year. He wanted us to know how well prepared he was for the course he taught (as I recall, he taught five sections of the same course).

As a younger teacher, a part of me was envious about how someone could be so prepared and organized. There was a larger part of me, however, that found this reality disturbing, and it has actually haunted me on some levels ever since. I have frequently wondered if this teacher continued to use those very same dittos, every day, every year that s/he continued to teach. I hope not, yet I am not so sure. Did s/he teach thirty (or however many) years, or only one year, thirty times?

As educators, it is fundamentally important that we embrace and actually live the concept of “lifelong learning,” however cliché or overused we may find that term. This means we owe it to the students we serve, and to the colleagues with whom we work, to continue our professional learning and to further develop our skills and practice in order to assure our students are provided optimal learning opportunities, challenges, and support. We need to learn *every* day, and we must constantly strive to be better today than yesterday, and perhaps not as good as we will be tomorrow. It means that for however long we serve in whatever role we hold, we must assure we are *always* learning and embracing new possibilities...not repeating or holding on to only our prior experience or knowledge.

As we enter a new school year, we have hopefully benefited from some time to reflect over the summer about the previous year – what we learned, what was successful, where and how we might improve. And hopefully we embark upon the new year with continued commitment to and fervor for not only the wonderful young people we are privileged to serve, but also with a similar commitment and fervor for all that we can learn, and all the progress in our professional practice and effectiveness that we will make over the ensuing twelve months.

As professional educators our opportunities to continue and further our own learning and professional development are limitless. Wherever we work and whatever position we hold, we are fortunate to work alongside fellow professionals from whom much can be learned if we are open to opportunities to share and discuss our practice. Beyond our own school or district, sometimes in schools or districts almost “next door,” we have colleagues with excellent experience and immense expertise as well. The reality is that our profession is filled with dedicated and “expert” practitioners. The only barrier to the maximization of such a resource is self-imposed; openness to collaboration with colleagues ultimately pays huge benefits to our students.

Further, we are fortunate to work in our profession at a time when professional development opportunities abound – including those sponsored or provided by our own schools or districts, and those provided by any number of professional associations, such as Washington State ASCD. It is wise that we embrace such opportunities to learn when they come our way, and that we participate actively during such trainings so that we can integrate and apply what we learn to what we consequently *do* in our practice.

Importantly, we are lucky, too, to live and work in a state in which we have many outstanding colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher and continued learning. These wonderful public and private institutions are filled with professors and teachers who study and understand both *what* and *how* people learn. And many have quality cohort programs, providing the opportunity to learn with colleagues who are engaged in similar work and who, like us, constantly seek to know and understand more.

What does a commitment to learning look like? For we who are educators, we need to constantly pursue and model learning; we need to be *lead learners* so that the students who are at the heart of our work see, in us, not only that learning never ends, but also that it informs and improves our practice and effectiveness. Through stretching ourselves, we inspire young people to stretch to learn all of which they are capable, and to become all they can be.

In education, and in life, we can all be teachers; we *must* all be learners; and we should strive to be both every single day.

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