What Professional Development Means to Me

Before I say what professional development means to me, I’ll start with some language from the CCA contract: “75% of a faculty member’s 40 hour workweek shall be spent in a combination of student contact and preparation. The remaining twenty-five percent of workweek hours shall be spent in professional activities, [e.g. office hours, professional development, and meetings (departmental, campus, etc.)]” (Article 8N2 138). For faculty, that means devoting each week 30 hours of time to prepping, teaching, and grading. From the original 40 hours, 10 remain for office hours, professional development, and meetings. A maximum of 5 of those hours are for office hours. So, technically speaking (if I’ve done my math correctly), professional development means 5 hours per week committed to attendance at meetings and/or professional development. If we faculty members aren’t spending 5 hours every week going to meetings, then what are we doing for 5 hours each week?

From 1993 to 1996, I was employed as an adjunct member of the BC English department—I loved and continue to love meeting students in the classroom, exposing them to the discipline of English: writing and reading about things that matter in the world and in literature, honing their skills in analyzing the world they live in, making sense of the written word and joining in an
academic conversation in a meaningful way. But as a full-time, tenured employee, the jump in salary was evidence (for me) of my responsibility to do more than teach English in the classroom. I was more than an English teacher; I was a Bakersfield College employee.

For some fulltime faculty members, Professional Development might strictly be seen as that thing we have to do to meet contractual duties. For me, it’s more than that. As we all know, many BC students come to our campus under-prepared and uncertain. They want a job that pays well so they don’t have to struggle as their parents have. But we know that an education does far more than pay the bills. I sought a position at a community college because I view the 2-year college as a place of transformation for the students. The community college is unique in providing a launching ground for the poor and the disenfranchised via its open access policies. Students come to get a better job, and while they are here, we expose them to ideas; we make them better readers, better writers, better thinkers. So in the end, it’s not just a better job for someone. BC is an opportunity for our students to become more than they or their parents might have imagined. For that reason, full-time employment signaled to me a responsibility to do more than simply teach my discipline, as I had done as adjunct.
When I look back at my own professional development, those activities I’ve been involved in since I was hired full time, I recognize that for the most part I followed my own sense of curiosity and interests. In my years here, I have explored. I volunteered for positions that would give me a greater understanding of the college: Academic Senate Secretary, BC rep for the CCA, Coordinator for English Placement, to name a few. Honestly, “Professional Development” wasn’t in my mind as I involved myself. What drove me was my own sense of inquiry. I wanted to make a difference in students’ lives and deepen my understanding of how the college worked. Certainly, I took advantage of those activities promoted by SDCC, but I also searched out events meaningful to me on a variety of levels. Meeting others outside my discipline = BC bowling, BC basketball. Understanding the college and the district = Budget Allocation Model presentations, BC president candidate forums, Levan Center discussions, Levan Center presentations, STEM presentations, KCCD Leadership Academy. Supporting students in their endeavors on our campus: attending plays and athletic events (baseball, softball, soccer, football, basketball, volleyball, cross country, track and field), viewing art gallery showings, attending Roughneck Review student readings, to list a few. I became, in essence, a BC groupie.
When I think about describing Professional Development at Bakersfield College, in a gross generalization, I notice two distinct trends: Faculty members who are involved in the fabric of the college, beyond the classroom, and those who meet on paper their contractual duties (attendance at department meetings, submitting FLEX forms with 24 hours of professional development activities, for 2 examples). The latter are those professors who are largely unknown on campus and maybe little known even within their own department. For me, getting involved isn’t a matter of what is owed contractually, but there is that: what is owed, so I’m not dismissive of the limited ways in which these employees might have met their contractual duties.

The greater point is what is gained. And if there are those not gaining, then there is the question of what is lost. At risk of being accused of “drinking the Kool-Aid,” I advocate greater involvement in Bakersfield College activities. BC does make a difference in the future of those students who attend our classes and use our services. How we meet student needs, how we play out our roles in the classroom and on committees, how we come to understand that our roles in this institution are what contribute to making its sum greater than its parts; these explain what it means to be an educator, a professional, a BC employee.
One’s list of Flex Activities might be the evidence of one’s continuing development in his or her field. That list and those weekly 5 hours devoted to meetings or professional development, in my mind, should have an impact on what happens in the classroom and on the campus. In these times of limited budgets, the “shiny” activities (conferences at faraway, exotic locations) and bountiful events (coffee & pastries or lunch served at functions) are largely non-existent.

Nonetheless and despite the limited resources of today, when I think about professional development for the future, I remain encouraged. Two of our department’s newest hires have committed themselves to creating opportunities for across-discipline involvement in supporting and highlighting our students: Roughneck Review, Poetry in my Pocket events. Two others have been involved in our department’s new accelerated classes; another organized a recent conference between local colleges. These colleagues are making a difference in our department and on our campus. Each of us is capable of creating our own opportunities to learn more in order to bring more to the table, and I think we can best do that by engaging meaningfully with others in the improvement and promotion of our college. Soon after I earned my Masters degree, I was hired at Bakersfield College. That degree was not an end to my education—it was the
start. I like to think that’s true of all of us. It is our hope that this morning’s activity will give you an opportunity to reflect on your own role here and the impact professional development has made in your life as a BC employee.

Pam Boyles
May 3, 2013—College Council
Below is an email note sent to the BC English department from colleague Kate Pluta:

[D]on't wait til someone asks you personally to participate. For those who haven't yet, take the initiative to get involved outside the department to learn more about the college. Play a role. Be an active part of BC life.

**Being part of Bakersfield College—what it means to me.**
- Teaching our classes and doing it well.
- Working within the department to plan, implement, and evaluate the work the department does.
  - We evaluate our students.
  - Our peers, administration, and students evaluate us in the classroom.
  - We need to evaluate what we provide to the college, our students, the community, and each other.
- Working within the college to help make it an invigorating place to be, for our students and for us.
- Working in the community to represent the college—reaching out to high school faculty and students; developing programs, lectures, or activities for the community.
- Using our expertise in every way we can.

What does being part of Bakersfield College mean to you?

Kate Pluta
April 18, 2013