ENGAGE IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN THE REMOTE CONTEXT

This is one of seven teacher guides in the series ‘Teaching in Remote Australian Schools: Enhancing Pre-Service Teacher Education – A Resource Package’.

INTRODUCTION

The end of your pre-service/initial teacher education marks a new phase in the continuing journey of learning how to maximise the educational outcomes of the thousands of students you will teach over the coming years. As you enter your “community of practice” the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) will be a valuable reference/starting point for you to develop your professional skills and knowledge as an effective and quality teacher. While the NPST will be used by all graduates, this teaching guide focuses on the learning needs and processes for continuing learning for graduates in remote contexts.

Your ability to effectively use the NPST will depend on a number of things. For example:

• your willingness and ability to reflect on your professional practice;
• your attitude and willingness to be a life-time learner;
• your ability to establish effective working and learning relationships with your colleagues;
• your ability to be an effective and constructive member of a learning community; and
• the extent to which you engage in keeping yourself current with theory and practice.

These are not always easy to do in remote locations.

These activities provide you with the opportunity to make a start on how you might use the NPST to identify your progress into your community of practice as a teacher at both the classroom and wider professional level in the remote context. These activities provide a starting point for you to consider how the NPST can be used by you to assess what action you need to take to improve your effectiveness as a teacher.

OUTCOMES

• Graduates can develop an individual professional learning needs plan based on the application of the NPST to their own practice in a remote context.
• Graduates can make decisions about specific areas of their practices that can be improved through applying the NPST in a remote context.
• Graduates can apply the NPST to reflect on progress being made with their individual professional learning needs plan in a remote context.
• Graduates can identify online learning resources and opportunities for professional interaction and growth in a remote context.
• Graduates can develop interpersonal relations with onsite, regional and distant peers for the purposes of professional learning.

TOPICS

Reflective theory practices associated with professional growth and development in the remote context.

• “…you cannot grow, understand a meaningful working life and become as skilful as you possibly can as a teacher without reflecting” (Fetherston, 2006, p.331).
• Using the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) to reflect on one’s working life and improve practice.

Community of Practice – building professional relationships in the remote context

• The meaning of Community of Practice generally and in the remote context?
• The dimensions of a Community of Practice?
• The impact of staff transience on Community of Practice in the remote context. Effective interpersonal and communication skills for participating in a Community of Practice. The development
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of online, face-to-face and “blended” forms of Communities of Practice.
- The role of the NPST in Community of Practice.

Working collaboratively with mentors, supervisors (line managers), learning area teams, literacy and numeracy learning teams, colleagues etc. in the remote context.
- Sharing knowledge and skills.
- Facing challenges together.
- Being a critical friend.
- Peer reviewing.
- Listening and other communication skills.
- Team building skills.
- Acknowledging ones strengths and weaknesses (especially in relation to the NPST).
- Networking skills.
- Using ICT for professional learning.
- Accessing opportunities and funding for professional learning.

Developing a Teaching Portfolio for performance reviews using the NPST as a framework.
- Documenting and collating evidence against the NPST.
- Use of off-site peer reviews.

TASKS
1. Based on your last practicum experience:
   - Select one focus areas and its related descriptor (Graduate level) from each of the National Professional Standards for Teachers. (http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/hrdevelopment/pages/workforcedevelopment/NPST/?refFlag=1)
   - Select one or more reflective practice strategy/approach (see, for example, Fetherston, 2006, p.331-336 or the 5 R Framework, Reporting, Responding, Relating, Reasoning and Reconstructing (Bain, et al., 2002)).
   - Identify the strengths you have in each of the selected focus areas. Use the Graduate Descriptor for that focus area to help explain your strengths.
   - Develop a professional development plan detailing activities you are going to undertake to address the area/s you have identified that need attention. (Heading might include: NPST, Focus Areas & Descriptors; Professional Colleagues).

2. Develop a professional portfolio with an emphasis on your experiences in a remote context. Use these teacher guides to identify evidence that could be used. Refer to AITSL’s Illustrations of Practice to assist your reflection http://www.teacherstandards.aietsl.edu.au/illustrations

3. How can you use on-line connections such as blogs and emails to document your professional growth?

4. Brookfield (1995) suggests that, to undertake reflection, teachers need to:
   - Collect autobiographical data about their actions such as diaries/accounts;
   - Find out from students how they perceive a teacher’s actions; and
   - Engage colleagues in critical conversations about practice.

Identify times and means for incorporating reflection practices such as these into your daily routine as a teacher in a remote context.

5. When you begin teaching
   - What autobiographical evidence are you going to keep which reflects on your practice and understanding in relation to the National Professional Standards for Teachers?
   - How could you collect feedback from students on your effectiveness as a teacher?

6. During your first year of teaching:
   How can close proximity of colleagues in a small school present difficulties for professional learning? How can you reduce negatives and develop strengths and alternative relationships?

7. Identify sources of funding to support professional learning e.g. scholarships from professional associations, corporate sponsors, community organisations e.g. ICPA, CWA etc.
   - How might a Community of Practice be different in a remote context to an urban context?
   - How can you maximise learning by working in a community of face-to-face and online learning?

RESOURCES


This resource package has been produced for the Tertiary Educators Rural, Remote and Regional Network (TERRR Network) as part of an Office for Learning and Teaching (formally the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) project titled Developing Strategies at the Pre-service Level to Address Critical Teacher Attraction and Retention Issues in Australian Rural, Regional and Remote Schools.

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