**Professional Development….What is it?**

Generally speaking, we would not be happy to find out that our doctors, dentists or other health professionals treating us have not received any additional training since they closed their books after their last exam some twenty years ago. As patients, we want to know that the professionals we hire are competent and current in their particular speciality. But somehow, we don’t seem to be similarly concerned about the other professionals we encounter. Are our builders, accountants, meteorologists, teachers and others, armed with the latest information in their particular areas? They should be.

Students too, expect that the professionals they interact with in their institutions are at the ‘cutting edge’ of their area of expertise. Is this the case? Do our professionals need retraining? Whose responsibility is it to retrain? Is it the responsibility of the individual or the responsibility of the employer?

Over the next few weeks, ABNAB will turn its attention to issues of Continuing Professional Development with particular reference to educational institutions but with general application.

**Professional Development – a definition**

Professional development is designed to improve individuals and, by extension, organisations. Leaders of successful organisations recognise the value of professional development for their employees. Continuing professional development in practice however, varies from organisation to organisation as a result of how it is conceptualised. For some it is interpreted in a narrow sense, while for others, it is more wide-ranging. A suitable definition of continuing professional development in the field of education is particularly difficult to reach. Is it for the individual’s own development or is it for the school’s benefit? Is ‘staff development’ the same thing as ‘professional development’?

Perhaps a satisfactory definition of professional development should include elements of personal growth, professional growth, staff development as well as institutional improvement.

**Reasons for professional development**

There are many reasons why organisations embark on continuing professional development programmes. The need to introduce staff to new technology, the desire to adjust to changing market demands or the pressure to improve standards and performance all require some form of retraining or professional development.

It is through continuous development of staff that organizational learning can take place in an effort to respond to the inevitable changes in classroom dynamics, in schools and in the wider society. In any educational institution, teachers must respond to changes in the society because all societal changes affect the students in our classrooms. In Antigua and Barbuda, some of these changes include, new family structures due to an increasingly diverse population, advances in technology – especially computer technology, increased competition for jobs and an increase in crime. The combination of all of these influences creates what we can call the ‘new’ student. Institutions must respond to or anticipate the inevitable changes in the classroom dynamics that this ‘new’ student will bring. Clearly this is a compelling reason for continuing professional development.

Anna Craft in her book *‘Continuing Professional Development: A Practical guide for Teachers and Schools’* suggests that reasons for professional development can be put into three categories:-

1. Personal - enhancement of skills, knowledge and self-esteem, job satisfaction. Participants can achieve personal development by improving their knowledge base and updating their skills.
2. Professional – improvement of performance skills, knowledge, preparation for promotion, and development of career path. Teachers’ professional abilities can be sharpened and new learning acquired through activities designed to achieve these ends.
3. Institutional – preparation for change, understanding of school policies and role in the institution. Changes in technology, especially computer technology have had, in recent times, great impact on the ways schools are managed and the way the curriculum is delivered. It is therefore only practical to train staff in the uses of the new technology so that the institution is not left behind.

ABNAB will continue to look at professional development in the up-coming weeks.