In this paper, the characteristics and qualifications that are deemed as essential to professional expertise in the field of pedagogy in Canada and particularly Alberta, have been compiled with the assistance of direct interview method from teaching professionals in Alberta. The teachers have submitted, based on their experiences, what they believe it means to exhibit and practice pedagogical teaching methods that attain a high standard of professionalism. In addition, they were also requested to comment on the concept of the ten thousand hour rule as it pertains to teaching, promoted by Malcolm Gladwell as the amount of time needed for the brain to comprehend all it needs to know to achieve true mastery. Gladwell noted that “that this is true in music, professional sports, or any other especially accomplished area of life. It’s what separates professionals from the rest (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012, p.95).” The primary goal of this paper is to portray the viewpoint and experiences of Alberta teachers on the topic of professionalism from a perspective of teaching experience, ranging from one to thirty-four years. Hopefully, the responses put forth by these interviews can be both beneficial and confirming to beginning teacher professionals and teachers with varying levels of experience in the way that they engage in teacher professionalism in the 21st Century.

**Literature Review:** There are numerous scholarly perspectives in the way that professionalism in teaching and pedagogy is depicted.
Fullan and Hargreaves contend that being professional and being a professional vary in their meaning even though there is a connection.

“Being a professional is about what you do, how you behave. It’s about being impartial and holding high standards of conduct and performance. Being professional is about quality and character - not getting too personally involved with children, refraining from gossiping about parents, and learning to challenge colleague’s actions without criticizing them as people. Being professional has more to do with how people regard you, and how this affects the regard you have for yourself. This is what people are usually referring to when they ask whether teaching is truly a profession or not. Does it have the same status and levels of reward that other professions do? Is the training long and rigorous? Do members of the profession have collective autonomy over their actions, and freedom from excessive outside scrutiny (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012, p.80)?

They also list the following as characteristics for professionalism: knowledge and expertise, professional language, collective sharing of teaching practices, rigid qualifications, ability to collaborate with colleagues, self-control, and ongoing professional development (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012, p.80).

The Alberta Teachers Association is very explicit in their definition of teacher professionalism.

“Professionalism is defined by the quality of a person’s work, and includes conduct, demeanor and standards of practice. Professionals are characterized by the extensive knowledge that they possess – knowledge that is both abstract and practical, takes a significant time to acquire, and is difficult to master. They are able to make effective, informed decisions regarding their practice. Teachers are educational professionals. Professionals are the recognized experts in their area of specialty. They have strong ethics, high standards of practice, exclusivity over their service, and high degrees of autonomy… The teacher acts in a manner which maintains the honour and dignity of the profession…preparation; dress communication, body language; and attitude. By advancing and maintaining a professional image, teachers are ensuring continued trust, respect and credibility (www.teachers.ab.ca, Spring, 2008, p. 2-4).
In Professional Practice Competencies, a framework from the Government of Alberta for 21st Century teaching, it is emphasized that the professional teacher and teacher quality are part of an ever changing society.

“To engage students in compelling, meaningful work teachers facilitate flexible, innovative and student-centered approaches to learning. Professional teachers establish positive relationships with their students and make evident that their learning is relevant and meaningful for their futures. They work collaboratively with parents, other professionals and community members to ensure learning needs of all students are met. The professional (certified) teacher is a collaborative partner, a researcher, a reflective practitioner, and a change agent with expertise in recognizing and responding of the intellectual, psychological, social, emotional/spiritual and physical learning needs of students. Teachers are facilitators of learning as well as disseminators of knowledge (Government of Alberta, 2011. P. 5).

John Hattie, along with Dick Yaeger, carefully researched and analyzed the differences between expert and experienced teachers. They identified the following sixteen features of excellent teachers. Expert teachers:

“Have deeper representations about teaching and learning; adopt a problem-solving stance to their work; can anticipate, plan, and improvise as required by the situation; are better decision-makers and can identify what decisions are important and which are less important decisions; are proficient at creating an optimal classroom climate for learning; have a multidimensionally complex perception of classroom situations; are more context-dependent and have high situation cognition; are more adept at monitoring student problems and assessing their understanding and progress, and they provide more relevant, useful feedback; are more adept at developing and testing hypothesis about learning difficulties or instructional strategies; are more automatic; have high respect for students; are passionate about teaching and learning; engage students in learning and develop I their students’ self-regulation, involvement in mastery learning, enhanced self-efficiency, and self-esteem as learners; provide appropriate challenging tasks and goals for students; have positive influences on students’ achievement; and enhance surface and deep learning (Hattie, 2003, p. 5-9).
Interviews:

Guest One: Thirty-four years of experience: Junior High

Professionalism:

To be a true professional, you need to follow what is set out in the Alberta Teachers’ Code of Professional Conduct and you have to use common sense. First off, a teacher needs to treat all students and staff with and respect without any prejudice. Your opinions on these matters need to be either kept to yourself or parked at the curb. A teacher needs to know his or her material well and use whatever methodology is required to deliver that material in order for each student to have the opportunity to learn in his/her own way. Student information needs to be kept private and only shared with those in authority — gossip on a student’s background or struggles cannot occur. A professional teacher always fulfills his/her contract and allows time for his/her vacant position of be filled, out of respect for the school and School Board. A professional does not criticize or undermine fellow colleagues. There is due process for disagreements or criticisms that need to be followed. No teacher should act in a way to dishonour the profession (use common sense here). Besides accepting that service to the teaching profession is a professional responsibility, a teacher must act in such a way which honours and dignifies the profession.

Teacher Mastery:

I would say that I have become a much better teacher over time and with experience. I learned how to deliver the information in so many ways to so many different kinds of students. Students learn at vastly different ways and at varying paces. As a result, I had to learn over time. I could not just deliver a lesson and expect all 25 students in each class to learn it at an exemplary level. It takes repetition and different approaches to reach everyone. In looking back to my
beginning teacher years, I made numerous mistakes in both delivery and relating to students. Even now, I learn new strategies or teaching methods to reach students in a manner that perhaps could not be reached in the past. I mastered the content long ago. However, being a master teacher and having the ability to deliver the goods in an engaging manner to reach students in the 21st Century is much more challenging. Teaching in this century includes an ever changing culture of student learning. Consequently, teaching becomes a moving target, one that I aspire to become consistently successful at.

**Guest Two:** Junior High Teacher: Experience: First Year

**Professionalism:**

Professionalism in teaching to me means respecting yourself, your peers/co-workers and students. Respect is defined as a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements. If a teacher is not offering respect to themselves and those around them, they are not withholding themselves to a professional standard.

**Teaching Mastery:**

I truthfully feel that becoming a master at teaching is close to impossible. Mastery to me is saying you know absolutely everything to know about something. To make that claim about that claim about teaching is inhibiting. I have heard from many veteran teachers that despite the fact that they have taught for multiple decades, they never experienced the same year twice. This demonstrates to me that teachers are constantly adapting and learning new strategies to assist students in achieving inside and outside of the classroom. I think that a more appropriate achievement for teacher professionals is to strive to become masters at learning with no time constraints. Teachers who are passionate about what they do, engaged in what they are teaching, and deeply
committed to their students will achieve mastery at learning faster than those who simply regard teaching as a job.

**Guest Three: One Year Experience**

**Professionalism:**

Professionalism has many different aspects. Firstly, I believe that professionalism involves your physical appearance. For myself, I believe that as teachers we should exhibit a level of professionalism in our manner of dress, including our make-up (this is important with teaching junior high). We should be demonstrating to our students what appropriate attire is.

Secondly, I believe that professionalism involves our relationships with our colleagues. It is not always easy, as colleagues often become like family (we spend more time with them than with our spouses) and as such, normal family dynamics occur. However, we must still be intentional about how we talk to each other and about each other. It is very easy to focus on what is going wrong in our daily teaching practice than what is going right. Furthermore, we are human and at times need to rant. However, these conversations should remain private and kept at a minimum. As adults and professionals we need to confront and solve issues with colleagues in a proper and ethical manner and upload our responsibilities by not talking behind one’s back. Staff interaction and communications are not always easy. Many of us take this job very personally. However, we need to support each other and work as a collective group instead of being individuals. Instead of conversing in a negative fashion, we should steer ourselves towards becoming actively involved in constructive brainstorming;
where we discuss successful teaching strategies. The third dynamic about professionalism involves the students. In addition to teaching youth, we have accountability in helping them grow and mature. There is no doubt that we all get frustrated with our students at times, but we must make reference to them in a positive manner.

Lastly, as teachers, we are in the spotlight 24/7. This means that we need to be aware of what we do at all times, both in and out of school. This is becomes more evident in smaller communities where you are less anonymous in the public. As a teaching professional, we are held to a higher standard because of our influence on youth. In today’s society, with the advent of technology, we also need to be accountable in our use of social media. In general, be aware of your surroundings.

**Guest Four:** Teacher and Administrator: Ten Years of Experience; Rural Alberta

**Professionalism:**

Professionalism in teaching is an important aspect of being a teacher. I really appreciate the Teaching Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta (Ministerial Order # 016/97) that clearly states the following knowledge, skills, and attributes (KSAs):

1. Teachers’ application of pedagogical knowledge, skills and attributes is based on their continual analysis of the following contextual variables.

2. Teachers understand the legislated, moral and ethical frameworks within which they work.

3. Teachers understand the subject disciplines that they teach.
4. Teachers know there are many approaches to teaching and learning.

5. Teachers engage in a range of planning activities.

6. Teachers create and maintain environments that are conducive to student learning.

7. Teachers translate curriculum content and objectives into meaningful learning activities.

8. Teachers apply a variety of technologies to meet students’ needs and progress.

9. Teachers gather and use information about students’ learning needs and progress.

10. Teachers establish and maintain partnerships among school, home and community and within their own school.

11. Teachers are career learners.

Evidence is accumulating from around the world that the single most significant means of improving the performance of national education systems is through excellent teaching. (OECD, 2005). I take my position as a professional teacher/administrator very seriously, as I know that what I do and how I do things directly influences the learning and well-being of others. I take time to learn and share with my students, parents, colleagues and community members. I make a concerted effort to dress in a professional yet manner to convey that I am an administrator who takes pride in the role that I play in our school’s learning environment.
Teacher Mastery:

Malcolm Gladwell’s popular “10,000-hour rule” has been tossed around by supporters and critics alike. It has been supported by some who feel that 10,000 hours are required for mastery at any skill. Others argue that some skills do not require that amount of time to develop mastery. Gladwell defends his argument against this reasoning by saying that “it does not invalidate the ten-thousand-hour principle however, to point out that in instances where there are not a long list of situations and scenarios and possibilities to master-like jumping really high, running as fast as you can in straight line, or directing a sharp object at a large, round piece of cork-expertise can be attained a whole lot more quickly. …In cognitively demanding fields, there are no naturals (The New Yorker, August 21, 2013).” I would add to this dialogue by saying that in my journey as teacher and administrator, the “10,000-rule” has come and gone without me feeling mastery in my role as an educator. I am okay with this, and it is why I love my chosen career path. I feel that there is always new things to learn and practice.

Guest Five: Teacher and Administrator: 27 Years of Experience

Professionalism:

For me, professionalism in teaching is about how you conduct yourself throughout your daily life. This includes your interactions with your students, colleagues, parents, friends, and the greater community. Your actions will elicit reactions from those around you. Educators need to ensure that their actions will encourage positive reactions due to such actions being viewed by a large cross section of the local society. As a role model we need to conduct ourselves so that we are worthy of the responsibility.
This conduct should include the following:

“Appropriate dress at school; involvement in school and community programs such as charitable work, coaching, or leading; appropriate conduct on all forms of electronic and social media; maintain a positive rapport with parents and community members.”

Teacher Mastery:

The concept of taking 10,000 hours to reach a mastery level of anything has some merit. However, I am reluctant to give this designation of myself or any other educator. My reason for this is that educational research is constantly revealing new and innovative teaching strategies and formats of instruction. As well, the advent of technology has contributed to changing the way in which we teach. As a result, it is my contention that we never really attain a true mastery in the teaching profession. As educators, we need to implement lifelong learning and strive to explore the competencies put forth for 21st Century learning.

Guest Six: Two Years Teaching Experience: Various Levels

Professionalism:

First of all, it is my belief that teaching is a life choice and not a career choice. With this in mind, teachers need to demonstrate professionalism across many areas of their lives. To me, being professional in the wider sense of the word means always using appropriate language, acting, dressing and being productive at your particular job. Being professional as a teacher includes all of these key elements with a few additions; firstly, genuinely caring about the wellbeing and development of students is the key to being professional. In addition, being flexible and available to take on additional roles and duties outside the classroom is characteristic of being a professional teacher. For me, professionalism in teaching does not finish at the end of the school day – it continues through every part of a teacher’s day to day living away from school and perhaps at the public sports facilities and venues.
**Teacher Mastery:**

I do not feel that this concept can be applied to teaching. As professionals, we need to continue to grow and challenge ourselves to keep in touch with new technologies, teaching practices, assessment and reporting requirements. After considering these concepts, the biggest viable of them all; the students. Teachers should never feel that they have reached a level of mastery. It is true that teachers can master a high level of knowledge in their subject area, but to reach mastery level in all aspects of the profession would be a stretch. Due to the nature of who teachers are, as individuals we can often reach a level of sustenance. This can result in teachers becoming stagnant and unwilling to become active purveyors of 21st Century education practices.

**Guest Seven:** Fourteen Years Teaching Experience at Various Levels

**Professionalism:**

As a teacher, professionalism requires us to continue to respond and adapt to the learner and learning styles; not only does the knowledge about brain development change, as in the case of neuroplasticity, but the learner themselves are evolving in response to technology and their environment. The teaching professional must keep up with “best practices” in education and adapt to them through continuous professional development. Preparing students for high school, 21st Century learning and future employment has become a major component for me as a teaching professional. In addition to understanding the curriculum, I need to keep current in my understanding of modern music, pop culture, social media, IPhones, ADD, ADHD, nutrition, OCD and numerous other facets of today’s society. When I think of being professional, I believe that one must also give careful consideration to topics such as code of conduct, student privacy, assessment practices and extracurricular activities.
Conclusion:

The seven teachers who gave responses for this paper represent approximately eighty years of experience, from one to thirty-four years. As 21st Century educators, evident that there are numerous strategies and perspectives on the subject of teacher professionalism. There appeared to be a common theme that dress, appearance, and the way that one presents themselves, is an essential component of professionalism. The one commonality for these teachers is that they teach in rural Alberta. This explains why there was a consensus on the importance of developing and enhancing positive community relationships within the school context and in diverse activities outside the school environment. The teachers appeared to address important aspects of teacher professionalism which are confirmed in the Teacher Quality Standard Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education:

“Teachers recognize they are bound by standards of conduct expected of a caring, knowledgeable and reasonable adult who is entrusted with the custody, care or education of students or children. Teachers recognize their actions are bound in moral, ethical, and legal considerations regarding their obligations to students, parents, administrators, school authorities, communities and society… understand the importance of contributing, independently and collegially, to the quality of their school. They know the strategies whereby they can, independently and collegially, enhance and maintain the quality of their school to the benefit of students, parents, community and colleagues (Alberta Education Teacher Quality Standard, 1997, p. 3).”

For the most part, the teachers agreed that achieving a “mastery” level in the teaching profession is most likely not attainable. As a consequence, the teachers appear to reflect the common belief that teachers need to adapt to new strategies and competencies in a changing society. This results in life-long learning.

For myself, the term professionalism with respect to teachers, obviously has to involve the adherence to the professional Code of Ethics and Standards of Professional Conduct. The expectations for this are clearly documented. The second aspect of
professionalism revolves around practice, and the teachers’ desire for continuous improvement in that area. If we aspire to reach a “mastery” level in the profession, we must continue to be active participants in life-long learning through an ongoing process of professional development. The concept of teachers as life-long and career learners is explained in the following passage:

“Teachers engage in ongoing professional development to enhance their understanding of and ability to analyze the context of teaching; ability to make judgments and decisions; and, pedagogical knowledge and abilities. They recognize their own professional needs and work with others to meet those needs. They share their professional expertise to benefit of others in their schools, communities and profession. Teachers guide their actions by their overall visions of the purpose of teaching. They actively refine and redefine their visions in light of the ever-changing context, new knowledge and understandings, and their experiences (Alberta Education – Teacher Quality Standard, 1997, p. 8)”

When we examine the competencies for 21st Century learning and the transformation of schools, elements such as instructional capacity, literacy, numeracy, assessment, use of technology and differentiated instruction are other crucial aspects. It is my contention that the internal desire to increasingly inspire and engage students in meaningful experiences is truly what a professional strives for on a daily basis.
References:


