

Standards for accomplished teachers and principals

a foundation for public confidence and respect

March 2009

Teaching Australia Network


Teaching Australia

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP LIMITED



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The top of the page features a dark blue banner with a repeating pattern of the words 'Teaching Australia Network' in a lighter blue, sans-serif font.

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Professional excellence underpins quality education

Wide public recognition of dedicated, accomplished teachers and principals as exemplary professionals is central to high quality education and a respected teaching profession.

Professional status and respect stem from many sources – formal qualifications, professional preparation and income, and transparent, rigorous standards that set out what accomplished professionals should know and be able to do. Other hallmarks of a highly regarded profession are a commitment to the welfare of clients, a significant measure of professional autonomy in practice, a valued knowledge base and collegial behaviour.

"...standards are but one part of the repertoire of policy strategies that can make a difference to student achievement..."

In fields such as accountancy, medicine and engineering, practitioners are highly regarded in part because

they are certified by their peers as accomplished according to agreed standards of practice. In contrast, the history of teaching has meant that the work of the teaching profession is comparatively undervalued. This has implications for attracting and retaining the best teachers and principals.

Research has clearly and convincingly established that good teachers make a difference to students' life chances and the best teachers make the most difference. As a result, governments have given high priority to raising the quality of teaching. Separately and jointly, they have supported a broad range of initiatives to raise the quality of teaching and school leadership.

Teaching and principal standards are but one part of the repertoire of policy strategies that can make a difference to student achievement by influencing teacher and principal quality. In the current climate of accountability, standards sit alongside and reinforce other policy



measures. In Australia, they are being developed and implemented at a number of different levels, through different processes and for different purposes.

"...standards help build the status of the profession..."

While governments and regulatory bodies have a clear responsibility for assuring qualifications and

competence, there is a point where external regulation is less appropriate and effective than professional control. In the complex and challenging education environment, it is especially important that members of the profession are able to define the high levels of professional expertise required to operate most effectively.

In the development and implementation of highly accomplished standards, the profession should have a lead role, with the overall goal of valuing, supporting and improving teaching and school leadership.

Standards of accomplishment

By making the skills and knowledge expected of accomplished teachers and principals transparent and accessible, standards help build the status of the profession. Claims to professional status are more likely to be taken seriously when the profession demonstrates its commitment to articulating and measuring what counts as accomplished practice.

Standards for accomplished teaching and school leadership distinguish between what is competent practice and what is exemplary. Successful overseas models define accomplished teachers as those who have “moved beyond the academic knowledge level of the beginning teacher, have added the practical knowledge of the experienced teacher and have enhanced their performance with human qualities, expert knowledge and skill, and professional commitment that represent true excellence in teaching.”[§]

The desire to describe what constitutes high accomplishment in their particular fields has led a large number of professional teaching

[§] National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. (2008, April). *Standards development handbook*. Arlington, VA: Author.

associations in Australia to develop their own standards. This has resulted in the development of accomplished standards in areas as diverse as science, mathematics, English/literacy, special education, library and information services and modern languages.

Following extensive consultation, work is now underway under the auspices of Teaching Australia to develop standards in new areas and to renew some existing standards – initially, for early childhood, science and primary teaching and for principals – so that they are consistently presented and pitched.

Accomplished standards can be used to identify excellence and expertise and frame professional development. Using standards to assess teachers and principals has been shown to bring tangible benefits to individuals and can provide a rigorous and credible basis for employers to value and reward professionals.


A key role for the profession

A compelling reason for the profession to assume collective responsibility for standards of practice is that regulation and prescriptive approaches cannot in themselves assure the quality of a child's education. The outcomes for a student are dependent in large part on the skills and knowledge of teachers and principals. To capture fully the challenges of teaching in diverse contexts and give all students the best education

"...regulation and prescriptive approaches cannot in themselves assure the quality of a child's education."

possible, approaches to accountability need to strike a balance between government regulation and professional responsibility.

Teachers and principals need to be intimately involved in describing the sophisticated and complex dimensions of accomplished practice. This work involves subject and curriculum knowledge and expertise in relation to particular student age groups as well as the intellectual capacity, skill and flexibility to apply this knowledge to diverse learners



and contexts. It includes the ability to select the best pedagogical strategies to maximise learning outcomes for all students.

"...profession-wide standards complement existing and planned generic government and system standards..."

Through involvement in standards development, teachers and principals deepen their understanding of their craft and improve

their practice. The process of drafting, consultation and amendment of standards gives the profession the opportunity to reflect on its beliefs and practices, to test aspirational expectations against real-life contexts and to create a shared and public conversation about practice.

Profession-wide standards complement existing and planned generic government and system standards. They are not dependent on jurisdiction, system or school, and add value to teachers, principals and school systems by focusing on professional responsibility and specialist skills.

These standards can serve a number of purposes. They:

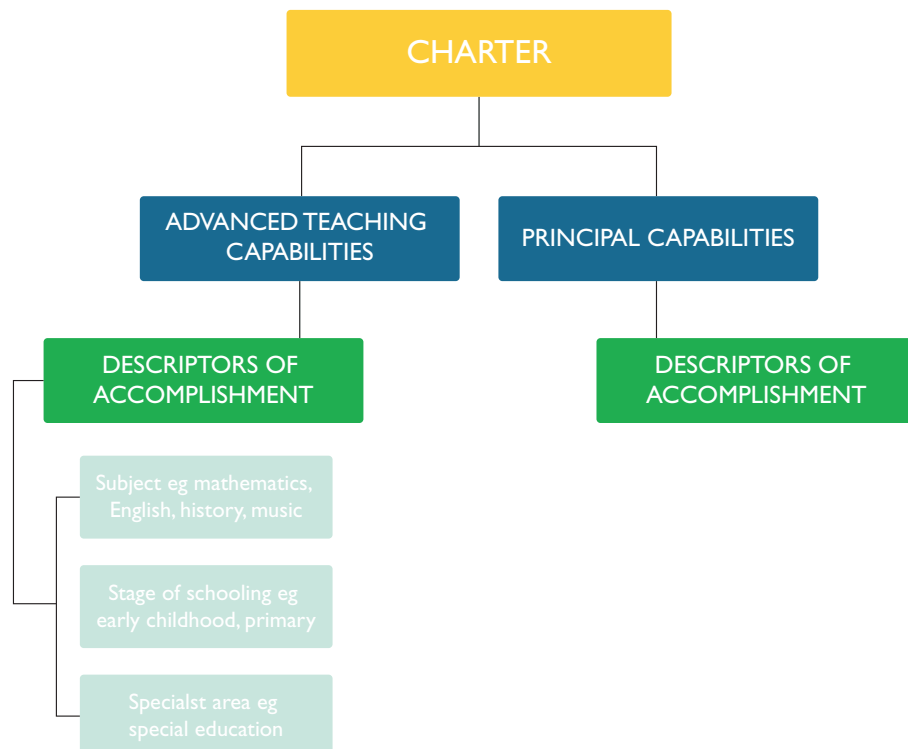
- ~ enable the profession to make public its values, beliefs, knowledge and practices
- ~ guide members of the profession in reflecting on and improving their practice
- ~ provide a framework for teacher and principal professional learning
- ~ articulate distinctive attributes and aspects of specialised practice as a complement to generic standards and competencies
- ~ inform assessment and promotional procedures
- ~ recognise and reward degrees of accomplishment
- ~ raise self esteem within the profession and affirm a public professional commitment to accountability.

Specialist standards

The deep knowledge and skills that are captured in specialist standards are at the heart of highly accomplished practice.

"...specialist standards are at the heart of highly accomplished practice..."

Through research and consultation across the network of professional associations, the profession has reached agreement on a model to move the development of accomplished standards forward.





The standards model brings together three elements:

- ~ the Charter for the Australian teaching profession, which affirms the high ideals and principles that underpin teaching and school leadership
- ~ a set of generic capabilities that set out the knowledge and skills expected of teachers and principals operating at an accomplished level
- ~ specific descriptors of accomplished practice in specialised areas.

What is common in accomplished teaching and school leadership is reflected in the capabilities; what is unique is reflected in the more detailed descriptors. Generic descriptions cannot do justice to the complex knowledge and skills that underpin accomplished practice in fields as diverse as early childhood teaching and pre-tertiary physical science teaching. Expertise in one teaching area – whether a subject area or a particular stage of schooling – cannot simply be transferred to another.[§]

"...curriculum standards and accomplished teaching standards go hand in hand..."

Specialist standards also respect the features that characterise each curriculum area and are distinctive for that speciality, wherever practised.

For example, an accomplished maths or chemistry teacher or early childhood professional brings specialised knowledge, skill and experience to their successful teaching wherever they are operating in the nation.

National curriculum developments highlight the value of specialist standards. Successful implementation of the national curriculum will be underpinned by the specialised skills and knowledge of accomplished teachers. Curriculum standards and accomplished teaching standards go hand in hand.

[§] Ingvarson, L.C. (2009). *A partnership whose time has come: National curriculum and national professional teaching standards*. Melbourne: Centre for Strategic Education.

Conclusion

In the Charter for the Australian Teaching Profession, teachers and principals commit to giving students the best education possible for them to lead fulfilling, purposeful and productive lives.

The readiness of teachers and principals to take responsibility for articulating and promoting high standards of accomplishment is a significant contribution to the collective endeavours of governments, schools and parent groups to improving the quality of school education.

Teaching Australia Network Associations

Art Education Australia
Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia
Australian Association for Environmental Education
Australian Association for the Teaching of English
Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers
Australian Association of Special Education
Australian College of Educators
Australian Council for Computers in Education
Australian Council for Educational Leaders
Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation
Australian Council of Deans of Education
Australian Council of TESOL Associations
Australian Curriculum Studies Association
Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations
Australian Federation of Societies for Studies of Society and Environment
Australian Geography Teachers Association
Australian Joint Council of Professional Teaching Associations
Australian Library and Information Association
Australian Literacy Educators' Association
Australian Primary Principals Association
Australian School Library Association
Australian Science Teachers Association
Australian Secondary Principals' Association
Australian Society for Music Education
Australian Special Education Principals' Association
Australian Teacher Education Association
Business Educators Australasia
Catholic Secondary Principals Australia
Early Childhood Australia
History Teachers' Association of Australia
Home Economics Institute of Australia
Middle Years of Schooling Association
Social Educators Association of Australia
VETnetwork Australia

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