

CLOSING PLENARY

Introduction

This has been a wonderfully stimulating one and a half days. In drawing together our experience we have covered a lot of territory. It has been open, with high levels of interest, passion and debate. One of the strengths of the conference has been in the wide range of views/perspectives expressed. For me there have been so many powerful insights and learnings that I can't begin to outline them here.

As a profession we are seriously grappling with challenging issues. I am proud to be part of this profession. As representatives of the profession we have the power to reinvigorate/encourage the next stage of the development of the profession.

Where are we at?

- There is a strong platform on which to build – we can take heart from the impressive work that has been done by the profession.
- It is clear we are at different stages of thinking, but there is strength in that.

Moving forward now as a profession, we need to recognise that a more coherent and unified voice will increase our influence and standing. NIQTSL gives us the opportunity to bring our work together under one umbrella – not as one identical set of standards but as part of a **consistent story**, one that can be easily grasped by the people we serve, children and young people and their parents, and the community at large.

NIQTSL's aim

- to unify and bring together
- to advance the profession and professional input

In doing so we want to work collaboratively with all the parties with an interest in school education and complement rather than supplant.

Moving forward - three reflections on the conference

1. Drawing the profession together

The conference demonstrated for me that we have different understandings about what it means to be a professional – and even what we mean by our profession. The term 'our profession' has been used on many occasions in the last couple of days with very different meanings. An independent observer might even talk about the 'balkanisation' of profession, reflecting perhaps the contestability of curriculum.

If we want to expand our influence, advance our profession, we need to focus more on the common ground, on what characterises the whole profession.

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This has led me to think about the NIQTSL business plan. Under our objective 'strengthening the profession' we have listed 'developing a statement of ethical principles'.

Reflecting on the last day or so, maybe we, the profession, need to refocus this activity towards developing a short, succinct 'charter' or overarching statement on what it means to be a teaching professional.

We wouldn't be starting from scratch because there are many models and a lot of work on which to build. What we would be trying to do is to get a collective understanding.

Charter for teaching profession – what might it look like?

The charter would have to be thoroughly talked through to be owned by the profession, but it could include:

- the architecture of teaching articulating the central role of designing and managing student learning:
 - establishing learning expectations;
 - determining where individuals are and factors impacting on them;
 - planning, role, timing, delivering a range of strategies;
 - assessing and monitoring progress; and
 - review
- our commitments, which could include commitments:
 - to the individual learner;
 - to operate from an evidence base;
 - to professional learning, reflection;
 - to operate collegially with peers, professional outcome;
 - to act ethically; and
 - to be advocates for the profession.

It might also draw together the concept of generic and specialised standards in ways that provide professional coherence while recognising and valuing the importance of specialised standards.

2. Critical issues to be worked through

At this conference we have identified a number of important issues and risks to address and recognised that we have different views and are at different stages in relation to these issues. In particular we need to focus on:

- Purpose: the 'why' is fundamental. It needs to be considered from the perspective of the people we serve, the community at large and the profession (individually and collectively). In this context the presentation by Judyth Sachs was very helpful.

- Content: the 'what' issues around languages and framework need to be explored.
- Process: the 'how' we go about the next stages of development and redevelopment of standards in a coherent way with common understandings about language.

What are the next steps?

NIQTSL is committed to the profession having a national system by 2007. Some points to note are:

- This is ambitious, but we have to balance consultation, involvement of profession with a time-frame that moves us forward and gets us somewhere.
- We recognise that education is important, with a lot of other players with legitimate interests.
- This is very much a work in progress.

The conference has provided important early input to the first phase of the process the Institute intends to follow.

The next steps from here will start in October with:

- the conference report – which will draw out issues, diverging views, areas of consensus;
- receipt of the report of the literature review and critical analysis that Lawrence Ingvarson is undertaking for us: looking at current developments, strengths and weaknesses. This will give us a firm evidence base by covering work on standards by professional associations, employer, nationally and internationally; and
- the issues identified from these processes. We will then embark on a nationwide consultation process – probably into early 2006 – focussed on real options going forward. We will need to think about whether we should come together again in another conference like this or some other way.

3. Communication and leadership

Our challenge is to engage broader communication strategies and conversations about standards.

- As a profession it is time to move from individual to collective ownership of standards as a key element in being a profession.

- We know that teachers are busy and engaged in the day to day activity of helping students, professional learning and a myriad of other activities.
- The task of those of us here today as leaders of the profession is to make every effort to communicate to practising teachers about advanced standards. To broaden their understanding of what standards mean for teachers and for the profession, and to engage them in the process.
- Note that we are proposing to prepare a series of information articles from the conference that associations might wish to use or adapt for their journals.

Conclusion

This is hard. We don't have all the answers but there is a considerable body of work to build on and enormous goodwill. A national and profession-wide approach is something we will all benefit from.

The establishment of NIQTSL is an opportunity for the profession. It is an opportunity to bring together the work of the various elements within the profession.

Together we are more than the sum of the parts. And in working together we will increase our voice and influence.