

Advanced Teaching Standards

An article on outcomes of Sharing Experience: ways forward with standards conference, 21-22 August 2005

Landmark meeting sparks vigorous debate on advanced teaching standards

A landmark national conference for the teaching profession took some important steps towards answering some key questions like: how can we recognise good teaching and how important are issues like context, pedagogy, and content knowledge, to it?

The *Sharing experience: ways forward with standards* conference, convened by the National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership in August 2005, featured thought-provoking presentations and active participation at panel and workshop sessions by a 'remarkable' gathering of more than 180 people from the education sector. Teachers, principals, representatives from teacher registration bodies, employers, unions, teacher educators, researchers and policy makers from all states and territories took part.

The scene for healthy debate was set by keynote speakers, Professor Judyth Sachs of the University of Sydney, with her review of recent thinking and debate about standards, and Dr Lawrence Ingvarson of the Australian Council for Educational Research, with his appraisal of overseas and Australian experience in standards.

Both speakers addressed the need to arrive at an agreed language around standards. Professor Sachs carefully drew the distinction between *teaching* standards and *teacher* standards.

"Teaching standards treat teaching as a process that can be improved. They seek to build and hone teacher creativity and professional judgment at the local and individual level to help teachers understand their practice and improve it," said Professor Sachs.

"Teacher standards, on the other hand, are concerned with measuring teacher performance, placing teachers as objects for measurement. In their most extreme form, they become a form of regulation, dictating and standardising professional practice, removing the ability of teachers to be creative, innovative, and use their professional judgement."

The keynote speakers were followed by presentations at panel and workshop sessions, which prompted exploration of a wide range of issues in the development and use of standards. These presentations were given on behalf of professional associations at

varying stages of progress with standards in the areas of English/literacy, environmental education, mathematics, computer education, English as a Second Language, science, music, teacher librarianship and business education.

According to Fran Hinton, Chief Executive of the Institute, one of the strengths of the conference was the wide range of experiences, views and perspectives contributed.

“We don’t have all the answers, but we now have a strong platform on which to build—we can take heart from the impressive work that has been done across the profession,” she said.

Through the Institute, the teaching profession has the opportunity to bring existing work on standards together under one umbrella. This approach could respect critical differences between the various professional standards, while making adjustments where appropriate. A national system could identify common elements and articulate how different standards could be related and applied.

The Institute is set up as an independent body with Australian Government funding to support and advance the quality of teaching, the quality of school leadership and the status of the teaching profession. After a year of interim operation, it is on the verge of permanent establishment with a governing board composed mainly of people nominated by the profession.

Developing a coherent, cohesive and consistent national system for recognising accomplished teaching is one of the Institute’s main goals for the next three years. This conference was an important step towards that.

Through the conference, the Institute sought to:

- explore the issues relevant to developing advanced teaching standards based on the work that has been done so far;
- reach some common understandings of how standards can underpin quality teaching; and
- identify ways in which national professional associations and the Institute can work together to advance these standards.

Ms Hinton says that a national system of advanced teaching standards has the potential to provide recognition for the achievements of teachers.

“The contributions of quality teaching to the achievements and successes of students should be appreciated by a much wider audience than the local school community,”

she said. “Teachers have never placed great emphasis on the public recognition of their work, but they do deserve public recognition and a wider appreciation of their success in promoting student learning and achievement.”

Reflecting on the conference, Ms Hinton said the teaching profession may also benefit from a succinct ‘charter’ or overarching statement on what it means to be a teaching professional. The charter would need to be discussed and debated, but could serve to provide a unifying and binding set of commitments and understandings of the profession, both for the profession itself and for the community.

Following a nationwide consultation process early in 2006, the aim is to see a proposed system of national standards developed by November 2007.

“This is hard,” said Ms Hinton. “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 Institute appreciated the work of the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers, the Australian Association for the Teaching of English, the Australian Science Teachers Association, the Australian Literacy Educators’ Association and the Australian Council for Computers in Education in organising the conference.