

Teacher Accreditation

Teacher accreditation is flawed and is damaging teacher status, as well as our wellbeing. I agree with Noam Chomsky when he tells us that consent can be manufactured. The semantics of our language reveal our bias, whether we support the status quo or rail against it. One such bias is the current accreditation of teachers as proficient. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) places a huge burden of proof upon teachers wishing to advance beyond proficient. This burden of proof is untenable. **Surely all teacher training should be aiming to make every teacher highly accomplished. If not, why not?** If, at the end of this process, the mediocrity of proficiency is still the norm, you will have failed.

If you really want to create a highly accomplished generation of teachers you must consider three things. Quality teacher training, quality teacher recruitment and making highly accomplished accreditation the norm by closely linking this with all professional training and development so that it becomes a celebration of achievement not an untenable burden.

1. Quality Teacher training

Good quality training is essential. Unfortunately, not all teacher training is equal. As an assistant principal, I have supervised several student teachers who were on their last practicum (their internship). One of these students – sent to us from Strathfield Catholic College – had never seen the syllabus. I think that is a problem, don't you? She was going to be a teacher at the end of her placement. Last year, a student was sent to our school from Sturt University in Wagga. The teacher supervising and the student's mentor had some serious concerns, she was incompetent, they did not think she was ready to become a teacher. The university refused to fail her. Frankly, this is not good enough. It is too late once such teachers are in schools. Not all teacher professional development courses are equal either. Several years ago, I, along with other assistant principals in my area, was made to attend a health and safety course run by our director. It was not about keeping teachers safe, no, it was about filling in staff accident forms in a timely manner, to save the department money (he got a cost saving bonus).

AITSL needs the power to accredit all teacher training. Teacher training that produces graduates and all professional development training that happens at conferences and within schools. All this teacher training needs to be aligned to the teaching standards and delivered at a level that produces highly accomplished teachers. Currently our professional development only aims to produce proficient teachers. Is that a deliberate cost saving bias, or a complete lack of vision?

2. Teacher Pay and Quality Recruitment

Every aspect of Australian society and our global competitiveness is determined by the quality of our education. Despite the importance of education for our overall wealth and health, Australian teacher pay is so low, and portrayal of teachers in the media so negative, it is viewed as a low status job. This low status repels our brightest students away from teaching. (My friend left school in Year 10. He became an apprentice electrician. Even as an assistant principal I have never earned more money, in a year, than he has. My daughter finished the HSC last year. Neither she nor any of her high achieving friends wish to become teachers and when I asked them why, the answer was unanimous, 'The pay sucks!') We

need to increase quality teacher recruitment by increasing teacher status. We must increase teacher status by increasing teacher pay. This will increase quality teacher recruitment. It is that simple. Look at the pay of teachers from Singapore, Canada and Finland. Our government and our unions should be ashamed.

3. Accreditation, Professional Standards, Professional Development and Over Work.

The AITSL teaching standards are a great step forward, professional development needs to be closely aligned to these standards and teachers should be paid accordingly. Currently, however, the burden of proof, required for teachers to show that they are lead or highly accomplished, is too great and remains a disincentive – despite the promise of more pay. You may say that becoming accredited as highly accomplished or better, is achievable because some people have managed the process. True, but most do not and you should be asking why. **Why are teachers not taking up the challenge of becoming highly accomplished?** Or do you have an assumption that most teachers do not have or cannot acquire the skills to become highly accomplished? (There is that bias and low status issue again)

A cynical person would describe the whole process as a cost saving measure. Designed to be unachievable so that the government can pay us less. The task of accreditation above proficiency for most of us is overwhelming. When placed on top of a huge pressure to gather and enter data, attend continuous professional development, participate in after school meetings while programming, reporting and actually teaching, the whole process is unattainable. To take on such a burden would compromise our teaching and our professional or family relationships. I know of only one person, in a high school near where I teach, that others refer to as having achieved accreditation at a lead level and this person has little credibility and is viewed by his peers as self-serving, overly ambitious, not very bright and definitely not to be trusted. He may or may not have achieved accreditation at a leadership level but the important thing is that people believe he has and there are negative connotations associated with his 'achievement'. What is the state of our teachers' wellbeing when successful accomplishment is seen as a negative?

Keep in mind, teachers all work so hard for so little, with so much negative feedback from the media and politicians that we no longer care what the bureaucrats think. Even our department leaders are now so divorced from the reality of face to face teaching that they further alienate us all by talking about 'value adding' children. Let me assure you, every teacher thinks every child has inherent value and that value is in no way, whatsoever, connected to their NAPLAN score. We do not need validation from such people, nor AITSL or anybody else. We get validation from our students' wellbeing and the good opinion of their parents. Accreditation above proficiency has become synonymous with over ambition and self-serving aggrandisement. Frankly, the whole process is insulting.

The way forward is to change the nature of our training. Why would anyone want to train to be just proficient? Highly accomplished must become the norm. Maybe, just maybe, highly accomplished teachers will become mentors for highly accomplished children. But only if you change the status quo. Please do. The future health and wealth of our country rests on your decision.