Promising Practices

Australian Professional Teaching Standards

Country category: Australia
Teacher education pathway category(ies): Equipping teacher candidates with what they need to know and do
Stakeholder category(ies): teacher candidate; teacher educator
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This case study describes a “promising practice” drawn from an OECD review of initial teacher preparation in Australia from 22-26 May 2017.

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Context

The term “professional teaching standards” in the context of initial teacher education (ITE) is commonly used to describe what teachers should know and be able to do, including a desirable level of performance (Révai and Guerriero, 2017[1]). Kleinhenz and Ingvarson (2002[2]) conceptualised the use of standards in two ways:

- as a measure, such as a content or performance standards, which may be used for teacher certification or registration
- a set of values that “unites people around shared ideas and values…[and] encourage the reconciliation of divergent views”.

But teaching standards are not the “magic bullet’ for teaching quality (Darling-Hammond, 1999[3]). In the pursuit of the ultimate goal of using teaching standards to improve teacher quality and in an effort to nuance the “one size fits all” static perception of teaching standards (Sachs, 2003[4]), the complex processes of co-constructing, monitoring and evaluating professional teaching standards – and the mechanisms for embedding standards within other policy frameworks such as ITE programmes and accreditation of ITE programmes – merit closer examination. A recent OECD working paper, which explores the intricate interplay between professional standards for teachers, the content of teacher education and educational sciences, notes the importance of “…monitoring and understanding the revision and renegotiation process of national standards, and analysing the change of both standards and teacher education curriculum over time to reveal whether they constructively influence each other towards: 1) a more integrated conception of professional knowledge and 2) raising teacher quality.” (Revai, forthcoming[5]).

In Australia, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teaching Standards) were conceived as both a measure and a set of values to which it was hoped that all states and territories would agree. The Teaching Standards were endorsed by state and territory education ministers in 2011 (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014[6]) following an intensive consultation period, and subsequently reviewed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), in collaboration with the Centre for Programme Evaluation at Melbourne University and their partner, the Australian College of Educators between 2013 and 2015 (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership and University of Melbourne, 2016[7]). Developed and implemented by AITSL, the validation process for the Teaching Standards descriptors involved almost 6,000 teachers.

How do the Teaching Standards work?

The Teaching Standards provide descriptors of four career stages for teachers – Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead – each representing increasing levels of knowledge, practice and professional engagement for teachers, in line with the Australian curriculum standards. Descriptors are intended to provide benchmarks that recognise the professional growth of teachers throughout their careers. The Teaching Standards describe
six national programme standards related to programme outcomes, programme
development, design and delivery, programme entry, programme structure and content,
professional experience, and programme evaluation, reporting and improvement. They also
describe the seven teacher standards at the “Graduate” level:

- how students and how they learn
- know the content and how to teach it
- plan for and implement effective teaching and learning
- create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments
- assess, provide feedback and report on student learning
- engage in professional learning
- engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community.

The Teaching Standards present a two-stage process for teachers to attain full registration
in Australia:

- To obtain provisional registration – and “Graduate” level of the Teaching Standards –
teachers must have graduated from a recognised and accredited teacher education programme
and be deemed suitable to work with children based on an assessment of character and criminal history. In some cases a demonstration of
English language proficiency is required.

- To be fully registered, teachers are required to show evidence that they have attained the “Proficient” level of the Teaching Standards, which normally requires
showing a portfolio of evidence to the school principal, a school-based panel of
reviewers or the Teacher Accreditation Authority (Table 1), following guidelines
provided by the regulatory authority. Minimum numbers of teaching and
professional learning days are also stipulated by each state and territory. To obtain
“Proficient” level of the Teaching Standards, a teacher is expected to show a
portfolio of evidence demonstrating how they meet eight criteria including:

  - Creating effective teaching and learning experiences for their students, adjusting their teaching to meet their individual needs and diverse cultural, social and linguistic characteristics.
  - Developing safe, positive and productive learning environments where all students are encouraged to participate.
  - Designing and implementing engaging teaching programs that meet curriculum, assessment and reporting requirements.
  - Using feedback and assessment to analyse and support their students’ knowledge and understanding.
Table 1. Categories of evidence for a successful teacher candidates’ portfolio to attain “Proficient” status of the Teacher Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching and learning programmes</th>
<th>Classroom observations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning programme</td>
<td>Observation notes and feedback from a line manager or mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson plan</td>
<td>Video of lesson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual student learning plans</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Reflection and feedback</th>
<th>Student assessment and learning</th>
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<td>Student conference notes</td>
<td>Differentiated assessment tasks</td>
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<td>Student feedback</td>
<td>Assessment tools and strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent interview notes</td>
<td>Student assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer feedback</td>
<td>Display of student work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance review feedback</td>
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<tr>
<th>Collaboration and communication</th>
<th>Professional learning</th>
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<tr>
<td>Video clip of team teaching</td>
<td>Performance and development plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources co-constructed and shared with colleagues</td>
<td>Action research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC meeting notes/meeting logs</td>
<td>Activities within professional associations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blogs and correspondence</td>
<td>Online course</td>
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The Teaching Standards are also embedded in both stages of the new accreditation of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in Australia: for new programmes (Stage 1) and continuing programmes (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2016[7]). For new ITE programmes (Stage 1), for example, ITE providers must submit evidence against the programme standards; map where in the programme the Graduate Teacher Standards are taught, practised and assessed; and a plan for demonstrating impact (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014[5]).

An evaluation of the usefulness, effectiveness and impact of the Teaching Standards by the Centre for Programme Evaluation at Melbourne University and their partner, the Australian College of Educators, with AITSL, between 2013 and 2015, found widespread acceptance and use of the Teaching Standards at the federal, state and school levels, especially by teacher educators. Their use generally involves mandatory requirements such as registration and certification, but examples for more extended use, such as professional development and teacher self-reflection, were also found in some cases (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership and University of Melbourne, 2016[8]). A more recent study found positive attitudes towards the Teaching Standards by both teachers and school principals, which could be attributed to teacher ownership over the standards and their implementation (Adoniou and Gallagher, 2017[9]).
Why are the Teaching Standards a strength?

The OECD review team in its review of Australia from 22-26 May 2017 concluded that the Teaching Standards are a strength in that:

- **There was strong co-construction of all frameworks and guidelines** – developed over time and written in accessible and relevant language for schools, ITE providers, state authorities and agencies, etc. – led by a national body that is respected and is implementing reform.
- **They are now embedded in state and territory registration processes** and are being used in hiring decisions – and in the revised ITP programme accreditation.
- **It offers a clear and consistent basis for articulating readiness to teach decisions**, which is articulated in accessible language for schools, school leaders and ITE providers.
- **It acknowledges the importance of teacher’s professional learning**, including the importance of induction to support new teachers and learning leadership.
- **Evidence collected demonstrates authentic teaching experiences** and shows development over time.

How could they be improved?

However, the OECD review team also noted that:

- **There remain different requirements for moving to full registration across states** in terms of teaching experience and the process for demonstration of competence against the Teaching Standards. This could weaken the overall coherence and effectiveness of certification processes, including the application of the Teaching Standards.
- **Although the “Highly accomplished” and “Lead teacher” (HALT) status of the Teaching Standards has great potential to drive leadership in schools, improve support for all teachers, and increase the attractiveness of teaching in general** – for the moment there is the lack of a systemic approach to support new teachers.

For more information


