

**NEiTA's 2010 ASG National Teaching Excellence Awards**

**17<sup>th</sup> June 2011**

***Recognising and Rewarding Quality Teaching***

**Professor Stephen Dinham OAM**

Chair of Teacher Education and Director of Learning and Teaching

Melbourne Graduate School of Education

University of Melbourne

Thank you to NEiTA and the Australian Scholarships Group for the invitation to speak on the occasion of the National Teaching Excellence Awards for 2010.

There has been universal recognition that the major in-school factor affecting student learning is the teacher and that teacher quality varies widely. Professional teaching standards are now seen as crucial in promoting quality teaching and much work has been done in Australia over the past 20 years by professional associations, employers and jurisdictions, work which has produced a vast array of standards, frameworks and approaches designed to articulate and engender quality teaching.

Previous attempts to drive improvement in teacher quality and to attract, retain, recognise and reward accomplished teachers have largely failed. One of the key reasons is that such schemes have never been mainstreamed to form an effective salary and career structure.

Seemingly simplistic measures such as paying teachers on 'merit' or by 'results' are also doomed to fail. Present incremental salary and career structures for teachers are 19th-century industrial artefacts that see teachers' salaries peak too soon and at too low a level. At present, more than three-quarters of Australia's teachers are at the top of incremental salary scales where they earn approximately one-and-a-half times the salary of a beginning teacher. This difference is too small. While too high a proportion of beginning teachers resign in their first three years – over

25% - there is also a hidden resignation spike associated with teachers reaching the top of such salary scales after 10-12 years of teaching.

David Berliner has suggested that moving from novice status to achieving competence as a teacher takes around two to three years. The development of a high level of skill, however, takes five to seven years and a great deal of work. The professional standards frameworks developed and being introduced across Australia by AITSL reflect this reality.

We need to address teacher quality at every step of the teacher career progression i.e., at every key point of leverage.<sup>i</sup> However, assessing teachers' performance in valid and reliable ways is far more difficult and complex than many believe.

The solution lies in combining two present agendas: the introduction of national teaching standards and the call for 'bonus', 'merit' or 'performance' pay to reward and drive improvement in teacher effectiveness.

In a report for the Business Council of Australia in 2008<sup>ii</sup>, Dinham, Ingvarson and Kleinhenz suggested that equilibrium in a national certification system for Australia's teachers would see around 30% of teachers at the *Highly Accomplished* level and 10% at the *Lead* (Teacher) level. The remaining 60% of teachers would be seeking or have gained certification at the mandatory *Proficient/registered* level.

However, there are a number of key issues that need to be addressed to reach this situation. Firstly, there is a need for effective performance standards that have authenticity, utility and add value. Secondly, *how* teachers are assessed and *who* conducts these processes are crucial. Portability and currency of certification are also significant issues. Most important, however, is the question of whether certification of teachers at the voluntary *Highly Accomplished* and *Lead* levels will be rewarded financially through integration into existing and future salary and career

structures. If this fails to occur, then the AITSL standards will gain little traction in driving improvement in the quality teaching.

It is essential that the assessment processes for certification are valid, reliable and credible within and across the profession. The assessment processes should be based upon the national standards and include observation of teaching and school visitations as well as 'off-site' assessment and validation across school and systems. Assessors/observers should be fully trained and over time, many should have been certified *as Highly Accomplished/Lead* teachers themselves.

The goal of advancing quality teaching is best achieved by having all Australian teachers certified at some point of the teacher career continuum from *Graduate to Proficient to Highly Accomplished to Lead* teacher level (and possibly beyond in the case of aspiring/practising principals).

While the lower *Graduate/Proficient* levels could be assessed by the existing teacher registration authorities within states and territories on a nationally consistent basis, because of the prestige and importance of the *Lead* teacher level, this should be truly national and conducted through or on behalf of AITSL. *The Highly Accomplished* level being far larger could follow piloting of the *Lead* level procedures.

However, there are a number of additional issues. A poor 'rubber stamp' process with too many unsuitable teachers gaining certification at the higher levels could lead to a salary blow-out with little credibility or gain from the exercise. Quotas won't work either. Certification for each level needs to be linked to evidence of student learning, the intended impact of teaching. It will be necessary to measure teacher *performance* and *growth* against the standards at each level. Multiple measures of student learning will be required, including, class, year and school-based assessments; teacher portfolios (these need careful consideration); NAPLAN (only where relevant); and use of other standardised measures. Key documents such as the Melbourne Declaration (2008) and the

Charter for the Teaching Profession should be used as frames for the type of evidence that will be required.

Lawrence Ingvarson, a key figure in the field, has noted that:

*'The most valid assessment processes engage teachers in the activities of teaching - activities that require the display and use of teaching knowledge and skill and allow teachers the opportunity to explain and justify their actions.'*

As well as the standards for the various levels of certification, protocols and frameworks will need to be developed to guide teachers, their mentors, supervisors and their assessors in the gathering and presentation of suitable evidence of performance and achievement across such areas such as student achievement, contributions peers and to the school community and involvement extra-curricular activities, student support and leadership and service to the profession.

The scale of this undertaking is daunting given the quarter of 1 million teachers currently practising in Australia yet it must be done.

After many years of false starts the key pieces of the quality teaching and learning puzzle are coming together quite quickly. The new national standards for teachers (and the coming standard for principals) have the potential to drive, recognise and reward teachers' professional learning and development from the graduate through to the 'expert' level of teaching.

We are on the cusp of a new era of national teacher professionalism and the AITSL standards and their application are integral to that development.

With the increased expectations placed upon schools, teachers and principals it is vital we have a clear understanding of the sorts of qualities and capabilities needed to meet these and whether they are in fact being demonstrated and achieved.

However to reiterate, it is vital that the new national teaching standards and the associated measures for assessment and certification are integrated into salary and career structures across the profession.

This can't be mandated centrally and will be a matter for negotiation within each industrial award. This will not be easy and it won't be cost-neutral but if it doesn't occur, we will be left with a loosely connected, ambiguous, outdated and weak system for driving teaching quality and we can expect to continue to slide down the ranks on international measures such as PISA.

Applications for teacher education courses in Victoria fell by 9% this year. Whether this represents a temporary statistical aberration or whether it is indicative of a longer-term trend is impossible to determine at the moment. However there is a danger that we have reached a tipping point in the attraction of teaching as a career. We will all be watching the level of demand for teacher education later this year with great interest.

I have written previously that:

*'The biggest equity issue in Australian education today isn't computers, new buildings or equipment. It's each student having quality teachers and quality teaching in schools supported by effective leadership and professional learning in mutually respectful local community contexts.*

*Life isn't fair, but good teaching and good schools are the best means we have of overcoming disadvantage and opening the doors of opportunity for young people.'*

If we cannot attract, prepare, support and retain quality teachers, we won't be fulfilling our commitment to the young people of Australia as expressed in the Charter for the Australian Teaching Profession<sup>iii</sup> and the Melbourne Declaration.<sup>iv</sup>

These NEiTA ASG awards are very significant in recognising and hopefully encouraging quality teaching but they are only one part of what needs to be a much greater whole. I congratulate the award winners and commend the organisers of these awards for their attempt to further the cause of quality teaching in Australia.

*Thank You*

---

<sup>i</sup> Dinham, S. (2008). 'Driving Improvement in the Quality of Australian Education: Points of Leverage', Australian College of Educators, Victorian Branch Oration, University of Melbourne, 15<sup>th</sup> August.  
[http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1079&context=stephen\\_dinham&sei-redir=1#search=%22Driving+Improvement+in+the+Quality+of+Australian+Education:+Points+of+Leverage%22](http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1079&context=stephen_dinham&sei-redir=1#search=%22Driving+Improvement+in+the+Quality+of+Australian+Education:+Points+of+Leverage%22)

<sup>ii</sup> Dinham, S.; Ingvarson, L. & Kleinhenz, E. (2008). 'Investing in Teacher Quality: Doing What Matters Most', in *Teaching Talent: The Best Teachers for Australia's Classrooms*. Melbourne: Business Council of Australia. Available at: <http://www.bca.com.au/Content/99520.aspx>

<sup>iii</sup>  
[http://www.ptc.nsw.edu.au/SiteMedia/w3svc361/Uploads/Documents/CHARTER\\_for\\_the\\_Aust\\_Teaching%20Profession.pdf](http://www.ptc.nsw.edu.au/SiteMedia/w3svc361/Uploads/Documents/CHARTER_for_the_Aust_Teaching%20Profession.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup>  
[http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/National\\_Declaration\\_on\\_the\\_Educational\\_Goals\\_for\\_Young\\_Australians.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf)