

Teaching Standards: Addressing Diversity?

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Teacher professionalism

What do we mean by professionalism?
 Why focus on professionalism?
 Will it increase the status of teachers?
 Will it equip teachers to take control of the intellectual conduct of their work?
 How does meeting the diverse needs of students fit within the professional standards?
 How might the professional standards incorporate diversity more positively?

Professionalism

Gale and Dinsmore (2003) argue that the classical view of professionalism involves a combination of expert knowledge, autonomous judgements and ethical practice and that this tends to restrict teachers working with parents, students and other community members.

On the other hand, if teachers do not learn to connect knowledge and pedagogies with the experiences of their students, their students' lives, histories, cultures and everyday experiences then a Eurocentric world view is likely to be reinforced and the status quo reified (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1993).

Critical ethical issues around professionalism

Will the move towards professionalism take teachers work focus away from the issues of caring, compassion and equity that are crucial in teaching.

Teaching is unique among the professions precisely because it is a shared, inclusive and democratic pursuit so will professional standards remove teaching from the community

and will it therefore become more elitist? Will professionalism and standard setting be used to discriminate against teachers and students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural groups?

Professional standards for teachers?

What are, and why have, professional standards for teachers? Does the idea of standards connote 'superior status'? Does it mean that teachers have to be 'neutral' and does this then mean they are unable to take part in action to overcome social inequalities and social injustices?

Delanedshere and Arens (2001)

classify standards as

- traditional (standards that assume culture is static and unchanging) or
- progressive (standards that are used to help to transform society).
- Debates on standards have been recurring in educational discussion in Australia.
- Many authors tend to classify standards as either generic (also known as first wave or old) or specific (also known as second wave or new) categories, with the suggestion that specific standards are superior (Louden, Wallace and Groves 2001, Nicoll and Harrison 2003).
- Louden, et al write about the first wave professional standards, which tended to follow a competency based model often with a set of indicators of performance. In contrast they see the second wave standards characterised as 'briefer, less opaque, more contextualised, and focused more on the details of teaching.

Alternative views

Chadbourne (2001) suggests that this approach is not correct, and that a third wave of mixed generic and specific standards should be utilised.

However, Brock (2002) takes an alternate viewpoint, looking at generic standards as being a 'framework' on which subject-specific professional standards can be built.

Louden, Wallace and Groves (2001) argue that 'making sense of standards is a product of the intersection of practitioners' interactions with lists of standards and case material, and reflections on their own teaching and the teaching of others (Louden, Wallace and Groves 2001, 233).

Sachs (2003) defines the term 'standards' and presents four definitions

Categorisation by usage

- Standards as common sense
minimum levels of achievement – what teachers know and should be able to do (significant implications for teacher autonomy – complex issues simplified)
- Standards for quality assurance
Public accountability (regulatory) (to raise the status of teachers in the public perception)
- Standards for quality improvement
A developmental approach to promote teachers' professional learning and career development (transparency regarding the expectations and obligations of teachers)
- Standards for certification or control
Professional registration

Sachs (2003) three rationales for the existence of standards

- To improve the performance of teachers
Need for critical debate about the nature of teaching and how to improve it – needs to be owned and approved by teachers
- To improve the status of the teaching profession
Non supportive media and embedded community prejudices
- To contribute to the ongoing professional learning of teachers
Teachers should have control over what is identified as the standard

Parker (2004)

presents an alternative viewpoint, suggesting that teachers can be so focused on achieving a set of standards that this becomes their primary goal and therefore real learning can suffer as a result.

Similarly Darling Hammond writes:

'Standards, like all reforms hold their own dangers. Standard setting in all professions must be vigilant against the possibilities that practice could become constrained by the codification of knowledge that does not significantly acknowledge legitimate diversity of approaches or advances in the field' Darling Hammond (1999, 39)

Other viewpoints from the literature

Louden (2000) maintains it is vital that context (which appears to be closely related to awareness of cultural sensitivities) be remembered and considered in formulating any set of standards.

Nevertheless, Scarino and Papademetre (2004) remind us that standards usually have an Anglo-Australia cultural norm as their basis.

Other literature

In the USA, the Assembly of Alaska Native Educators (1999) has developed a set of standards specifically to help teachers teach in a culturally sensitive manner

Tellez (2004) looks at standards as relating to teaching Latinos in the US.

Standards of Professional Practice for new teachers

The current Standards of Professional Practice for new teachers are compared in two Australian states, Victoria and Queensland.

Websites with the current standards specified

www.vit.edu.au/pdfs/Standards.pdf

www.btr.qld.edu.au/pdf/standards.pdf

<http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/learning/standards/teachers/>

The first two sites listed are registering authorities whereas the third site is a state employing authority

Recently explicit professional standards for new graduates have been established. (VIT 2003 & Board of Teacher Registration 2002).

- Built into these professional standards, in Queensland, for example, is an explicit requirement that new teachers understand and can design learning experiences that '*will acknowledge the diversity of learners' language and socio-cultural realities*' (BTR, 2002, 6).
- Additionally, in Victoria, reflecting the growing concern that new teachers must be able to teach cross culturally, a recent parliamentary report recommends that by 2007, professional standards are developed that 'reflect the Government's and the community's goals for the inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse students.' (Victorian Parliamentary Report, 2005, 136).

Standards examining cultural diversity

The Board of Teacher Registration (BTR) Queensland (2002) does not specifically mention cultural sensitivity in its standards, accompanying literature notes the need for cultural sensitivity and the ethics brochure (BTR) mentions that ethical teachers should respect diversity.

The Queensland Department of Education (and the Arts)

The Queensland Department of Education Manual (2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2003a, 2003b) not only has a specific section relating to Cultural and Language Diversity, but also contains references to the need to respect diversity throughout the document as a whole.

Competing discourses

Contradiction of the competing discourses and practices that are around the use of standards to improve performance and professional identity as a teacher versus professional control and ownership.

It can be argued that both approaches can say they use standards as a basis for reforming the teaching profession.

Competing discourses

The tensions between

- the entrepreneurial approach (regulatory approach used as a managerial tool to measure outcomes of teacher performance, to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of individual teachers, schools and systems, and can be used to control teacher professionalism) and
- the professional learning approach (developmental approaches which are linked to a more democratic form of teacher professionalism)

Dynamic and active professionalism

Need to resist a constraining and restricting model of professional standards in favor of a 'vital and living one' (Ayers 2004, 85).

Standards need to be 'flexible, participatory, built up in practice and never far from the action itself' (Ayers 2004, 114).

Flexibility is needed because context is important in how and what teachers teach and in the learning outcomes of their students

Teaching for diversity

Teaching for diversity and social justice 'demands a dialectical stance: one eye firmly fixed on the students - Who are they? What are their hopes, dreams and aspirations? Their passions and commitments? What skills, abilities and capacities does one bring to the classroom? - and the other eye looking unblinkingly at the concentric circles of context - historical flow, cultural surround, economic reality' (Ayers 1998, xvii).

How do professional standards encourage this in a living and dynamic way?

How is difference and diversity addressed in teacher education courses?

Encouraging preservice teachers to consider the broader ethical and social implications of their professional work

The equity and diversity concerns in courses such as 'Sociocultural Understandings' and 'The Activist Professional'.

Additionally work in community involvement and community partnership programs where students actively participate in community activities and then critically reflect on their experiences in terms of their professional identity and teachers work

How is difference and diversity addressed through mentoring, induction programs, and portfolio development to assist new graduates?

Both in Victoria and Queensland there are some strong mentoring and induction programs for new teachers however these programs still have many of the contradictions around meeting the needs of culturally and socioeconomically diverse students that are implied in the previous discussions around professional standards. Both Victoria and Queensland are currently piloting programs to see how portfolios of work around the professional standards can be used for registration and employment purposes. But how diversity fits with this is still a dilemma.

Some concluding quotes

'We are living in a society characterised by diversity of experience of different cultures. Our evolving national character and identity are shaped by an understanding of our cultural origins, reconciliation with the past, and the challenge to embrace benefits of diversity. All of these factors contribute to the rapidly changing world of teachers' work' (BTR 2002, 3).

'Providing a safe and supportive school environment is a priority, as is the need for students to learn the communication and inter-cultural skills to participate in diverse cultural environments. Teachers aim to provide an education inclusive of all, and strive to redress disadvantage experienced as a result of differences in ability, culture, linguistic background, gender, location, and socio-economic status' (BTR 2002, 3).

Questions and Conclusions

Who sets the standards?

How are they set and for what purposes?

Where does diversity fit with the standards?

This is a crucial site of the struggle between the profession (the 'traditional' or the 'progressives' within the profession) and

other stakeholders

More often than not, it is omitted from the discourses around professional standards.

Will professional standards be used to discriminate against teachers and students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural groups?

What other ways can teacher education students and new graduates be supported to meet these professional standards for teachers?

How can the professional standards for teachers be more diversity inclusive?

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