
Professional Certification: Promoting and Recognising Successful Teaching Practices

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Abstract

*This paper focuses on the challenge of developing a system for recognising and rewarding accomplished teachers operated by the teaching profession – a **standards-based professional learning and certification system**. While the focus is on recent Australian experience, it draws on the experience of several countries that have sought to reform teacher career structures and pay systems so that there is a closer alignment between career progression and increasing expertise. Over the past twenty years or so, teacher associations in several countries have demonstrated that the profession has the ability to reach a consensus on teaching standards without imposing uniformity of teaching style. These standards indicate that the profession can lay down long term professional development goals for its members based on research and successful professional practice. A standards-based professional learning and certification system has the potential to overcome major limitations in traditional systems of professional learning for teachers: the lack of clarity about what teachers should get better at; the lack of incentive to attain high teaching standards, and the low level of ownership and control teachers have over the professional development system.*

Introduction

This paper examines the challenge of developing certification systems for recognising and rewarding accomplished teachers. While it focuses on Australia, it draws on the experience of other countries, such as Chile, England, Scotland and the USA, that have attempted similar reforms. These reforms aim to promote effective professional learning and build closer links between career progression and increasing expertise as a teacher (Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2006a). Debate has long raged in Australia, as in other countries, about how to strengthen links between pay and performance for teachers. While most agree that the current pay system needs to become a more effective instrument for ensuring quality opportunities for students to learn, there is distinct disagreement about how this should be done.

A recent OECD report (OECD, 2010) points out that if education systems are to provide high-quality education to the broader population they need policies that will enable them to recruit their teachers from the top of the higher education pool. Recent surveys in Australia, however, show that many of the abler graduates who would probably make very good teachers choose not to teach because of the status of teaching, but also because salaries reach a low ceiling after only eight or nine years of automatic increments – only 1.47 times the starting salary. The salary structure says, in effect, that after eight or nine years a teacher has got as good as they are ever going to get. It provides few incentives and little recognition for professional learning. Consequently, our career structure is a weak instrument for ensuring widespread use of successful teaching practices and lifting student learning outcomes.

Getting serious about quality certainly means lifting salaries to levels whereby teaching can compete with other professions for the best high school and university graduates. *However, this will not be enough.* While attracting good teachers is one thing, retaining them and ensuring their development to higher standards of teaching is another. The latter calls for much more fundamental reforms - the evolution of a new conception of teaching as strong and accountable profession – with career stages closely linked to evidence of increasing expertise in the classroom and in supporting colleagues. If teachers want employing authorities to create a stronger market for successful teachers, the profession has to show that it can identify those teachers in ways that are valid, reliable and fair.

Certification

Certification refers to an endorsement by a professional agency that a member of that profession has attained a designated standard of practice. Australian examples include “Chartered Engineer” and “Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons”. A professional certification is portable. It is not a job or position with a particular school, though it may be a criterion for eligibility for promotion to one of these.

Certification is the way most professions drive continual improvement in their member’s practice, in their own and in the public interest. They provide novices with high performance standards to aim for over several years. They provide a rigorous and independent system for assessing when they have attained those standards. Successful applicants gain a respected certification that employers are willing to pay for, thus creating a strong market for their knowledge and expertise. They gain the esteem of having “made it” in their profession.

A certification system is a system for defining high-quality teaching standards, promoting development towards those standards and identifying those who reach them. Professions are normally trusted to run their own certification systems. If convinced about its rigour, employing authorities usually encourage members of the profession to seek certification and reward its attainment through access to higher salary scales and eligibility for promotional positions.

Certification systems for teachers aim to build a closer alignment between increasing expertise and career progression. The assumptions underlying such systems - about how to link teacher pay to performance and “incentivize” teachers - stand in stark contrast to those underlying quota-based merit pay schemes, typically limited to annual one-off bonus payments (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008; Johnson, 1984; Johnson, 1986; Murnane & Cohen, 1986).

Reformed career structures based on professional certification aim to enhance student learning by driving higher quality teaching. A rigorous certification system creates a basis for significantly increasing salaries for accomplished teachers, thereby making teaching a more attractive career option for abler graduates and better able to retain its best practitioners. They aim to build what will be referred to in this chapter as a *standards-based professional learning and certification system* (Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2006b).

Is professional certification applicable to teaching?

It is an open question whether the professional model of certification can be applied to teaching profession. Teachers have rarely been entrusted with such a responsibility, or claimed it. If such a model were applied, it is not clear who would, or who should, have “jurisdiction” over such a system. Over the past twenty years or more, Australia has made several attempts to establish a national professional body and to reform salary schedules. Mobilising the many specialist teacher associations in a common cause has not been easy.

Teaching has been relatively strong industrially, but weak professionally. While the weaknesses of the traditional incremental scale are widely recognised in review after review, it has proved highly intractable (Australian College of Educators, 2003; Crowley, 1998; Dinham, Ingvarson, & Kleinhenz, 2008). The need for reform in Australia has now become an imperative as the academic quality of entrants to teacher education programs has fallen significantly in recent years and the resignation rates of teachers in their first five years of teaching continue to rise (Productivity Commission, 2012).

While some form of advanced certification is common among most professions, it is rare in the teaching profession. However, as countries focus policy more on teacher quality, increasing numbers are introducing certification schemes for accomplished teachers (Ingvarson, In press). Examples are as follows:

- Chartered Teacher Scheme in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2001; Scottish Executive, 2008);
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards scheme in the USA (NBPTS, 1989);
- Certification of Teaching Excellence (Asignación de Excelencia Pedagógica) Program in Chile (Araya, Taut, Santelices, & Manzi, 2011; Araya, Taut, Santelices, Manzi, & Miño, 2012; Manzi et al., 2007);
- Excellent Teacher and “Advanced Skills Teacher” levels in England and Wales (Fuller, Francis-Brophy, & Harding, 2010; Ofsted, 2001); and
- Master Teacher career track in Singapore¹ (Lee & Tan, 2010; Sclafani, 2008).

Australia is currently attempting to introduce a system for the certification of teachers at two levels; the Highly Accomplished Teacher and Lead Teacher levels. Despite strong support in

¹ <http://www.moe.gov.sg/careers/teach/career-info/>

principle by the main stakeholders, implementation is proving difficult. In fact, attempts to introduce certification schemes for teachers have met with difficulties in most countries.

The NBPTS (1989) is arguably the most ambitious attempt by any country to establish an independent national system for the advanced certification of teachers. Over 200,000 teachers have applied and nearly 100,000 have been successful. Yet, after more than 20 years, despite positive evaluations of its professional development benefits (NBPTS, 2001a; NBPTS, 2001b), its validity and the reliability of its assessment procedures (National Research Council, 2008), it is yet to become an integral part of career pathways for most teachers. However, notwithstanding this, it remains the most highly respected and longest standing system for recognising and rewarding accomplished teachers in the USA. It is no accident that practising teachers play a major part in every level of its operation.

What is becoming clearer from recent international research is the link between the professional status of teaching as a career and the quality of student learning. Recent OECD reports, for example, increasingly emphasise the central importance of building a high-quality teaching profession (e.g. OECD, 2009b; OECD, 2010; OECD, 2011). However, these reports rarely elaborate what it might mean to build a profession of teaching, or what the necessary conditions might be in raising the status of teaching to that of a profession.

Getting to scale with successful teaching practices

The kinds of change that matter in education, in terms of both quality and equity, are those that lead to the widespread implementation of successful teaching practices – practices consistent with research and high standards of teaching. Dick Elmore (1996) estimated that in the US over the 20th century, there were many well-proven examples of good practice, but even the best of them was rarely adopted by more than 20 per cent of teachers.

Elmore asks, why is it so hard to ‘get to scale’; that is, to ensure widespread implementation of proven educational practices and curriculum materials? One of the main reasons, he argues, is that the teaching profession does not have well-established institutions or procedures for using research to identify and define standards for what its members should know and be able to do – normative structures related to good practice are weak. The culture of teaching tends to encourage a view of teaching in which ‘everyone does their own thing’ behind closed doors, practices that may only be loosely connected to research on teaching or profession-defined standards.

Elmore attributes the problem of ‘getting to scale’ with educational reforms to a belief common among teachers that good teaching is more a ‘bundle’ of personality traits than something most people can learn to get better at. Getting to scale with educational reforms, Elmore argues, will depend on building new structures for defining and applying teaching standards in the teaching profession.

‘The existence of external norms is important because it institutionalises the idea that professionals are responsible for looking outward at challenging conceptions of practice in addition to looking inward at their values and competencies.’ (Elmore, 1996: 319)

Thus, the major challenge in improving teaching lies not so much in identifying and describing quality teaching, but in developing structures and incentives that ensure *widespread use of successful teaching practices*: to make best practice, common practice (OECD, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005; Elmore, 1996). This is a core function of a profession. This challenge calls for new institutions that will enable the teaching profession to build its own infrastructure for defining high quality teaching

standards, promoting development toward them and providing recognition to those who reach them.

For Elmore, the key to effective professional learning is to build a new professional culture characterised by collective responsibility for teaching practice and student learning. Central to this is the responsibility to establish its own standards-based professional learning and certifications system.

Effective Modes of Professional Learning

The basic problem in professional learning is not a lack of evidence about the characteristics of effective modes of professional learning for teachers; modes that link professional learning to improved student learning outcomes. Numerous research reviews reveal a consensus on the matter (e.g. Kennedy, 1998; Wilson & Berne, 1998; Sykes, 2002; Cohen & Hill, 2000). It is how to ensure that most teachers have the opportunity and the incentives to engage in those modes of professional development and learning.

While the importance of professional development is widely recognised, current provision falls far short of what the research says is necessary to improve learning outcomes for all students. There are many individually effective professional development programs and activities operating at school and system levels, but the overall pattern of provision is brief, fragmentary and rarely sequential. The capacity of the profession to engage most of its members in effective modes of professional learning over the long term is weak.

There is clear evidence from recent research that the content of professional learning matters as much, if not more, than the process. Hawley & Valli (1999) condense this research into a set of nine design principles for effective professional learning, the first three of which are:

1. The content of professional development (PD) focuses on what students are to learn and how to address the different problems students may have in learning the material.
2. Professional development should be based on analyses of the differences between (a) actual student performance and (b) goals and standards for student learning.
3. Professional development should involve teachers in the identification of what they need to learn and in the development of the learning experiences in which they will be involved.

These principles clearly call for teachers to play an active role in their own professional learning. They call for professional learning based on analyses of feedback and current practice. And, as Elmore puts it, they embody the idea that professionals “*are responsible for looking outward at challenging conceptions of practice in addition to looking inward at their values and competencies.*”

This paper argues that the time has come to build capacity for learning, not only at teacher, and school levels, but also at the level of the profession. Policies are needed that will support the profession in building a national framework for continuing learning, from registration to advanced certification, guided by professional standards and assessments, and supported by career paths that recognise the central importance of teachers’ knowledge and skill to successful learning outcomes for students.

What characteristics would a country’s professional learning system need to have its aim was to ensure all teachers engaged effective modes of professional learning and widespread use of successful practices? There would certainly be a need for greater clarity about what teachers should get better at with experience; i.e. teaching standards. There would certainly be a need for stronger incentives for teachers to engage in modes of professional learning that helped

them attain those standards; i.e. recognition for increasing expertise. And, teachers would need a stronger sense of professional ownership and responsibility for the quality of that system; i.e. greater control over their own professional learning system, as is common in most established professions.

A *professional learning and certification system* is a stable system driven by research about what effective teachers know and do in their specialist fields of teaching. It is complementary to systems for implementing current government policy priorities. A professional learning system also calls for a radically revised model for how teachers should be paid - a model of a highly educated profession, capable of defining standards for effective teaching, promoting development toward those standards and providing recognition for those who reach them.

A Standards-Based Professional Learning and Certification System

A recent OECD report (OECD, 2011) points out that:

There may be a relationship between the degree to which the work of teaching has been professionalised and student performance. Indeed, the higher a country is on the world's education league tables, the more likely that country is working constructively with its unions and treating its teachers as trusted professional partners . . . (p. 240)

This sounds good, but the report does not provide details of what it might actually mean for teaching to be “professionalised”. One thing it could mean is that teachers develop their own independent profession-wide certification system.

A professional certification system leading to a substantially higher salary scale aims to provide strong incentives for all teachers to develop their practice to the level where they can demonstrate they have attained high professional standards and earn professional certification. To be effective, certification should be a career step that most teachers aspire to – something achievable by most teachers given opportunities for professional learning, not just an elite few. Certification is open to all teachers and is based on demonstrated attainment of the standards. Unlike bonus pay schemes, it is a non-competitive award as it is standards-based rather than norm-referenced.

The main components of a standards-based professional learning and certification system are:

- High teaching standards that articulate what teachers and school leaders should get better at and provide direction for professional development over the long term.
- A rigorous, voluntary system of advanced professional certification based on valid methods for assessing teacher and school leader performance against the standards.
- Staged Career paths that provide recognition for good teaching and provide substantial incentives and for teachers and school leaders to attain the standards for certification.
- An infrastructure for professional learning that enables teachers and school leaders to gain the knowledge and skill embodied in the standards.

These components can be conceptualised as four pieces of a jigsaw, whose interlocking character is captured in Figure 1.

Taken together, the four components form a ‘system’ of interdependent and mutually supportive parts. Each component has its own functions and characteristics, but each is less effective without the others. If one is taken away, the system loses its capacity to function

effectively as an instrument for encouraging and recognising evidence of professional learning. For example, the certification procedures for assessing performance define what counts as meeting the standards. Few teachers will undertake assessment for certification unless employing authorities provide recognition. New models for professional learning are needed to help teachers prepare for certification, and so on.

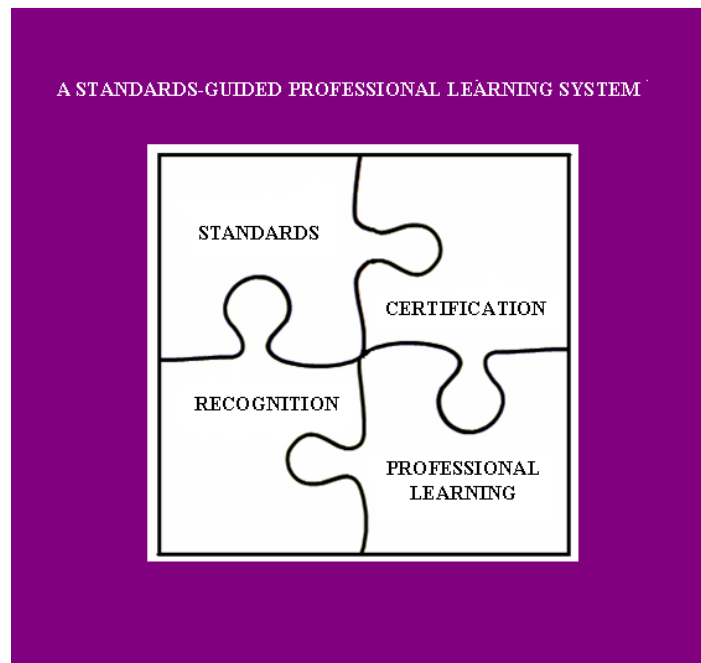


Figure 1

International Developments

Countries vary in the extent to which they get all four components right. In addition, it is becoming clear that independence and rigour are critical to the success of a standards-based certification system.

The English “threshold” scheme failed to engage teachers at any stage in its development or to ensure rigour in its standards and assessment process. It was more a performance management system than a professional certification system. Consequently, the scheme had little impact on professional learning and quickly lost respect (Wragg, Haynes, Chamberlin, & Wragg, 2003). The scheme has been discontinued.

Scotland, for example, got the recognition part right in its recent Chartered Teacher scheme (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2001). They ensured strong buy in from teacher unions, governments and employing authorities and all agreed to provide substantial incentives for teachers who gained certification (20% pay rise). It also mobilised the universities to provide an impressive professional learning infrastructure to support applicants (Forde & McMahon, 2011). However, the scheme has faltered, partly because the credibility of the assessment process for certification was not clearly established (Ingvarson, 2009). The scheme became vulnerable. A recent review of the Chartered Teacher scheme (McCormac Review, 2011) claimed that:

While we received evidence that demonstrated the commitment and professionalism of many chartered teachers, the widely held view is that the existing cohort of chartered teachers does not singularly represent the best teachers in Scotland.

Insufficient attention was given to ensuring that the process for assessing teachers was rigorous – and therefore capable of withstanding criticism about its credibility. Consequently, the system has come into question recently as the economy has weakened. Proponents are struggling to provide good arguments for retaining the system as governments seek to cut costs.

In contrast, the NBPTS certification scheme carried out extensive research to ensure that its assessments met high psychometric standards procedures before offering certification (Ingvarson & Hattie, 2008). It encouraged rigorous tests of the reliability and validity of its certification from leading figures in educational measurement (NBPTS, 2007). These studies provided convincing evidence that the assessment process was rigorous (National Research Council, 2008). Other research has shown that the process of preparing evidence for certification has powerful effects on teachers' professional learning (Lustick, 2011). and the research indicates that the process has had effects on their professional learning (NBPTS, 2001a; NBPTS, 2001b; Lustick & Sykes, 2006; NBPTS, 2007; Lustick, 2011).

The NBPTS operates in a large federal system with local school management and industrial bargaining. Persuading governments and 14,000 school districts to provide substantial salary recognition for professional certification has been a slow process. However, as states and school districts provide salary increases for National Board certification, such as North Carolina (12% pay rise), increasing numbers of teachers have applied. -

In the Australian case, the Advanced Skill Teacher (AST) concept was introduced twenty years ago, as part of industrial award restructuring (Ingvarson, 2010). Union leaders played a major role in shaping the way this reform was implemented. However, salary increases were small and teachers who gained AST status were often burdened with extra work or extra responsibilities, even though the intention was that they would continue to be classroom teachers.

Although the AST was a national scheme, procedures for evaluating teachers were left to local negotiation between employing authorities and unions. Each school system developed its own set of standards and methods of assessments. Most lacked the expertise or the resources to develop and trial methods for evaluating teachers to ensure they were valid and reliable. Almost all eligible teachers who applied gained AST status. Consequently, the AST concept quickly lost credibility and, with it, its capacity to reform the professional development system for teachers. The Advanced Skills Teacher concept was absorbed back into the traditional notion of career ladders based on movement out of professional practice into management hierarchies.

One of the main lessons to emerge from the AST experience, therefore, was the importance of ensuring that procedures for evaluating teachers' knowledge and performance were reliable, valid and fair. The teacher evaluation system needed to be operated by an independent professional body drawing on agencies with expertise in standards and educational measurement.

Related to this was the need to ensure a clear separation between the certification system, and systems for giving recognition to that certification in terms of pay and status. While the latter is properly the business of employing authorities and unions to negotiate, it was clear that the former function would be conducted more effectively and efficiently if delegated to an independent professional body, with expertise in standards and methods of assessment. The

certification system needed to be independent of the arrangements and methods employing authorities chose to reward certification.

Since that time, nearly 20 teacher associations in Australia have developed standards for accomplished teaching in their field and they want them to be used for teacher evaluation and recognition (e.g. see Australian Science Teachers Association, 2002). These include subject associations, level-specific associations such as the Early Childhood Association, support associations such as the Australian School Librarians Association and associations for school principals. Members of professional associations in Australia believe passionately that the profession should take the primary responsibility for setting and administering professional standards. However, they recognise that this responsibility must be shared with employer and teacher unions, if teachers who gain its certification are to be rewarded financially and in career progression. Teachers in several countries have also demonstrated that they can develop and apply high teaching standards. Teachers comprise the bulk of the twenty-five NBPTS standards committees in the USA.

Australia reached a consensus about the need to build a standards-based professional learning system in 2008. However, as we shall see, maintaining that consensus and implementing such a system in a federal political system like Australia is also proving to be more difficult than anticipated.

Establishing a certification system: the Australian Case

A remarkable consensus emerged in Australia during the 2000s about the desirability of a national certification system. In 1998 a Senate Inquiry into the Status of Teaching (Crowley, 1999) recommended that:

A system of professional recognition for teachers must be established, which is based on the achievement of enhanced knowledge and skills and which retains teachers at the front line of student learning. Such knowledge and skills should be identified, classified and assessed according to criteria developed by expert panels drawn from the profession. Education authorities should structure remuneration accordingly. (p. 7)

The Senators recognized that a professional certification system has two components essential to its success: a rigorous process for the certification of teachers who attain high standards; and recognition for the value of that certification in terms of substantial salary advancement and new career opportunities, for example in teacher leadership. They recognised that responsibilities for these two components should be kept distinct, for good reasons. The first rests with the profession; the second with governments and other employing authorities if they are really committed to promoting teacher quality and recognising high standards.

In 2003, 15 teacher associations put together a National Statement from the Teaching Profession on Teacher Standards, Quality and Professionalism. It recommended that

A nationally coordinated, rigorous and consistent system should be established to provide recognition to teachers who demonstrate advanced standards . . . The enterprise bargaining process between employers and unions will be an important mechanism for providing recognition for professional certification. All employing authorities should be encouraged to provide recognition and support for professional certification as the process comes to demonstrate its credibility and its effects on professional learning. (p. 4)

The 2003 National Statement was consistent with the Senators' recommendation and with several other major reports at that time, such as, the Ramsey report, Quality Matters:

Revitalising teaching: critical times, critical choices (Ramsey, 2002), the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education Australia's Teachers: Australia's Future (Department of Education Science and Training, 2003) and the Business Council of Australia (Dinham, Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2008).

In addition, during the 2000s, sixteen professional associations developed certification standards for their specialist field (most with Australian Government funding amounting to several million dollars). Two developed their standards and assessment methods to the point where they provide a potentially valid basis for a national certification system.

Teacher unions were supportive provided teachers would be assessed by an independent and fair process and rewarded through salary increases. In 2007, the in-coming Labor Government had promised to establish a rigorous standards-based certification system for recognizing accomplished teachers.

In an address to a Teaching Australia and BCA Symposium (15 October, 2008) the Minister for Education, Julia Gillard MP, stated

In broad terms, both the Business Council's and the AEU's proposals for a rigorous national certification system are consistent with the approach currently being examined by COAG and MCEETYA.

Following this, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was established in 2010, with responsibility "for developing and implementing a nationally consistent certification function".

Factors limiting the development of an effective certification system

AITSL has made considerable progress in several areas, but it is becoming apparent that it does not have the capacity to ensure that Australia gains the respected profession-wide certification system that it needs. Several factors have undermined its chances of success.

Lack of independence and authority

The first factor, perhaps the main one, is AITSL's lack of independence and authority. AITSL bears little resemblance to certification agencies in other professions. Its original Board consisted mainly of representatives of state government and other employing authorities. The Board did not include any practising classroom teachers. It reports to state and territory Ministers of Education and representatives of other employing authorities.

The Council of Australian Governments directed the AITSL Board to develop a "nationally consistent", not a national, system of certification. Jurisdiction to operate a certification system in the way that applies to other established professions was not granted to AITSL. Instead, MCEETYA members directed that the certification function be delegated to state and territory "jurisdictions", meaning that Australia would have at least eight different certifying bodies, and probably several more. In effect, state and territory Ministers of Education and other employing authorities have successfully assumed responsibility to operate their own local certification systems (even though, strangely, they will be based on the same set of national standards agreed to by all.) AITSL's capacity to develop a rigorous national professional certification system was severely undermined.

The unwillingness of governments and other employing authorities to step back and entrust the profession with responsibility for the certification system is proving to be a critical weakness. Despite years of rhetoric about the importance of strengthening teaching as a profession, MCEETYA members excluded the possibility of an independent professional certification body from the initial consultation process about AITSL's roles and functions.

Nor were national teacher associations consulted on the matter, ignoring the fact that some of these associations had demonstrated their willingness and ability to operate a single national certification system ten years earlier.

Most established professions in Australia and England received their “jurisdiction” through some form of Royal Charter many years ago. More than twenty professional associations in Australia now operate under a jurisdiction overseen by the Governor-General. It may be time for the Australian teaching profession to seek a charter similar to the one a Select Committee of the House of Commons recently recommended for teachers in England.

We acknowledge and support the case for a new, member-driven College of Teaching, independent from but working with Government, which could play important roles, inter alia, in the accreditation of CPD and teacher standards. We recommend that the Government work with teachers and others to develop proposals for a new College of Teaching, along the lines of the Royal Colleges and Chartered Institutions in other professions.

Lack of a stable policy context

AITSL’s brief keeps shifting in significant ways with changes in government policy and changes in ministers of education at federal, state and territory levels, undermining its capacity to deliver an effective certification system. Recent Government decisions have even undermined the concept of certification itself.

During the last election, for example, the Australian Government suddenly announced that it would introduce a Reward Payments for Great Teachers bonus pay scheme if elected. Without warning, AITSL was handed task of developing what was the Government called *The Australian Teacher Performance Management Principles and Procedures scheme* was handed to in addition to, and in contradiction to, its previous certification brief.

This bonus pay scheme was clearly inconsistent with AITSL’s original brief to develop a nationally consistent certification system. It bore all the hallmarks of what politicians will say to win elections. Bonus pay schemes are the business of employers and it was seen inappropriate for a federal government to be imposing one on state government and other school authorities. In addition, the methods listed were undeveloped and untested, the scheme would be expensive and a burden for schools, and would have a negative effect on staff relationships.

This proposal ignored the original certification role the Ministers had given to AITSL. Quite apart from the fact that this scheme was an ill-conceived election promise, it placed AITSL in an awkward, if not contradictory, position. Was its main role now to establish a nationally consistent certification system, or was it to provide school managers with procedures for their performance management and annual bonus pay schemes? The latter was an unusual thing for a federal government to do, given that education in Australia is a state responsibility.

In effect, the Australian certification scheme was being transformed into a performance management and bonus pay scheme. Under the current directions from the Australian Government Minister for Education, teachers who apply successfully for certification will gain a one-off bonus, not a certification recognised in terms of advancement to higher salary levels. In addition, it is unclear whether a teacher’s certification gained in this mode will be recognised profession-wide in other states or sectors of the education system.

Unsurprisingly, given the increasingly unstable political context, AITSL’s initiatives in this area also appear unlikely to gain national acceptance and support. After recent elections and changes in government, two states, Queensland and Victoria have opted out of the AITSL

certification system. The Victorian Government has rejected the idea of certification in favour of a merit pay scheme for state schools, currently at the centre of a fierce and disruptive industrial dispute. The scheme will require school principals to evaluate all of their teachers every year and place them into one of four or five payment categories; those who will receive no salary increment, those who will receive an increment only, and those who will receive an increment plus a 10%, 6%, or 1.4% bonus.

It is apparent that Australia provides a good example of a problem that Elmore (2011, p.35) identifies in the USA:

I used to think that policy was the solution. And now I think policy is the problem . . . To policy makers, every idea about what schools should be doing is as credible as every other idea, and any new idea that can command a political constituency can be used as an excuse for telling schools to do something. Elected officials . . . generate electoral credit by initiating new ideas, not by making the kind of steady investments in people that are required to make the educator sector more effective. The result is an education sector that is overwhelmed with policy, conditioned to respond to the immediate demands of whoever controls the political agenda, and not in investing in the long-term health of the sector and the people who work in it . . .

For the future, I am putting my energy into building a stronger profession, not into trying to repair a desperately dysfunctional political system

It takes a stable policy environment to establish a successful certification system and a patient long-term trust in the capacity of teachers to ensure its rigour. And, as the House of Commons select committee recognised, independence is essential for stability.

Failure to appreciate the complexities of standards-based assessment

Third, the timetable imposed on AITSL to develop valid and reliable assessment methods for advanced certification reflects little understanding of what it takes to do it well; or, the importance of engaging the profession. AITSL has been given less than a year to develop the assessment methods and processes for training assessors before the system goes “live” to scale. A rushed agenda to meet a political timeline will risk imposing a system that fails to gain credibility and respect with the profession. Development of the methods of assessment, the methods to be used to train assessors and the setting of performance standards has not reached the level of sophistication and rigour it needs to be at if certification is to go to scale and gain respect.

Reliability in judgements seems unlikely, as the current guidelines about assessment tasks, such as portfolio entries, are not structured in ways that will ensure teachers interpret them in the same way. Consequently, it will be difficult to train assessors to the levels of consistency required. There needs to be greater clarity in the assessment guidelines about what exactly a teacher is expected to demonstrate in the evidence they provide in each portfolio entry. This calls for carefully structured assessment tasks, such as portfolio entries. Contrary to expectations, research indicates that structure is welcomed by teachers and leads to perceptions of fairness in the assessment process. Transparent structure breeds confidence in a system.

As indicated, current AITSL guidelines for assessment methods are being implemented in different ways across states and territories. Reliability also requires that the assessment methods together cover all the National Standards and provide adequate evidence from each of the Domains. However, under current guidelines, evidence for the Knowledge Domain is poorly sampled, even though research indicates its importance. (For example, applicants are not asked to demonstrate current knowledge of subject matter or research about teaching and

learning in their specialist field, although research shows possession of this knowledge leads to better student outcomes.)

Current guidelines also need to recognise the need to ensure *generalizability*; that is, the need to gather a sufficient sample of teacher's knowledge and performance to be able to generalise confidently about their capability to meet the standards. One portfolio entry or one case study cannot provide sufficient evidence to make a reliable and valid judgement about a teacher's capacity to meet the standards. At a minimum, for example, a primary teacher's portfolio should contain several independent entries showing their ability to promote learning in each of the main key learning areas of literacy, numeracy, science and social studies. Likewise, a secondary teacher's portfolio should contain several independent portfolio entries, each from different classes and year levels.) Early indications are that some certifying authorities are asking for limited direct evidence of highly accomplished classroom practice and ability to advance student learning compared with evidence about activities beyond the classroom.

No procedures for *setting standards* and arriving at a final decision about whether or not to certify a teacher appear to have been developed. This is a complex process, not to be dealt with in a casual way. It involves decisions about the relative weighting that will be given to the different types of evidence. It involves developing a defensible process for amalgamating the assessment scores and setting the standards for certification; that is, for deciding what levels of knowledge and performance represent meeting the standard. This depends on developing rubrics based on the standards that clearly distinguish qualitatively different levels of performance. However, the current National Standards do not provide an adequate basis for developing such rubrics, as they do not provide elaborations of the standards describing the key indicators and critical attributes of highly accomplished practice.

Without developing and testing such procedures, doubts about the *validity* and comparability of certification will spread quickly – its ability to distinguish teachers who meet the standards from those who do not needs to be established by well-resourced trials and research. Previous research indicates it would be unwise to proceed before confidence in the validity of the certification process has been demonstrated

The development of a credible professional certification system is a major educational measurement exercise requiring the highest levels of psychometric expertise. That expertise needs to be assembled in the service of a national professional body. It is unrealistic to assume that it exists across the eight or more current state and territory certifying authorities. A profession-wide approach is more likely to lead to a rigorous and efficient certification system than that which appears to be emerging across the states and territories.

Quality of the National Professional Standards Framework

Many of these concerns about the rigour of the assessment procedures stem from the generic and somewhat politicised nature of the National Professional Standards Framework itself. The standards have not been elaborated to reflect contemporary research on what accomplished teachers know and do in the various specialist fields of teaching (e.g. what should a graduate teacher know about recent research on teaching reading? What should a highly accomplished mathematics teacher know about identifying and rectifying misconceptions in learning important mathematical concepts? Etc.) These elaborations go to the heart of the knowledge base of a teaching profession.

Nor do the career stages in the Framework reflect an underlying theory about the development of expertise. For example, no distinction is made between “highly accomplished” and “proficient” teaching of English, physical education or drama, etc., in terms of classroom skills and levels of performance. What highly accomplished teachers know and do differs significantly across the different specialist areas of teaching.

There needs to be much more clarity and elaboration of the core capabilities expected of accomplished teachers in different fields of teaching. These weaknesses make it difficult to develop rubrics that distinguish different levels of knowledge and performance. Consequently, it will be difficult to train assessors to the levels of reliability essential for a credible certification system.

Governments are not living up to their side of the National Partnership Agreements.

A certification system aims to provide a service for employing authorities who wish to promote and reward professional learning. The National Partnership Agreement on teacher quality contains an agreement to provide recognition and reward to teachers who reach high standards and gain certification.

The final and perhaps most important factor limiting AITSL's capacity to deliver an effective advanced certification system is that most state and territory governments and the Australian Government appear to be withdrawing from their side of the bargain, which is to use certification as the basis for substantial salary advancement beyond the top of current incremental scales and create new positions of teacher leadership to capitalise on the expertise of certified teachers. As a result, the certification system will not realise its capacity to become a powerful driver toward widespread use of successful teaching practices.

At a time of national concern about the ability of teaching to attract and retain high quality graduates, this is shortsighted and irresponsible. As the recent Productivity Commission report points out, teachers' salaries have not kept pace with increases in other professions. Teachers' salaries in Australia are only 30% above GDP per capita, whereas the average in OECD countries is 65%. Australia faces major concerns about the profession's capacity to attract and retain its share of the ablest schools graduates.

Governments are ultimately responsible for ensuring that salaries and career pathways enable teaching to compete with other professions for the best graduates. A rigorous certification system gives the profession and the public a sound basis on which to press governments to meet this responsibility. There is strong public support for improved teacher salaries provided this is linked to performance. Rhetoric about the importance of teacher quality is hollow if this responsibility is not met. Likewise, for the profession's side of the bargain; teachers wanting greater respect and rewards must embrace the responsibilities of a profession to set their own high standards and demonstrate their ability to assess those who have reached them.

A major challenge for many employers and teacher unions is how to reform career pathways and create positions of responsibility within schools to make effective use of the expertise of professionally certified teachers. Certified highly accomplished teachers have potential to provide valuable leadership in building professional community and school improvement. An emerging issue in Australia is whether gaining certification should progressively become a requirement in applying for school leadership positions. Research on effective school leaders indicates the importance of leaders having the credibility as teachers that certification provides.

The possibility of establishing a standards-based professional learning and certification system in Australia remains uncertain. A splendid opportunity to professionalise teaching and treat teachers as trusted professional partners appears to be slipping away once more. COAG members have not supported the concept of a national and independent professional certification body for Australia.

Concluding Remarks

A standards-based professional certification system is only one piece in a set of policies a country needs to promote the quality of its teachers and teaching. The evidence indicates that a certification system provides a sounder basis for evaluating and rewarding good teaching than competitive bonus pay schemes (National Research Council, 2008). However, it needs to be recognised that establishing such a system is a complex enterprise, politically and technically - it should be regarded as a 10 to 20 year endeavour.

If a standards-based certification system were working well, it would have these characteristics.

- Teachers and school leaders would regard the standards as challenging and worth pursuing as a guide to their professional learning.
- It would lead most teachers and school leaders to seek professional learning experiences that helped them reach accomplished standards and improve student learning outcomes.
- Teachers and school leaders would regard the assessment methods as valid, reliable and fair
- Employing authorities would regard certification as a reliable basis for recognising accomplishment and providing salaries and career paths that attracted and retained the best graduates.
- It would lead teachers who could not attain the standards to consider other occupations

A profession-operated certification system is consistent with recent OECD reports on building a high-quality teaching profession referred to earlier (e.g. OECD, 2009, 2010, 2011).

Where their education systems do not yet match the best-performing systems, they might directly adapt the methods used by Finland, Canada and the East Asian countries. They will be in a position to recruit a substantial proportion of their teachers from among the best university students in the country and offer them a lot of discretion in the way they do their jobs. They will be looking for ways to build the capacity of their systems and support their teachers. Their accountability systems will tend to the professional model, not the administrative model. Rather than regulating and directing what goes on in the school, they will focus on devising incentives and support systems that will align the interests of the school faculty with the public interest. (OECD, 2010)

A professional certification system is consistent with the idea of entrusting teacher with the responsibilities of a profession - it strengthens the role that teachers and school leaders, and their organisations, play in

- Standards development – in defining what the profession expects its members to get better at.
- Developing methods whereby teachers and school leaders can demonstrate how they meet the standards
- Operating systems for assessing performance and providing certification to teachers and school leaders who meet the standards
- Developing and operating professional learning programs to help teachers and school leaders meet the standards.

Some clear of lessons are emerging from recent attempts in Australia and other countries to develop certification systems for identifying and rewarding accomplished teachers:

1. Make sure the system is the responsibility of an independent, national body representative of all key stakeholders, with a majority of teachers and school leader practitioners.
2. Recognise that teaching is made up of many specialist field - elaborate the standards and provide certification for accomplished teachers in each field
3. Build a new professional learning infrastructure, within and across schools and in collaboration with universities, to support teachers and school leaders preparing for certification.
4. Conduct the research needed to ensure the certification process meets high psychometric standards for validity and reliability before going to scale.
5. Base assessment on evidence of what students are doing and learning as a direct result of a teacher's teaching, rather than value-added measures based on national tests.
6. Ensure that assessors are teachers and school leaders who work in the same field of teaching (but not the same school) and are trained to high levels of reliability.
7. Get the incentives right if you want most teachers to engage professional learning – use professional certification linked to career progression rather than one-off bonus payments.
8. Ensure that the pathway to advanced certification is a broad pathway expected of all teachers, not just an elite few.
9. Mainstream professional certification – that is, make achieving each certification stage a condition for being eligible to apply for the next (i.e. Lead Teachers and School Principals should have gained certification as accomplished teachers.)
10. Do not confuse professional certification and local performance management.
11. Work hard to ensure that employers come to trust the certification as a measure of accomplished teaching and school leadership and use it as the basis for higher salaries and career advancement.

Without a demonstrated capacity to define and apply standards, a profession is defenceless against policies that may run counter to quality practice and conditions that enable practitioners to do their best. Teaching and school leadership standards give the profession an opportunity to play a stronger part in key decisions about quality in teacher education and continuing professional learning, on behalf of the public. These are decisions about who joins their profession, who trains them and how, and what their members should get better at with experience. No one can doubt that it is in the interests of governments and employers to have a teaching profession that has a strong sense of ownership for the standards that are used in making these decisions. When given the responsibility for developing standards for entry and advancement, the United States and Australian experience has been that teachers set standards that are higher than governments and employers have dared to set.

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