

Whose standards?

IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE ENSURE THAT NEW NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ADDRESS THE INNER PERSON, AND THAT STANDARDS AREN'T REDUCED TO STANDARDISATION, SAYS **DAVID LOADER**.

There's no question that the views of Prime Minister Julia Gillard about education are no less important to our profession, and nation, than were her views as Commonwealth Minister for Education. As Education Minister, she wrote in a 'Letter of Expectation' to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), AITSL's 'single biggest priority...will be...to finalise and oversee a set of national standards for teaching and school leadership.'

Have no illusions, this continuation of the work begun by the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee National Standards Group of the Teacher Quality Steering Committee means you are soon to be governed by a new standards-based framework, and it would be hard to argue against that. Standards are important. They identify what is required of teachers in terms of practices and levels of achievement. We can also expect that they'll set out what school leaders should know and be able to do across the domains of professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement.

Another key priority for AITSL identified by Gillard is 'to increase excellence and provide national leadership in the professional development of teachers and school leaders against the professional standards framework.' This, too, should be positive, assuming there's a significant budget to go with it.

I have two main concerns. The first is what will constitute professional development for school leaders. The emphasis in existing programs is on the observable behaviours of school leaders, without any mention of developing the inner person.

A good example of this thinking is provided by one of the most highly regarded school leadership programs in the world, that of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), which defines a leadership framework with a view to building the capacity of school leaders. The critical capacities required by leaders are technical, human, educational, symbolic and cultural. Darrell Fraser, Deputy Secretary at the DEECD, has made it clear that school leaders are to use this framework to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, and to guide their professional learning.

Those DEECD human leadership capabilities include advocating for all students, developing relationships, and developing individual and collective capacity, which are all important, but they don't really acknowledge the principal's emotional life or 'inner person.' This is something I'll address in more detail next month.

My other concern is that, in the wrong hands, standards can easily become standardisation. The existence of a standard doesn't mean it's always useful or appropriate in all situations.

AITSL has been set up with responsibility for rigorous national professional standards; fostering and driving high-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders; and working collaboratively across jurisdictions and engaging with key professional bodies.

Clearly, just as AITSL has this responsibility, members of the profession, individually and collectively, have a responsibility to watch over AITSL equally vigorously. Established in January this year, it's important that in its formative years AITSL is well directed.

Following its fifth board meeting in August, AITSL published this statement: 'Since its establishment, AITSL has given considerable thought to building on the substantial work already undertaken on principal standards, recognising the critical need to attract, develop and retain high-quality leaders for 21st-century schools. There was consensus on an approach which encompasses a steering group, expert writing and review, extensive stakeholder engagement and communication, and a focus on the scope and effectiveness of current professional learning strategies used to support existing and aspirant principals.'

I urge you to take them up on that offer and have your say or you may find yourself working to a set of standards that you don't like. **T**

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