

Evaluating Australian teachers

ACER researchers Lawrence Ingvarson and Elizabeth Kleinhenz have investigated current Australian policies and practices in teacher evaluation and their relation to the improvement of teaching and learning.

The Australian Research Council funded project Teacher Evaluation in Australia was established to find answers to the following questions:

- Under what policies and through what kinds of processes are Australian teachers being evaluated?
- How well is Australian education being served by current approaches to teacher evaluation?
- What new approaches are emerging with greater potential to satisfy current imperatives?
- How well do current teacher evaluation methods fit with the goal of building schools as accountable professional communities?

The project was underpinned by an understanding that there are two imperatives for teacher evaluation:

- the need to safeguard the educational interests and welfare of all students (public accountability); and
- the need to ensure that teachers continually review and improve their practices in the light of contemporary research and professional standards (professional accountability).

The project commenced in 1999 at Monash University with Lawrence Ingvarson and Rod Chadbourne of Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. Part of the project was transferred to ACER a year later when Dr Ingvarson joined ACER's staff.

The project had three stages. In the first stage the investigators interviewed and collected documentation from education administrators in all states and territories who held responsibility for teacher evaluation in their systems. The aim of this phase was to research and document current teacher evaluation policies and practices across Australian states. In the second stage of the project, an attempt was made to evaluate the quality of these policies and processes in terms of a range of criteria for the conduct of personnel evaluation in education and comparable professions, such as the Standards for Personnel Evaluation, laid down by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1998).

In the third and final stage of the project, a series of case studies was undertaken in schools. The aim of this phase was to explore the relationship between some current teacher evaluation practices and the quality of teaching and learning. This research was conducted mainly in the form of interviews with teachers, principals, and other school personnel who were involved in school based teacher evaluation.

Elizabeth Kleinhenz presented findings of the research in papers delivered in 2001 and 2002 at the AARE conferences in Fremantle and Brisbane.





Dr Kleinhenz explained that a 'mapping' phase of the project identified ways in which Australian teachers are evaluated at four periods or 'phases' that correspond with their career paths.

'Our interest was in the evaluation of classroom teachers. Therefore we did not investigate the various ways of evaluating teachers for promotion positions.'

The four phases were:

Phase 1 Pre-service

Phase 2 Induction

Phase 3 Career progression

Phase 4 Accomplished practice

'We had a special interest in the use of standards for teacher evaluation,' Dr Kleinhenz explained. 'We found a very 'mixed bag', that ranged from brief and perfunctory generic criteria of the kind used, for example, to support some formative induction processes, to much more elaborately developed standards such as those used in Victorian Annual Performance Review processes, that were initially developed by the Standards Council of the Teaching Profession.

'There appeared to be little coherence or consistency in standards across states and systems, although quite a bit of use had been made of the National Competency Framework for Beginning Teachers, developed in the early nineties under the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning.'

The examples of teacher evaluation that were found to be most common in government and non-government schools were those developed within various examples of performance management or 'Annual Review'. A related issue was that of evaluation for full teacher registration, carried out by registration bodies that are independent of employers. Evaluation for this purpose is now being carried out by the Board of Teacher Registration in Queensland and the

Victorian Institute of Teaching in Victoria. In both states, the recommendation that a teacher is ready to move from provisional to full registration is made, after an induction period of approximately twelve months, to the registering authority by the school principal.

Teacher evaluation policies and practices in Australia, whether the responsibility of school principals or teacher registration bodies, were generally found to be at an embryonic stage of development.

Dr Kleinhenz said that teacher registration bodies are still finding their way. 'School site based evaluation by principals under the performance management umbrella vary greatly. Major questions remain in terms of validity, reliability, generalisability and consistency.'

The work completed by ACER on this project is proving timely in view of the burgeoning interest in the development of professional teaching standards and their application in teacher evaluation and professional learning. In 2002–03, the ACER Teaching and Learning research team responded to requests from the New South Wales Institute of Teachers and the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) for advice on the development of their standards' frameworks. ACER has also worked closely with the VIT Standards and Professional Learning group in the design and implementation of professional development and assessment materials to support a pilot program in which 200 graduate teachers and their mentors prepare for an evaluation that will move them from provisional to full registration.