

ENABLING SCHOOL LEADERS AND TEACHERS TO DRIVE PRACTICE AND TO BUILD CAPACITY

LILA MULARCZYK

Lila Mularczyk, Melinda Haskett, Emma Mansfield, Maurie Mulheron, Belinda Giudice, Abby Saleh and Karen Graham share their insights into how schools can draw on the expertise of their HALTs, along with creating connections to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, to build the capacity of their teachers and to create a standard -based teaching and learning

culture. . .

Teaching is an ever-evolving profession. The skill of teaching will never be a constrained skill. This is why it is pertinent for school leaders to continuously build teacher capacity when driving improvement.

“To be a world-leading education system, Australia needs to better encourage, support, and recognise teaching expertise. Growing the pool of expert teachers in Australia is critical to creating an education system that strives to support every student’s individual learning growth through tailored teaching practices.” (Hattie 2009. Gonski 2.0 Through Growth to Achievement, March 2018).

“High performing countries deliberately organise the sharing of expertise within and across schools so that the system becomes even more effective”. Empowered Educators, How High Performing Systems Shape Teaching Quality Around the World (Linda Darling Hammond et al March 2017).

Leaders and teachers need to understand the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST or Standards) (NESA, 2018) in action, acknowledge the industrial frame and support and embed practice that enables the demonstration of impacting teaching practice collaboratively, within and across classrooms, school, and system.

“In recent years, Australian teachers have become increasingly concerned that the status of the profession is under constant challenge. Of course, these concerns are shared with teachers elsewhere. While teachers themselves have strong and resilient beliefs in the complexity and importance of the work they do, there are

others, generally external to the profession and in positions of influence, with a deficit view.

In the absence of objective benchmarks that reflect authentic professional practice, solutions have been offered in many jurisdictions that are antagonistic towards teachers as well as being unsuccessful. These include performance pay schemes, the employment of people without teaching qualifications, the spread of the Teach for America franchise, and punitive accountability regimes that are, more often than not, based on testing data...

...But the first question that needed to be answered was: what makes teaching a profession? The answer to that question needed to reflect the authentic practice of teachers and those understandings shared across the profession. In short, a common language needed to be created that could articulate the complexities of the daily practices of a qualified, competent teacher, from those beginning their career through to those that hold educational leadership positions in schools.”

(Alegounarias, & Mulheron 2018)

THE AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS: BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION AT THE TEACHER, SCHOOL, AND SYSTEM LEVEL

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) clearly describe the practices of teachers at the varying levels of expertise, from Graduate to Proficient and onto the higher levels of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher levels. Expert teachers in the Australian context, are those teachers demonstrating practices as described in the higher levels of the APSTs.

The standards define what effective teaching looks like, how it displays in the classroom, and how it improves student learning. The standards give the teaching profession a shared language about teaching practice - what we know as teachers, what we do, what we believe in and what we value about teaching.

They are also a framework and common language to communicate with others - school leaders, teacher educators, professional associations, parents/ carers, and the public – they are a public statement attesting to the professionalism of teachers.

Considering that ‘language’ is a system of communication it is appropriate to view the standards as being the language of teachers. The standards:

- Provide a common understanding and language about best- practice teaching
- Describe expertise level and provide a continuum of capabilities
- Articulate the skills needed by teachers to teach and lead effectively
- Guide the direction of your professional growth.

The Standards are excellent tool for teacher reflection (one of the most critical traits of an effective teacher). The lexical patterns within the Standards clearly demonstrate the gradual development of teacher expertise. Verbs such as ‘support’ and ‘lead’ colleagues appear regularly at the higher levels. Whereas verbs such as ‘demonstrate’ are almost exclusive to the graduate level. This focus on the main verbs of each of the standard descriptors assists teachers in engaging in deep reflection upon their practice and also supports school leaders in identifying and supporting aspiring leaders and potential HALTs.

At the individual level, the Standards enable us, as teachers, to plan, practise, reflect on, and refine our teaching practice.

We use them to monitor our ongoing growth and development as professionals, and the associated classroom practice, capabilities, and expertise.

When teachers become accredited, or certified, the benefits extend beyond the achievement of that certification.

The greatest impact on school communities happens when school leaders work effectively with Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers (HALTs) and support them to share their expertise.

Accreditation lifts the professional status of teachers. The higher level of accreditation offers a pathway for excellent teachers to grow in their self-efficacy and in their careers.

Findings from the HALT Census and further research demonstrate that higher teacher accreditation can enrich the quality of teaching by recognising expert teachers and increasing their confidence AND allowing teachers to understand the impact of their instructional practices on learners and colleagues

By offering flexible pathways for professional development that encourage HALTs to lead from within the classroom AND creating a high-quality professional learning experience that is rigorous, self-reflective, sustained and job-embedded, accreditation acknowledges expert teachers within the wider community AND provides opportunities for teachers to network and collaborate with other expert practitioners.

In addition to benefiting the teachers themselves, having a certified HALT in a school contributes to an increased culture of learning amongst staff and enables quality teaching to impact across the school and all learners.

When a teacher reflects against the Standards and completes certification, they are validating their skills and capabilities as a teacher who positively impacts their students’ learning and their colleagues’ practice.

When HALTs collaborate with others, mentor, and coach colleagues they are lifting teaching quality across the school, network, and system.

The outcome is that all teachers are engaged in cycles of high-quality professional learning and growth for the benefit of students and their school.

HALT certification can play a key role in raising the professional status of teaching, particularly in the eyes of the community.

“National Teacher certification provides an opportunity for school leaders to develop staff and improve student outcomes through a process that is largely externally managed, and teacher led. Certified teachers are esteemed to become the next instructional leaders. By mentoring and empowering colleagues, they are well placed to improve outcomes for all.” (AISTIL 2018)

EXPERT (HALT) TEACHERS

- Are leaders, contributors and advocates for high quality teaching and learning
- Contribute to an increasing professional status of the teaching profession
- Have an opportunity to impact learning for students, of HALTs and their colleagues
- Build opportunities for networking, sharing expertise and leading others
- Facilitate leadership related to classroom practice
- Facilitate leadership career pathways for colleagues
- Refocus and identify teaching and learning as an acknowledged and valued priority
- Contribute to the critical mass of teaching and learning leaders and to quality on-going professional learning (AITSL 2021)
- Improve student outcomes.

Remember it is not a position, it is a portable recognition of expertise

DEVELOPING TEACHING CAPACITY THROUGH THE AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS

Teachers demonstrate their professional practice at varying levels. These demonstrable behaviours are articulated within the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (NESA, 2018) as well Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leaders Classroom Practice Continuum (AITSL 2018).

Standard Descriptor 6.1.4 of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers states that teachers working at the lead levels of accreditation ‘use comprehensive knowledge of the Australian professional Standards for Teachers to plan and lead the development of professional learning policies and programs that address the professional learning needs of colleagues and pre-service teachers’ (NESA,2018)

Standard Descriptor 6.1.1 (APST, 2018) states that teachers working at the graduate level of accreditation ‘demonstrate an understanding of the role of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers in identifying professional learning needs.’

This same descriptor lies in the focus area of “Identify and plan professional learning” which identifies the continuum in which teachers operate and the need to differentiate the learning opportunities for our teachers.

The APSTs provide a map of a teacher’s career paths from initial teacher training, induction, and early experience through to the heights of the profession. It is important to note that the number of years of teaching does not necessarily equate to expertise in teaching. AITSL’s classroom continuum (AITSL, 2018) identifies what an expert teacher looks like in the classroom. Expert teachers in the Australian Context are those teachers demonstrating practice as described in the higher levels of accreditation within the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST, 2018). Utilising both the APST and AITSL Classroom Continuum, teachers and school leaders are able to identify their current level of expertise in the classroom as well as plan for further professional learning opportunities in continuing to develop their teaching expertise.

LEADING CHANGE THROUGH EMBEDDING APSTs AND CREATING A STANDARDS-BASED CULTURE

One of the most frequent questions that is asked about accreditation at the higher levels is how the process can be embedded within the everyday practices of a school and is not seen to be extra work for our teachers (Cole, 2022). We know that there are many teachers across the state who are consistently demonstrating the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher standards of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs)

(AITSL, 2011) as part of their everyday practices. While teachers and leaders are interested in undertaking, or supporting the process, they are mindful of engaging in a process which will increase their workload (Audit Office of NSW, 2019).

To counter this, and to support teachers to gain accreditation at higher levels as part of their existing roles, school leaders can work collaboratively to develop a culture where staff are able to gather evidence and demonstrate their practice, related to the Standards, through existing initiatives, milestones and programs running throughout the school (NESA, 2018). Key practical ideas to do this can include:

- Aligning the school's Strategic Improvement Plan with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011).
- Embedding relevant professional learning into everyday practices
- Providing differentiated professional learning opportunities for all teachers regardless of their career stages
- Creating an evidence-based school culture

This not only provides individuals with the opportunity to gather evidence as part of their existing workload but also ensures that there are greater opportunities for collaboration and sharing of expertise.

Many schools have put in structures that both support teachers aiming for accreditation at higher levels and build capacity for all teachers. As one example, Macarthur Girls High School has embedded the structure (outlined above) and, in doing so, has supported teachers to achieve, as part of their everyday role, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher Accreditation.

UNDERSTANDING THE SCHOOL LEADERS' ROLE IN CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Pre-assessment: recognise expert teachers in schools and encourage them to consider certification

Stage 1: applicant to complete their portfolio of evidence and provide a referee representative

Stage 2: be involved in a professional discussion with the external assessor during the site visit

LEVERAGE THE EXPERTISE OF HALTS IN SCHOOL

School leaders can:

- Create roles through formal and informal modes - HALTs can support beginning and pre-service teachers to use the Standards and reflect on their practice
- Allocate time and resources - this can enable nationally certified teachers to lead projects, (for example on developing instructional leadership capacity in others) and present back to staff
- Initiate inter-school collaboration: by establishing links with other schools, nationally certified teachers can grow networks and clusters to drive improved student outcomes. This could have a focus on a particular subject or effective pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning.

CASE STUDY

This case study is applicable to primary and high school contexts and aims to develop a mind-set shift in school improvement.

Prairiewood High School highlights collaborative processes that align faculty and whole school portfolios, structures, and organisation with the APST in order to achieve capacity growth and to enrich programs, leadership and school leadership capacity and succession planning.

CONTEXT/SITUATION

This case study highlights the significant changes at Prairiewood High School from 2018 after a complete change over in substantive senior executive staff. A new Principal was appointed mid-2018, and from October 2018 to present, four substantive Deputy Principals' have been appointed (one Above Centrally Identified Position - ACIP). There has been a negotiated restructure in terms of school operations and portfolios at the senior executive level. The school now has two HT Teaching and Learning, and the school has appointed new Head

Teacher positions (Administration, Mathematics, PDHPE and TAS). This case study highlights the approach the school is currently undergoing in terms of empowering School Leaders and Teachers to drive practice and capacity.

THE PROCESS

Step 1 Gathering information

Collect information on the existing systems and processes that drive school improvement at your school? What currently occurring is aligned to the Standards? (Suggestion that it informs Situational Analysis planning for the SIP)

Step 2 Gaining feedback on the information gathered & communicate your vision

We established we needed:

- Clarity around roles and responsibilities
- Clearer vision of purpose - a movement from compliance to school improvement
- A deliberate focus on embedding the Standards (Principal, APTS) and integrating the School Excellence Framework into practice
- Capacity building and succession planning focus
- A planned and coordinated approach to leadership and school operations

As a result, we gained feedback through asking the following questions:

- What role statements need to be developed?
- Name at least two school processes or structures that are working well. What makes them effective processes?
- Name two, or more, aspects of school operations needing clarification, fine-tuning or enhancement.
- What whole school teams should we have?
- Are there any short-term project teams we could run?
- What would you like to go and see in action in other schools?

School leadership teams will need to create an approach based on the information gathered and the problem(s) identified.

Step 3 Agreed upon catalyst of change

In leading this process, the senior executive's aim was to collaborate with the executive to re-align roles and responsibilities to the Australian Professional Standard for Teachers. The NSW Department of Education (DoE) School Excellence Framework (SEF) (2017) has also underpinned this process. This has set the framework to empower school leaders and teachers to drive practice and capacity.

Step 4 Setting the scene

The Executive mapped the leadership portfolios that relate to the APST, and role descriptors have been developed that reflect the cohesion of portfolios between curriculum and non-curriculum Head Teachers. This showed how we all work effectively in a school

Step 5 Effective organisational practices supporting TAL (joining the dots)

Once we collaborated on this process, we found some disconnect between the roles of the Senior Executive and Executive and other school operations and structures. We then identified the specific structures, systems and processes that were going to drive continuous improvement in our context.

Questions that support this process included:

1. What are the key staffing positions that support Teaching and Learning (TAL) at your school?
2. What teams need to exist to support school organisation to impact on TAL?
3. What is the purpose/vision of the various teams? How effectively do you use the SEF and APST to embed a culture of continuous improvement?
4. Is there alignment of school policies and procedures?

This has enabled a strategic, deep and purposeful alignment of systems and practices that ensure teaching and learning remain our core (and valued) priority.

RESOURCES

- Getting the best from your teachers: A principals' guide to national teacher certification
- Spotlight: Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers
- Certification documentary evidence supplement: Highly Accomplished Teachers
- Certification documentary evidence supplement: Lead Teachers
- Teacher Self-Assessment Tool (useful as an indicator of readiness for HALT)
- My Induction app (to use with beginning teachers)
- NESA Website
- Centre for Professional Learning course:
Enabling School Leaders is currently a one-day program, with additional 5 morning sessions delving deeply into aspects of the process and work. There is opportunity for participants to nominate content. Each session builds on previous deliveries, and each operate as a stand-alone participatory presentation. Expert educators inform all sessions, underpinned by policy and practicality. Topics are tailored for School Leaders, aspiring HALT's, for colleagues considering HALT and for aspirant leaders. Evaluations have been exceptional. The program(s) will be scheduled again in 2022. Please look on the NSW Teachers' Federation Centre of Professional Learning (CPL) website for dates and other programs.

REFERENCES

Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools. (2019, July 2). Audit Office of New South Wales. <https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/reports/ensuring-teaching-quality-in-nsw-public-schools>

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. (2018). *Getting the best from your teachers: A principals' guide to national teacher certification.* Retrieved from <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/getting-the-best-from-your-teachers-a-principals-guide-to-national-teacher-certification>

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leaders (2017). *Australian professional standards for teachers.* <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/standards>

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leaders (2018). *Classroom practice continuum.* Retrieved from https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/teach-documents/classroom-practice-continuum-revised-edition.pdf?sfvrsn=9344f63c_4

Cole, J. (2022, January 25). Why the push for tremendous teachers ground to a HALT. *Australian Association for Research in Education.* <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=11794>

Darling-Hammond, L., Burns, D., Campbell, C., Lin Goodwin, A., Hammerness, K., Low, E. L., McIntyre, A., Sato, M., & Zeichner, K. (2017). *Empowered educators: How high-performing systems shape teaching quality around the world.* Jossey-Bass.

Department of Education and Training. (2018). *Through growth to achievement: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools.* Commonwealth of Australia 2018.

NSW Education Standards Authority. (2018). *Australian professional standards for teachers: Teacher accreditation.* (Rev. ed.). Retrieved from <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/wcm/connect/9ba4a706-221f-413c-843b-d5f390c2109f/australian-professional-standards-teachers.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

NSW Department of Education. (2017). *School excellence framework* (2nd ed.). https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/school-excellence-and-accountability/media/documents/SEF_Document_Version_2_2017_AA.pdf

NSW Education Standards Authority. (2021). *Home page.* <https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/home>

"Professional Teaching Standards in Australia: A Case Study" (2018) Tom Alegounarias and Maurie Mulheron <https://www.cper.edu.au/publications>

Alegounarias, T., & Mulheron, M. (2018). *Professional teaching standards in Australia: A case study.* <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60d14074f91b5b0fddfa9652/t/60ff8c7d9d9d0801c4241865/1627360402782/Professional+Teaching+Standards+A+Case+Study.pdf>

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



LILA MULARCZYK

Lila Mularczyk's commitment to education was recognised by being honoured with the Order of Australia Medal (OAM). Lila has been contributing to public education for 40 years. She currently is undertaking a portfolio of work including leading or participating on multiple National and State Education Boards and Reference Groups and projects (including, PEF, ACE, UTS, UNSW, NSWTF and CPL.) tertiary professional experience officer, coach and mentor, UNSW Gonski Institute, State and Vice Chair ACE, supporting HALT's, tertiary lecturer, work in and for schools, research, contract work, critical friend, innovation projects etc

Prior, Lila was the Director, Secondary Education, at the Department of Education. Immediately prior to this, Lila was President of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council (SPC) from 2012 to 2016. As President and as a school Principal, Lila represented Public Education around Australia, and frequently globally, at conferences over many years. Lila was Principal at



MAURIE MULHERON

Maurie Mulheron was President of the NSW Teachers Federation (NSWTF) from 2012 after 34 years as a public school teacher and principal. He held that position until January 2020 leading the union's many campaigns. Maurie represented the NSWTF on the Federal Executive of the Australian Education Union (AEU) for twenty years. From 2015-2020, he was Deputy Federal President of the AEU. Maurie was active in Education International's Global Response Network which coordinated international opposition to the growing commercialisation and privatisation of education. Maurie is currently the Director of the Centre for Public Education Research (CPER).



MELINDA HASKETT taught at a school for 15 years until 2016.

Melinda Haskett is a national certified Highly Accomplished teacher and has taught in Southwest Sydney high schools for almost 15 years. For the past 5 years she has been working at the system level for the NSW Department of Education providing strategic advice and executive support on a range of reforms and initiatives. Melinda is currently working with the Department's COVID Taskforce.

Melinda is a strong advocate for national certification, is a founding member of the AITSL HALT Steering Committee and in 2018 led the first ever HALT Forum for certified Department teachers in NSW. She is a member of the NESAC, Moderation and Consistency Committee and contributes to a range of reports, panels and professional learning events around the role of certification in building the status of the teaching profession.



EMMA MANSFIELD

Emma Mansfield is Deputy Principal at Macarthur Girls High School and relieved as Principal for a substantial amount of time. She is currently working as Leader, School Excellence in the NSW Department of Education. Throughout her career, Emma has worked in a range of different teaching and leadership roles both within schools and across the national and state education systems. Since gaining Lead accreditation in 2017, Emma has been a passionate advocate for the certification process. She has extensive experience in supporting teachers to undertake the process of accreditation and in promoting how school leaders can use this process to improve teacher quality and enhance school improvement. She has been heavily involved in a range of system wide initiatives as well as formal and informal mentoring programs at a school, network and system level. Emma regularly contributes to the wider dialogue surrounding accreditation at numerous events including the International Forum for Teacher Regulatory Authorities, and ACEL National Conference.



BELINDA GIUDICE

Belinda Giudice displays a deep commitment to public education. She began her career at Merrylands High School and was Co-Principal there from 2012-2015. She has been the Principal of Canterbury Boys High School and is the current Principal of Prairiewood High School. Belinda has presented at state and national levels in the areas of: Quality Teaching, Leadership, and Student Wellbeing. Belinda displays a passion not to accept the status quo and to make structural improvements that lead to real and required change. She has received numerous education awards including: an NSW Australian College of Educational Leadership Award, an NSW Quality Teaching Award, a Public Education Foundation Secretary's Award for Excellent Service, a New South Wales Secondary Deputy Principals Association (NSWSDPA) Fellowship and is a NSWSDPA Life Member. Belinda is a visionary leader who is passionate about contributing to the education community.



KAREN GRAHAM

Karen Graham has been teaching and leading in south west Sydney for the past 19 years. For the past 3 years, she has been a relieving Deputy Principal and Instructional Leader at Blairmount Public School. Karen was accredited as a Highly Accomplished Teacher in 2017 and believes that accreditation at Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher is a great way to recognise and promote the expertise of our teaching profession.



ABBY SALEH

Abby Saleh is a NESAC Accredited Highly Accomplished Teacher currently working as Deputy Principal Instructional Leader at Fairfield Public School. As a former refugee and proud product of public education, Abby has over 20 years' experience working with low socio-economic communities and is passionate about building teacher capacity to support CALD students and their families. Her mantra is "Never Stop Learning". To learn more about the process of accreditation at the higher levels, see Abby Saleh's article in this edition of the Journal of Professional Learning.