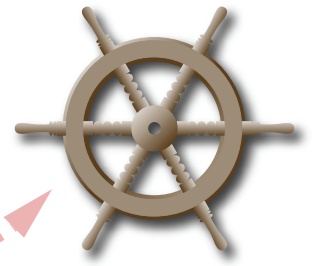


Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



The Evolution of Teaching Standards

by Dr. Anne Rodrigue, recently retired Deputy General Secretary, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario and former NSTU executive staff officer

The professional teaching standards movement is a worldwide phenomenon nested in the accountability and performance agenda of global education reform, and the rationalization of education spending in the public sector. Introducing teaching standards is seen as a response to the increased complex demands put on education systems, linked to improving student outcomes and addressing external demands from parents, governments, and employers.

The move to establish teaching standards began in the United States in response to the publication of the 1986 Carnegie Commission Report *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*. In Britain, the introduction of the National Curriculum in the 1980s, and the focus on improving student achievement in numeracy and literacy led to a renewed focus on teacher preparation, credentials, and practice. But the professionalism movement in its multiple re-enactments is not only restricted to the United States and Britain.

In 2010, a report commissioned by the International Labour Organization indicated that 100 countries were implementing, developing or considering adopting teaching standards. In Canada teaching standards have been adopted by the British Columbia College of Teachers, The Ontario College of Teachers, and Alberta Education to name but a few. Many frameworks for teaching standards have been in effect for decades.

Establishing teaching standards can help define the qualifications, knowledge base, and competencies required to teach. Teachers have often complained that everyone thinks they can teach; they recognize that teaching requires specialized knowledge and an inventory of skills and knowledge that includes content and pedagogical knowledge, presentation skills, and a deep understanding of individual and collective learning needs. Teachers and everyone engaged in the daily life of a school, recognize the complexity of providing effective learning for all.

Teaching standards have not only been used by governments but by the profession itself to improve the status and salaries of teachers and also to address the flat career path in teaching by introducing new categories or salary designations for differentiated career paths such as master teacher or coach. This has been the case in the United States where professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and others, have established various levels of accreditation and designation.

Teaching standards address levels of competency from novice to master teacher and also span the career of a teacher from pre-service candidate, to the probation or induction period and the ongoing professional development or life-long learner phase. During the early 2000s in Ontario, teachers had to be recertified on an ongoing basis and beginning teachers had to pass a teacher test in order to be qualified. Those requirements were rescinded in response to teacher union pressure and issues associated

to costs and the bureaucracy necessary to support teacher testing.

Teaching standards vary across jurisdictions depending on who developed them. In many cases, teachers, and the organizations that represent them, collaboratively developed the standards. In other jurisdictions, parents and members of the public were also asked to provide their input on the standards that should govern teacher qualifications, competency, and performance.

Standards also drive teacher evaluation both formative and summative. Teacher performance is aligned to the standards and the indicators developed from these standards—the look fors that a principal will use to determine if the standards are being met.

Standards impact the design and delivery of professional learning as the content of professional learning programs may be linked directly to Ministry or Board initiatives and will determine how and what learning opportunities a teacher can take and be recognized for. In this era of evidence based decision making it will be necessary to justify how professional learning directly impacts student learning outcomes. A question that arises from the linking of professional development to standards is, “What will be the place, if any, for teacher self-directed learning?”

Teacher standards can also be used to coordinate educational policy and ensure that all education partners are working on the same page.

It is believed that qualifications and competency frameworks otherwise known as teaching standards will help promote teacher life-long improvement but the difficulty lies in achieving a common understanding of what the standards really mean.

Good teaching standards should define good teaching—what does it look like? We also need to determine how good teaching will be assessed—what measures will be used, how will data be collected? Finally, how will we define good enough? What does it mean to meet the standards?

Developing and implementing teaching standards is a long technical process and should be collaborative in nature to ensure the buy-in of education partners. These standards need to be legitimized, and validated in the context in which they are being used.

An OECD research paper, innovative *Teaching for Innovative Learning*, (2013), indicates that to develop learning standards for students rarely takes less than four years and that developing teaching standards takes only a slightly shorter time.

Implementing teaching standards is not system tinkering; it is the re-engineering of an entire system.

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