

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION

Quality Teaching in Schools Policy 2007

As adopted at the
2007 Annual Federal Conference

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1 Quality teaching in context

- 1.1 Teaching is a complex professional activity which involves integrating a deep understanding of a knowledge base encompassing theoretical knowledge, pedagogy, subject discipline, child development and learning theory, in practical and unpredictable circumstances.
- 1.2 The quality of teachers and of teaching is but one factor, albeit one of the most important, influencing the quality of education for students. A singular focus on teacher quality ignores governments' responsibility for properly resourcing public education. Improved outcomes for students require attention to social, political and economic pressures on public education and communities.
- 1.3 Education is of enormous importance to society and its future at the global, national, community and personal level. Quality teaching contributes to the building of communities, particularly in rural and remote areas, and to the development of active democratic citizenship. Therefore the quality of teaching is of profound importance to society.

2 General principles

- 2.1 Responsibility for ensuring the quality of teaching rests with many groups within or associated with the profession.
 - 2.1.1 Teachers themselves have an obligation, individually and collectively, to critically reflect on and inquire into their practice and its effectiveness and to continue their professional growth throughout their career. This is best facilitated by the development of a culture of inquiry in systems and in schools. Opportunities to develop the capabilities for inquiry and school based research must be provided.
 - 2.1.2 Systems must support and nurture quality teaching through the provision of resources that are optimal for quality teaching to occur in areas such as:
 - Time allocations
 - Class sizes
 - ICT
 - Quality curriculum frameworks and support documents
 - Professional learning/research opportunities
 - Support staff

- Preparation time
 - Materials
 - Buildings and facilities
 - Pay and conditions
 - Research into factors which affect the quality of teaching.
- 2.1.3 Governments must provide adequate levels of funding and create a culture of informed and constructive decision making around education.
- 2.1.4 Good leadership in schools is critical for schools to be vibrant learning organisations in which teaching flourishes as a collegiate activity.
- 2.1.5 Teacher educators and universities need to be funded to ensure quality amongst new generations of teachers, to conduct research into learning and pedagogy and the contexts in which they occur, and to assist schools as learning organisations.
- 2.1.6 Teacher unions have a vital role in advocacy and support for optimal professional and industrial conditions, to achieve best professional practice for quality teaching and learning.
- 2.1.7 Teaching standards appropriate to various career stages can form a useful basis for the development of quality teaching provided they :
- Are developed by the teaching profession;
 - Reflect the complex work that professionals undertake in educational settings;
 - Are embedded in industrial or formal agreements between employers and teacher unions;
 - Are used to guide professional learning and are not used punitively for performance management;
 - Are used voluntarily at the advanced level.
- 2.2 The profession has the right and responsibility to maintain and improve quality by:
- determining entry and continuing professional learning requirements;
 - defining professional ethics;
 - determining professional standards;
 - being involved in educational decision making at all levels;
 - engaging in practices that both attract new teachers and subsequently retain them;
 - engaging in public debate on educational issues.
- 2.3 Teachers working in non-permanent modes of employment have the same rights and responsibilities and should have the same access to professional development as those in permanent employment. It is incumbent on systems to provide the resources and conditions necessary to ensure this.
- 2.4 Members of the profession must be university qualified through teacher education courses which develop deep knowledge and understanding of:
- Subject content

- Professional studies
 - Professional experience in schools.
- 2.5 Schools and the system should operate on shared values and a common responsibility. For this to occur the system bureaucracy must be closely connected to the culture of public schools.
- 2.6 The location of decision making should relate to what is best for student learning across the system. Judgements about the location of decision making will be based on an approach that ensures appropriate systemic resources while allowing each school the flexibility necessary to cater for its unique student community.
- 2.7 Quality decision making involves the profession being included in educational decision making at all levels. Teachers have a responsibility to contribute to the development of the profession through active engagement in professional consultation and decision making at school and system levels, and through participation in the work of unions and professional associations.
- 2.8 Systems and the profession share a responsibility to be accountable to students, parents and society through a variety of mechanisms which provide valid and pertinent information. Simplistic models which suggest that the complex nature of education can be treated like a commodity, measured and ranked, are rejected.
- 2.9 Factors external to the education system such as social and economic conditions, family wealth, geographic isolation and access to social and health services affect the ability of schools and teachers to respond effectively to students' learning needs. Many of these factors are beyond the capacity of teachers and schools to address. Governments must examine and address the links between these factors and student achievement.
- 2.10 Quality teaching and quality career paths are interconnected and encompass:
- Recruitment
 - Initial teacher education
 - Induction
 - Continuing professional learning
 - Salary
 - Conditions of work
 - Promotion pathways
 - Specialisation
 - Research opportunities.
- 2.11 The quality of individual schools and the quality of all schools in the system are symbiotic. A balance must be sought between the desire of a particular school to recruit the staff most appropriate to its needs and the appropriate distribution of teachers throughout the system. Proper system wide processes should ensure that all schools have the teachers they need.
- 2.12 The teaching workforce should more accurately reflect the multicultural make up of Australia. Efforts to attract and retain teachers from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds

must be recognised as a key quality issue and strategies to support teachers of all cultural backgrounds, including overseas-trained teachers, to teach in public schools.

- 2.13 Similarly, there is a clear need to recruit and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers.

3 Teacher Education

3.1 Relationship Between Education Faculties and Schools

- 3.1.1 The quality of teaching is greatly enhanced by the integration of theory and practice at all stages of a teacher's career and in all aspects of school operations.
- 3.1.2 Closer links between teacher education faculties and schools are already forming, and this trend should accelerate and become more formally recognised over coming years.

This should manifest itself in a number of ways, such as:

- ongoing relationships between faculties and individual schools;
- the interchange of personnel;
- a clearly defined and mutually supportive partnership between schools and teacher educators;
- joint approaches to solving challenges that schools identify as priorities, using the research expertise and knowledge of university personnel to work in partnership with teachers as school/classroom researchers or critical friends.

3.2 Pre-Service Teacher Education

- 3.2.1 The first step in ensuring quality teaching is to ensure that those recruited to teaching are of high academic standard and have an aptitude for teaching.
- 3.2.2 It is also desirable to actively recognise and credit the knowledge, capabilities and experience of prospective teachers who have been engaged in other professions, and to implement recognition of prior learning arrangements in ways that reinforce high standards for the teaching profession. Genuine recognition of prior learning is desirable; watering down of entry qualifications is not. Subject knowledge and experience cannot be substituted for pedagogical knowledge.
- 3.2.3 Over time, there has been a trend for the period of time spent in initial training to increase, and the demands of the learning society would seem to require that current course length be at least maintained.
- 3.2.4 Teacher education courses should ensure students develop a deep understanding of their discipline/s in order to convey the underlying principles when the content is changing. At the same time, increasing expectations of the skills and attributes to be developed by all students increases the need for professional studies in appropriate pedagogies.
- 3.2.5 Additionally, the need to develop practice alongside theory requires more contact amongst education faculties, student teachers and schools. Student teachers should be developing the skills they will need as teachers, including self-reflection, engagement in professional dialogue and using research as a guide. This should be achieved by a more direct involvement of teacher educators with what student teachers are learning in schools, and by greater use of practising teachers in university courses, through

both short-term visits and longer exchanges, perhaps involving conjoint appointments and secondments.

3.2.6 As well as an understanding of the social, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds of students and the impact of these on students' learning, initial teacher education must ensure teachers develop:

- a specific understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with special education needs, students from non-English speaking backgrounds and students with challenging behaviours.
- a knowledge of strategies for addressing their needs.

4 New educators (Beginning teachers)

4.1 Completion of initial teacher education must be followed by a period of timely, accessible and effective induction in which the beginning teacher has the opportunity to integrate theory and practice. Provision for induction should include:

- reduced teaching load;
- time for new educators to prepare and to reflect on their practice;
- mentoring from designated teachers in the school who have received training in mentoring and are allocated time to carry it out;
- ongoing support from their university education faculty.

This will assist in developing the conditions through which new educators will develop the practice of action research, apply research to practice, and take part in professional dialogue about practice.

4.2 There should be a process of provisional registration leading to full registration of teachers at the end of a period of induction.

4.3 It is imperative that professional learning opportunities are offered in the early years of teaching to build on the teacher's pre-service learning. They must be resourced in such a way that they provide for professional support and growth so that teachers' early professional experience is positive, constructive and rewarding. Special provisions should be put in place for new teachers who begin their professional careers in a part-time, non-permanent capacity or in areas that are geographically and/or professionally isolated.

4.4 Professional learning opportunities to cater to the specific needs of new teachers who have been previously engaged in other professions, teachers who have had an extensive break from teaching, and teachers who were trained overseas should be provided.

5 Professional growth

5.1 Continuing professional learning is central to the practice of teaching and school leadership. The quality of professional learning will determine the quality of the ongoing development of teachers and must become a joint responsibility to which all parties devote greater effort and resources.

- 5.2 Professional learning can take many forms, including:
- formal courses of study at university;
 - specifically designed short courses;
 - whole school or department developmental activities;
 - participation in professional activities and dialogue;
 - professional representation on decision-making bodies;
 - professional reading;
 - observation of other teachers, work shadowing, mentoring, and professional exchange;
 - industry experience;
 - joint planning with colleagues;
 - participation in research;
 - mentoring colleagues.
- 5.3 Provision of professional learning opportunities is a right. School systems must provide a range of opportunities, ICT infrastructure and support at individual, school and system level so that each teacher or school leader can develop their own professional experiences to build system capacity regardless of geographic location.
- 5.4 Departmental needs for professional development relating to curricular up-dating or changed policy are important, but not sufficient to meet all the needs of a modern teacher workforce. Professional learning priorities should not be dominated by system priorities but should also meet the needs of individual teachers and schools. Teachers should have access to personal professional development and school-based in-service education as well as learning opportunities provided by state and national systems.
- 5.5 It is important that a substantial portion of professional learning relates to actual experience, stems from the teachers' perceived needs, encourages both self-reflection and an awareness of what others do and is sustained over time.
- 5.6 It is also important that there is an element of professional learning that is research based and that feeds into the professional knowledge pool.
- 5.7 The development of formal professional learning activities must be built on a substantial research base, involve the experience of practising teachers and school leaders, be of assured quality and be delivered with the minimum disruption to teachers' and school leaders' personal lives.
- 5.8 School systems should develop and maintain system capacity in teacher advisory support in all curriculum areas.
- 5.9 Faculties of education have a continuing role to play in supporting practice-based, research-informed professional development, which itself may also be a form of

action research of use to others. This can involve individual teachers, a whole school, a year level, or a subject area.

- 5.10 Management and development of both schools and teachers must be clearly linked to processes and principles of school development and enhancement, supporting teacher and school leader development. It must not become an end in itself.
- 5.11 Professional learning linked to any requirement relating to continuation of teacher registration must take account of the full range of teacher learning activities, not add unduly to teacher workload, and places an obligation on systems to ensure the accessibility of relevant professional learning.

6 Leadership

The link between quality leadership and quality teaching is well established.

- 6.1 “Leadership” as a term should be understood as a function rather than a position. Whilst those in positions of formal authority in schools and systems should be expected to exhibit qualities of leadership, leadership may be evidenced in practice in many ways by many others – for example, through academic research or mentoring.
- 6.2 Leadership viewed in this way may encompass all teachers and the broader school and developing leadership capacity should be concerned with this full range.
- 6.3 This dispersed leadership can play an important role in leadership succession and ensuring more equitable distribution of promotion positions.
- 6.4 School leadership needs to be set in the context of highly developed systemic educational leadership. This will result in a system which throughout is working towards improved student learning and in which all accept responsibility commensurate with their position.
- 6.5 Education bureaucracies must be structured to provide support to schools and promote the vision and mission of the public schooling system.
- 6.6 System leaders are key members of the education community and as such must be appropriately qualified and experienced in educational roles. They must “own” the problems that occur and take responsibility for the ongoing development of all elements of the system, not merely play a managerial accountability function that sets targets and deals with the failure to meet them.
- 6.7 Schools and their leaders need to identify themselves as part of and be committed to a broader public enterprise. Public school leadership should be characterised by a willingness to share problems and solutions, learn from each other, and work together.
- 6.8 The AEU supports consideration of alternative formal leadership structures such as co-principalship and other forms of shared leadership.
- 6.9 The totality of those in formal leadership positions must increasingly reflect the cultural diversity of Australia in general.