

**Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Employment,
Workplace Relations and Education**

Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education 2007

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(CPTAV)**

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The Council of Professional Teaching Associations of Victoria is the peak organization representing professional teaching associations in Victoria. Its forty member associations are composed of both subject specific, discipline based and cross-curricular organizations which represent teachers across all sectors. Its motto is "Building professional learning communities" and its main objective is to assist all members to enhance their capacity for delivering quality professional learning and, by implication, enabling teachers to improve student learning. CPTAV acts as a conduit, facilitating access to professional teaching associations.

At both state and national levels, it plays a vital advocacy role, stimulating professional debate on matters of educational importance. It promotes subject matter as a specialized area of knowledge, strengthening each organization's gate keeping role in protecting subject status and contributing to the task of professionalizing teaching by affirming members' expertise.

CPTAV welcomes the Inquiry into the Academic Standards of School Education currently being undertaken by the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee. The inquiry has the potential to affirm, at State and national level, current best practice and achievements in literacy and numeracy standards measured against international figures.

CPTAV is also appreciative of the opportunity for professional teaching associations, the gatekeepers of teaching and learning standards, to present the views of their members; teachers who witness every day the effects of social change on the curriculum and on professional practice.

Views from the Chalk face

Factors influencing teaching quality

- **Social change**

Teachers are increasingly being expected to be all things to all people. They are not equipped to be so. With constant educational reforms and curriculum demands covering an excessive number of areas, no one is afforded time to reflect, let alone find opportunities to initiate change. Is this the point at which society says, "Teachers are incompetent"? With a "revolving door" approach, teaching professionals experience a confusing variety of learning/change management programs where there are seldom opportunities for complex skill development.

Our society expects success in any context. Losers are not celebrated. It is observed that to accommodate this expectation teachers lower challenge, thus lowering risk. To engage this vital issue of academic standards is to engage with the issue of risk. "Risk" (understood as human interaction with uncertainty) as an essential element of teaching has disappeared from school vocabularies. Without risk there can be no growth.

So as society changes and the future beckons with both promise and uncertainty let us equip students by first supporting and encouraging their teachers.

Governments at both State and Federal level can be instrumental in encouraging educators at any level to shift from simple knowledge transmission to developing students to be critical thinkers who can then be the future knowledge creators. For such a significant mind shift, the vision needs to be clearly stated and money invested in facilitation. Ask the questions: "what do we value from our educational past, what currently works for us, what do we anticipate the future will look like?" Remembering that with this last question all educators try to skill students for a future they themselves will not see.

Ask educators to travel into the unknown alongside you, as parliamentarians and professionals together. Develop and maintain genuine dialogue so that there is a sense of joint ownership of strategies and reforms.

- **Valuing Learning**

Teacher education needs to empower professionals to take on for themselves, and hence for their students unfamiliar tasks which are harder to teach but will result in much richer learning experiences. Thus much work needs to be done at tertiary education level to acculturate pre-service teachers and those already in the profession in intellectual risk-taking. It is about valuing knowledge creation and using it wisely.

To do so requires changing the current mindset of education as a commodity – a quantum leap. All of us are learners in the words of Abraham Maslow -

'All of life is education and everybody is a teacher and everybody is forever a pupil'

Summary

Teach, from an early age, that some failure can be formative. Failure can help to develop resilience. Do not endorse inadequate effort. Encourage self-knowledge for the most effective teaching and learning strategies.

This must be the very essence of community teaching.

- **Academic Standards**

The CPTAV is cognizant of international assessment standards, which found that Australians are performing very well in terms of applied learning. It acknowledges that in assessment of rote learning Australian students are less successful. Geographic and cultural differences between states provide one explanation for the latter.

Council wants to emphasize that national and state education initiatives over the past twenty years or so have veered between the Mayer Competencies, work-based assessment, senior school certificates which embraced both university and technical college entry level assessment. New approaches to measuring educational standards were intended to prepare Australian students for the future. The current dismay from some quarters concerning poor performance in

rote learning, affording opportunities to criticize the Australian teaching profession has no grounds.

Summary

Council wishes to emphasize that professional teaching associations hold and maintain rigorous and relevant academic standards grounded in the daily practice of teaching. If this is so highly valued by government, more support for reflective professional learning.

It will be the responsibility of individual associations to answer the inquiry's questions on academic rigour.

- **Learning for the 21st Century**

Generation Y is not afraid to challenge the status quo. It requires a learning environment where creativity and independent thinking are looked upon as a positive. This generation is independent and technologically wise, qualities not always present in the current generation of educators. Thus the importance of professional learning for all generations of teachers cannot be understated.

Moss and White (University of Melbourne, 2004) sum it up like this:

'... if we are to claim teaching as a profession that will understand and support knowledge that is being transformed through cultural influences, changing technologies and media, we need to acknowledge that the ways we learn and learn to teach are changing as well. It's through engagement in the process of ... making our own professional meaning that we'll distinguish the professional in the twenty-first century.'

Summary

It is through participation in the learning programs offered by professional teaching associations that teachers are afforded opportunities to participate in decisions concerning their own work. All stakeholders, following creative, collegiate conversations, ideally design the learning programs. Professional teaching associations are pivotal in transforming education both in and out of the classroom.

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