TEACH[R]

The National Professional Standards for Teachers

Towards an authentic integrating domain for teachers in Christian schools

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Introduction

Every serving teacher and 'teacher to be' will be moulded decidedly by The National Professional Standards for Teachers[1] (NPST). Officially released on 9th February 2011, after piloting, they become the benchmark for what constitutes teacher quality in Australia. The question is: Are these norms—plus a 'coating of religiosity'—all that there is to being a quality *Christian* teacher? Or is there more?

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This article explores and proposes a new integrating 'teaching domain': *Teaching Ministry*, and three attendant 'teaching standards' together with specific descriptors for various focus areas.

- Engage in a teaching ministry informed by a Christian worldview;
- Cultivate and nurture spiritual growth and discernment;
- Commit, belong and contribute to a servant-hood community of faith.

These proposed categories are intended for *practitioners in Christian faith-based schools* and form an integral part of outlining an authentic integrating teaching ministry. The categories are *distinctly different*—some might say counter-cultural, in today's secular educational climate—but follow on from, and are a 'coda' to the existing three domains and seven standards that comprise the mandated NPST.

Context

The recent NPST come on the heels of a *national* approach in the areas of curriculum and assessment. The Commonwealth Government's establishment of The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) supersedes the disparate efforts by state and territory jurisdictions to establish clear professional standards for teachers through various bodies, although it should be noted that, significantly, many of the NPST were derived from the standards developed by the NSW Institute of Teachers, which in turn—as a perusal of available literature and websites should plainly show—accessed, utilised, and built on earlier work of several overseas education bodies;[2] including other Australian state jurisdictions. It is envisaged that the NPST are likely to 'normalise' the registration and certification of teachers, perhaps permitting a greater movement of teaching expertise across state borders, as well as bringing rigorous quality control, but possibly a tedious sameness[3] to teacher education courses in tertiary institutions.

An overview and brief introduction to the NPST is succinctly provided by AITSL:

> The National Professional Standards for Teachers comprise seven Standards which outline what teachers should know and be able to do. The standards are interconnected, interdependent and overlapping.
>
> The Standards are grouped into three domains of teaching: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement. In practice, teaching draws on aspects of all three domains.
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> Within each Standard, focus areas provide further illustration of teaching knowledge, practice and professional engagement. These are then separated into Descriptors at four professional career stages: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead.[4]

In essence, the four career stages above represent the perceived continuum of a teacher's professional growth and expertise, beginning as a graduate from a recognised tertiary institution and then a competent practitioner through to being highly accomplished and culminating as a leader in the teaching profession.

The purpose of education

AITSL has been addressing and making progress on the important issue of teacher quality, which affects the whole tenor of the Australian educational enterprise. Others—among them university academics—have been concerned about an equally important issue. They have questioned the very *purposes* of Australian public education that are currently being pursued by the incumbent federal government, whose education policy focuses primarily on the economic purpose of education. Critics point to the policy's serious shortcomings:

> This narrowing of educational vision to seeing students as human capital to be enlisted in the cause of economic recovery and growth, marginalises the important cultural, social, political and relational aspects of education. It understands students as potential workers and consumers rather than local and global citizens... [T]he central work of schools in a democratic society is the development of the capacities for social practice. These include capacities for citizenship, work, intercultural understanding, community involvement, communication and so on—capacities that build the common good.[5]

The Vice-Chancellor of Sydney's Macquarie University expressed a similar view in an address to a recent meeting of the Australian College of Educators. Professor Steven Schwartz pointed out that according to the federal government, the purpose of universities is to grow the knowledge-based economy. Furthermore, he used the example of the UK parliamentary expenses scandal and the shameful and unethical behaviour in the banking and investment fraternity as revealed by the Global Financial Crisis—both cases involving some of the brightest graduates from stellar universities—to assert that universities need to "remoralise". He argued that from their earliest origins, one of the universities' main tasks had been that of character building; a mission that most universities pursued until the 19th century, but that has been lost sight of. It has been the aim of Macquarie University, he said, to reclaim education's purpose of character building, in its new undergraduate curriculum structure.[6]

In a pluralist secular society, such an endeavour will surely be regarded as either courageous, bordering on revolutionary, or quaintly naïve; although it would strongly resonate with most Christian educators.

Character building

Increased attention is presently given to student character development at the primary and secondary education levels; whether in public or private schools, as a scanning of the literature should show. It is evident from the delivery of curriculum programs of varying nomenclature—values education, human virtues, citizenship—and the contribution of many reported service learning projects. A Sydney school has even taken the step of appointing a Director of Character Education.[7] Importantly, the authoritative and influential 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians asserts that young people:

> Develop personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, empathy and respect for others…act with moral and ethical integrity… [and] understand the spiritual, moral and aesthetic dimensions of life.[8]

The significance of character has been highlighted by one Christian author as follows:

> True education does not ignore the value of scientific knowledge or literary acquirements; but above information it values power[9]; above power, goodness; above intellectual acquirements, character. The world does not so much need men [and women] of great intellect as of noble character.[10]

In the above contexts, *character* generally refers to a person's durable ethical and moral strength.

What connection, if any, is there between the NPST and character building? The NPST cast teaching principally in terms of technical and cognitive competencies and tasks. A closer examination should disclose that, other than Standards 7.1 and 4.5, which require that *professional* ethics and responsibilities be met and the ethical use of Information and Communications Technology, the NSTP appear to have no *personal* moral or ethical dimension. It borders incomprehensibility that teachers who oversee the education of future generations in public schools must meet strict standards of professional knowledge and skills; yet society has few ethical and seemingly no clear moral expectations of them other than the absence of a police record.

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In some respects, this is not surprising given the absence of a broad consensus of what constitutes ethical personal behaviour in postmodern society. We see this compartmentalisation of the individual self into the 'professional' and the 'personal/private' life of the individual—*vis-à-vis* an 'integrated life'—played out frequently in the media. When, in 2010, the propriety of a NSW state government minister's visit to a questionable 'establishment' came under public scrutiny, a seemingly typical justification offered was:

Teaching ministry

Standard 8 — Engage in a teaching ministry informed by a Christian world view

Focus Area	Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
8.1 Belief system reference point	Demonstrate a knowledge of Bible-based beliefs, and the perspectives of different Christian faith traditions	Relate Christian beliefs and faith to students' lives, educational practice and everyday living—from the school's sponsoring faith tradition specifically and other faith traditions generally	Communicate and explain commonalities and differences of faith traditions and build 'bridges' of goodwill and understanding between students who identify with them	Take a leadership role in articulating the school's Christian culture in light of the school's sponsoring faith tradition and also the wider Christian community
8.2 Vocation and ministry	Understand the basic principles of a servant-hood teaching ministry	Demonstrate commitment to an on-going teaching ministry based on biblical principles and virtues	Act collegially in building a teaching ministry team that is characterised by biblical wisdom	Model, promote and advance a relational school-wide servant-hood teaching ministry
8.3 Integration of faith, learning and practice	Understand and apply strategies of integrating faith, learning and practice in lessons and units of work	Demonstrate creative integration of faith, learning and practice in curriculum planning and teaching practice	Develop and share cross-curricular materials and resources for integrating faith, learning and practice	Take a leadership role in making Christian faith relevant to learning, living, and teaching in contemporary society

> If it's someone's private life and it does not impact on his job or potentially impact on his job, it's a private life, but if it impacts on his portfolio or potentially on the execution of his duties, I think it's a matter of public interest.[11]

Similarly, when a clergyman was stood down by the professional standards board of his denomination, a parishioner was reported as expressing the view he did "not really care what [the clergyman] did in his private life, because… he was a good minister…He is a nice looking, very personable young man."[12] It is evident from the examples given that there appears to be a popular and commonly held notion that professionals should not be held accountable for their private life and morals; whether as members of parliament or of the clergy—unless they are breaking the law; quite apart from behaviour that is 'perfectly legal', but may be unethical, immoral or even corrupt. The ethics of the two areas of life—professional and private—simply are not perceived as intersecting.

For a Christian, on the other hand, wisdom literature poses the question: "Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?"[13] Mindful of the observation about the foundations of human behaviour: "Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life,"[14] Jesus further challenges the validity of the 'compartmentalised life', "No sound tree bears rotten fruit, nor again does a rotten tree bear sound fruit."[15] Jesus does not leave us the option of leading a life of double standards.

> *The proposed delineated domain, Teaching Ministry applies Kingdom values and virtues in developing trans-formational standards for teaching*

The proposed delineated domain, *Teaching Ministry*[16] applies Kingdom values and virtues in developing *transformational standards* for teaching in Christian faith-based schools.

Authentic Christian teachers

The values and virtues underpinning the proposed standards are reflected in the focus areas; they make for an authentic Christian teacher identity.[17] The latter may be illustrated and briefly explicated along several parameters.

Role perception: The call to servant-hood ministry means following in the footsteps of Jesus. It is a call to integrity, submission, humility and contentment (Matt 5:37; Luke 22:26–27; Phil 2:3–5, 8; 1Tim 6:6) but also to tremendous joy, privilege and responsibility (John 15:1–17).

Teaching ministry
Standard 9 — Cultivate and nurture spiritual growth and discernment

Focus Area	Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
9.1 Spiritual formation	Recognise the importance of, and cultivate a personal relationship with God	Develop and nurture a habit of personal devotions and Scripture reading and study	Mentor and guide colleagues in their personal spiritual formation, guided by the Holy Spirit	Promote and cherish an active school culture of spiritual formation and character development
9.2 Faith development	Demonstrate a knowledge of the stages of students' faith development	Apply principles of faith development in teaching students of different ages	Share experience, literature and research relevant to advancing the understanding of students' faith development	Draw on and mobilise church and community resources to enhance the faith development of students
9.3 Spiritual decisions	Understand the importance of students' spiritual choices and commitments	Utilise spiritual insights, understandings and opportune learning situations to facilitate students making age-appropriate spiritual choices and commitments	Assist colleagues in upholding environments free of pressure and indoctrination to permit students to 'own' their spiritual decisions and commitments	Sponsor/lead school programs and activities that nurture staff and student spiritual discernment and growth, facilitating a personal commitment to Jesus Christ
9.4 Giftedness	Appreciate the diversity of God-given gifts and skills in all students	Identify, respect and nurture the spiritual gifts and skills in every student	Devise strategies for developing, nurturing and mentoring students' spiritual gifts and skills	Give leadership to activities and programs that advance students' particular spiritual gifts and skills

Service and orientation to it: A servant-hood teaching ministry also implies appropriate modelling of service. A respected Christian educator makes the point compellingly:

> We can only prepare our students for lives of service—lives of responsive discipleship—if our schools, our families, our churches, are places suffused by service. We cannot for twelve years foster and focus on individual success and achievement and expect that thereafter our students will walk the paths of sacrificial service. The goal of the "Christian good life" will not be replaced overnight by that of a truly Christian good life. It will only be as our students learn day by day to honour weakness, to serve one another rather than themselves, that we will play our part under God's gracious guidance in nurturing successful servants rather than those who serve the idol of success.[18]

Rather than a means to an end, service is an end in itself. Some may regard service as instrumental to the acquisition of specialist skills, recognition in the profession, satisfaction of self-interest and attainment of self-actualisation, or just plain pragmatism. It should not even be seen as a stepping stone to 'nobility'; instead, service *is* nobility, according to Scottish theologian, Thomas Manson.[19]

In secular leadership literature also, service has long been recognised as a means of bonding leaders and co-workers, providing the former with moral *vis-à-vis* bureaucratic authority.[20]

Claim to expertise: Christian teachers are trustees of their gifts and talents (Matt 25:14–30). Unlike some 'self-made' persons who delight in their architect, Christian teachers acknowledge the source of their abilities which are developed in co-operation with the Lord who gave them. Talents are to be developed for the uplifting, guiding, nurturing and benefit of the faith community (Eph 4:8, 12), which subsumes the school.

Identity formation: The reality for many professionals 'in the wider world' is that the

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Standard 10 — Commit, belong and contribute to a servant-hood community of faith

Focus Area	Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
10.1 Pastoral care	Exhibit familiarity with, and understanding of Christian schools' pastoral care tasks that focus on healing, wholeness, community and management	Show genuine agape love for students and provide effective Christian nurture and pastoral care for students from diverse backgrounds	Monitor and ensure that the school's pastoral care activities and program meet ethical and biblical criteria	Build the school into a community of grace, care and nurture through servant-hood leadership; where members learn, contribute and are loved and valued
10.2 Altruism	Demonstrate a knowledge of the benefits of student service learning activities that reflect biblical values	Plan and facilitate altruistic student/staff learning activities and projects, both within and beyond the classroom	Advise and assist colleagues to monitor, evaluate and debrief student/staff learning activities and projects	Mobilise whole-school service involvement in identified, just and valued local, national or global causes
10.3 Lifestyle	Demonstrate a lifestyle in keeping with Christian values, ethics, and practices that reflect positively on the Christian faith	Exhibit a lifestyle that supports the school's sponsoring faith tradition and is indicative of a personal relationship with Jesus	Develop support for, and encourage loyalty to the lifestyle expectations of the school's sponsoring faith tradition	Model and promote the culture and lifestyle of the school's sponsoring faith tradition and develop mentoring strategies
10.4 Mission and ethos	Attend and participate in meetings having a spiritual focus and/or Christian worship services, on a regular basis	Worship at, show support for, and contribute to the activities of a Christian church/fellowship on a continuing and regular basis, being a member of the "priest-hood of all-believers"	Build and maintain an ethos of Christian worship during school chapels or services, that honours an authentic relationship with God	Lead in organising and presenting worship services for students, parents, staff and the wider community for the school's sponsoring faith tradition
10.5 Guidelines, ethics and expectations	Demonstrate awareness and understanding of the mission and ethos of Christian schools	Support and implement the educational philosophy and mission of the school's sponsoring faith tradition	Monitor and review school practices, programs and policies to ensure they reflect the school's mission and ethos, and the broader principles of Christian education	Provide servant-hood leadership in promoting Christian education to parents, churches and the wider community and developing the school's ethos and accomplishing its mission
10.6 Fellowship	Know the basic governance, structure, and employment procedures of selected Christian schools/education systems	Act in harmony with the code of ethics and policies outlined in the school's/Christian education system's handbook	Support staff with expertise, advice and opportunities for interpreting and implementing policies perceptively	Take a leading role at the school level in policy assessment, review, and formation, in light of socio-economic and educational change

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profession gives them their identity and often provides them with an answer to the existential question: Who am I? Moreover, that professional groups perform an important socialising function; with their frames of reference, values and views frequently adopted by inductees, has been acknowledged in the literature.[21]

In contrast, teachers engaged in a teaching ministry, are led by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:14). In the first instance, they find their identity in Jesus Christ, and relate to a loving community of believers and colleagues who are able to provide, according to Heb 13:18, a powerful support group and prayer network.

Recognition and status: Scripture teaches that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). While the service of specialised teachers in Christian schools should be appreciated, caretakers, receptionists, gardeners, canteen workers, teacher aids and administrators, together *with* teachers, should be seen as valuable members who contribute to a whole-school teaching ministry.

Governance of conduct: The Australian College of Educators is typical of organisations that have a laudable code of ethics. The code spans a spectrum of values and consists of a "statement of broad principles regarding professional conduct to function both as guidance and ideals for members."[22] For Christian educators, the biblical concept of a 'covenant' might be a useful suggestion; providing a 'cameo' of general principles to guide their servanthood ministry. Teachers and members of the school community would put in writing their mutual commitment and accountability to each other and their Lord. In making a covenant they would agree, for example, to: Believe in the hope and forgiveness of Christ, live integrated Christian lives, listen to and pray for each other, communicate openly and honestly, show respect and sensitivity, work for the common good of the school community; among other pledges, some of which may be shared with a caring school community.

Acting in harmony with such a covenant and shaping one's pedagogy and relationships in line with the proposed teaching ministry standards, cannot be coerced. It is a voluntary decision by teachers who want to identify with, and commit to norms and values that are communally held. Agape love, according to Jesus, should characterise Christian relationships (John 13:35).

Power and control: 'To empower each other as servants of Christ' could also be included in the covenant of a school community. Those engaged in servant-hood ministry should promote the sharing of knowledge and skills; demonstrate inclusiveness; and empower and enable students, parents and community in the mental, social, physical, emotional and spiritual spheres of life, bearing in mind that Jesus is the vine and we—his disciples—are the branches (John 14:15). Also, teachers should never forget that in place of exercising power or control, they are to be channels of God's love and that their students are fellow citizens of God's kingdom; at the foot of the cross, all people are equal.

Teaching ministry: A point of departure

As predicated in the introduction, this domain and the attendant standards differ, *in essence*, from the existing mandated NPTS—despite their apparent conformity to NPST 'formatting'. The difference is notable in two *critical* areas: First, in their *philosophical conception*; and second, in their intended *implementation*.

The language of the NPST appears to be one of performativity; competence; technical knowledge, skills and tasks; and audit requirements, within what is often perceived as a bureaucratic framework.

> The use of technical or instrumental language assumes that ends or ultimate purposes and values are either already agreed upon and can be taken for granted or that they cannot be agreed upon and are best left out of consideration.[23]

Consequently, this means *how* we do things—rather than *why* they merit our efforts—becomes the focus of our attention.

In contrast, the proposed *teaching ministry standards* are spiritually and morally embedded. They embrace not only a biblical world view, but also, as David Smith advocates, view teaching as value-laden.

> [Teaching is] rooted in relation, above all, the relation between student and teacher; and relation in turn—the nature of our interactions with our fellow humans—is essentially moral in character… [A]ll teaching aims to change people; any attempt to change another person has to be done with the assumption, usually implicit, that the change will be for the better…[T]he decisions we make as teachers…ultimately also have to be based on moral rather than objective or scientific principles: That is…on what we believe is right and good…We recognise that our deepest and best instincts as teachers arise from belief or faith rather than pure logic.[24]

In what respects should the implementation of the proposed *teaching ministry standards* be different? It is not intended as another burdensome 'audit load' for teachers; an increase of 35%! Neither is it mandatory, prescriptive or exhaustive. It is *descriptive and illustrative* and should be regarded

> **Teaching ministry standards *should be regarded as a 'mirror' in which teachers in faith-based schools might collegially reflect on and closely examine their ministry of teaching***

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Such reflections, whether in pairs, groups, departments, or the whole staff may take various forms. The latter could range from observations, sharing of experiences, discussion and journaling, to colleague reviews, surveys, questionnaires, and feedback—formal and informal—from different 'insider' and 'outsider' stakeholders. The groups should also search for appropriate 'evidence' to authenticate their endeavours.

These reflexive exercises, whether *ad hoc* or generic, thus move from mere idealism to realistic, authentic practice.

Conclusion

What general conclusion can be reached in response to the initial question posed? It seems evident, the posited teaching ministry standards manifestly exclude the notion of a 'veneer of religiosity'. Instead, they are a challenge to engage in an authentic, transformative Christian teaching ministry.

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Finally, a postscript: With the publishing of The National Professional Standard for Principals,[25] just recently, in July 2011, an interesting complementary question arises. What might categories for an authentic, integrating *servant-hood leadership for principals* in Christian faith-based schools look like?

Endnotes

[1] See AITSL website: http://www.teacherstandards.aitsl.edu.au/Standards/Overview, retrieved on 27th June, 2011.

[2] For example, education bodies in Canada, Hong Kong and Scotland; also refer to websites listed on: http://www.wacot.wa.edu.au/index.php?section=51 ; retrieved on 16th November, 2010.

[3] The NPST may have a similar effect on teacher education courses (and those who 'deliver' them) as NAPLAN has on reported teaching practices in some schools. Refer to: Rieger, W. (2010). Pastoral care, action research, and teaching as a profession. *Teach Journal of Christian Education, 4*(1), 18–23.

[4] AITSL website, ibid.

[5] Reid, A., Cranston N., Keating, J. and Mulford, B. (2011). Bringing back the public purposes of education. *Professional Educator, 10*(4), 20–23.

[6] Schwartz, S. (2011). An address to the Australian College of Educators. Homebush, NSW, June 11.

[7] See http://www.cathnews.com/article.aspx?aeid=27465 ; retrieved on 18th August, 2011.

[8] Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians (2008). See Goal 2, p. 9; also: A commitment to action, p. 13.

[9] The *power* referred to here is not the Nietzchean 'will to power'—the sense of predominance and ambition—but potential cognitive, creative ability.

[10] White, E. (1903). *Education*. Mountain View, CAL: Pacific Press Publishing Association, p. 225.

[11] Moore, M. (2010). Seven defends outing, despite false claim. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, weekend edition, May 22–23, p. 11.

[12] Maley, J. (2010). Defrocked and fired. Ibid. p. 6.

[13] Proverbs 6:27, *Revised standard version.*

[14] Proverbs 4:23, ibid.

[15] Luke 6:43, *The Moffat New Testament*. London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton.

[16] The first draft of the '*teaching ministry*' domain was developed by the writer in 2006, during a consultancy with the Dept. Ed. of the SDA Church, Greater Sydney Conference. The 'graduate' category of the standards was developed jointly with members of the Faculty of Education, Avondale College.

[17] The writer draws here on his article published in *Adventist Professional, 9*(3), 7–11.

[18] Blomberg, D. (1993). The great commandment. *Nurture, 27*(4), p. 21.

[19] Manson, T. (1948). *The church's ministry.* London: Hodder and Stoughton.

[20] Brandt, R. (1993). On rethinking leadership: A conversation with Tom Sergiovanni. *Educational Leadership, 42*(2), 46–49.

[21] Redecop, C. (1982). Can I be a creative subversive? In Kraybill, D. and Good, P. (Eds.). *Perils of professionalism*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, pp. 220–221.

[22] The Australian College of Education (1992). Code of ethics. *Members handbook*. Canberra, ACT: ACE, pp. 4–5.

[23] Sullivan, J. Reading habits, scripture and the university. In Jeffrey, D. and Evans, C. (Eds.), (2007). *The Bible and the university.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 235.

[24] Smith, D. Biblical imagery and educational imagination, quoting B. Johnston, *Values in English language teaching*, 4–5, 9. In Jeffrey, D. and Evans, C. (Eds.), (2007). Ibid. p. 205.

[25] See the AITSL website, http://www.aitsl.edu.au