Leading the implementation of the standards in schools

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The introduction of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers represented a watershed moment in the history of national schooling reform. The Standards are already having a significant impact reshaping the professional lives of teachers and school leaders, with many positive examples emerging across the country of positive transformative change occurring. The continued successful implementation of the Standards hinges to a large extent on the role of school leaders, who play a crucial role in ensuring ongoing engagements with the standards in schools. School leaders are the number one factor in ensuring meaningful and sustainable implementation of the Standards in schools.

In a forthcoming OEL Workshop, Dr. Glenn C. Savage, Senior Lecturer and Research Fellow in Education Policy at the University of Melbourne, will draw upon an extensive body of research conducted into the implementation of the Standards across Australia. Dr. Savage will provide unique insights into existing research evidence and will engage participants in activities designed to enhance their understanding of the standards and the key factors that influence positive uptake in schools. The workshop will mix ‘theory and practice’, connecting the latest research evidence to practical strategies that school leaders can use to support and facilitate the implementation of the Standards at their school.

Research Evidence

Dr. Savage is a Principal Investigator on a large-scale research project titled Evaluation of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. The project was commissioned by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and conducted by the Centre for Program Evaluation (CPE) at the University of Melbourne. The research involved a three-year evaluation to assess the usefulness, effectiveness and impact of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Three major data collection activities were conducted, including: A National Forum, including interviews and workshops with high level stakeholders; two National Surveys, each including over 6,000 teachers, school leaders, pre-service teachers and teacher educators; and Case Studies conducted in 53 schools and organisations.

Context for implementation

The implementation of teaching standards is a shared responsibility that takes place in a complex national system, with different roles for governments, school sectors, regulatory authorities, school leaders and teachers. The session will analyse the ‘implementation ecology’ of the Standards, exploring the roles and relationships between diverse stakeholders involved in the process of embedding the Standards in teaching practice. The session will highlight the importance of school leaders, who must work in conjunction with various stakeholders, and who have crucial roles as ‘change agents’ in the implementation process.

Knowledge and use of the standards

Successful uptake and implementation of the standards hinges to a large extent on: a) whether school leaders and teachers understand the standards; b) their attitudes towards the standards, and c) their experiences using the standards. The research suggests that deep levels of understanding, paired with positive attitudes and experiences, will lead to sustained engagement with the standards. On the flipside, a lack of understanding, negative attitudes and unsatisfactory experiences will lead to disengagement. The session will focus on the importance of increasing awareness of
the standards in schools, generating positive learning experiences for school leaders and teachers in relation to the standards, and will explore strategies for facilitating effective use and experimentation in schools.

The impact of the standards on teaching practice

The standards are being used in a diverse range of ways across the nation and are impacting in significant ways upon the daily lives of school leaders and teachers. However, the standards do not impact upon all teachers and school leaders in the same way, with clear differences evident between schools. The session will explore the wide range of impacts emerging from the implementation of the standards. The session will focus on the importance of school leaders in positioning teachers to use the standards for developmental purposes, and will caution against using the standards in overly punitive ways.

Factors that facilitate positive use

A broad range of stakeholders influences the implementation of the standards. Multiple factors can either support or hinder the implementation of the standards in schools. The session will focus on key ‘facilitating factors’ for successful implementation, including: school culture, readiness, whole-school approaches, collaboration and communication, teacher engagement, targeted resourcing, and appropriate forms of monitoring and evaluation. Specific attention will be given to the role of school leaders in driving the reform and strategies will be offered for embedding ‘facilitating factors’ in schools.

Sharing ‘best practice’ and accessing resources

A wide range of effective practices is emerging across the nation. In turn, a rich body of resources is also emerging to help school leaders and teachers engage effectively with the standards. The session will highlight examples of ‘best practice’ generated by the evaluation project and will offer participants opportunities to share examples of effective practice from their schools.

About the author

Glenn C Savage is a Senior Lecturer in Education Policy and an ARC DECRA Fellow (2016-18) in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. His research focuses on education policy, politics and governance at national and global levels, with a specific interest in federalism, intergovernmental relations, and policies relating to curriculum, equity, school funding and standards-based reform.

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