



**Lucille Flegg remembers good times at school and thinks Teaching Standards should reflect our high-quality, high-status profession...**

## My favourite teachers

When I look back at some of the key experiences I had as a student in the NSW public education system, it is with fondness that I remember the teachers who really made a difference to me. Below are some special memories:

### *Year 6*

The teacher brought in Cynthia Voigt's *Homecoming*. I remember how she pulled me aside before lunch and carefully gifted me the volume and explained she wanted to extend me beyond the novels in the classroom; it was to become my favourite book for a time.

### *Year 8*

Mathematical concepts suddenly made sense! I distinctly recall how proud I felt when I realised I could actually succeed in Mathematics across Year 8 and Year 9, and it was the teacher's explanations which made a difference for me.

### *Year 10*

The teachers spent days and nights preparing for and making possible my cherished opportunities to perform scenes from *Macbeth*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at my school's annual Shakespeare Day and Shakespeare Night events.

We know there has always been good teaching in NSW.

My experiences above, and many more, were made possible by the dedication of just a few of the intellectual, hard-working educators in our state. This article emphasises an approach to teacher accreditation that recognises the holistic nature of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards), and suggests that they should always be utilised with one goal in mind: quality teaching for every child in every classroom.

## What's in a Standard?

For the majority of my schooling, there were no published teaching standards in NSW, and my teachers did not have any accreditation requirements to meet. So, if I remember such good experiences as a student prior to accreditation requirements, what is the purpose of the Standards?

When I look back, the good teaching I can remember so clearly aligns with the Standards that have become second nature to me now. The Standards are a public statement of what constitutes quality



teaching. There is power in having such a thing written down. Closer to home, at the beginning of each year, many people write down with pen and paper their new year's resolutions. The familiar act of seeing goals on the page makes them concrete, and we often feel more accountable in meeting them.

In reading each of the thirty-seven Standard Descriptors for the Proficient Teacher career stage (the required level of accreditation all NSW teachers must reach), it becomes clear that what is intended is a holistic description of high-quality practitioners; just like the ones I had when I was a child, without the mystery of a 'feeling' or 'instinct' of what some good practices might be.

## Becoming a teacher

I decided to become a teacher when I was completing my HSC. I wanted to provide to others what my teachers had provided for me. I became passionate about my content areas in large part because of some key teachers in high school. When I made the choice to study teaching, I didn't think about the Standards at all, but they came to be an intrinsic part of the journey ahead.

As a teacher, I found that I used the Standards more and more as I developed my practice. When I was working towards my accreditation, my goal was not about finishing it, but it was always about becoming a better teacher for my students. This goal remained unchanged after I achieved my Proficient Teacher accreditation (or Professional Competence as it was then).

In working towards my goal of becoming a better teacher, I observed my more experienced colleagues and learnt from them. I self-reflecting when assessing student progress and allowed this to inform future decisions. When I wasn't sure how to adapt my practice, I asked for help. When things didn't go well, I asked myself, 'what should I do now?'. I changed my approach to programming over time to allow for more meaningful, long-term learning experiences for my students. I sought professional development as a matter of course and applied what I learned.

While doing these (and other) things, I also kept items that I thought might be useful for accreditation. Then, when I reflected on the Standards and thought I was ready, I began the process with my Head Teacher of selecting the items from my collection which gave an overall snapshot of my practice.

The journey was not about the accreditation requirements, but about becoming a better teacher over time. The Standards defined what this looked like; they allowed me to pinpoint the effective teaching I observed in others. Having the Standards documented as a reference for what exemplary teaching looks like was helpful to me. It meant that I could more readily define what I needed to work on, and improve accordingly.

This constant refinement may have happened naturally over time, yet without the Standards as an authoritative guide, my development may have been more challenging, taken significantly longer, and possibly become misguided or vulnerable to educational fads.



## Better together

Significantly, the process of developing my practice against the Standards and becoming accredited gave me scheduled opportunities to work with my supervisor. Structured conversations around my practice helped immensely in reflecting on how I was going, and what I needed to work on. For my early career colleagues, the Standards guarantee these valuable conversations occur as part of our induction to the profession.

Having had this experience also aided me when supervising others later in my career. The Standards provide an anchor to frame professional discussions, facilitating meaningful feedback for professional growth. I also learned some fantastic practices from those I supervised in how to meet the Standards in different ways which I could bring to my own classroom.

Thus, meeting the Standards is not a static goal but an ongoing one. The Standard Descriptors remain crucial to me, and the conversations I have with teachers now who are working towards Proficient Teacher accreditation continue to centre on refining practice against the Standards to maximise student learning outcomes.

## Tips for your accreditation

To all the teachers out there working towards Proficient Teacher accreditation, my best advice is to approach the journey as an opportunity to develop your teaching practice over time with the structured support that all professionals need and deserve when starting a career. This is the main purpose of accreditation, and the majority of your timeframe will involve developing your practice against the Standards. If you start with a focus on your practice and the Standards, the rest will follow. Other suggestions include:

- Talk to your supervisor early in the process so that you are both on the same page and so that you have ample time to receive and apply feedback from them to continually refine your practice. Also, remember that you can draw upon other colleagues around you for feedback and advice on how you are going.
- Be aware of the requirements for accreditation, so that you have a clear understanding of what you are working towards. All the information you need is on the [NESA website](#), and you should read this carefully before you begin the process of finalising your accreditation. You should also be aware of any employer-based requirements around accreditation, and speak to your supervisor or principal if you are unsure.



- Remember that the evidence needed to become accredited at Proficient Teacher will occur naturally as you do the day-to-day activities that come with being a teacher. The items of documentary evidence used for accreditation should be a genuine reflection of your practice, so hold onto items after you have used them, for example, program excerpts with your adjustments noted throughout and student work samples including your feedback. Also, remember to utilise the resources available on the NESA website, including the [Evidence Guide for the Proficient Teacher Standards](#).
- Start with your practice when selecting your final evidence. When you know you are meeting Standards, select items of evidence that demonstrate this. This will put you in better stead to write meaningful annotations that explain how the evidence you have selected demonstrates the Standard Descriptors.

Most importantly, do not be afraid to ask for help or advice from those around you, or from NESA. The accreditation process is about inducting the newest members of our profession with the support of others, and with the support of the Standards so that you know how to recognise good teaching practices, can improve your own teaching, and confidently join our important profession.

*Lucille Flegg is a Policy Officer at the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). Her role focuses on quality assurance processes for teacher accreditation at Proficient Teacher. Lucille also supports schools, principals and teachers to implement NESA's teacher accreditation policies. Lucille is committed to quality teaching against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the provision of opportunities for the continual growth of teachers over the course of their careers. Lucille has been a Modern History, Ancient History and Society and Culture teacher and a Relieving Head Teacher in south western Sydney. She has experience mentoring early career teachers through their first years of teaching and has delivered professional development within her local community of schools.*

Contact NESA for enquiries about accreditation by emailing [PTenquiry@nesa.nsw.edu.au](mailto:PTenquiry@nesa.nsw.edu.au) or calling 1300 739 338.