

Looking for teacher-librarians in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

By Pru Mitchell

While the Australian Curriculum may be slowly making its presence felt amongst rank and file Australian teachers, an associated Australian government policy initiative – the **Australian Professional Standards for Teachers** – has generated rather less discussion. This is interesting considering how long teacher standards have been in development. This article provides an overview of national teaching standards and asks where Australian teacher-librarians fit into the current standards framework.

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers Timeline

The table below summarises some key milestones in the process of developing Australian teacher standards, leading to the current iteration delivered by the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in 2011. It also records the work done by professional associations during this period.

Year	Australian Government	Professional Associations
1996	National Competency Framework for Beginning Teachers was developed in an attempt to establish a national basic teacher qualification and to improve portability across states and territories	
1998		ALIA Library and Information Sector: Core Knowledge, Skills and Attributes set out core knowledge, skills, and attributes for those who work in the library and information sector
2000	Australian Government Quality Teacher Project was launched to fund research and teacher professional development projects, including professional standards	
2001	Ministerial Council established a Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership Taskforce to “foster national collaboration to enhance the status and quality of the teaching profession”	Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) produced STELLA: Standards for Teachers of English and Literacy in Australia describing “what good English/Literacy teachers believe, know and are able to do”
2002		Australian College of Educators (ACE) convened a national meeting of professional educators to raise awareness of professional standards and document the priorities of the teaching profession
2002		Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers (AAMT) published Standards for Excellence in Teaching Mathematics in Australia
2002		Australian Science Teachers Association’s (ASTA) tested their Professional Standards for Highly Accomplished Teachers of Science

2002		A Standards for Teacher-librarians project was proposed by the ALIA/ASLA joint policy task force
2003	National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching was endorsed by Education Ministers	
2004	Australian government-funded and established the National Institute of Quality Teaching and School Leadership (NIQTSL) "to act by and for the teaching profession and to raise the status, quality, and professionalism of teachers and school leaders throughout Australia"	Australian School Library Association(ASLA) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) joint publication Standards of Professional Excellence for Teacher-librarians was adopted by ALIA and ASLA
2005	NIQTSL was renamed Teaching Australia	Australian School Library Association(ASLA) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) joint publication Standards of Professional Excellence for Teacher-librarians was launched
2008	Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 2008 National partnership on improving teacher quality was signed	
2009	Development of current standards commenced	
2010 Mar - May	National Professional Standards for Teachers Consultation was held	
2010 June	Draft National Professional Standards for Teachers 2010 Consultation Report was released	
2010 July - Nov	Validation of the standards was conducted by the University of New England's SiMERR National Centre	
2011	National Professional Standards for Teachers was released National Professional Standard for Principals was released (July 2011)	National Professional Standards for Teachers Professional Associations Training Day was held to engage teacher professional associations in development of support materials
April	Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers in Australia policy released Name of standards changed to Australian Professional Standards for Teachers	ASLA/ALIA Policy Advisory Project Team commenced working on a Teacher-librarian context and evidence document
2013	Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers was due to commence in most states	SLAV Council members workshop was held to consider evidence for Victorian teacher-librarians ASLA/ALIA Policy Advisory Project Team presented a draft of the Teacher-librarian Context document for Highly Accomplished

Why should teacher-librarians care about professional standards?

Standards are not new to our profession; however, mandated standards may be new to many. The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and Australian School Library Association (ASLA) *Standards of Professional Excellence for Teacher-Librarians* were adopted in 2004 and 'represent the goals to which all teacher-librarians should aspire, and provide inspiration for quality teaching and ongoing professional practice.' These were voluntary, self-regulated standards specific to the teacher-librarianship context.

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There are a number of ways in which mandatory teacher professional standards may be used by teacher-librarians, including

- to meet legislative requirements
- to get (or keep) a job
- to improve your practice and continuous learning
- to grow your professionalism and the profession
- to provide an example of what a teacher-librarian is, knows and does
- as a feedback tool, both professional and personal
- to improve student learning.

Where do teacher-librarians sit in the Australian Standards for Teachers?

Despite being a national initiative, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers will initially mean different things to different states, systems, sectors and schools. Implementation of the standards is the responsibility of state and territory teacher registration bodies, such as the **Victorian Institute of Teachers** and the **Queensland College of Teachers**, in conjunction with employers. Teachers moving between states and between systems will need to continue to check local policies and requirements as the standards are phased in across Australia.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers will not however mean different things to teachers in different subject areas, specialisations or those working at different levels of schooling. The standards developed by many professional association including the ASLA-ALIA standards, and overseas bodies such as the **US National Board of Professional Teaching Standards** (NBPTS) recognise such differences by producing contextualised standards. AITSL however is required to treat all teachers the same way, regardless of level of schooling, size of school, geographic location, socio-economic status of students, specialised context or specialist teaching area.

So how do teacher-librarians (or science teachers, or early childhood specialists) find their place in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers?

So how do teacher-librarians (or science teachers, or early childhood specialists) find their place in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers? This question will remain unanswered until we start working within the standards framework and start sharing our experiences and solutions.

What is standards-referenced professional learning?

For experienced teachers, their first encounters with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers are likely to be through standards-referenced professional learning activities and the teacher registration renewal process in their state or territory. For example, the **Victorian Institute of Teachers Renewal of Registration** (2012) instructions for re-registering teachers states that:

Teachers are required to undertake at least 100 hours of professional development activities in the five years leading up to their due date for renewal of registration.

All activities must have a reference to the standards of professional practice.

At least half the activities must provide access to research and knowledge sourced from outside the immediate school or work environment.

The balance of activities can come from either more activities providing access to research and knowledge sourced from outside the immediate school environment or activities teachers identify as contributing to their professional practice,

knowledge or well-being.

The Queensland College of Teachers **Continuing Professional Development Framework** (2012) which became policy for Queensland renewing teachers on 1 January 2013 contains requirements that teacher professional development should demonstrate a balance across the following identified areas:

- employer directed and supported CPD
- school supported CPD
- teacher identified CPD; and
- a range of types of CPD activities

Professional associations as providers of professional learning need to reconsider their programmes in the light of professional standards, and AITSL is making clear statements about the types of professional learning it recognises as likely to have an impact on classroom practice (Cole 2012, p. 6):

- The professional learning focus is on the implementation of teaching strategies and mastery of teaching techniques rather than on the acquisition of educational knowledge (e.g. new theories, new policies and new research findings)
- Individual, group and whole school professional learning plans are structured around actions designed to promote precision teaching by skilling teachers in the use of evidence-based micro-teaching strategies and techniques rather than around generic professional learning goals linked to annual performance management processes

The whole standards-referenced professional learning philosophy could be summed up in the sixth standard of the original Victorian Institute of Teachers standards.

Teachers reflect on, evaluate and improve their professional practice.

It is not the hours spent in standards-referenced professional learning activity that improves professional practice, but the reflection on that activity that produces learning.

Teacher-librarians are encouraged to take a leadership role within their school in this area, and there are practical activities available from AITSL including **Professional Learning Charter stimulus cards** that you could use in a team meeting or staff meeting.

What's this about certification?

Graduate teacher entry level standards are the responsibility of initial teacher education programs in universities, and along with recognition of overseas and interstate teachers it is accreditation of graduate teachers which has thus far been the main concern of the state-based teacher registration bodies. **Graduate teacher standards** and the procedures for beginning teacher registration are now largely sorted, and attention is turning to the other career stages, namely **Proficient, Highly Accomplished** and **Lead teachers**.

While the Proficient teacher standards are mandatory, the Highly Accomplished and Lead teacher standards are voluntary. A 'rigorous and transparent, national certification' process for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers was endorsed by Education Ministers in April 2012. As the ASLA-ALIA standards were clearly written as aspirational - for exemplary teacher-librarians or the equivalent of the AITSL Highly accomplished career stage, it is likely that many teacher-librarians will be looking at whether the certification process is relevant to them.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is working in partnership with certifying authorities in the development of the national Assessor Training Program for certification. According to AITSL the proposed approach to the **certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers** is informed by five principles:

1. **Standards-based:** Certification is against the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*.
2. **Student-improvement focused:** Certification recognises those teachers who are highly effective in promoting student learning, engagement and wellbeing. Evidence of student outcomes is central to the certification process.
3. **Development driven:** Certification is part of a wider teacher development approach that includes professional learning, and performance management and development.
4. **Credible:** Certification is credible when assessments of teacher performance are based on rigorous, valid, reliable, fair and transparent measures and processes.
5. **Evidence-based:** Certification must be built on evidence-based practice and contribute to the development of evidence about what works in promoting and recognising teacher quality.

Teachers considering working towards certification at the highly accomplished or lead teacher level are encouraged to start the process by using the **self assessment tool** developed by AITSL.

What evidence is required?

If you were asked to produce the evidence that showed you meet professional teaching standards, and were a fit person to hold a teacher-librarian position in an Australian school, how would you fare? Where is your evidence? How are you recording professional learning? What are you keeping, and what should you be keeping?

Collecting and presenting evidence is possibly our major challenge, especially in the current environment where requirements, purposes, mandate and timeline have not yet been determined for most of us. It is becoming increasingly important that teachers take control of this evidence and not leave it to employers, registration bodies or even professional associations. Now is a good time to get started and to consider presentation options for that evidence.

E-portfolios, professional blogs or journals are some of the ways that teachers are recording, presenting and sharing evidence of their professional learning. Jarrod Lamshed's (2013) **Connected Learning blog** demonstrates one effective strategy by tagging blog posts with standards terminology.

An excellent resource that has been developed for Victorian teacher-librarians is **VIT Standards and teacher-librarian practice** (2012) compiled by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and Victorian Catholic Teacher-librarians (VCTL) Working Party on VIT Standards. This provides practice and evidence pointers for each of the standards indicators, for both primary and secondary school teacher-librarians. These pointers could be readily adapted by teacher-librarians in other states to the national standards. The ASLA/ALIA Context for Teacher-librarians document should also be available this year.

What resources are available?

There is a wealth of resources to support implementation of the standards published on the **AITSL website** and its associated sites. This article provides a path through some of these resources and ties them into ideas for teacher-librarians seeking to find their place in professional teaching standards. This is a site to investigate in depth. Professional associations pushed to be included as much as possible in this process, and have been involved in projects to develop supporting materials.

AITSL Clearinghouse

AITSL provides a **Research Clearinghouse** with over 750 recent articles, blog posts, research and other resources aimed at school leaders. Notice the search facets down the right hand side to get a picture of the content types and topics provided within the Clearinghouse and consider how you can bring these to the attention of teachers and leaders. Some of the resources to which the Clearinghouse links are not publicly available but may be accessed on a pay-per-view basis, subscription basis, or 'by some other means'. It is arguably the school library's role to source these resources for their school leadership team and for teachers undertaking professional development.

Teacher-librarians on AITSL

There is a growing body of material featuring the work of teacher-librarians using the standards being published by AITSL.

- **Primary Teacher of the Year 2011 – Jo Sherrin** from Northern Territory
- **Highly Accomplished: Information literacy** Anne Girolami at Mercy College, Coburg
- **Lead teacher: New Zealand Exchange**
- **Fact or fiction**
- **Engaging readers**

How will we know when we get there?

The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood (2012) **Discussion paper** on *New Directions for School Leadership and the Teaching Profession* sums up what we are looking to gain from the introduction of national professional standards for teachers.

- Evidence supporting teaching standards and achievement against them is sound, easily accessible and used systematically.
- Evaluation of teacher performance is rigorous and fair, and includes localised feedback from peers and students.
- There is a shared understanding of what good teaching looks like and how it is measured.

- All teachers are motivated to improve, and consistent underperformance is addressed.
- High performing teachers are recognised and rewarded (p. 25)

What can we do?

Firstly, follow @AITSL on Twitter or Facebook and ensure you stay up-to-date with new resources, and more importantly with changes to policy and procedures around the professional standards agenda.

Secondly, start collecting evidence of your own professional practice and sharing this with colleagues. There is no point, in a national standards environment, in everyone starting from scratch and developing their own professional learning, standards mapping and resources. Teacher-librarians and their professional associations are strongly encouraged to start sharing their standards-referenced practice via social bookmarking, blogs, workshops and documentation of evidence, to both reduce the workload and more importantly to enhance the professional practice of teacher-librarians nationally.

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