‘She Just Blends and Just Comes Down to Our Level and Communicates with Us Like We’re People’:

Students’ Perceptions of Quality Teaching and Teaching Standards

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This paper explores the current interest in teacher professional standards from the viewpoint of contextual frameworks. The paper has two distinct sections, the first, suggests a typology of frameworks in which teacher standards might be examined and briefly identifies the significant voices which are heard within these frameworks. The second, examines in detail the most neglected of these frameworks, the learners’ framework. This section captures the voices of students as they identify what in the lived world of their learning experiences constitutes quality teaching and the concomitant standards which constitute such teaching.

National and state-based teacher standards have recently been developed in Australia as a result of the growing research evidence that quality teaching has a significant impact on student achievement. The provenance of the renewed interest in teacher standards can be located in the accountability movement of the first half of the twentieth century and the competency-based movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. This latter attempt at identifying the characteristics of quality teaching adopted a behaviourist competency approach which attempted to identify the discrete skills associated with teaching. This movement was unsuccessful because isolating teaching competence into
its smallest constituent parts did not provide a useable, holistic conceptualisation of teachers' work. Recently in Australia a more integrated vision of teachers' work is evident in the 'National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching' (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment and Training, 2003) and 'Draft Professional Teaching Standards' in NSW (Interim Committee of the Institute of Teachers, 2003)

In this paper I argue that what has been missing from the discussions on teacher standards are the voices of students, the major stakeholders in quality teaching and hence in teacher standards. Further I suggest that why this has occurred is that teaching standards are discussed within what I call contextual frameworks and it is rarely the learners' framework in which these discussions take place. A typology of the contextual frameworks in which discussions of teaching standards might be positioned includes:

- the historical, policy frame
- the professional frame
- the epistemological frame
- the school frame
- the learners' frame.

These frames are of course interrelated, however, positioning the discussion within one frame focuses attention on the dominant voices within that frame, thus ensuring which voices are included and excluded. For example, the historical, policy frame focuses on government and economic interests as major stakeholders, with some voice given to teachers in the identification, development and implementation of standards. In the professional frame the focus of the discussion shifts to the process of professionalising teachers' work and here the identification of teacher standards is seen as a way for teaching to become more widely regarded as a profession. Here the policy voices still dominate but are joined by the voices of academics and teachers. The epistemological frame centres the discussion on the nature of teachers' knowledge base and on the voices of academic researchers. In the school frame the discussion hinges on situated practice and gives voice to school administrators who focus on the standards required in teachers' daily practice within school communities. The final frame in this typology is the learners' frame. It is only here in students' lived experiences that their voices become the pivot of the standards discussion. Initially I will examine the way different frames change the discussion about standards before exploring in detail the learners' frame in the second part of the paper.

DISCUSSION FRAMEWORKS

The historical, policy frame

The historical, policy frame draws attention to recurring issues of accountability, state regulation of teaching and more recently quality teaching. Within this frame quality teaching is seen to be provided by highly qualified teachers, identified as those teachers
with certification based on state determined standards (Cochran-Smith, 2003a, p. 96). These standards are arrived at through government established inquiries and committees which privilege the voices of political and economic interests although giving some voice to teachers. Within this frame, however, the complexity of quality teaching is frequently overlooked and it is assumed that the standards-based reform of teaching is straightforward (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004).

In NSW the link between quality teaching and teaching standards has been identified in The Department of Education and Training’s discussion paper, ‘Quality teaching in NSW public schools’ (2003) and in a number of reports and reviews, for example, Ramsey Review (2000) and Vinson Inquiry (2002). Following recommendations from Ramsey and Vinson the NSW state government in 2002 established the Interim Committee of the Institute of Teachers. This committee, after initiating discussions with teacher focus groups and working parties and liaising with US experts in teacher standards, identified seven teacher standards:

- Teachers know their subject content and how to teach that content to their students
- Teachers know their students and how they learn
- Teachers plan, assess and report for effective learning
- Teachers communicate effectively with their students
- Teachers create and maintain safe and challenging learning environments through the use of classroom management
- Teachers continually improve their professional knowledge and practice
- Teachers are actively engaged members of their profession and the wider community (Interim Committee of the Institute of Teachers, 2003).

The first three standards identify professional knowledge, the fourth and fifth professional practice and the remaining two standards relate to professional commitment (Page, 2004).

These standards represent a structured hierarchy of four stages representing different career benchmarks for teachers. Graduate standards are those standards with which it is expected that students will graduate from teacher training programmes. Professional competence is the stage at which teachers will be fully accredited to work in NSW schools. There is no time factor built into the standards, however, it is anticipated that this initial level of competence will be reached within the first two years of beginning professional practice (Page, 2004). The next stage is professional accomplishment where teachers’ competence is attested to by colleagues. The final stage is professional leadership where teachers articulate, amongst other things, a vision of education. Identifying and implementing standards is one way of improving the status of teaching and for this reason this frame is closely associated with the professional frame.
The professional frame

The professional frame shifts the focus of the standards discussion to the process of professionalisation, that is, the process by which teaching, like other so-called ‘new professions’ (Etzioni, 1969) seek professional status. The research literature on the professions, for example, Hoyle & John (1995), Eraut (1994), Perkins (1989), and Dingwell & Lewis (1983) indicates that the identification, development and implementation of professional standards founded on a professional knowledge base is a necessary ingredient in the professionalisation process. Concomitant with the establishment of standards is the creation of a credentialing authority, such as, the proposed Institute of Teachers in NSW, to act as a professional gate-keeper. Such credentialing authorities regulate initial admission to the profession and control advancement within the profession. It is in this professional frame that Cochran-Smith (2003a, p. 96) suggests that quality teachers are seen as those with certification, which means with subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and the ability to make decisions based on research and practice.

The epistemological frame

The epistemological frame is closely linked with the professional frame for it is here that the nature of teachers’ knowledge base is scrutinised. There is a considerable literature on the knowledge base of teaching, however, because of the brevity of this examination I will draw only on the work of Shulman (1987) and Hiebert, Gallimore & Stigler (2002). Shulman identified the following categories of teachers’ knowledge:

- Content knowledge
- General pedagogical knowledge
  (the broad principles and strategies of the classroom)
- Curriculum knowledge
- Pedagogical content knowledge
  (the amalgam of content and knowledge unique to teaching)
- Knowledge of learners
- Knowledge of educational contexts
- Knowledge of educational ends.

These broad knowledge categories identified by Shulman distinguish teachers’ knowledge from the knowledge bases underpinning other professional practices. That is, these categories are what constitutes teachers’ knowledge.

A somewhat different approach to an analysis of teachers’ knowledge is provided by Hiebert et al. (2002) who differentiate between what they call ‘practitioner knowledge’ and professional knowledge. Practitioner knowledge is that knowledge generated by teachers through active participation and reflection on their own practice. This knowledge has three characteristics: it is linked with practice, it is detailed, concrete and
specific and it is integrated. However, if this knowledge is to become professional knowledge and hence the accepted knowledge base of the profession then it must be made public, be storable and shareable and must be accurate, verifiable and continually improved (Hiebert et al., 2002, 7-8). Epistemological interrogations of teachers’ work, such as those of Shulman and Hiebert et al., are significant in identifying the knowledge base that underpins teacher standards.

The school frame

The school frame draws attention to the operationalisation of standards, that is, to the practitioner knowledge identified and defined by Hiebert et al. (2002). Within this frame school administrators, for example, focus on the standards required in the daily life of teachers. It is this frame and the daily life of teachers in schools that Apple (1996) argues receives scant attention in the development of standards. This neglect Ballantyne et al. (1998) have helped redress with their interviews of principals in Queensland schools. This research established the following conceptualisations of beginning teacher competencies:

- Having a particular type of personality
- Being a subject expert
- Being a skilled manager
- Having a professional approach
- Having control of the class.

Not all principals placed equal emphasis on all competencies and the research found that different principals had different understandings of competence. Furthermore, these understandings were informed by their preconceived ideas and preceded their judgement of beginning teacher competence (Ballantyne et al., 1998, p. 6). Moreover, a disturbing discovery considering the key role of principals in determining beginning teacher competence, was that ‘competence means whatever the principal wants it to mean’ (Ballantyne et al., 1998, p. 2). That is, according to Ballantyne et al. (1998, p. 7) the most successful beginning teacher is the one who best fits the conception of competence held by a particular principal, ‘competence is thus demonstrated by modelling oneself on the principal’ (Bartlett, 1992, cited in Ballantyne et al., 1998, p. 7). This of course has serious implications for the implementation of standards and the role of school principals in the standards process.

The learners’ frame

Finally the learners’ frame, and the focus of the second part of this paper, engages learners’ voices, voices not heard in the standards discussions in the other frames within the typology suggested above. This is not restricted to the Australian context and Cochran-Smith (2003b) argues that discussions of teacher standards ignore the teaching of real students in actual classrooms in the context of particular times and places.
THE LEARNERS' FRAMEWORK

The learners' frame is the last frame in the typology, potentially the most significant and certainly the most neglected. Rowe (2003, p. 22) argues that this neglect is a cause of some unease because there is so little research evidence of quality teaching from the students' perspective. There has been work in South Australia by Slade (2002) and Slade and Trent (2000) in which students were interviewed about good teaching and the research found that 'good teachers make all the difference' (cited in Rowe, 2003, p. 23). The research evidence presented in this section of the paper makes a significant contribution to this lacunae in the discussion of teacher standards because not only does it draw on the perspective of students but also because the findings come from a three year in-depth study conducted by the author as a teacher-researcher (Scanlon, 2002).

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

The research was situated within the Tertiary Preparation Certificate (TPC) a TAFE equivalent to the Higher School Certificate (HSC) in a pre-vocational or general education section of a large urban TAFE college in NSW. This course was inaugurated in NSW in 1983 and in 1995 was reaccredited in a competency-based format and was designed to provide successful students with an alternative entry to university. The shift to a competency-based format, which was the impetus for the research, introduced a number of new elements into the course and in order to contextualise the research and position students' voices within the course context it is important to briefly outline these elements.

The first element was the research based nature of many course subjects, second and closely related was the extensive use of assessment criteria and third, and again related, was the authentication of college marked assessments by verification panels composed of teachers from across NSW. This last element was particularly significant because it ensured that teachers' curriculum and assessment practices were publicly evaluated by their peers. Not only that but through the verification process students too became aware of their teachers' practices and whether or not these practices assisted them in achieving learning success within the course.

The nature of the course and the context of the college determined both the educational and socio-economic profile of students. The students were drawn from the local area of the college and so represented the socio-economic profile of the area which was one of economic hardship. All were young adults and most were recipients of either social security benefits or worked to support their study. More than half the students had children, and over three-quarters of these students were single parents. As well none of the students had completed their school education and did not initially see themselves as successful learners. They all reported negative school learning experiences and indicated that these experiences had not been assisted by teachers 'who just threw facts at us' or 'somehow had too much power over us'.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The student's voices heard in the following examination of teaching standards were captured in recorded conversations with students over a three year period. The principal focus of the research was to examine students' learning experiences within a general education, competency-based curriculum. However, in recounting these experiences students revealed a deep understanding of their own learning needs and the kinds of teachers who could support these needs. It was from these students' accounts that I extrapolated the set of standards identified by students as indicative of quality teaching.

TEACHER STANDARDS: THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

The research evidence presented below is quite rare because, as Rowe (2002, p. 23) argues, we do not have synthesised accounts in their own words of students' actual perceptions and experiences of good teaching. Students identified five standards that teachers should engage with if they are to provide students with quality teaching:

- Interpret the curriculum
- Possess subject and pedagogical expertise
- Create an interesting learning situation
- Engage in effective communication
- Understand students' needs

These standards represent an holistic view of quality teaching from the students' perspective. Students expected individual teachers to possess a synthesis of these standards and in this the students were unlike the principals who tended to favour particular standards (Ballantyne et al., 1998). What follows is a detailed account, using students' own voices, of each of these standards. What becomes evident in this examination is the complex nature of learners' needs, the significance of teachers in accommodating these needs and the ability of learners to articulate these needs.

Interpret the curriculum

The emphasis placed on curriculum interpretation is seen in students' descriptions of how teachers 'explained', 'went through', 'interpreted', 'simplified' and 'clarified' the language of the curriculum. Here students were concerned with the intended curriculum manifested in syllabus documents. In these interpretive efforts, as James explained, teachers 'give us their version of it' or as Kate commented, teachers 'write their own little thing about it'. Curriculum interpretation was critical to quality learning because students found the curriculum language arcane. Curriculum interpretation as we have seen was a public and visible teacher activity because of the evaluation of teachers' interpretations by the verification panels. These panels were the gatekeepers of curriculum
interpretations and hence of teachers’ credibility as interpreters of the curriculum.

The following students’ comments are indicative of the frustration that curriculum language caused students and explains why they were so dependent on teachers.

It’s too complicated. Why can’t it be easy? Like, “Hello! Explain it to me 10,000 frigging times”. (Matthew)

The language is like a bunch of crusty old fogies saying, “Let’s use all this complex jargon”. Only the teachers will understand this shit. I think it’s deliberate. No one can understand it. (Jack)

The language is hard to understand and they’re really wordy and you read it and say, “What the hell’s that mean?”. (Stephanie)

The way it’s written it’s not helpful. I don’t think it’s been written for students. I think that the language they’re using is wrong. I mean, if you can’t understand the syllabus how can you understand your topic you’ve picked. (John)

The curriculum documents about which students were so concerned were intended for teachers’ and for students’ use but were written in such a way that most students were reliant on teacher interpretation. Some students were so frustrated that they suggested that the abstruse nature of the language was deliberate. The difficulty of the curriculum language, however, did not prevent students from attempting their own interpretations and Sarah described her attempts.

The language, you have to sit there and break it down, you really do. Even when you break it down into your own language, that doesn’t necessarily mean that your thoughts are right. You see, you have to clarify it with the teacher. (Sarah)

Even after this process, Sarah was still reliant on the teacher as the final arbiter of interpretation. Danny had more success than Sarah but he still relied on teachers as interpreters.

When you talk it over slowly with someone else and the teachers explain it, it’s OK. When you pull it apart you think, “Why was I so stupid?” It’s so easy. It is written in a text like a teacher has written it, it’s written in a certain way. (Danny)

Danny found the language less mysterious once interpreted by the teacher, but this was in retrospect and he continued to depend on teachers throughout the course.

There were some students who had less difficulty with the language than others, for example, Patrick commented, ‘They’re a bit formal but nothing you can’t understand.’ Shirley also felt that, except for a few words, most of the subjects were ‘OK’. Hannah found that the ‘language didn’t sink in’ but once she read the subject a number of times she also felt it was ‘OK’. Hannah, however, did recognise that ‘a lot of students don’t understand the words’. Overall the majority of students were like Beth and found that the language ‘was very daunting. If it hadn’t been explained by the teacher I wouldn’t have had clue. It seemed totally beyond me’.
Students specifically targeted the arcane language of the assessment criteria documents to explain another reason why they were so heavily reliant on teacher interpretation of the curriculum.

It would be very hard to understand them if they weren’t deciphered. I’d lean more to saying no they’re not useful. They’re unclear as to what’s what. If you miss a part of the criteria you miss so many marks. (Nel)

Nel simply found it too risky to interpret the criteria herself because the potential for lost marks was simply too great.

It is evident that the language of the curriculum documents and specifically of the assessment criteria ensured teachers made the definitive decisions on curriculum interpretation. This, however, did not prevent students suggesting their own interpretations, often with the result that, what developed according to John, were ‘layers of meaning’ and ‘everyone was putting their meaning on it’.

**Possess subject and pedagogical expertise**

In characterising the teacher as expert, students distinguished two kinds of expertise, first, subject expertise, that is, students expected teachers to ‘know their subject’ and second, pedagogical expertise, that is, they expected teachers to plan and implement structured, effective classroom learning. That students expected teachers to be subject experts is evident from comments like, ‘I expect them to know what they’re talking about’ and ‘they should have a lot of knowledge’. However, while students expected teachers to have subject knowledge expertise what was of specific concern to them was the teachers’ pedagogical expertise.

The following observations illustrate some of the characteristics of the teacher as pedagogical expert.

I expect them to have prepared a class, not to turn up and say, “Well today we’ll.... ???”
Like it has been in one subject that I dropped. It just wasn’t prepared and I just wasn’t getting anything out of it. I expect to learn something. (Sarah)

I feel that he doesn’t have a lot experience in teaching students and his education was not very detailed. I don’t think he went to a very good university. (Yvonne)

It’s important that they be flexible, the ones I appreciate most are not set in their ways. I’ve had a few who are set in their ways and are rigid. (James)

We’ve got a new teacher this semester and she spoon-feeds us and I’d really got into going out and doing my own research. Now we get all the information and I hate it. I get so bored now. (Alison)

Students expected teachers to display pedagogical expertise in a number of ways: being able to plan and implement a learning programme; being flexible; and engaging in student-centred pedagogical practices. Overall, students saw pedagogical knowledge as
particularly significant and did not consider a teacher’s subject knowledge expertise compensated for a lack of pedagogical expertise. They also speculated on why some teachers lacked pedagogical knowledge and suggested that this might result from a lack of experience or from the teacher’s inadequate teacher preparation at university.

Hannah described what was for her an expert teacher.

Saffron doesn’t put her nose in the air and helps anybody who comes to her. That’s why I respect Saffron a lot. I respect her so much, she’s so educated and yet she treats everyone equal. She just blends and just comes down to our level and communicates with us like we’re people. She’s a very rare teacher. I can pick now and some of them make me sick. (Hannah)

This was the expert teacher who blurred the boundaries between herself and her students an exceptional teacher who was respected both for the way she interacted with students and for her expertise.

Create an interesting learning situation

Creating an interesting learning situation required a teacher with spirit and vivacity able to enthuse students. This is particularly significant because the conceptualisation of being a student, either at school or in TAFE, has changed appreciably. Students no longer delay other aspects of their lives in order to study (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001). Studying is not the prime or the only occupation of students particularly in high school or TAFE. Students live complex lives fulfilling multiple roles and meeting multiple demands and expect their learning life to be interesting and engaging. Students explained how teachers could create an interesting learning situation.

Brice as a teacher is in the dark ages. Vicki and Sharon we could have every day of the year. They always compare and contrast and don’t go by the book. They make it interesting. Brice is too old fashioned. Old fashioned is by the book. (Danny)

I like her style because it’s kind of physical. I don’t like teachers who sit there and use the same tone of voice all the time. The two hours seems like four. (Shirley)

She explains so well. We always talk about her class and how much we enjoy it. (Mona)

Learning was enjoyable if teachers engaged students by using a variety of challenging techniques which students associated with current pedagogical practice. Andrea pointed out that her lack of enthusiasm was a result of a teacher who lacked the ability to inspire students.

She just babbles on, I never thought teachers could babble on so. She talks too much. I want to pass but I just can’t stand going into the room. It’s draining. If I’m interested I’ll do well in it. It’s such a drag I can’t push myself to do something I don’t like. (Andrea)
This teacher not only failed to enthuse students but she also created a learning context that so repelled Andrea that she found being in the same room difficult. Margaret explained how a teachers’ imaginative approach made a potentially boring topic interesting.

Today in class we started to talk about essay writing and I cringed at her words, as I have heard so much about it. But as she started to explain it I was thinking to myself, “This was the best way any teacher had described how to structure an essay.” (Margaret)

Margaret described how the same teacher used the analogy of ‘moving house’ to illustrate essay writing, drawing a parallel between packing and labelling boxes and constructing paragraphs. Janice also responded positively to an essay writing lesson because she found it was fun and different.

Today was about essay writing. The teacher makes it really fun to understand what essays are about. She doesn’t make it seem scary and she takes the time with you, she isn’t impatient and makes us understand. She takes the time with people who are having difficulties. I like that. (Janice)

About the same class, Rebecca commented that she was going to enjoy the subject because the teacher was good at ‘these talks’ and so made them interesting. Multiple demands on students, as well as multiple distractions from outside the learning world explain why students need to be enthused in their learning world, and frequently need to be distracted from other areas of their life-world. To enthuse students and engage them in effective learning implies effective communication.

Engage in effective communication

Students spoke about effective communication between teachers and students, and also between teachers. Lack of communication was evident, Andrea explained, when teachers became ‘edgy’ if they were asked ‘too many questions’, which led Andrea to wonder why people like this became teachers in the first place. Other students referred to the ‘complicated language’ used by some teachers creating a barrier to student understanding.

Lack of effective communication between teachers and students had serious implications for students’ learning. For example, Jack and Sarah withdrew from a subject because the teacher was unable to effectively communicate with students. Ellen’s experience illustrated the impact that inappropriate communication with one of her teachers had on her.

I think I’m being left out. I don’t feel I’m part of the class. I’m part of the class in other classes. Maybe I feel that I’m being degraded. It has happened in front of people. I like to speak up and voice my opinion but I get the feeling that I’m not being listened to. The way she speaks to me. She speaks down to me. Other people are treated like that too. (Ellen)
Ellen not only felt excluded from the classroom conversation because the teacher did not listen to her, but she also felt that the teacher disparaged her attempts to join in discussions.

Garry suggested some of the characteristics that distinguished the teacher with effective classroom communication.

The teacher explains things well and is concerned about how you’re going and you’re not afraid to go up and ask questions and she’ll try and guide you in the right way. If you need help you can get it. (Garry)

Unlike Andrea’s ‘edgy’ teacher, the teacher Garry described was always willing to answer questions and ready to guide students. Yvonne also speculated on how and why some teachers were good communicators.

People like Saffron leave a mark on students’ lives because of the exceptional ability to convey information and for students to understand. It has a lot to do with training. (Yvonne)

For Yvonne good communication was about enabling students to understand, a skill she expected teachers to have acquired in their teacher training.

Communication between teachers was the other form of communication considered important. Students were confused by the number of different subjects they were required to study and the number of teachers with whom they interacted. This confusion increased when there was a lack of communication between the subject teachers themselves. As Stephanie observed, ‘One teacher wants something one way, the other wants it another way.’ Stephanie explained that she had difficulty in determining what each teacher required.

It’s been a nightmare trying to clarify what the teachers want. Trudy, Sharon and Vicki were very supportive and helped me find clarity and sanity in the midst of hell. Roxley tried to offer helpful advice but I felt generally confused and even insulted by his advice. (Stephanie)

Effective communication was seen as fostering the inclusion of all students and teachers in the learning process. It was about ensuring that all were involved in the educational conversation. Teachers who were able to do this demonstrated to students that they understood and were responsive to their learning needs.

Understanding students’ needs

Students expected teachers to understand them, for example, Avery expected to be treated as an adult and was surprised that he had to forcefully negotiate with a teacher to ensure that his needs as an individual were being met.

She came in and started talking down to me and I said, “Excuse me I’m an adult too, if you want courtesy out of me you give me some courtesy”. We’ve sorted this out and now we get on really well. (Avery)
Louisa, like Avery, expected teachers to respect her and treat her as an equal.

The most important thing is that they don’t talk down to you. I expect teachers to give you respect. Some of them have the attitude that if you’re a mature age student, then why are you here? But we’re doing something, we’re not just sitting on the dole. We’re trying to do something to get a future for us. (Louisa)

Although Louisa suspected that the lack of respect received from some teachers stemmed from the fact that she had not completed her education, Carmen’s experience was different and she observed, ‘I think they respect people who have come here to better themselves’.

Yvonne commented on a teacher who was unable to show empathy, who seemingly had forgotten what it was like to be a student.

Someone like Luis, no one understands the way he talks, he uses such complicated language. He doesn’t relate to us as students and doesn’t understand where we’re coming from. It’s like he’s forgotten he was ever a student. Forgets how hard it is. I know he’s not there to sympathise with us or anything like that but he doesn’t give us a great deal of support. I can’t go to his office. I just can’t, he’s not approachable. (Yvonne)

Ben provided a poignant description of a teacher who was unable to engage empathetically with students.

In one class, I have no idea where we’re going, what we’re doing, how we’re getting there. It’s just pitched at his own level and pace for his own purpose. He told me it was his first time at this level, so I understand where he’s coming from. It might be his first time but this is my only time. I’ll probably fail because of it. It isn’t right. On reflection I would like to have known where we were going and how we were going to get there. If only he’d been prepared to stop and say, “OK, this isn’t working let’s start again”. (Ben)

It is significant that Ben was able to empathise with his teacher in a way that the teacher was unable to empathise with him. His comments underline the critical role of teacher empathy in students’ success.

DISCUSSION

The teacher standards identified in this paper have been extrapolated from students’ accounts of what teachers need to do in order to support students’ learning. Positioning the standards discussion in the learners’ frame has inverted the discussion and locates and addresses the lacunae in the standards discussion previously identified by Rowe (2003), Cochrane-Smith (2003a) and Apple (1996). More significantly it has provided poignant accounts in the words of students of real students’ everyday learning needs in real classrooms, the standards are no longer abstractions but embodiments of real practice.
What concerns the voices in the other frames of the typology is not always of concern for students. For example, within the historical, policy or the professional frame the voices are frequently concerned with the hierarchical development of standards. Within the learners' frame, however, students are not concerned with the hierarchical representation of standards. What concerns students is that in their classrooms they have teachers who enhance their learning in the ways that they have indicated. It simply does not matter to students where teachers might be positioned on an abstract hierarchy, for as Ben commented, 'It might be his first time but this is my only time.'

It may never be possible to fully capture the complexity of teaching in formalised standards. The difficulty is that even if the discussion is positioned within the learners' frame the difficulty is to capture the ontological dimension of quality teaching. This dimension is seen, for example, in Hannah’s description of Saffron which clearly indicates that there are 'special' teachers who have a particular sense of being in the classroom and of relating to students. Perhaps this is a meta-standard, difficult to formulate, which is necessary if the elements of quality teaching are to come together into a meaningful whole. Without this any identification of individual standards and elements of standards may suffer the fate of the earlier competency-based standards movement when it was found that the sum of the parts did not equal the whole.

There is a similarity between the standards referred to in the paper for they all make reference to content or subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and they all embrace some kind of professional commitment. However, what students tell us is how these abstractions are translated into daily practice in order to provide students with quality teaching which engages them in meaningful learning. The translation of standards into lived experience entails contextually specific approaches to teaching and learning. This provides an opportunity for teachers to engage in research led teaching in order to identify those qualities identified within the contexts of their own teaching. If we listen to students it is possible to isolate from specific instances what they identify as essential to their learning.

The research in which this paper is grounded was situated within a specific teaching and learning context, the TAFE sector in a general education curriculum. Nonetheless, the findings from this research are also germane to the school context because of the changing nature of how students make life choices. Study is not the only, or frequently not the prime occupation of students, who no longer delay life choices such as work or parenthood and frequently combine these with study. Moreover, school is no longer the final learning destination before students embark on further study or work. Therefore, it is not possible to sustain the old boundaries between schools and TAFE with the argument that the latter focuses on adult education while the former does not. The boundaries have become blurred as adults return to school to complete the HSC and school students leave school to complete the HSC or the TPC at TAFE. Senior colleges have been created on multi-site campuses with students studying across the school-TAFE-university sector.
Lists of disembodied standards fail to capture what Cochran-Smith (2003b) calls the 'unforgiving complexity of teaching'. In order to capture that complexity the standards discussion must be positioned in the learners' frame where they become embodied in real life, lived experiences.

REFERENCES


