

# Using professional standards: Assessing work integrated learning in initial teacher education

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## List of acronyms used

AARE	Australian Association of Research in Education
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AITSL	Australian Institute of Teaching & School Leadership
ATEA	Australian Teacher Education Association
CoRPs	Communities of Reflective Practitioners

## Executive summary

All Australian teacher preparation programs must include practical experience – the practicum. It is a critical part of learning to become a teacher. One of the major challenges in initial teacher education is to provide good quality assessment of the practicum. Assessing the practicum is filled with tension for both the individual supervising teacher as well as the preservice teacher. In 2011 the Australian National Professional Standards for Teachers were established. On completion of teacher preparation programs, graduate teachers will have gained the knowledge and practice to meet the seven national standards. For teacher preparation programs, the successful implementation of the standards will rely on the opportunities for preservice teachers to gather evidence of achieving the standards. This project focused specifically on evidence of achievements of these standards through assessment practices during the practicum.

The overall aim of this project was to enhance the academic and school-based teacher educators' and preservice teachers' capacities and understandings for assessing the practicum. To achieve this aim four outcomes were developed to provide professional learning for improving assessment practices of the practicum: a website resource, a collaborative partnership process, a professional learning model (PLM) and a developmental 'inventory' of evidence of achievement of the first five national standards. The website resource provides materials and activities for staff involved in the design of professional experience courses within initial teacher education programs, to work with partner schools and preservice teachers to facilitate high quality supervision and assessment in practicum sites. The collaborative partnership process used for achieving these outcomes – communities of reflective practitioners – is integral to the professional learning focus of the project. It guides the use of the resource in future teacher education sites of practice. The professional learning model and website materials emphasise the critical role that evidence-informed judgements play at school sites in learning and assessment of future teachers.

The success of this project design – which became known to participants as *Project Evidence* – depended on the active involvement of experienced school staff members who supervise preservice teachers. By focussing on the practicum, the project partners were cognisant of the critical importance of good quality assessment of future teachers. The quality of a practicum impacts on so many: the university teachers; the school based supervising teachers; the novice preservice teachers; the experienced classroom teachers and the classroom students. The project design was based upon 'enabling praxis'. Kemmis (2005, p.392) explains the importance of "... developing a critical approach among participants, empowering participants to take action, building their sense of solidarity, drawing on and developing their life experiences, opening communicative space between them...". To achieve this, the project team's methodology prioritised strategies for interaction and dialogue with participants. These were our invited school-based teacher educators (supervising teachers) and preservice teachers selected across three Australian states: Queensland, South Australia and Victoria.

The Australian National Professional Standards for Teachers had been recently accepted at a national level during the early days of Project Evidence and provided the basis for the submission of this Priority Project for funding. As the project progressed, the result has been an increased commitment by all members to become fully aware of the national professional standards in terms of what they mean for valid and reliable assessment practices.

Specific outcomes from the project were:

- A publicly available internet site (**teacherevidence.net**). The site contains a collection of guided activities and accompanying resources for the assessment of preservice practicums. The informing standards that have been used to frame the resource are the *Australian National Professional Standards for Teachers* Numbers 1 to 5.
- The development of a process for working in truly collaborative partnerships. This process we termed communities of reflective practitioners (**CoRP**).
- The development of a framework to represent the professional learning connections for making informed judgements about the quality of teachers. This we termed the **Participatory Professional Learning Framework**.
- The development of an inventory to guide selection of appropriate evidence at each of three 'stages' of practicum experience across a preservice teacher program – from beginning to final prior to graduation. This guide we termed **Possible Evidence for Judging Achievement on Graduate Teacher Standards**. The inventory is applicable in any site. However it should be viewed as a guide for continued critique and refinement in school sites.

Trialling and refinement of the internet site has incorporated feedback from all participants in the project across the three states. Members of the advisory group have provided positive feedback through teleconferencing plus attendance at face to face state meetings with members of the team. The independent evaluator has attended two of the four workshops in Queensland as well as two of four Project team meetings. In Victoria, and South Australia members of the advisory group attended at least one of the workshops – this has included representatives from the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Presentations at national events during the project have been favourably received.

Our findings from research with communities of reflective practice (CoRPs) have affirmed the importance of understanding and clarifying

- Supervising Teachers' expectations of their Preservice Teachers
- Preservice teachers' expectations of their practicum supervision and experiences
- Supervising Teachers' responsibilities in assisting their Preservice Teachers to learn e.g.
  - to model effective teaching strategies for their Preservice Teachers.
  - to have professional conversations as feedback for preservice teachers
- Supervising teachers' knowledge and practice about making judgements and reporting

We recommend that these approaches guide the establishment and maintenance of CoRPs. They will support higher education institutions and teachers to engage through effective communities of practice.

Finally, the project has demonstrated the value of building enduring partnerships. The influence of supervising teachers is acknowledged is central to the success of preservice teachers' learning. We can confidently state that all members of the project were co-producers of the outcomes of this project. As a result of the complexity of the supervisory role and responsibilities in teacher education, all participants were committed to the principle that our work would improve the practicum component of teacher education. Our project's outcomes are a significant contribution to explicating the essential place of evidence-informed assessment practices in the application of the professional standards for teachers.

# Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
List of acronyms used .....	4
Executive summary.....	5
Figures.....	9
Chapter 1: The practicum – a site for learning as well as assessment .....	10
Chapter 2: Approach and methodology .....	13
Chapter 3: The role of professional standards in this project .....	18
Chapter 4: The professional learning site .....	20
References .....	24
Appendix A: Presentations and publications.....	27
Appendix B: Formal, independent project evaluation .....	28



## Figures

Figure 1: A Participatory Professional Learning Framework .....	10
Figure 2: Preservice teacher filmed for Project.....	14
Figure 3: Extract from Guide Inventory.....	18
Figure 4: Extract from website : Evidence page.....	20

# Chapter 1: The practicum – a site for learning as well as assessment

Assessment during practicum, the focus of this project has been shown to be especially fraught with disparate understandings (Patrick, Peach, & Pocknee, 2008). At this point in time Australia has a set of nationally agreed professional standards for graduate teachers. For the purposes of the study, we used these national professional standards (numbers 1 to 5) focusing on the 'professional knowledge' and 'professional practice' domains.

All teaching and all learning is shaped by the contexts in which they occur. Over a decade ago research was increasingly acknowledging the impact of context on teaching, in teacher education, and in the assessment of teaching (such as Darling-Hammond and Snyder, 1999). Each practicum setting is different as are the characteristics and expectations of the supervising teachers and preservice teachers in those settings. Such variables as school organization, resources, materials, the nature of the timetable, the relationships among the teachers and their students, school community expectations and values influence the processes and outcomes. The practicum experience is further shaped by the subject matter, stage of preparation of the preservice teacher and the practicum's expected goals.

Whether in university or school settings, teacher educators need to be knowledgeable about what constitutes valid assessment evidence of the graduate teacher. Demonstration of achievement of the standards by preservice teachers needs to be judged across the range of contextual factors of each school setting. Thus interpretation of what constitutes evidence of the standards needs to be consistent regardless of the setting.

To help alleviate this tension, shared understandings of and practices for valid assessment are critical. Most detailed discussions of assessment draw in some way upon the notion of validity. But as in all things educational, there are no simple answers. Fifteen years ago, Sambell, McDowell and Brown (1997) in their review of literature around assessment for learning, identified that research has established that 'definitions of validity consist of a confusing diversity of ideas'. Making decisions around the professional learning of novices involves professional reasoning, which, as Kemmis 2005 (p392) explains:

... involves drawing on understandings about one's own and others' intentions, understandings, meanings, values and interests, and on one's own and others' reflexive, unfolding understandings of the situation in which one is practising at any given moment.

Assessment of preservice teachers is a practical problem for all those involved in teacher education. The practicum component presents a particularly complex challenge that includes the school-based supervisors. The practicum assessment is not an individual responsibility – it is a professional one, informed by a regulatory body. It has been acknowledged by researchers in the field of initial teacher education that one of the major and long-standing challenges of preservice teacher education programs has been to strike a balance between the theory and practice of the profession. Similarly, improving assessment practice is best served through involving communities of practice. Such professional communities enable understandings to be shared about the nature; meaning and consequences of assessing preservice teachers in school settings. Through such interaction, the full impact of assessment on the student teacher is examined. In particular, the positive and negative effects that assessment can have on the individual preservice

teacher's confidence and developing philosophy about the profession.

What preservice teachers are taught and expected to apply in different school-based learning sites is often inconsistent. The National Professional Standards (2011) present the challenge of interpretation for practice. Each standard needs interpretation by all involved in the practicum. The challenge we face is for preservice teachers, university teachers and school supervisors all having a common understanding of what constitutes evidence from their practice of each standard. That understanding should be the same as that held by their university teachers and their school supervisors regardless of universities or schools. A lack of agreed understandings can result in a range of assessment reports based on varied interpretations of acceptable evidence provided by preservice teachers to meet the standards. The consequence of such variations is inconsistency and uncertainty, which affects the reliability of assessment. This is a critical issue for all stake holders in teacher education: university teacher educators, preservice teachers being assessed, educational authorities, and employers relying on assessments of knowledge and capabilities.

The underlying assumption of the project is that the practicum is a place for learning **and** for assessment. This creates a space of tension for the role of the supervising teacher (Sim, 2011). From the project a conceptual framework has been developed (<http://teacherevidence.net/professional-learning/>). It provides one way of thinking about the professional learning needs of all involved: preservice teacher, teacher or teacher educator). It also challenges us to think about what constitutes evidence of achievement of learning. No matter what the role, the intention of the model is that it encourages participatory professional learning. It has been designed as a tool to encourage reflection, discussion and critique.

Figure 1: A Participatory Professional Learning Model



This model acknowledges that an individual can explore a professional standard from multiple perspectives and from different viewpoints. The conceptual model itself, with the four questions sits within a professional learning community. While the professional standard and focus are central to this model as a starting point, the context of the school environment will be significant to responses to the questions. So the space around the model is not 'empty'. Consider the space filled with groups – professional communities – interacting as they respond to the four questions as they relate to a particular standard. The participatory emphasis is to highlight the importance of collegial interactions.

## Chapter 2: Approach and methodology

The project was underpinned by a collaborative approach to teacher education. This was essential for the acknowledgement of the complexities of professional placements and the importance of evidence-informed judgements. The methodology included strategies for interaction and dialogue with our school participants who included school-based supervising teachers and preservice teachers selected across three Australian states: Queensland, South Australia and Victoria. *Project Evidence* (as our work became referred to by all involved) is grounded in the learning of preservice teachers in the school sites that are integral to teacher preparation. This setting impacts all stakeholders from the university teacher educator to the school based teacher educator, from the novice preservice teacher to the experienced teacher, from classroom teacher to the classroom student.

One emerging factor in the study was the range of terminology used to refer to our school based colleagues who are also teacher educators. In the literature and across different sites, the following terms are used, often interchangeably: mentor teachers, associate teachers, co-operating teachers or supervising teachers. For the purpose of the project we used the 'supervising teacher' nomenclature. Our basis for this decision was to emphasise the dual roles of mentors and assessors these teachers must play during the practicum. The preservice teachers are learning to teach from supervisors, and will be assessed by them before they leave the schools.

The design of the project was developed as an 'enabling praxis' (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). This refers to a design that explores the practicum as a shared space of educational practice in which all were committed to taking action that was informed and oriented by the collective knowledge and experiences in the field. This was to be achieved through the collaborative work of experienced supervising teachers, preservice teachers and higher education academics in initial teacher education programs. Buysse, Sparkman and Wesley (2003) explain the promotion of dialogue and inquiry for the purpose of supporting a learning environment in which practice is improved, as the primary goal of a community of practice. If designed well to ensure that all involved are able to interact as peers and colleagues, sharing information and experiences, these learning communities enable participants to actively reflect on their own practices (Le Cornu, 2009).

Thus the framework of our study drew from three key pillars synthesised from the literature in the area of communities of practice:

- knowledge is generated and shared within a social and cultural context (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Palinscar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford, & Brown, N., 1998). Barab & Duffy, 2000;
- understanding and experience are in constant interaction (Schon, 1983, Buysse, Sparkman & Wesley, 2003, Francis, Newham & Harkam, 2005;
- reflection and critical thinking is enabled through interaction (Wenger, 1998).

The Project design for the exploration and collection of data consisted of three state-based communities of experienced teacher education practitioners. Each community consisted of eight school teachers experienced in supervising preservice teachers. Each community was facilitated by two members – experienced university teacher educators - of the project

team. We referred to our communities as CoRPs – Communities of Reflective Practitioners. The school members of each group were selected based on their nomination as experienced and expert school-based supervising teachers who supported the professional development of student teachers on prac in their particular school sites.

After considering the advantages in selecting and comprising the CoRPs specifically of Primary or of Secondary teachers only, we determined that as the standards for graduate teachers were established for the profession regardless of level, that each CoRP would include both primary and secondary teachers and would represent state and independent sectors. These experienced teachers participated in four workshops in each state. The dialogue included exchanges that often began with a Primary or a Secondary teacher saying to a peer in the CoRP – “I don’t know what it is like in your school but....” This opportunity to exchange experiences was highly effective in building a sense of mutual respect for the differences and yet the strong commitment to quality learning for the novice teacher in their various schools. Thus the CoRP approach in this study has provided a means to ‘open up’ localised and situated teacher education knowledge and practices.

Data gathering and analysis were based on a collaborative, iterative process, using strategies that:

- acknowledged the experiences of all stakeholders;
- would develop resources informed by the ideas and practices from communities of experienced teachers and pre-service teachers;
- would enable the knowledge and best practice about professional learning to be shared rather than limited to single sites.

The teacher participants in this project worked with the project team over 18 months. Each state-based group participated in four full day workshops that incorporated three core goals required for effective professional collaboration and knowledge building:

- to examine the influences, issues and evidence that affect decision making when assessing pre-service teachers’ achievement of professional standards;
- to explore the implications of these for practice by teacher educators both in schools and in universities now and in the future, and
- to develop an inventory of appropriate types of evidence of achievement of particular elements of professional standards to guide professional experience assessment decisions.

Each of the four workshops’ focus was as follows:

1. Examine and critique existing state-based assessment inventories in terms of assessing pre-service teacher standards.
  - Key Question: what types of evidence are required to demonstrate competencies in particular Teacher Standards?
2. Critique video clips and sample documents (i.e. lesson plans/resources) as stimuli to respond to
  - Key Question: what are expectations and standards regarding different stages of learning for pre-service teachers on practicum?

3. Continue to critique video clips and sample documents (ie lesson plans/resources) as stimuli to continue to respond to:
  - Key Question: what are expectations and standards regarding different stages of learning for preservice teachers on practicum; and to
  - Select video clips useful for the learning site.
4. Examine first draft of materials planned for website for feedback. Suggest organisation, content and structure to ensure suitability for all intended users of the website – in particular supervising teachers and preservice teachers.

All discussions were audiotaped. As the intention of the project was to explore and make explicit the pedagogical expertise and interests of the participating experienced supervisors, the video stimulated method was designed to facilitate targeted reflection and discussion among the participants.

**Video stimulated discussion** forms a major source of data for the study. In order to provide an authentic basis for reflection and discussion, unrehearsed and unscripted videos of preservice teachers were used. The first stage of the project therefore involved nine preservice teacher participants who were willing to have their lessons video recorded. Participation was voluntary. These preservice teachers became incorporated as colleagues and their own CoRP in the project. Their videos have provided them with a professional learning opportunity (Reitano & Sim, 2010).

In the first six months of the study, the team leaders videotaped a lesson delivered by each of the participating preservice teacher while on practicum. The Principals and supervising teachers in each of the practicum school sites were approached and informed consent was gained from all participants – including the parents of students in the classrooms video recorded.

Following the videotaping, each of the preservice teacher participants met with one of the lead researchers to view and discuss the video-recording of the lesson. This provided feedback to the students at a level of detail that they otherwise may not have gained during a prac. At the same time through audio-taping of these interviews, we were able to gather additional data on novice teachers' thinking and reasons for particular selections of activities and strategies during the teaching episode.

Figure 2: Preservice teacher filmed for Project



Video stimulated recall is designed to provide access to teachers' thoughts about teaching. Traditionally, as used with the preservice teachers, the strategy involves videotaping a teacher delivering a classroom lesson and it is used to stimulate discussion with that teacher about his/her practice. For this study the additional purpose of the videotaped sessions was to facilitate interaction in their workshops. While there is a variety of ways in which the video may be used to stimulate discussion (see McMeniman, Cumming, Wilson, Stevenson & Sim, 2000), in this project the video examples were edited for the added purpose of stimulating articulation of thoughts and beliefs about judgements of what constitutes evidence of teaching. Thus, in our state based Workshops 2 and 3, the project team used edited clips from our video footage to facilitate discussion around what constitutes evidence of the Graduate Level of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011) for standards 1 to 5.

Through the critiquing of these video clips with their peers in each state's CoRP, the experienced teachers explicated the theories, beliefs and values that underpin their judgements about the demonstration in practice of the standards. These judgements were emphasised as needing a solid verifiable basis of clear and consistent performance criteria and evidence. Rich data that resulted has been gathered from these workshops and contributed in the following ways:

1. individual stories of experiences with preservice teachers and for the preservice teacher CoRP , with supervising teachers,
2. recommendations regarding best practice for supervising teachers that supports both the learning and the assessment,
3. knowledge and understanding of the Professional Standards for Australian Teachers and in particular, expectations of professional standards at the Graduate Level,
4. articulation and clarification of knowledge and beliefs about teaching and assessment of preservice teachers during school-based learning and practice,
5. the development of a shared language about standards of pre-service teacher performance and the roles of the teacher-mentor.


























In designing the project it was essential that each workshop in each state was aligned in activities and use exactly the same video clips. The interaction in the workshops progressed from general discussion and sharing to closer, critical analysis. In the latter process the members of the CoRP were encouraged by the team facilitators to elaborate and refine their existing knowledge and understandings of the nature of criteria needed for performance assessment. Here the focus was on the criteria that a standard implied would need to be demonstrated in a preservice teacher's performance. Thus selection of valid evidence for making judgements about those criteria was the challenge we gave them.

We added to this challenge by asking them to identify discriminatory levels for those criteria in order to make judgements about a particular stage of practicum experience that preservice teachers progress through during a teacher preparation degree. Analysis of the data by the team progressed in order to contribute to each workshop. Thus as the participating teachers shared their refinements, more specific articulations of types of actions, products and performances that would count as reliable evidence resulted.



Throughout the workshops, CoRP members returned to the video-clips of preservice teachers' lessons both to stimulate reflection and to formulate valid suggestions regarding evidence. The work of the CoRPs on this, produced questions and closer discussion around the practices of university and school based teacher educators in this complex area. These discussions provided all of us with important data on what knowledge needed to be provided for the professional learning schools. The data was then selected and refined collaboratively to complete the major deliverable: the learning site at *teacherevidence.net*. While the inventory of suggested evidence was achieved, the critical factor in achieving this outcome was the professional discussions that had occurred to achieve the inventory. Thus, the website materials, organisation and activities have been designed to enable users to replicate the types of processes and questions that were integral to the development of knowledge and practices around valid and reliable assessment during the practicum.

Figure 3: Extract from Guide Inventory (teacherevidence.net)

<b>1.1 Physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students</b> <i>Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students and how these may affect learning.</i>		
 <b>Early Stage</b>	 <b>Middle Stage</b>	 <b>Graduate Stage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Written observations, guided by supervisors, demonstrate understanding of the physical, social and intellectual development &amp; characteristics of students</li> <li> Identify that all students learn in different ways. This is shown through their planning of a range of activities.</li> <li> Follow the modeling of the supervisor in catering to difference.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Observations and discussions identify and record the differences exhibited by students in the classroom.</li> <li> Use strategies to learn some of the differences within the group of students e.g observation, discussion with supervisor, establishment of prior learning, assessment data</li> <li> Lesson Plans cater to individual differences with a range and variety of activities.</li> <li> Individual student support is given.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Written observations demonstrate understanding</li> <li> Identify that all students learn in different ways. This is shown through the planning of a range and variety of activities</li> <li> Recognise students' individual needs.</li> <li> Anticipate where adjustments are necessary for individual student's needs and plans and implement these adjustments e.g. extension activities, extra support</li> <li> Make effective links between their previous and current lessons and students' understandings</li> </ul>
<b>1.2 Understand how students learn</b> <i>Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research into how students learn and the implications for teaching.</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Identify that all students learn in different ways. This is shown through the planning of a range of activities and consciousness of attention spans.</li> <li> With supervisor guidance, observe individual students' needs in a targeted learning area. Evidence would be in written observations.</li> <li> With supervisor guidance, plan and deliver a lesson indicating an understanding of the variety of ways students learn.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> * Observe the different theory based learning styles of students and cater by using a range of activities.</li> <li> By week 2, under the guidance of the supervisor, plan and implement a series of lessons indicating an understanding of the variety of ways the observed students learn.</li> <li> Reflect on the effectiveness of teaching strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Identify that all students learn in different ways. This is shown through their planning and reflection</li> <li> Identify individual students' needs in a targeted learning area. Evidence would be in written targeted observations</li> <li> Set expectations for what the students will learn during the lesson</li> <li> Demonstrate a good understanding of different learning styles in planning.</li> </ul>

## Chapter 3: The role of professional standards in this project

The National Professional Teacher Standards were endorsed on the 14th February, 2011 by the Australian Government and are being used by teachers, leaders, teacher educators and policy makers to provide direction and structure which is nationally consistent (AITSL, 2011). The standards do this by articulating what teachers are expected to know and be able to do at various stages of their career.

For some the introduction of national standards for teachers is seen as a positive step in the debates around quality teaching, as they identify key elements of effective teaching and provide a national framework of certification and evaluation for teachers (Ingvarson, 2011). Others however are less enthusiastic about the Standards. Connell (2009), for example, argues that ideas about what constitutes a good teacher are contested and open to change and there is the risk competencies can become the key focus.

Notwithstanding these arguments, the National Professional Teacher Standards for Graduate Teachers provide a framework for assessing preservice teachers' knowledge and capabilities in both school-based and University-based courses and as such complement the work of school-based and university-based teacher educators.

The Standards provide a common basis for planning learning pathways and assessing professional learning and achievement. They provide not only a common set of outcomes but also a common language for talking about and providing formative and summative assessment feedback for the preservice teachers' regarding the knowledge and skills they develop during school-based learning. Knowledge and understanding of the Standards should assist in the development of consistency and equity of teaching and assessment of pre-service teachers.

Each standard consists of a statement. This documents a set of relevant knowledge and skills to be realised by the preservice teacher by the time of graduation. This knowledge and skills will need to be demonstrated in a variety of ways. Sometimes they can be observed in practices and performances as well as the products to inform those practices. But of course teaching involves complex knowledge and understanding which is not always observable. The knowledge, practices, products and performances listed in standards' statements are interconnected. These statements cannot, therefore, be used as an assessment checklist (Connell 2009). This Project's intention has been to focus on the importance of consistent interpretation of the standards and that this is integral to the work of teacher educators in schools in order to effectively work with preservice teachers to achieve the standards.

The National Professional Teacher Standards for Graduate Teachers are divided into 3 domains:

1. Professional Knowledge
  - Standard 1 - Know students and how they learn
  - Standard 2 - Know the content and how to teach it
2. Professional Practice
  - Standard 3 - Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning

Standard 4 - Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments

Standard 5 - Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning

3. Professional Engagement

Standard 6 - Engage in Professional Learning

Standard 7 - Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community

Each Standard targets one aspect within the domains of knowledge, practice or professional engagement. Within each broad domain, each Standard also specifies a number of focus areas that are connected to the overall Standard. These specifications provide a clear guide for preservice teachers regarding the areas in which they should concentrate their own learning. For university and school teacher educators, the foci within each standard specifies the important areas of knowledge, skills and processes that need to be taught, practised and assessed.

During the school-based learning segments of their degree programs, preservice teachers will be assessed. Criteria for that assessment should reflect evidence of achievement of the Standards. These assessments, made by school-based teacher educators are based on judgements about the quality of the practical performances and products developed for and used in those performances. In the interest of assessment consistency and reliability, it is important to pre-specify an agreed on range of possible practices and/or products that could count as evidence of having achieved each Standard. Consistency in assessing preservice teachers across all university-partner school sites and all States will be more likely if school-based teacher educators are armed not only with knowledge of the National Professional Teacher Standards for Graduate Teachers but also with process to develop guiding inventories of possible evidence of the graduate teacher standards.

As explained in Chapter 2, the framework of communities of practitioners working together on this critical educational practice guides the use of the learning site. The activities have been designed to enable such a process. If the standards are to be used as a framework for learning and assessment in school-based learning placements, they will need to be adapted according to the stage of the development of the preservice teacher, that is, whether they are being assessed against standards at the end of their first, second or final practicum. Further, the impact of different school-based learning contexts and the types of learning experiences the preservice teacher is exposed to should also shape and limit the particular standards and/or foci that could be taught and validly assessed on any practicum

## Chapter 4: The professional learning site

< [teacherevidence.net](http://teacherevidence.net) >

Part of the complexity surrounding the practicum is that teaching itself has changed, as has the context within which teaching occurs – both at schools and universities. Consequently, the multiple, interlocking roles of teacher, mentor and assessor involved in supervising are changing and expanding as the current context for teaching becomes more challenging and focused on performance-based assessment against national professional standards.

As a result it is imperative that strong school-university partnerships are developed (see Le Cornu, 2010; Martin, Snow & Torrez, 2011). This partnership approach is very important as the roles of school based teacher educators and university based teacher educators are very different but complementary. Both are needed if the learning achieved by preservice teachers on prac is to be maximised.

For these reasons the development of this project's professional learning site has the focused on process and products primarily aimed at:

developing an inquiry culture in a field setting, developing a critical approach among participants, empowering participants to take action, building their sense of solidarity, drawing on and developing their life experiences, opening communicative space between them (Kemmis, 2010:17)

The members of the CoRP collaborations sought to resolve the tensions that they identified as routinely affecting the learning and assessment of preservice teachers during school-based learning. These tensions reflect the issue of the range of settings discussed earlier that create differences of conditions experienced by individual preservice teachers during their school-based learning. The differences identified by our CoRPs were in particular around

- the expectations and conditions at different schools,
- the relationships between supervising and student teacher, and
- affording the preservice teacher with learning opportunities which they would then be judged upon in relation to assessment of the practicum.

All three tensions are related to the professional relationship between the preservice teacher and school based supervisor. This is considered a key aspect in a successful practicum (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009). The role of the school based supervisor is often ambiguous and high in tension particularly when trying to find a balance between mentoring and assessing a preservice teacher (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Hudson & Hudson, 2010; Hudson & Millwater, 2008; Johnston, 2010; Laker, Laker, & Lea, 2008; Sim, 2011).

The analysis of data and refinement through the collaborative work of the CoRPs, identified five major areas of professional knowledge and understanding.. These five areas formed the basis of the organisation of the professional learning website at *teacherevidence.net*. These areas are:

- i. Professional standards
- ii. Professional learning
- iii. Professional roles

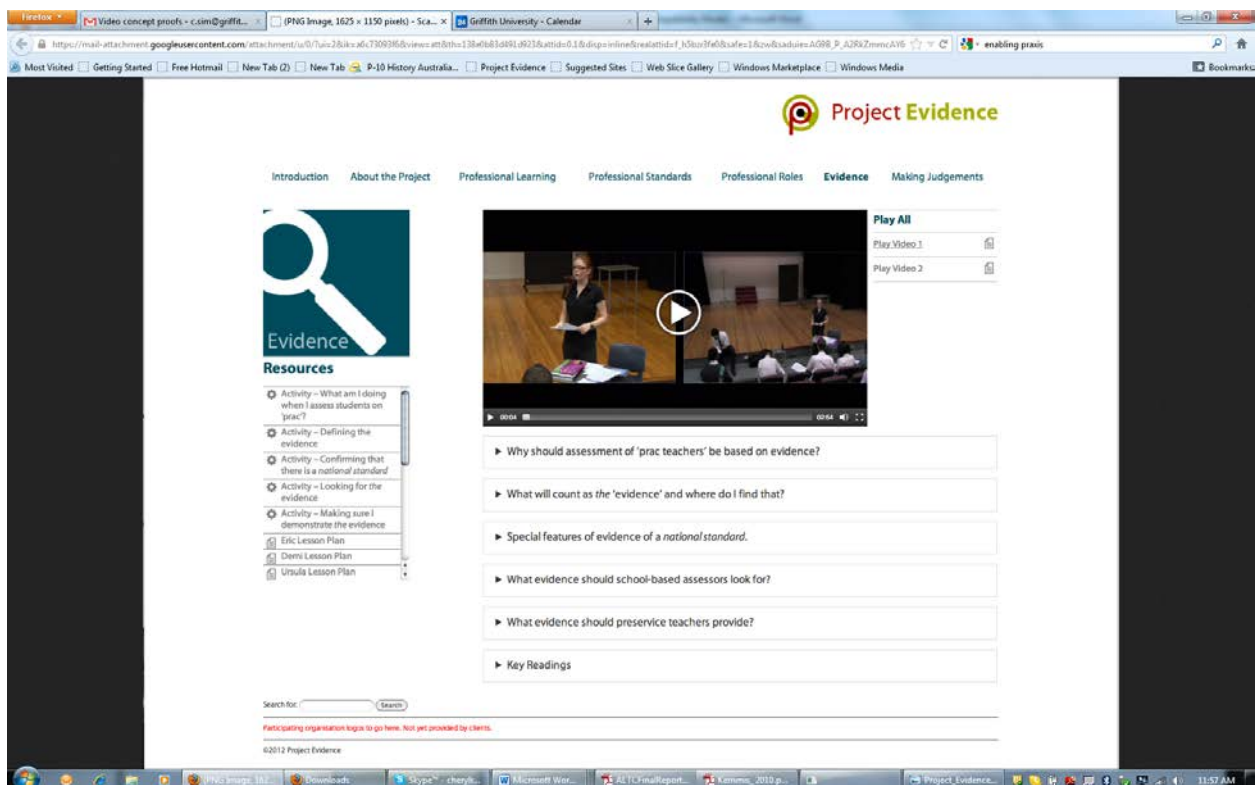
- iv. Making judgements, and
- v. Evidence

Each academic member of the Project team led the first draft of writing for each area. These drafts was then the focus of each state CoRP meeting around Workshop 4. Since then further work in rewriting was completed and the outcomes examined by the Queensland Project leaders and CoRP members.

The structure of the website pages and the design of the site was developed progressively with assistance from the Project leaders' institution media design experts as well as the experienced teachers from the Queensland CoRP. Each section became structured around key headings that would facilitate

- making meaning of issues associated with that area;
- using video clips where appropriate –in the same way we had used them during the study- to stimulate professional discussions in sites where the practicum was happening (including with preservice teachers in the university prior to visiting schools);
- resources to support the learning that occurs during the practicum; and
- activities to facilitate decision-making around the reporting of preservice teachers achievements in different stages of their development towards graduation as a teacher.

Figure 4: Extract from website : Evidence page



## Chapter 5: Project outcomes and impact

### Outcome sought

This Priority Project in the field of academic standards, assessment practices and reporting had its focus on the practicum component of preservice teacher education programs. As a collaborative study the project examined knowledge and practices to provide a resource directed to improving the professional learning experiences of preservice teachers during placements. The project used the newly developed Australian Professional Standards for Graduate Teachers as an opportunity for sharing practice and critical reflection about valid and reliable assessment of the work integrated learning (prac) component of preservice teacher education programs across Australia. It is intended that through this project the current research about the developmental needs of novice teachers has been extended. It has used its findings to develop a comprehensive professional learning resource that would help improve the quality of assessment of the school placements.

### Advancing existing knowledge

The project team consisted of academics whose research and practice is well known in the fields of teacher education; professional experience and assessment. The collaborative approach of the project recognised and valued the experiences and knowledge of practitioners who contribute to the teacher education process in schools. In this way, it used existing knowledge from research and experience on teacher education to focus on a productive partnership to improve the quality of the assessment of the professional preparation of preservice teachers. The approach has ensured that the important history of practice in this field and the multiple perspectives are represented in the data.

In this way – and through further analysis of all of the data collected – Project Evidence advances current knowledge about assessment practices of professional placements. The project led by Griffith University with Deakin and Monash Universities and University of South Australia, has developed from the data:

- a. A comprehensive process for the development productive partnerships which has been evaluated over the period of the project (2 years). The establishment of the CoRPs has enabled collaborative work to address, define, and enhance understandings of standards and their links to assessment and reporting practices. The Project evaluator's report provides evidence of the success of this approach. These CoRPs continue and are an essential part in disseminating the outcomes of the project.
- b. The development of practitioner endorsed evidence-explicit elaborations of existing professional standards statements.
- c. A professional website for use in universities with teacher educators and preservice teachers and in schools with supervising teachers and preservice teachers. The site will enable use in diverse school settings (eg remote as well as urban). The material and activities and resources on the website have been designed to be used in a range of professional learning modes (small group or individual; face to face or on-line). The dissemination of knowledge, understandings and examples of assessment inventories to support excellence in assessment of performance during professional experience is facilitated.

The project has raised questions about the support that graduate teachers in employment receive - the type and quality of induction to ensure the resilience of teachers in the workforce can be improved by raising the expectations around induction as novice teachers move to the proficient level.

### Factors critical to the success of the project

Project Evidence was successful as a consequence of relationships previously established between the partner universities and other stakeholders in schools in Queensland, Victoria and South Australia. Issues that were critical to the success of this project included the capacity of the project team, advisory group and evaluator to be objective about the roles and experiences of all participants in teacher education placements. The project was designed to identify the challenges, share and design materials and resources to enable further development rather than to develop checklists and directions that would be viewed as final and not requiring continued critique for improvement. It is recognised that the issue of quality in teacher education is a highly contested and sensitive area. The assessment of the school-experience component of teacher education encroaches on the activities of a variety of people and institutions each with experience and different capacities to influence changes and improvements. It was important therefore to ensure that the project focused on how to create a positive climate for change. The major strength of the project has been the willingness of stakeholders to consider how their different roles impact on the professional learning needs and assessment practices of preservice teachers and to consider strategies for continued improvement.

### Dissemination

Dissemination occurred across all phases of the project through the meetings held with the Advisory Group. Broader dissemination has been achieved through:

Presentations in

- July 2011 and July 2012 at the Annual ATEA Conference
- December 2011 at the AARE Conference

Future dissemination is planned

- a) the European Conference of Educational Researchers, Sept 2012, and
- b) at the Griffith Institute for Education Research Symposium August, 2012
- c) Website Launch in October to December. This will occur in Queensland, Victoria and South Australia. Invitees will be from Higher Education Institutions; teacher registration authorities and state and non- state education offices.

Publications have been planned and currently one co-authored paper is under review by the Australian Journal of Teacher Education and a book proposal is being prepared following an approach from Cambridge University Press.

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# Appendix A: Presentations and publications

## CONFERENCE PAPERS

*ATEA, 2011: Using Professional Standards: Assessing Work Integrated Learning in Initial Teacher Education*

*AARE 2011: Performances that count: what evidence do supervisors look for when assessing pre-service teachers during professional experience*

*ATEA 2012: Best start for the future: Participatory research to engage the profession in graduate teacher education standards.*

*GIER, August 2012: Griffith Institute of Educational Research: Lecture Series: Participatory research to engage the profession in graduate teacher education*

## Appendix B: Formal, independent project evaluation

Final report of a formal, independent evaluation of the project:

**“Using Professional Standards: Assessing work integrated learning in initial teacher education”**

September 2012

Lead institution: **Griffith University**  
Collaborating institutions: Deakin University, University of South Australia  
ALTC Project Reference: PP10-1642  
Grants Program: Priority Projects

*Conducted by Professor Nan Bahr, Queensland University of Technology, at the request of the project team.*

**Terms used in this report**

AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
CoRPs	Communities of Reflective Practitioners
Professional Standards	<p>State Ministers for Education have agreed to require jurisdictional regulatory authorities for teacher registration across Australia to apply a consistent suite of standards to teaching. These standards stipulate the performance expected at each of four career stages for the teaching profession. For initial teacher education, the standards to be achieved before registration are termed the “Graduate Standards”. For this project, since it considers initial teacher education the terms Graduate Standards and Professional Standards are interchangeable.</p>
WIL	<p>WIL is the acronym for Work Integrated Learning. Work integrated learning includes any learning activity that relies on engagement with professional contexts. This can be campus based or industry based. For this project the term is synonymous with Professional Experience, which for teaching is predominantly site based practical practice teaching opportunities designed into the initial teacher education program. It is these Professional Experiences that provide significant opportunity for pre-service teachers to demonstrate achievement against Professional Standards.</p>

## **Project Outline**

The aim of this ALTC Priority Project was to:

*“enhance both the validity and reliability of assessment of the work integrated learning (WIL) component of pre-service teacher education programs in Australia”*

The project drew on a series of structured workshops delivered across three states by researchers from three higher education institutions with extensive engagement in WIL for pre-service teacher education programs. These workshops engaged practicing teachers in a community of practice in each of the three (3) states. These communities of practice supported the articulation and formation of consensus views regarding evidentiary bases for determining pre-service teacher performance and progress against national professional standards. The workshops were sequenced to first elucidate pre-existing views on pre-service teacher assessment and evaluation standards and evidence, and then to challenge and refine these through collaborative activities designed to lead participants through codification of evidence from videos of pre-service teachers in authentic contexts. This in turn was designed to inform and support the development of a website to assist in the provision of targeted experience and evaluation of pre-service teacher achievement against the professional standards during field experience.

From the project submission, two key focuses were identified:

1. *“Clear and explicit descriptions of evidence of achievement of professional standards that reflect high academic standards within the field of teacher education at undergraduate level”*
2. *“The project specifically focuses on assessing students in professional practice settings and focuses on both formative and summative assessment criteria, standards and practices.”*

## **Project Outcomes**

The project was designed to address the following key questions:

- How do practising teachers make their judgements about pre-service teachers under their supervision?
- What is the shared knowledge that supervising teachers bring to these judgements?
- How can this knowledge be systematised to ensure consistency of judgements across the different stages of pre-service WIL and help pre-service teachers meet specific professional standards?

The research approach aimed to answer these questions in order to inform the development of a suite of tools addressing the needs of practising teachers charged with a

role in making consistent judgements of pre-service teacher performance against the Professional Standards. Therefore, the goals of this project were to:

1. Document the evidence that forms the basis of supervising teachers' assessments of the quality of pre-service teachers' performance during professional experience.
2. Document expert supervising teachers' elaborations of the knowledge, practices and dispositions that form the criteria and standards for assessing the performance of pre-service teachers, and the educational reasoning practices that are brought to bear on discussions of quality,
3. Develop inventories of knowledge and practice to guide assessment of performance on WIL to ensure consistency of judgements across the different stages of pre-service WIL and help pre-service teachers meet specific professional standards.

The stated project deliverables were outlined as:

- **A set of recommendations** for Higher Education (specifically teacher education) to build communities of practice between Higher Education Institutions and teachers, based on experiences from the establishment of three (3) exemplar communities of practice during the project in three states.
- **An inventory** of specific performance criteria and standards that constitute evidence of three levels of achievement of professional standards at three stages of pre-service teachers' professional development through WIL.
- **A professional learning package** consisting of both a website and CD Rom with supporting handbook, video clips, and elaborated inventories to inform the assessment of pre-service teachers.

### **Project Research Approach**

The research was designed in three (3) phases:

1. Project Establishment Phase. In this phase the researchers videotaped classroom practice of pre-service teachers in professional contexts. These videos formed the bases for the stimulated recall prompt material used across the project. Also in this phase, the researchers recruited experienced pre-service teacher supervisors in each of the three states to form communities of reflective practice.
2. Project Implementation Activities. This phase involved the establishment of three communities of reflective practice and their engagement in workshops to develop the criteria and guidelines for the tools created in phase 3.
3. Materials Development. Creation, development and dissemination of the project deliverables.

The project approach used a layered and nested research design that featured stimulated recall, structured focus group sessions, and annotated inventories. The deliverables extended from an iterative process of development across the entire project.



## **Project Evaluation**

The purpose and conduct of the formal independent evaluation was agreed following discussions between the research team and the appointed project evaluator. An evaluation brief was provided at that time. It was determined that the evaluation would be conducted continually across the project and report in two stages, at interim and final report junctures. The formal evaluation has been conducted in conjunction with the undertaking of the project with participants.

Three approaches to evaluation have been employed:

1. Workshop session debriefing evaluations: The Queensland based evaluator either attended and conducted debriefing type semi structured focus groups at the conclusion of each local workshop, or has collected written evaluation responses for workshops at interstate locations. Participant focus group sessions were of around 15 minutes duration, were recorded and transcribed. Where written evaluation forms were completed, individual participants responded to same questions as those which framed the focus group sessions.
2. Workshop session observation evaluations: The evaluator's base location coincided with the site for the first two workshop cycles. Comprehensive observation notes were made to inform the evaluation process.
3. Researcher team focus group: After the workshops had been conducted in each region/state, the evaluator met with the research team and conducted unstructured focus group meetings to consider the general effectiveness of the project. The focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed.

## **Achievement of Project Outcomes**

The project team created pre-service teacher videos that extensively supported workshops conducted in each of the three states with each of the CoRP. These videos also provided a base for the website product deliverable.

Workshop 1: This first workshop introduced the participants to their community of practice and to the project. The activities of the workshop collected their initial views on pre-service performance in authentic contexts and assessment approaches for this.

Workshop 2: This workshop challenged participants to identify features of performance that could be used to inform an assessment judgement of a pre-service teacher against specified professional standards.

Workshop 3: The CoRP considered video clips and sample documents to refine their conceptualisation of the standards as demonstrated, and selected video segments for the website.

Workshop 4: The CoRP viewed and provided constructive feedback and advice for the first draft of the website and materials.

The participants reported a sense of growth through the research project and a deep appreciation of the recognition of their expertise in the judgments to be made. Where possible, the CoRP was augmented by representatives from AITSL which provided an opportunity for deep shared understandings of the standards, but also for the raising the awareness of the importance of the developing work to inform AITSLs agendas. The CoRP reported that they were particularly satisfied with the opportunity that the project has provided for them to clarify for them their role in the assessment of pre-service teachers and to engage in professional dialogue with other teachers and academics in a way that has amplified their understanding of professional standards and exemplification of these in authentic contexts. They reported that the project equipped them with skills and language to more effectively describe and respond to developmental needs of pre-service teachers while they are involved in WIL. Several participants reported that their own approach to teaching changed, such that they have become more intent on identifying evidence to support their judgements. Participants also reported that they have become more comfortable with working actively as teacher educators. The CoRPs were particularly invested in the website look and feel, and materials development. They reported that the website was a powerful means to support teachers in consistency of their judgments and in their confidence in supporting pre-service teachers on placement. They reported that it was exciting to have such a suite of tools created collaboratively with teacher education academics and practicing teachers.

Both the participants and the researcher team commented on the effectiveness of the processes of the project. The workshops were clearly structured to elucidate opinion and then problematize through facilitated discussion of the case videos and draft website materials. The participants and researchers were very satisfied with the impact of activities on the growing sense of understanding and of professional connection to the community of practice and to the teacher education endeavour. The processes of tabulation, sharing, engaging with peers across sectors and schools supported development extremely well.

The researchers reported satisfaction with the communication and alignment of the researcher team and their respective local activities for the project. Their use of regular teleconferences, well timed/spaced face to face meetings, communication on the feedback from workshops, and sharing of materials was an effective model for the management of a national project without dependence on a huge participant footprint. They expressed satisfaction with the observation that the project design has enabled them to move beyond the potential barriers of differences in course structures at different institutions. That is, the consideration of WIL at early, middle and late stages of pre-service teacher undergraduate study provided sufficient nuance to support the activities of the CoRP to date irrespective of their jurisdiction, their educational sector, or of a variety of teacher education course

structures. Participants of the CoRP reported that they would like their collaboration to continue beyond the project.

## **Deliverables**

**A set of recommendations.** The team have engaged with higher education teacher educators in three key ways, through their presentations at national and international conferences (ATEA, AARE), their authorship of journal articles and their book proposal, and through their engagement with jurisdictional regulatory authorities and AITSL. The website itself provides a comprehensive suite of recommendations for higher educators and practicing teachers engaged in professional experience evaluation. The project has provided a conceptual framework for participatory professional learning, which enhances and distinguishes teacher education placement experiences from more general WIL experiences. In form and content the project team have also contributed substantially to higher education by providing an excellent model for the establishment and conduct of CoRP.

**An inventory** A guide inventory was produced. The website provides detailed information unpacking the specific performance criteria and standards that constitute evidence of three levels of achievement of professional standards at three stages of pre-service teachers' professional development through WIL. By considering pre-service teachers at three levels of development, the project has greatly assisted the field by providing a useful frame for consistent judgement across diverse settings and for students of a wide variety of teacher education programs.

**A professional learning package** The team produced a website but not a CD Rom. In consultation with the CoRP it was agreed that the website was the most appropriate format enabling version control and supporting further development and sustainability. The supporting guide, video clips, and elaborated inventories to inform the assessment of pre-service teachers are included on the website.

## **Conclusion**

This has been an exceptional project. The team have worked extremely well to ensure high quality and appropriate deliverables and in doing so have demonstrated a highly effective model of collaboration between stakeholders in teacher education. This project has engendered a great deal of interest across the sectors nationally and internationally as it touches upon a hot topic for teacher education. I suggest though that the approach to the research and the model for the outcomes would suit other disciplines as they engage with site based WIL.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nan Bahr". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Professor Nan Bahr