

Chapter 5

Professional Standards for Teachers: “Pass the Message Game”

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ABSTRACT

This chapter uses the concept of ‘pass the message’ game as a metaphor to explore preservice teacher education in relation to the communication of the requirements of the professional standards for teachers that are intended to regulate teacher quality. The concept of ‘pass the message’ represents the variation in individuals’ interpretation and understanding about a particular phenomenon, for example, an individual’s understanding of teacher quality. ‘Pass the message game’ demonstrates how the meaning of a message becomes distorted as it is told and moved on from one person, or organisation in this case, to another as different interpretations are applied according to beliefs, preferences, knowledge and experience. The passing on and down of intended understandings of professional standards for teachers, suffers from the same challenges as shown by the game of ‘pass the message’. However, with respect to the focus of this chapter, the message is not being passed down from person to person so much as from organisation to organisation. Hence, the issue explored here is the loss in understanding of the original message after it has been promulgated and interpreted from one organisation to the next.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines how the passage of professional standards for teachers at the graduate level, used to assess preservice teacher quality, may have changed by the time they reach their intended audience at the level of the preservice teacher practicum, where they are intended to play a major role in guiding the experiences and assessment of preservice teachers and the work of their supervising teachers. The authors argue that there are both challenges and emerging opportunities involved in trying to ensure that preservice teachers are supported and judged appropriately against such standards. Consequently, this chapter extends the research reported so far by focusing more deeply on the extent to which video evidence collection in the feedback and assessment processes of preservice teachers on practicum is impacted by the transfer of knowledge such as professional standards for teachers. It addresses an emergent issue, which is the role and impact of such nationally used standards during practicum experiences, in keeping with the need for epistemic fluency (Markauskaite & Goodyear, 2015). The findings showed that the alignment of a university program's learning objectives within a practicum course, within an undergraduate program's learning objectives, can be problematic when the standards are also used as a basis for practicum assessment.

Standards and Considering What Is at Stake

More than any other time the quality of teachers internationally, nationally, and locally is under public scrutiny (Livingstone, 2007). Relevant to this public scrutiny are three major considerations. First, there is cogent research, which attests to the link between a student's learning and the teacher (Caldwell, 2012; Dinham, 2012; Hattie, 2009). Second, there is evidence indicating that the level of a teacher's impact on a student's learning is dependent upon the quality of the teacher and this quality varies from teacher to teacher (Alloway, Gilbert, Gilbert & Muspratt, 2004; Caldwell, 2012; Creswell & Underwood, 2004; Hanushek, 2010; Hattie, 2009; Hayes, Mills, Christie & Lingard, 2006). Third, research now substantiates that one of the reasons for a decline in a country's gross domestic product (GDP) is linked to student's learning (or lack of) and the impact of the quality of the teacher (Auguste, Hancock, & Laboissière, 2009; Jensen & Reichl, 2012).

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