**Evidence of Teaching Capability: Teacher Performance Assessment and Professional Standards**

As I discussed in my keynote presentation yesterday, questions are increasingly asked about what it is effective teachers should know and be able to do, and how judgments can be made about whether teachers actually know and can do these things – and who should make those judgments. This is particularly relevant for beginning teachers and thus impacts teacher education. In teacher education, we tend to use proxies to make judgments about teaching capability, to assure employers and professional accreditation authorities as well as the public that our graduates are effective beginning teachers: proxies like grades in university units and practicum evaluation forms that don’t always provide the beginning teacher with the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do. I believe this is something that we need to examine as a profession and take responsibility for.

**Accountability**

Darling-Hammond (1989; 2004) outlined the following accountability
models designed to safeguard the public interest:

- *Political accountability*
- *Legal accountability*
- *Bureaucratic accountability*
- *Professional accountability*
- *Market accountability*

**Professional Accountability**

According to Darling-Hammond, professional accountability involves three principles:

- Knowledge is the basis for permission to practice and for decisions that are made with respect to the unique needs of clients.
- The practitioner pledges his first concern to the welfare of the client.
- The profession assumes collective responsibility for the definition, transmittal, and enforcement of professional standards of practice and ethics. (1989, 67)

Thus, a self-regulated teaching profession would take collective responsibility for ensuring that all those permitted to teach are well prepared, that they have and use all available knowledge to inform professional practice, and that they maintain a primary commitment to clients (that is, their students and the public). A professional accountability model comprising these dimensions, represents a “policy bargain” that the profession makes with society whereby greater (self-) regulation of teachers is guaranteed in exchange for deregulation of teaching:

For occupations that require discretion, knowledge, and judgment in meeting the unique needs of clients, the profession guarantees
the competence of members in exchange for the privilege of professional control over work structure and standards of practice. (Darling-Hammond 1989, 67).

**Judging professional practice**

In Australia, the dominant systems for teacher accountability – the state legislated registration authorities – have, in the main, used input models to make decisions about entry to the profession. They judge the quality of a teacher education program usually by paper review which involves a panel of stakeholders deciding on the likelihood that the program will prepare a competent beginning teacher. So, proxies are often used to determine the level of professional knowledge and practice for competent beginning teaching - proxies like grades in university subjects, completion of an approved teacher education program, compilation of a portfolio, or teaching practicum evaluations and observations. Only recently have some in the profession begun to think about a more outcome focussed model and ways of judging the actual professional practice of beginning teachers.

In the last decade, the US has seen steady increase in the use of various forms of teacher assessment for teacher licensing decisions, usually in the form of tests. In 2004, all 50 US states and the District of Columbia reported having a written test policy for teacher licensure (both initial and ongoing), (Council of Chief State School Officers 2005). 30 states used three forms of teacher assessment—basic skills, portfolio, subject matter knowledge, while 12 used two of these assessment methods. The 1998 reauthorisation of Title II of the Higher Education Act, which mandated that each state report annually the percentage of teaching candidates who passed state certification tests, has served to further legitimate
bureaucratic models of teacher testing. While there has been public outrage in some states about teacher failure in these tests (e.g. Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling 2001) and despite the fact that research on teacher testing has called into question their predictive validity and their capacity to actually measure a teacher’s ability to teach (Wilson and Youngs 2005), the movement continues.

In response to the identified shortcomings of teacher tests and in an attempt to acknowledge the contextualised nature of teaching and learning, many US states have moved to include a teacher performance assessment (TPA) in initial licensing decisions. This newer generation of teacher assessments, those based on observation and interrogation of classroom practice has the potential to authentically measure a teacher’s ability to use and contribute to the professional knowledge base, to be responsive to the learning needs of every student, and to inquire into and reflect on their professional practice. These teacher performance assessments aim to provide mechanisms for accountability based on the assumption that teaching is not a decontextualised skill. They aim to support and assess practices that are student oriented and knowledge based.

As promising as these new assessments are however, Youngs, Odden and Porter (2003) found that, in 2002, only nine US states employed some form of performance assessment when making initial licensing decisions, and most used classroom-based observations and interviews. Only two states, Connecticut and North Carolina, used a more rigorous portfolio approach. Youngs, Odden and Porter (2003) suggest that so few states are using teacher performance assessments in licensing decisions because of the high costs associated with implementing them, questions about their reliability and fairness, and possible effect on
teacher supply when there are many pressures to consider alternative pathways into the profession.

The question is whether a more widespread and coordinated teacher performance assessment can strengthen professional accountability and be a mechanism by which the profession can strike a more rigorous and accepted ‘policy bargain’ with the state. Such a teacher performance assessment must be more than mere documenting of practice, particularly in the form of observable behaviours like the competency movement of the 1980s. We need authentic assessments of teaching, approaches like cases, exhibitions, portfolios, and problem-based inquiries (or action research). What we have learnt in preservice teacher education is that these strategies appear to provide support for teacher learning and as well as avenues for more valid assessment of teaching (Darling-Hammond and Snyder 2000). Moreover, in any professional accountability framework, teacher professional knowledge and judgment must be at the centre. The challenge is to decide upon ways of assessing teaching that provide evidence of teachers’ professional practice as well as their professional thinking and judgment.

In 2006, the state of California mandated a teacher performance assessment for an initial teaching credential. A consortium of teacher preparation programs at a number of California universities - PACT (Performance Assessment for California Teachers) - developed a teacher performance assessment which was approved as a requirement for a teaching credential in California by the bureaucratic state-legislated agency that accredits teacher education programs and credentials teachers in that state, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.
The PACT assessments or teaching events (TEs) use multiple sources of data (teacher plans, teacher artifacts, student work samples, video clips of teaching, and personal reflections and commentaries) that are organized on four categories of teaching: planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection (PIAR). The PACT assessments build on efforts by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, which developed performance assessments for use with expert and beginning teachers. Like these earlier assessments, the focus of the PACT assessments is on candidates’ application of subject-specific pedagogical knowledge that research finds to be associated with successful teaching (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Fennema et al., 1996; Grossman, 1990; Porter, 1988; Shulman, 1987). What distinguishes the PACT assessments from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards assessments is that the TE tasks are more integrated (capturing a unified learning segment), are designed to measure teacher performance at the preservice level, and have no assessment center components. Moreover, the PACT assessment system also uses a multiple measures approach to assessing teacher competence through the use of course-embedded signature assessments. (Pecheone and Chung 2006, p.23)

Thus, PACT aims to be an integrated, authentic, and subject-specific assessment of teacher knowledge and skill. The research on the first 2 pilot years of implementing PACT in California suggests that it is a valid measure of individual teacher competence for the purpose of teacher licensure and is a powerful tool for teacher learning and program improvement (Pecheone and Chung 2006).
The processes for judging highly accomplished teaching should involve teachers submitting evidence which clearly demonstrates highly accomplished professional practice and the professional judgment which has informed that practice. This has to be clearly linked to the established professional standards for highly accomplished teaching and must avoid de-professionalising proxies like such as teacher tests, written essays, and so on, for judging what it is teachers know and can do. As such, some sort of teacher performance assessment (TPA) holds promise for being the most authentic way to judge professional practice and the professional judgment that informs that practice along with the knowledge base for teaching that it draws on.