

Teaching Competencies in the Classroom: deconstructing teacher experiences



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Research conducted among Tasmanian teachers between 1995 and 1998 used a questionnaire survey, classroom observations and follow-up reflective discussions of teaching practice to find out more about ways in which teachers implement in their classrooms the ideals of effective teaching and of teaching competencies. The understanding of teachers' prioritisation of classroom competencies was a first step in this investigation. The general agreement of teachers on the value and importance of the competencies irrespective of teaching levels is more marked than was expected, and the differences in terms of years of experience were less marked though seniority of position was significant.

Introduction to the Issues

The national debate on teaching competencies, in its most recent form, has been with us for the last decade, covering the work of the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (NPQTL) 1991-1994, the publication in 1996 by the Australian Teaching Council (now defunct) of the *National Competency Framework for Beginning Teachers* and in 1998 the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee Report *A Class Act: Inquiry into the status of the teaching profession*. This year the NSW Government set up a Review of Teacher Education to look at a wide range of issues bearing on status and quality. The continuing concerns about teachers' status and professional recognition and the quality of the public school system, which underpin most of these debates,

also focus upon the means of ensuring and enhancing the quality and professional competence of teachers. This inevitably raises issues, as it has done internationally, surrounding the identification and measurement of teaching 'standards' and/or specific 'teaching competencies'. The Senate Committee, for instance, recommended that a system of professional recognition for teachers must be established which is based on 'the achievement of enhanced knowledge and skills and which retains teachers at the front line of student learning'. 'Such knowledge and skills should be identified, classified and assessed according to criteria developed by expert panels drawn from the profession' (Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee, 1998, p.8).

The Senate Committee also argued that teachers should operate their own system to certify teachers who attain standards for high quality teaching, with the Commonwealth government facilitating such a system. The core messages in this important policy document, argues Ingvarsen (1999), include promoting the professionalisation of teaching, redefining the relationship between governments and the teaching profession over accountability, and rethinking assumptions about how educational policy for reform makes a difference to what happens in the classroom.

This last point is of great concern to the teachers themselves since there is disquiet and even contention in some quarters of the teaching profession about the way in which the 'competency' debate is going, the subtext of why it is being promoted and by whom, and a sense of the threat of de-skilling and de-professionalisation if the agenda is taken out of teachers' own hands and outside the classroom. McWilliam and O'Brien (1999) for instance locate these disagreements within the 'new discursive order' in teacher education policy and professional development practice. This discourse they argue is actively attempting to produce teachers as 'corporatising professionals'. Drawing on Foucaultian notions of the discursive nature of knowledge and identity formation they discuss the impact of the rhetorical shift of understandings about the 'professional' identity of teachers, and posit that the agenda in professional development is now being driven by consultants, policy makers and bureaucrats, within an economic rationalist frame of reference and not by experienced teacher educators (McWilliam & O'Brien 1999, p.97).

These tensions between the policy driven frameworks for reform of schools and of the teaching profession, and the interactive dynamics and discursive experiences of teachers in the classroom, along with the underlying power play involved, find resonance in international shifts in policy and practice.

In the UK the discussions and debates about teachers' 'craft knowledge' and new epistemologies of practice focussing on Schon's concept of the reflective practitioner (Schon 1983) contrast a scientific, technicist view of the professional with a more holistic, persona oriented approach. Grenfell (1996) argues that in this 'struggle' 'the teachers' experiential processes of

training are often overlooked' (Grenfell 1996, p.289) and that the artificial divide between 'theory' and 'practice' represents an 'unhelpful binary'. 'In this case what is at stake is whether professional learning is seen as unfolding, developmental and implicit or a progression through a pre-set list of competencies. These two approaches on professionalisation are based on opposing views of teacher training—the former sees it as personal and context dependent—the latter as the acquisition of definable skills. Yet neither gives an adequate account of the possible **processes** which underlie them' (Grenfell, 1996, p.289). Grenfell argues there is a need to rethink initial teacher education and in-service professional development by deconstructing teacher experiences.

Attempts to 'recentre' the teaching competencies debate back on teaching practice in the classroom and teacher experiences of self development, and away from some of the politicisation of recent years are reflected in writings on the Canadian public school system. The domination of economic rationalist measures and cost-cutting policies in schools are global, and in education in general 'more for less is expected' (Robertson 1998, p.9). 'Once the function of education is defined as preparing workers for business, it follows logically that business should determine what students learn' (Robertson, 1998, p.25) along with the notion of 'productive' and 'non productive' education. The 'ideological warfare' which this can create between public policy dominated by corporate interests and professional collegiality of teachers may also lead to myths and misperceptions on both sides (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p.80). Barlow and Robertson argue against a vision of education which is too 'results driven' and in which 'evaluation focuses exclusively on outcomes that are **observable** and **measurable**' which require more testing, more reporting, more accountability and more teacher surveillance (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p.213). They argue for a more humanistic, more dynamic and they believe more professional approach to teachers' work which moves away from testing narrow competencies of teachers which tend to 'freeze' present practices in place and 'reinforce a mentality that promotes doing more of the same, only with greater intensity' (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p.120).

Nevertheless, there is general international agreement that we need to ensure high teaching standards through teacher recruitment, training and professional development, and to improve teacher status through 'the development of a rigorous and professionally credible system for assessing teacher performance in relation to standards' (Ingvarson, 1999, p.7). We are still a long way in Australia from the establishment of such a system, such as is emerging in the USA as a result of the professional certification system being established by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Over the past 13 years the NBPTS has developed a national certification system with the aim of reshaping public perception of teachers' work. According to Ingvarson attempts in Australia to focus on

similar policy issues through 'the initiatives of the National Board for Employment, Education and Training in the late 1980s, the Advanced Skills Teacher Concept and the Australian Teaching Council', 'were largely unsuccessful' (Ingvarson, 1999, p.8). There have, however, been a number of recent State initiatives such as the Teacher Career Path project in Western Australia, which embeds a Competency Framework for Level 3 classroom teachers, which show promise.

The Western Australian model does not, however, adopt or modify the key competencies as set out in the *National Competency Framework for Beginning Teachers* (ATC, 1996) but uses a different five competency framework. 'This framework was based on understandings of professional expertise drawn from the literature (Jasman, 1998) together with other competency frameworks developed from teachers' writing and talking about their professional practices (Jasman & Barrera, 1998)' (Jasman, 1999, p.16). There is a danger therefore that, however well researched and implemented, we might see a proliferation of State and Territory approaches to the development of competency frameworks applied to local circumstances, rather than a National Framework such as the one for beginning teachers. In addition, the methods used to assess 'whether or not a teacher had attained these competencies' (Jasman, 1999, p.16) may differ. The benchmarking of competency standards has proved a problem not only for teaching but for all other professions and trades using competency based training. Our research has shown that while the *National Competency Framework for Beginning Teachers* seems to have been widely used by teachers in providing a focus for goals and objectives in key learning areas, for describing the scope of those areas of competence, and as 'triggers' for assessment profiles, there seems to have been little attempt to benchmark the competency areas, and especially the specific items within each area, nor to assess pre-service or beginning teachers against them in other than a pass/fail model.

Current debates, policies and practices surrounding teaching competencies, the quality and nature of teachers' work, the status and morale of the teaching profession and the agenda for 'reform' of teaching and of schools seem in the Year 2000 to stand at the crossroads. Understanding where these debates stand, both inside and outside the profession, required us in our research to look at underlying values, discourses and discursive practices in teaching, to deconstruct teacher experiences within the classroom and to attempt to overcome the 'unhelpful binary' between theory and practice.

Methodology

The research from which findings discussed in this paper are drawn spans the decade of reform and debate discussed above. The ARC funded project conducted between 1995 and 1998 focused upon teachers' understanding

of, development of and implementation of key competencies within the classroom experience and has attempted to ground in teachers' own reflective experiences the 'blueprints' of national policy frameworks. This research builds upon and continues research conducted within an earlier ARC funded project run between 1990 and 1992 which identified the qualities and characteristics of effective teachers who had been identified by their students within the longitudinal cohort analysis of post-compulsory retention in Tasmania (Abbott-Chapman, Hughes & Wyld, 1990, 1991; Abbott-Chapman, Hull, Maclean, McCann & Wyld, 1991; Holloway, Abbott-Chapman, Hughes & Wyld, 1992; Hollway, 1994)

The work has also been linked with the research conducted for the NPQTL project, as Phillip Hughes headed up one of the three national teams, commissioned to research a potential model or framework for teaching competencies. The framework of teacher competencies proposed by the Tasmanian team has provided insights and platforms for the latest investigation (Abbott-Chapman, Radford & Hughes, 1993; Abbott-Chapman & Hughes, 1995).

The methodology adopted in the research has laid emphasis especially on dynamic, contextual and developmental aspects and is in line with the 'holistic' and 'professional' nature of teachers' work stressed in the national teaching competencies document (ATC, 1996, p.3) especially in the realm of 'professional judgement'. We have particularly aimed to avoid a 'behaviouristic', or 'attribute based' approach (ATC, 1996, p.11) so that the subtle nuances of 'complex professional judgements in diverse situations' (ATC, 1996, p.13) are fully taken into account in examining classroom implementation. The research aimed to examine and analyse in depth the identification and perception of key teaching competencies by practising teachers of differing types and degrees of experience, and teaching at different levels; to investigate teachers' own priorities with regard to specific competencies within their own practice; and to relate these to competencies perceived by teachers to be essential for the beginning teacher. A related aim was to compare what teachers idealise as the competencies needed for effective teaching with what they actually do, and are observed to do, in their own classrooms.

The research involved both quantitative and qualitative data gathering from a sample of Tasmanian teachers over three and a half years. The data gathering methods reflected the different aspects of competency identification, reflection and implementation from both the practising teacher's and the researcher's point of view.

An initial anonymous questionnaire survey was used to identify teacher constructs, prioritisation and discourses of teaching. The **statistical framework** allowed us to categorise the 'surface' characteristics of the competencies being utilised and developed, and to compare with our previous teacher surveys.

The **action component** revealed in the actual practice of teaching, was observed for a smaller teacher sample by a researcher, with the full collaboration of the teacher who chose the class in which to 'showcase' the competencies which the teacher believed important. Some teachers chose to be observed more than once.

The **reflection in action component** of the teaching performance was then made explicit and transparent to both teacher and researcher through a subsequent intensive one-to-one interview in which the researcher shared and discussed the record of the observation, and the teacher responded with reflections and reactions to why certain things had been said or done and whether the perceptions of researcher and teacher tallied. Most participants said they found the exercise illuminating and helpful.

It will be seen that the methodology combines statistical analysis, collaborative action research in which the teacher is a partner with the researchers in the investigation (Van Maanen, 1990; Argyris & Schon, 1991; Bogdewic, 1992; Gilchrist, 1992), and critical reflection in retrospect on the part of the teacher and the researcher. This multi-stranded approach attempts to engage with the issues raised in this Paper's Introduction, and the different discourses which may be faced by teachers in the classroom and the developers of competency frameworks for use in training and assessment. In this sense the methodology is integrally linked to the findings within an iterative process of conceptual refinement. The intention of what happens in the classroom, is represented by the discourse of the questionnaire survey; the carry-through into teacher performance, is represented by the observed classrooms; and the comparison between what the teacher intended to happen or thought was happening in practice, with what to an observer appeared to be happening is represented by the reflective discussions in retrospect. Each layer in the process enabled a better interpretation and understanding of the other. This paper will discuss the first 'layer' of understanding gained through the questionnaire survey responses.

The sample was drawn from two government School Districts in Tasmania—Hartz in the South which covers parts of Hobart and a range of suburban and rural schools, and Forrester in the North which covers an equally wide range of schools from Launceston. All 1206 teachers in these two Districts were sent a postal questionnaire and were invited to take part in the questionnaire survey, classroom observations and reflective discussions. This allowed for the contextualising of a spread of teacher experiences in terms of school, community and regional characteristics, as well as in terms of the historical time period in which they were trained and took up their first teaching post. This is a study not just of what teachers say they do or should do but what they actually do, with an attempt to relate the two in modeling patterns of action and reflection, so

that the interaction of school, community and professional factors in terms of teacher outcomes is an important part of the contextual framework.

There were 336 responses to the Questionnaire survey—or 28 per cent of all teachers in the two Districts. The sample proved to be reasonably representative in terms of school locality and community, but with overrepresentation of female teachers and Primary school teachers. A subset of 41 teachers (12%) of varying years of experience took part in the classroom observations and 38 (11%) of these participated in the reflective discussions, some of them several times over a period of months. A great deal of quantitative and qualitative data was, therefore, gathered over a three and a half year period which gave insights into teaching competencies from many angles.

Findings discussed will show that there is a great deal of agreement among teachers about what constitute key teaching competencies, but even more agreement about what do not constitute key teaching competencies, and that there is perhaps greater congruence across primary and secondary teaching levels than is sometimes imagined. Differences in terms of various measures of 'teaching experience' combined with seniority have, however, been observed and appear more significant than teaching level differences for both classroom competencies and competencies in the 'school domain'.

Some Findings from the Survey: Teacher prioritisation of key competencies

The range of teaching experience of those who responded to the questionnaire survey was broad—ranging from first year out to over 30 years. Of the 336 respondents 242 (72%) were female and 94 (28%) were male. (This compares with 67 per cent female, 33 per cent male in the overall teaching population). In terms of qualifications 54 had a teaching certificate (16%), 141 a B.Ed (42%) 95 had a Dip. Ed or P.G. Diploma (28%) and 46 (14%) some other qualification. Qualifications had been gained from a University in Tasmania or elsewhere (44%), a TCAE in Tasmania or elsewhere or equivalent (39%) and 41 (12.5%) unspecified. The teaching experience of respondents is of course matched by the age range from under 25 years to 65 years.

Unfortunately there was a significant bias in the sample towards Primary School Teachers, 221 or 66 per cent were teaching in Primary Schools or the Primary levels of country District High schools, compared with 82 teachers (24%) teaching at Secondary or upper Secondary level, and a further 33 (10%) teaching 'across' levels including within 'Middle Schools'. The proportions in the total Tasmanian teacher population were 58 per cent Primary and 42 per cent Non-primary. It was assumed that teachers in the Primary and Secondary schools would have very different views about generic teaching competencies, but as the findings presented show this assumption proved to be incorrect. This finding which highlights more

than ever the importance of length of experience rather than solely the teaching level or context of experience, is highlighted by researchers like Berliner (1987; 1992; 1994).

A main objective of the survey was to discover the ways in which teachers understand and rank in importance two sets of competencies—those relating to the classroom domain and those relating to the wider organisational domain of the school. These pick up the thematic construction of the model suggested by Abbott-Chapman, Radford and Hughes (1993) which relates the dimensions of knowing, doing and critical review within a hierarchy of teaching competence. 'The hierarchy of teaching competencies allows us to specify with greater exactitude the skills, tasks and knowledge which are expected at each particular level' (Abbott-Chapman, Radford & Hughes, 1993, p.47). The 19 competencies listed in the questionnaire as within the 'classroom domain' and the 13 competencies within the 'school domain' were taken from the national teacher survey undertaken by Hughes (1994) as part of the NPQTL project, and cover generic teaching competencies agreed by the participating teachers, rather than those relating particularly to beginning teachers as presented in the *National Competency Framework by Beginning Teachers* (ATC, 1996).

The questionnaires were printed in three different batches which randomised the alphabetically listed competencies, therefore precluding the 'donkey vote' of just working down the list. Each respondent was asked to rank in order of importance each named competence in 'the sort of classroom in which you teach' and 'the sort of school in which you teach' (Questions 26 and 27). In other words the teachers were to rank and relate the competencies to their own teaching practice and situation rather than a hypothetical or abstract situation.

In addition, a related objective was to try to construct an index of 'teacher experience' which would have validity and reliability in terms of teacher responses. The three variables we considered are the Years of teaching, the Position held and the Level of Teaching (i.e. Primary and Non-Primary) as different but possibly related dimensions of 'teaching experience'. For the purposes of this study the years of experience were categorised as follows:-

1	up to 9 years	66 cases
2	10 to 19 years	141 cases
3	20 to 29 years	103 cases
4	30 to 39 years	26 cases

Table 1 below relates years of teaching experience to teaching position and shows the very high level of correlation between these two variables. When the non-respondents have been removed the χ^2 value of 132 based on 15 degrees of freedom gives a probability level of 0.01%.

TABLE I
Years of Teaching by Position

Position	Yr 0-9	Yr 10-19	Yr 20-29	Yr30-39	Total
Teacher	50	38	22	3	113
AST1	15	72	48	6	141
AST2	0	10	6	0	16
AST3	0	8	9	2	19
Ass.Prin.	0	3	7	0	10
Principal	0	6	11	12	29
No Resp.	1	4	0	3	8
Total	66	141	103	26	336

Teacher ranking of teaching competencies

The simplest way of comparing the rankings of competencies was initially by mean values—i.e. the smaller the mean value the more important the competency. This exercise demonstrated a clustering of the competencies by ranking. Firstly, we shall examine results for the 'classroom domain' competencies. Table II lists the abbreviations used in subsequent figures, the full description of the competencies and the mean values.

The most highly ranked classroom competencies are '**student centred**' such as 'use of a range of teaching strategies', 'initiating and guiding learning' and 'facilitating independent learning' while the competencies ranked as least important are seen as '**organisation centred**'—such as 'daily administrative responsibilities', 'accessing curriculum resources' and 'evaluating programs or units'. The 'unhelpful binary' Grenfell (1996) notes between practice and theory is also illustrated by these teacher rankings which place 'abstract' theory artificially low compared with what in reflective discussions they describe as 'theory in action'.

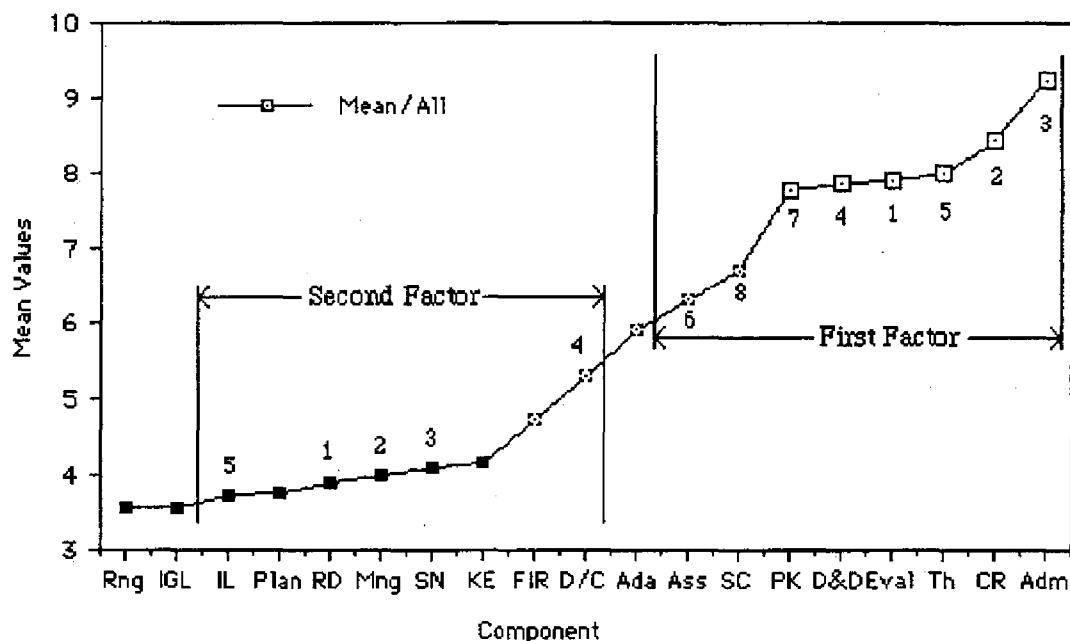
In addition, Figure 1 below identifies those components of a Factor Analysis which constitute two orthogonal factors, the first factor group statistically strong, the second statistically weak. The numbers shown are the ranks of the loadings in order of importance (below the line for the first factor and above the line for the second factor).

It is clear that the statistically stronger factor consists of most of the components that were ranked low in importance, while the statistically weak factor consists of some of the components ranked high in importance. In reality it means what we have found from interviews and observations that teachers are united in their hatred of the growing amount of 'administrivia' outside the classroom in which they are involved and which they believe keeps them away from their 'real job' of teaching students in the classroom. Most teachers are very student centred and enter the profession because it gives them intrinsic rewards such as 'helping students to learn' (Abbott-Chapman, et. al. 1991).

TABLE II
Mean Scores for the Classroom Domain Components

Group	Mnemonic	Description	Mean
1	Rng	Use of Range of Teaching Strategies	3.56
	IGL	Initiating & Guiding Learning	3.58
	IL	Facilitating Independent Learning	3.75
	Plan	Planning for Student Learning	3.76
	RD	Responsiveness to Individual Differences	3.90
	Mng	Classroom Management	4.01
	SN	Responsiveness to Special Needs	4.12
	KE	Knowledge/Enthusiasm for Subject	4.18
2	FIR	Foster Interpersonal Relationships	4.74
	D/C	Student Discipline and Control	5.30
	Ada	Adaptability to Differing Contexts	5.91
	Ass	Assessment of Student Achievement	6.32
	SC	Self Criticism of own Teaching	6.69
3	PK	Pedagogical Knowledge	7.75
	D&D	Demonstrating, & Developing Curr. Expertise	7.85
	Eval	Evaluating Programs/Units	7.90
	Th	Develop. own Theoretical Understandings	7.99
	CR	Accessing Curriculum Resources	8.42
	Adm	Daily Administrative Responsibilities	9.24

Figure 1



Similar analysis to the above was carried out for the 13 competencies in the **school domain** as shown in Table III and Figure 2.

The top two competencies in the table focusing on professional interaction and reflection were consistently highly ranked by respondents. By contrast over a hundred respondents were prepared to place the bottom four competencies in the bottom half of the list in terms of importance. The one anomalous value in terms of ranking rather than group means was the 101 respondents placing professional judgement in the first rank; however the number of respondents placing professional judgement in the second or third level of importance is smaller than those competencies adjacent to it in the list, which is why 'developing professional judgement' appears lower down the list in terms of its group mean.

TABLE III
Mean Scores for the School Domain Components

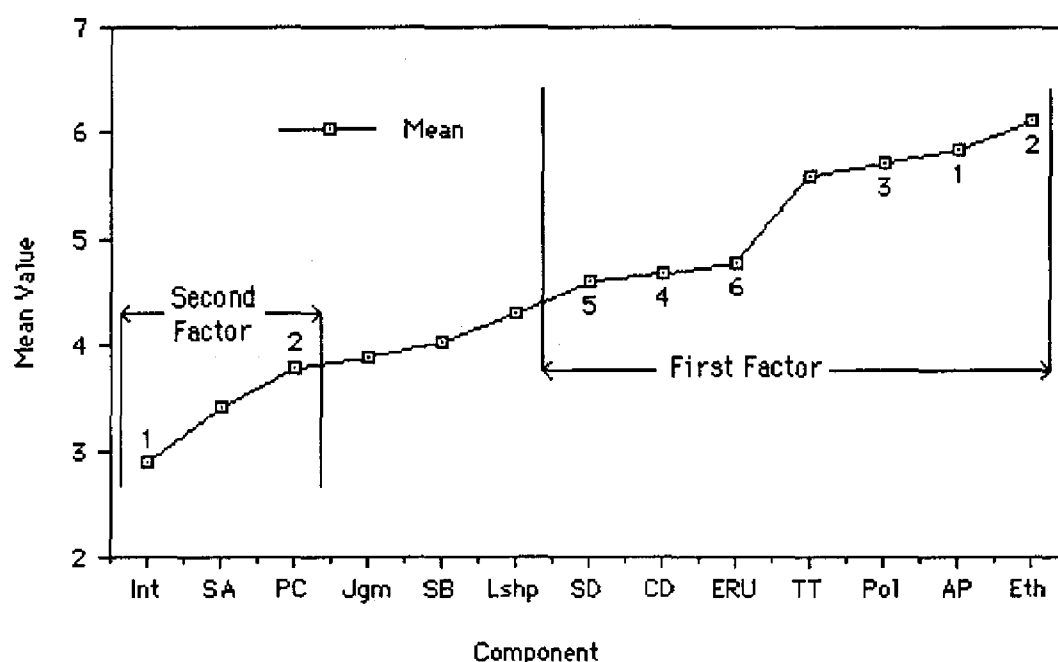
Group	Mnemonic	Description	Mean
1	Int	Interaction with Colleagues	2.89
	SA	Self Appraisal/Reflection	3.40
2	PC	Interaction with Parents/Community	3.79
	Jgm	Developing Professional Judgement	3.89
	SB	Knowing Student Backgrounds	4.02
	Lshp	Leadership/Decision Making	4.29
	SD	Staff Development Participation	4.60
	CD	Curriculum Development	4.66
	ERU	Effective Resource Utilisation	4.76
3	TT	Effective Timetabling	5.60
	Pol	Administering School Policy	5.70
	AP	Review of Assessment Procedures	5.83
	Eth	Ethical & Legal Obligations	6.12

Figure 2 shows how the 13 competencies can be divided into three subgroups, and also shows those competencies which have been included in an orthogonal factor analysis, reported earlier; the first factor has six components, and, as with the analysis for Q26, they are all at the lowest levels of importance. The second factor has only two components, being the two interaction components, with colleagues and with parents and the community. In the case of both the classroom and the school domain competencies the least valued competencies are the ones on which there is most teacher agreement.

Most teacher respondents agreed that Timetabling, Administration, Review of Assessment Procedures and Ethical and Legal obligations are the least valued as a 'key competence'. As the qualitative data revealed, this

does not mean that teachers do not fully realise the importance of all these competencies to the effective running of the school—they do. It is just that they do not see them as an 'intrinsic' part of the teacher's role. These perceptions of intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the teachers' role will be discussed in another Paper as it relates to actual classroom teaching.

Figure 2
Rank Order of Competencies in the School Domain



In order to verify the validity of the ranking of the competencies in the classroom and school domain by use of mean scores a second method of ranking was used. It was important to establish index validity since the comparisons of means of competency rankings for various subgroups was next undertaken. The second method, which took account of the fact that not all respondents used the full range of options, was based on **Ranking Scores** for each competence within four categories of ranking frequencies to which was assigned a weight, then summed.

Statistical significance of variations over the sets with regard to whole group and subgroup analysis was tested using the Kruskal Wallis one way analysis of variance and the Mann Whitney U test. Findings showed that despite some minimal reordering of competencies, overall there was no evidence to reject the null hypothesis that the sets of means come from the same population. Only for Years of Teaching was there doubt as to whether the null hypothesis should be rejected, and this proved to be important in the construction of the Index of Teaching Experience, to be discussed. The ranking scores method substantially confirmed the use of

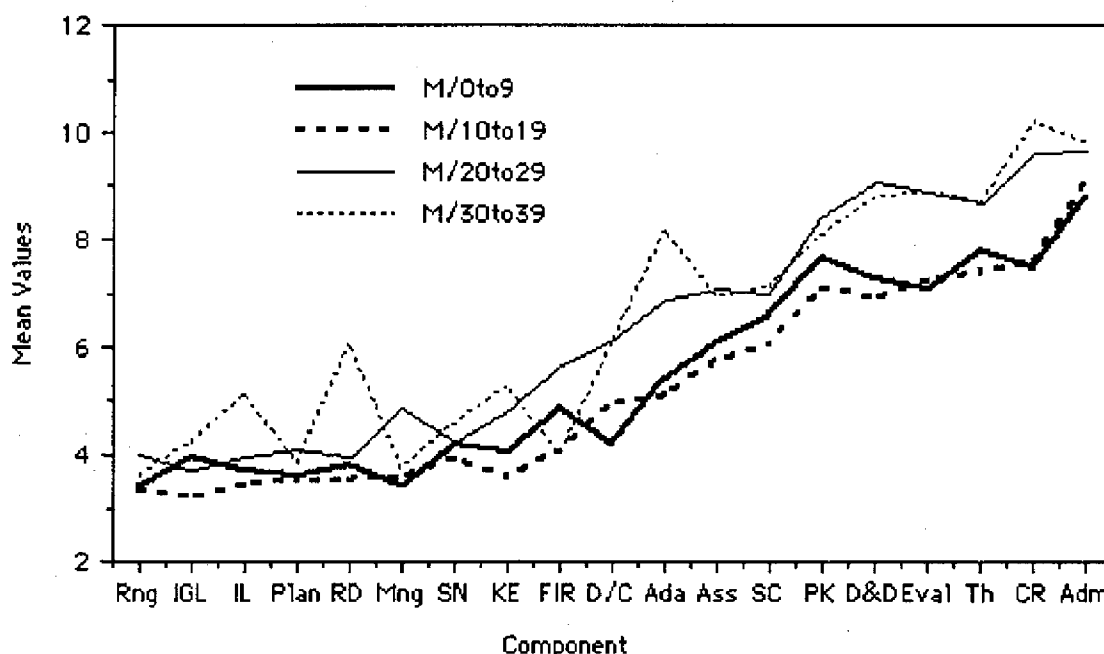
the Rank Means as an aggregate ranking for the whole sample and its component subgroups.

Comparisons of means of competency rankings for various subgroups

The mean value calculations for the ranked competencies were carried out for teacher subgroups in terms of Years of teaching, Position of seniority and Level of teaching (Primary or Non-Primary) as being important in identifying those competencies most sensitive to these teaching **experience** variables. With the knowledge that the mean values represented a robust measure of competency ranking, we have adopted these in presenting our sub-group analysis. The figures below show the comparisons of rankings within these sub-groups.

Figure 3 below shows the mean values, in the order determined by all the cases, for each of the four years of teaching groups.

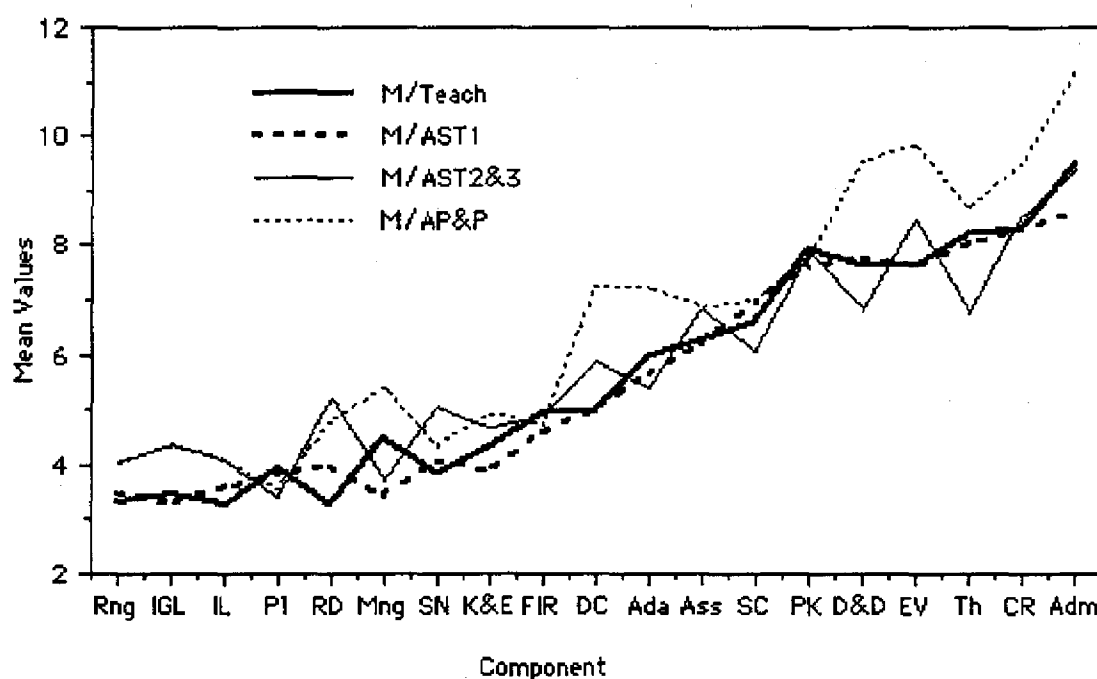
Figure 3



It will be seen that in general the '0 to 9 yrs' group and the '10 to 19 yrs' group are reasonably similar. The other two groups are also quite similar with the exception, for the longest serving group, of the 'facilitating independent learning', the 'responsiveness to individual differences', and the 'adaptability' competencies, where the mean value is higher, i.e. the importance is less; while for this same group 'planning', 'classroom management' and 'fostering interpersonal relationships' have mean values similar to the two shorter years of experience groups. Under the Ranking Scores method, in fact the 'classroom management', 'initiating and guiding

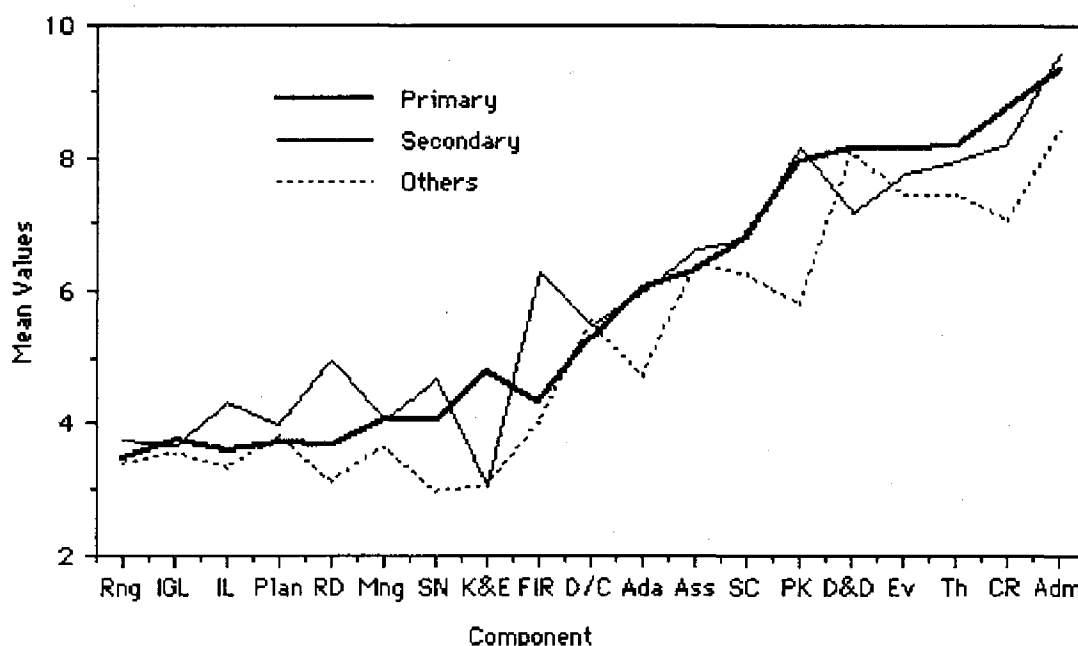
learning', 'planning for learning' and 'knowledge and enthusiasm for subject(s)' were most highly rated because some teachers only ranked those competencies—which is consistent with interview data. 'Classroom management' though means different things to less or more experienced teachers—to the former it is focused on discipline, to the latter it is more multi-faceted in terms of engaging students in learning.

Figure 4



As shown in Figure 4 the profiles for teachers and AST1s are almost identical. The profile for the combined AST2s and AST3s is almost identical to the first two, with the exception of 'demonstrating and developing curriculum expertise' and 'developing own theoretical understandings', which are slightly higher in importance; and conversely with the 'use of a range of teaching strategies', 'initiating and guiding learning' and 'responsiveness to individual differences', which are ranked lower in importance. However, the combined Assistant Principal and Principal positions show a wide fluctuation, in relation to, for instance, 'classroom management', 'discipline and control', and the last five components were ranked very much lower in importance by the Principals and Assistant Principals than by any of their more junior colleagues, including 'administration'! Are the Principals saying that although they have to perform these competencies daily as part of their job they do not like doing them and in overall terms do not value them very highly? Our qualitative analysis suggests this to be the case.

Figure 5



The primary teachers are numerically the dominant group, and their profile follows very closely the profile for all cases. The secondary teachers indicate a lower level of importance for 'independent learning', 'responsiveness to individual differences' and 'fostering interpersonal relationships', markedly so for the last component. They also indicate a higher level of importance for 'knowledge and enthusiasm' (markedly so) and 'demonstrating and developing curriculum expertise'. For the rest, i.e. upper secondary, other (including Middle School) and 'across levels', there are six components that are given a markedly higher level of importance, 'responsiveness to special needs', 'knowledge and enthusiasm', 'adaptability', 'pedagogical knowledge', 'accessing curriculum resources' and 'daily administrative responsibilities'. In terms of overall 'clustering' of competencies there was, however, much convergence of the Primary and Non-primary teachers—representing a general agreement, as found in interviews, on the ideals of good teaching.

The analysis was repeated for the competencies in the **school domain**. Once again these mean values for school domain competencies can be separated according to years of teaching, position and level.

It will be seen from Figure 6 above that once again the four years of teaching groups pair off into the two 'experience level' strands of 0 to 9 years & 10 to 19 years, and the 20 to 29 years & 30 to 39 years. The 'leadership' competency is the one which ranks roughly the same across all four groups, and the 'interaction with parents and community' being quite different for the longest serving teachers from the other three length of service groups. 'Effective resource utilisation' and 'assessment procedures'

have the widest divergence between the two pairs of length of service groups.

Figure 6
School Domain competencies by Years of teaching

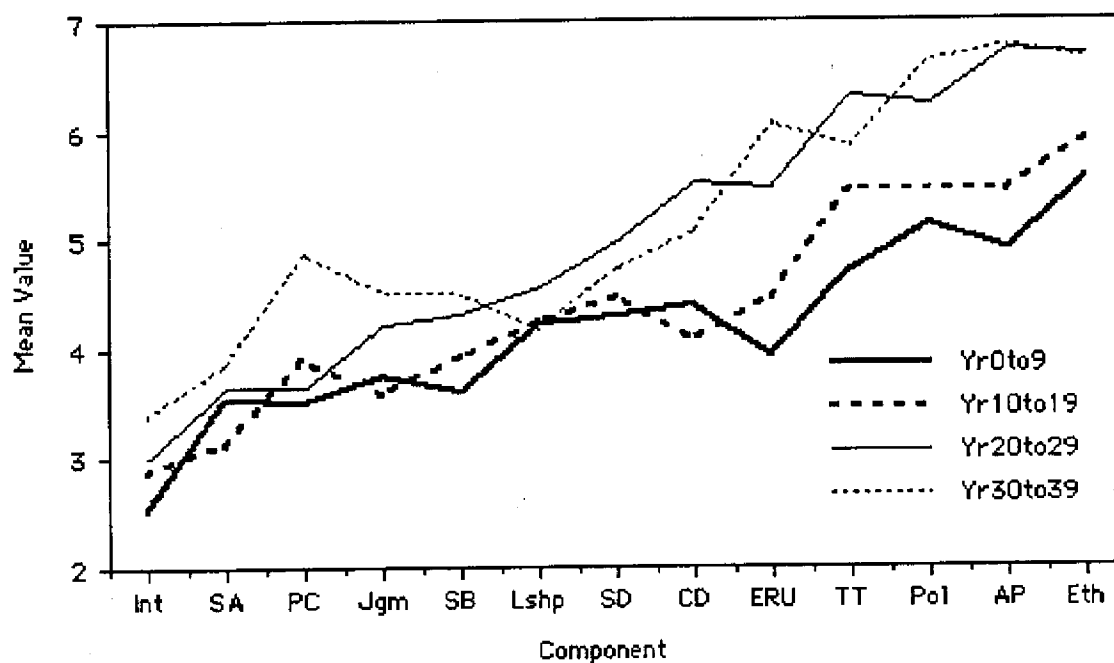
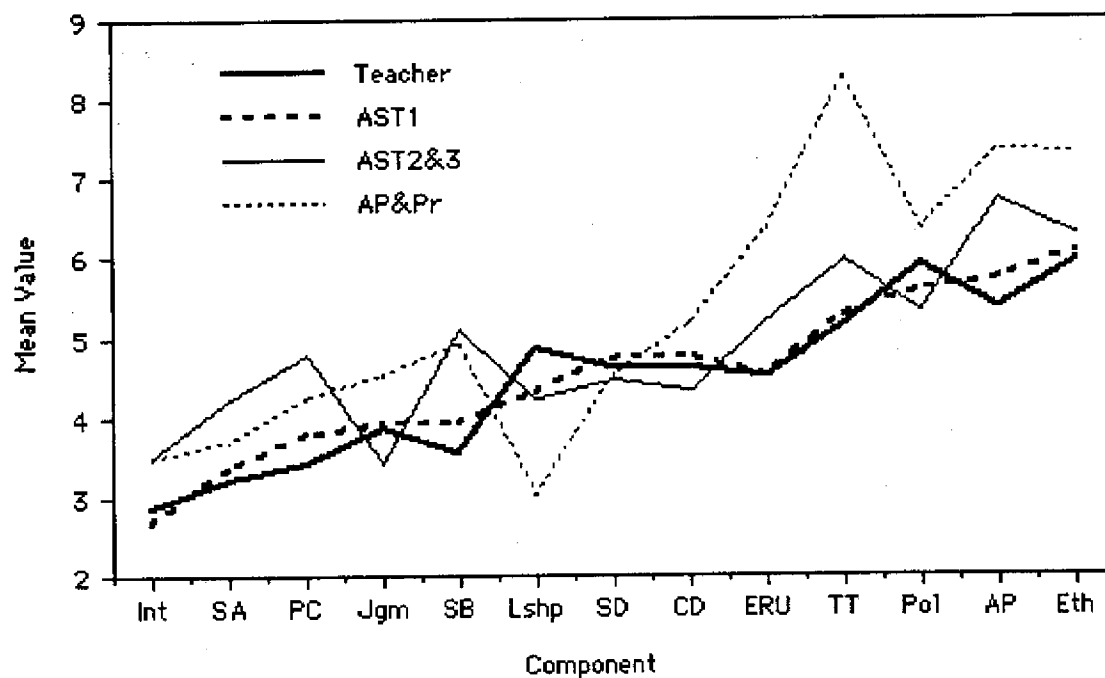
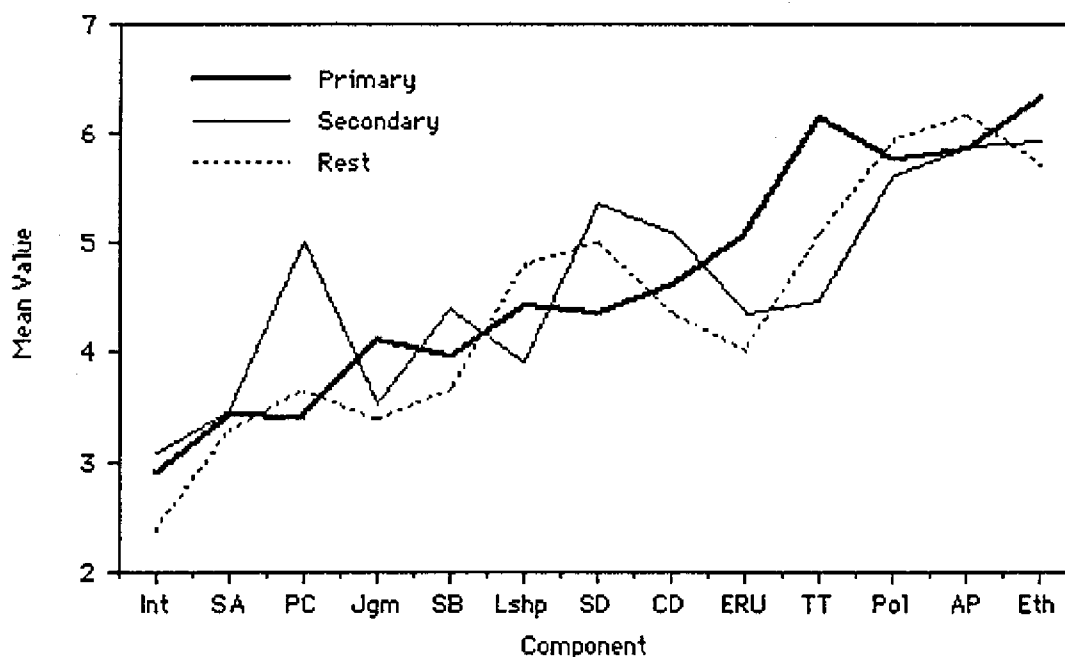


Figure 7
School Domain Competencies by Position Held



In considering the effect of position, as shown in Figure 7, the combined Principals and Assistant Principals show the biggest difference in the ranking of the components, with leadership ranked considerably higher, and effective timetabling ranked by far the least. It will also be noted that the combined AST2s and AST3s rank interaction with parents and the community rather lower in importance than the other groups.

Figure 8
School Domain Competencies by Primary/Non-Primary Teaching Level



In considering the effect of the level of teaching, as shown in Figure 8, the lines are very intertwined. The exceptions are the very low ranking in importance of the 'interaction with parents & community' and 'staff development participation' at the Secondary level; and 'effective timetabling' at the Primary level.

However, a clear difference emerged between the two plots by Years of Experience and Position achieved. The gap is smallest for the more valued competencies and widest for the least valued competencies. The classroom competencies where the mean responses are different are for example:

- responsiveness to individual differences
- discipline and control
- evaluating program units
- daily administrative responsibilities

In all cases the higher the position of respondents the less value they place on these competencies. With regard to school competencies those with the same mean values are:

- developing professional judgement
- staff development participation
- curriculum development
- administering school policy

The 'leadership' competency is ranked higher by the higher position respondents.

In summary, there is considerable agreement across these subgroups, represented by level of teaching (Primary and Non-primary), years of teaching experience and teaching position achieved, about the ranking in importance of teaching competence in both the classroom and school domains. As far as teaching level (Primary/Non-primary) is concerned, on the basis of this, and other analyses, there is no evidence to suggest that dividing the teacher population into these categories has any merit as far as discriminating both classroom and school domain competencies are concerned. Questions raised, however, about divergence in ranking some competencies by years of experience and position suggested a combined index might be constructed to embrace these two dimensions of 'experience', and that this might be used to further refine what we mean by 'experience' with regard to development of competencies.

Construction of an index of teaching experience

On the basis of the above analysis an Index of Teaching Experience was constructed with which to conduct further analysis of teacher responses to the questionnaire discussed elsewhere, and in order to test hypotheses regarding the developmental nature of teaching performance and hence the perceptions, evaluation and modelling of the listed competencies. This is part of the process of deconstruction of teacher experiences.

The Position/Year category (Pycat) has been devised using the two variables of Position and Years of Experience. The former is a six category variable of Teacher, AST1, AST2, AST3, Asst. Principal and Principal; the latter is a four category variable of 0-9 years, 10-19 years, 20-29 years, and 30 plus years. An index using additions of the two scores was used and discarded. The Index adopted is based on a multiplication of the one score by the other, giving a possible minimum score of one and a maximum score of 24.

The Index of Teaching Experience (Pycat) is a five category index based on the product values of the teacher's Position (P) and the Years of experience (Y) and has been used in further analysis of teacher questionnaire responses. It is a robust measure and reveals clearly through analysis discussed elsewhere that 'teacher experience' as a reflection not only of years of experience but **seniority** is a significant factor in both the ranking and interpreting of key competencies. The finding is not unexpected, but the fact that this factor overrides differences in teaching level (i.e. Primary and Non-primary) is less expected. Despite quite marked

differences in classroom context, structure and expectations at the Primary and Secondary levels, differences which have been suggested as reflected in classroom climate and teacher/student relationships, there appears to be quite a remarkable consistency, at least among this sample of teachers, in the ranking and evaluation of teaching competencies in both the classroom and school domain.

Conclusions and Discussion of Findings

Our questionnaire survey revealed that teachers readily identify with and rank competencies relevant to their classroom and in their school. There is a commonality among teachers about how competencies are ranked and valued in practice. This is true across types or sites of teaching experience as expressed by level of teaching (Primary and Non-primary), by years of teaching experience and by position achieved. There are differences of ranking on a few competencies—such that Primary teachers rank more highly 'responsiveness to individual learning differences' (RD) and 'facilitating independent learning' (IL) and Non-primary teachers rank much more highly 'knowledge and enthusiasm for subject' (KE). This last point reveals the greatest difference in the ranking of classroom competencies. Knowledge and enthusiasm for subject is ranked first by Non-primary teachers compared with 9th by Primary teachers. This finding on the importance of knowledge of and enthusiasm for subject for Secondary and Post-secondary teachers confirms that of the research on the qualities and characteristics of the effective teachers nominated by their students (Abbott-Chapman, Hughes, Holloway & Wyld, 1990; Holloway, *et al.* 1992). In terms of overall 'clustering' of classroom competencies there was, however, a great deal of convergence of the views of Primary and Non-primary teachers.

There was even greater congruence of ranking order of school domain competencies by teacher groups, especially as these related to roles and tasks surrounding organisation, administration, resource utilisation and evaluation—anything which smacks of paperwork, reporting or accounting and is seen to service the structure and not the student. The four lowest ranked competencies for all groups were 'effective timetabling' (TT), 'administering school policy' (POL), 'review of assessment procedures' (AP) and 'understanding and exercising ethical and legal obligations' (ETL). The three most highly ranked competencies by all teachers were the 'humanistic' ones seen as central to effective teaching performance, and above all **facilitating** effective teaching performance. These were 'interaction with colleagues' (Int), 'self appraisal and reflection' (SA) (these two seen in observation and interview as very closely linked) and 'interaction with parents and community' (PC) i.e., the importance of getting to know your students.

These findings, and the fact that teachers were most united on the lowest ranked competencies on both the 'classroom' and 'school' competencies, some even being unwilling to give a ranking to those competencies they believed were not central to their teaching role, underline the general opinion of teachers that their job is 'to teach students' and that many things they are now required to do outside the classroom detract from that task, or set of tasks. Teachers perceive their main focus as the students, and as they explained in interviews this was their motivation for going into teaching, not as 'paper pushers'. The intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, rewards of becoming a teacher, i.e. the fulfillment of 'helping others to learn', rather than pay, conditions or holidays, are the main attractions of teaching. Studies of teacher recruitment (Abbott-Chapman, *et al.* 1991) have demonstrated this clearly, and that despite award restructuring and attempts to 'industrialise' the profession this still remains true. Weber (1948) in his treatise on bureaucratisation highlighted that occupations and professions which become bureaucratised tend to lose sight of service to the client and become servants of the organisation or structure, spending more and more time and energy to keep bureaucratic structures and procedures in place. Teachers, in the main, believe that this is what is happening to teaching increasingly in a 'results' and 'productivity' driven world. 'Only things that you can count, count!' This is particularly true of those holding senior or administrative positions.

A number of writers have linked this trend to the thrust of economic rationalism, as was discussed in the Introduction. Hargreaves (1990, 1992), for instance, writes of the increasing demands made upon teachers' time, their increasing workload and the 'intensification' of their work. Other writers such as Lingard, Knight and Porter (1993) and Watkins (1994) see changes in education as part of a post-Fordist shift in capitalism, with an attempt to relate education more closely to industry. The outcome is a teaching situation 'requiring more work, more students and less time, and as being more instrumental, less expressive, less effective, less satisfying and less professional than in the past' (Easthope & Easthope 2000, p.43). In their Paper on Tasmanian Teachers of Behavioural Studies, Easthope and Easthope (2000) describe a clash between the economic rationalist discourse of the schooling system and its administration, and the professional discourse of the teachers. They argue that the increasing complexification of teachers' work is only part of the process, and that 'another important part of the process was the attempt by teachers to maintain their professional ideology of caring, an ideology in direct conflict with the administrative ideology of economic rationalism' (Easthope & Easthope 2000, p.57). This naturally produces teacher stress, especially in situations of limited resources. This research was conducted just prior to our own transformation, and illustrates the climate of

teachers feeling almost under siege as they struggled to maintain a strong personal commitment to their students.

The role 'diffusion' which teachers experience, rather than the role 'specificity' which they anticipated before entry into the profession, and the coping strategies they adopt, will be discussed in another paper. However, the point is germane to an examination of why the only significant aspect of 'experience' seemed to be seniority of position in conjunction with years of service rather than years of service alone. It appears from both the surveys and from the interviews and observations that those who have succeeded in moving up the hierarchy to AST3, Deputy Principal or Principal have perforce had to identify to a greater extent than their classroom colleagues with the 'administrative' and 'bureaucratic' competencies required in the modern schooling system although they do not enjoy them. They rank 'leadership' as very high, because they must demonstrate leadership, especially in guiding classroom colleagues into new, and sometimes for them unattractive ways of doing things. We had some 'exemplary' senior teachers in our sample, many of whom had been exemplary classroom teachers, who were promoted to vice principal or principal and now regretted having lost contact with the students. Conversely, some of our respondents confided they had not sought promotion because they did not want the 'hassle' of 'administrivia' this might entail.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the extent of teaching experience, marked by seniority of position as well as length of service, gives a slightly different slant on key teaching competencies and the development of these. The Index of Teaching Experience (ITE) which we have developed from our data takes into account these two dimensions and will be used in other papers to illustrate other differences in teaching discourses which are associated.

Finally, a side effect of this conflict of discourses, or potential conflict, has unfortunately 'washed over' into perceptions of areas of competence which one would have imagined would have been central to good classroom practice, but which have now become 'contaminated' by the revolt against abstractions of all kinds, and the withdrawal, particularly of older classroom teachers, into 'craft' mode. This refers especially to such competencies as 'demonstrating and developing curriculum expertise', 'pedagogical knowledge', 'evaluating units' and 'theoretical understanding', a low ranking of those competencies was given by both Primary and Non-primary teachers. From classroom observations and from subsequent reflective discussions it was clear that these are competencies commonly in use in everyday classrooms. Yet the defensiveness of many teachers, and their diffidence in externalising their theoretical positions in case they are not deemed ideologically acceptable leads them to 'throw the baby out with the bath water' and deny the value of these competencies in their classroom teaching. Another paper will deal with the ambiguities and

uncertainties produced for teachers in the context of their role performance and the intensification of their work, and will unpack 'meanings' of competence in the context of action, and action-in-reflection. With great prescience the editorial of the Newsletter of the Australian Teaching Council in November 1994 wrote of Australian teachers' 'ambivalence' about their profession, and that while believing their central role, teaching and learning, to be worthwhile and personally rewarding, experience 'considerable frustration, anger and even despair 'mainly arising from aspects of their working lives which are outside this central function'. 'Some of these include structural reforms in education, which do not appear to have a necessary relationship with the "core business" of teachers' (ATC, 1994, p.1).

It is hoped that this paper, will contribute to the debate about what is the 'core business' of teachers and how it should be supported.

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