Teacher as an individual and a member of community

Michelle Williams, (QUT and President ACCE) argued that we need to consider the role of teachers and their use of information and communication technologies on three levels - as an individual and on a personal level; as a member and client in local groups and national enterprises; and as a citizen in a global economy.

Changing nature of education

As part of societal changes, education and the teaching and learning process in classrooms is also changing. Teachers' possible uses of information technologies, when working with colleagues and with students and parents, can be re-analysed in the context of individual, national and global impacts. Examples include rethinking schools as workplace and learning communities, the growing use of the gathering of 'real' data collected either locally or globally, and the processing of information for analysis and publishing via staff and student presentations. Teachers' skills and understandings of how they might work with other teachers and students to use information technologies in 'learning projects' are crucial.

ACCE Project

Arising from discussions earlier this year of the changing role of teachers and their place in schools and society, the ACCE Board initiated a ‘Teacher Information Technology Competencies’ project. Graham Ferres presented an overview of the Australian and overseas movement towards developing sets of teacher competencies in the field of information technology (e.g. Finn & Mayer, Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria, USA). It was noted that the American systems have tended to focus upon student benchmarks for ‘computer literacy’. ACCE resolved to continue to strongly support teachers in their development of understandings about how to use information technologies with students and as part of their professional work life.

Capabilities, competencies and standards

In July, ACCE conducted a national conference in Adelaide, during which the Council conducted a seminar focusing on the trend towards state systems outlining desired or required competencies by teachers, particularly in the use of information technologies.

Bruce Rigby spoke how Victoria published, in March 1998, a ‘Teacher Capabilities Kit’. This included a collection of statements of desired teacher capabilities, and a skill matrix across three possible stages of self-assessment by a teacher of their use of learning technologies with students. He stated that there was no mandatory system, but a ‘strong’ encouragement to schools to link curriculum renewal with technology implementation. The notion of capabilities included, but did not involve, only technical information technology competencies.

Ken Price from Tasmania outlined how their Department developed a broad set of teacher competencies starting with the accreditation technique from vocational education and framework of functional analysis - what do you do as part of your role? The draft teacher competencies and intended outcomes were collated into modules, leading from operational skills with the technologies through to a focus on teaching and learning with the use of the technologies. It was not expected that the teacher competencies would be mandatory. (It is now understood that the Tasmanian project team has moved to emphasise more the teaching and learning competencies and intended outcomes with the use of information technologies, by stating that the module for technical IT competencies would be assumed and a pre-requisite to the teacher competencies portfolio.)

Carol Hughes described how Queensland developed a set of ‘Minimum Standards for Teachers - in Information Technologies’, as part of a 2001 Project. The project analysed current ‘best practice in the use of information technologies’ across classrooms and concluded that effective classroom practices included: strong IT skills, the ability to apply their use in the classroom, a say in curriculum planning, and an emphasis upon student-centred learning. They then trialed a set of teacher IT standards, which could be assessed by schools. The Department negotiated these arrangements with the Queensland Teachers’ Union through an enterprise agreement, as the teacher IT standards will be mandated.

The way forward

At the National conference, participants and the ACCE Council discussed the part that teachers and state organisations might play in these developments. It was argued that we should ensure that a central focus continues to be on pedagogical issues, with the integration of IT across the curriculum and within all KLAs, otherwise the focus will concentrate on IT competencies. And so the focus should be on effective classroom practice - and how to help teachers work towards changing their current practices, including greater use of technologies. Teachers should be encouraged to use information and communication technologies routinely as part of their work life through greater access to the technologies. PD which links, and does not separate, the development of curriculum change and new practice with the development of information technology skills, is crucial.