Editorial: English teachers' work in an era of standardisation

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The title of this issue of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* echoes the title of two volumes published during the past thirty years, each under the auspices of the International Federation for the Teaching of English (IFTE), namely *English Teachers at Work: Ideas and Strategies from Five Countries*, edited by Stephen Tchudi (1986), and *English Teachers at Work: Narrative, Counter Narratives and Arguments*, edited by Brenton Doecke, David Homer and Helen Nixon (2003). Each volume self-consciously announces its significance as a reflection of a certain moment in the history of English teaching, and, read together, these books do indeed capture developments within English teaching that we identify as constituting our contemporary professional landscape.

Of particular interest to us, as the editors of this issue of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, is the emergence of standards-based reforms, producing a situation in which English teaching has been subjected to standards at multiple levels – both professional standards that claim to map what teachers "should know and be able to do" (to echo the rhetoric that is typically employed to rationalise/vindicate the development of professional standards) and mandated learning outcomes, whether in the form of learning continua that purportedly capture outcomes that students are expected to achieve at each level of development or in the form of standardised literacy testing (see, for example, Zacher Pandya, 2011).

Signs indicate that the role of standards in reconstructing teacher's work has become even more intensified. It is, we think, possible to argue that the professional practice of teachers is now mediated by "standards" to an unprecedented extent, including (but not limited to) the development of a mindset that focuses on classifying students' performance against pre-defined benchmarks; that privileges standard English instead of affirming the rich variety of dialects and other non-standard-forms; and that treats proficiency in English language and literacy merely as an entry ticket to the workforce, rather than promoting imagination and play. Paradoxically there are also calls from politicians to give teachers more professional autonomy over the curriculum. This paradox presents an opportunity for commentary on the tensions between centrally controlled vs. locally controlled curricula and pedagogy (see Wyse, et al., 2012). The aim of this special issue of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* has been to look more closely at English teachers' work in the current moment, particularly to explore how (or if, or in what ways) it has been transformed in the intervening period between the IFTE Conference of 2003 on teacher's work and the present moment.

In this issue, we asked contributors to describe the relationships that exist between

neoliberal governments' attempts to regulate what happens in classrooms (that is, the "standards movements") and educational research conceptualizing the full domains of teachers' professional practice. We also asked, vis-à-vis these characteristic emphases in neoliberal policy statements about education, how English teachers' work has changed in recent years. Do understandings of English curriculum and pedagogy (such as those reflected in the IFTE volumes mentioned above) have a place in the contemporary world of teaching and learning? A number of articles in this issue, for example, Turvey and colleagues, and Montgomery, identify tensions between teacher autonomy and professionally based expertise and the kinds of teaching that standards-based reforms are calling about them to undertake. Other articles address the lived experiences of teachers in this era of standards-based reform (Rice, this issue), and ask, how, or in what ways, the content knowledge of English/literacy teachers is constructed by standards and standardised texts (Montgomery, this issue).

TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND CURRICULUM THEORY

One issue of central importance to us as educators and researchers is the ways "transnational education policies" are shaping and fostering the hegemony of standards in education policy discourse (Lingard, 2012). Transnational educational policy is reflected in commonalities of solutions to problems in education perceived by politicians. It arises to various degrees internationally as a result of the communication and networks between politicians and policy-makers. One of the most powerful and widely shared elements of transnational policy is high-stakes assessment. Internationally, these forms of assessment include the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements (IEA), Trends in Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). In order to shed further light on transnational educational policy, Lingard (2012) advocates sociological attention to the message systems of schooling: curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation.

In Bernstein's (1971, p. 47) seminal chapter on the classification and framing of educational knowledge, he defined curriculum as "the principle by which units of time and their contents are brought into special relationship with each other" (p. 48). Classification was defined by Bernstein as "the degree of boundary maintenance between contents" (p. 46). For example, a subjects-based curriculum (which Bernstein called a "collection" type) has strong classification, whereas a theme-based curriculum (an "integrated" type) has weak classification. Framing was defined as "the degree of control teacher and pupil possess over the selection, organisation and pacing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship" (1971, p. 46).

Bernstein's most significant contribution to curriculum theory was in two areas. The first was his identification of curriculum control in relation to power. For example, he contends that only a select few pupils/students are allowed access to "relaxed frames", in other words empowerment for these pupils to "create endless new realities" as part of the understanding that knowledge is permeable and provisional. The second significant contribution was his explanation (or perhaps advocacy) for a move to the

institutionalisation of weak classification and framing through integrated codes, particularly at secondary level. The main reasons offered for the move to weak classification and framing were recognition that higher levels of thinking were increasingly differentiated; that more flexibility was required in the labour force; the need for more egalitarian education; and the need to make sense of major societal problems related to power and control. Some of Bernstein's final thoughts in the chapter were particularly powerful:

> I suggest that the movement away from collection to integrated codes symbolises that there is a crisis in society's basic classifications and frames, and therefore a crisis in its structures and power and principles of control. The movements from this point of view represent an attempt to declassify and so alter power structures and principles of control; in so doing to unfreeze the structuring of knowledge and to change the boundaries of consciousness. From this point of view integrated codes are symptoms of a moral crisis rather that the terminal state of an education system. (p. 67)

While greater understanding of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment can emerge from sociological work, the philosophic critiques of rationalism are also significant in understanding policy. Joseph Dunne's (1993) extensive philosophical exploration of techne and phronesis through the work of four philosophers' critiques of rationalism was initially stimulated by a concern that the rationalist objective-led teaching approach was an inappropriate way to conceptualise and realise teaching and learning. Dunne argued that a more appropriate understanding of teachers' work could be found in Aristotle's ideas of *Techne* (making or production) and *Phronesis* (conduct in a public space).

There is a kind of philosophical pragmatism in Dunne's framing of his initial problem. Such a meaningful connection between modern educational problems and philosophy can be seen at its most powerful through the work of John Dewey. One of Dewey's main ideas was that good teaching is built on the educator's understanding that there should be an interaction between the child's experiences and ideas, and the school's aim to inculcate learning. Less effective learning takes place if, instead of interaction, an opposition is built between experience and learning. Over-emphasis on transmission of facts to be learned from a formal syllabus is one example of such opposition. Dewey was clear that the best knowledge available to society was the appropriate material for children's learning, but only through teaching that made a connection with children's experiences and thoughts. The dangers of rationalist conceptions can be linked with what Dewey called the three "evils" of inappropriate curriculum "material" (1902, p. 24): a) the material is not organic to the child; b) the connecting links of need and aim are conspicuous by their absence; c) there is a lack of logical value (Dewey, 1902, p. 24). Logical value to Dewey was curriculum organisation that represented the best knowledge in society organised through authentic hands-on experiences for the child. The teacher's role, however, was vital: "Guidance [that is, by the teacher] is not external imposition. *It is freeing the life-process for its own most adequate fulfilment*" (1902, p. 17 [italics in original]).

Comparison between Bernstein's and Dewey's thinking reveals Dewey's broader vision in relation to curriculum theory but with a concern shared by both about the structuring of knowledge. Dewey's thinking about the place of the child in his/her education was more explicit, but Bernstein's attention to egalitarianism, and the recognition that lack of control by teachers and pupils was a risk to society, can be

seen as a link with Dewey's. The role of the state in the control of curriculum and pedagogy becomes a key issue.

One of the important contributions that the authors of this special issue make is to reveal in some detail the impact of policy on pupils and their teachers. For many, this kind of detail is the essence of policy in reality. But although teacher mediation of policy is one important reality, there is a danger that the development of policy texts, and the significance of the texts themselves, can be neglected. Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue that the place of the text in policy is contested. For some, the text (printed or other) is only a marginal representation of wider processes, or even only one "text" within a range of policy messages that includes oral events such as speeches. It is certainly true that policy texts emerge as a result of contestation, compromise, and the often-uneasy bricolage of competing interests.

And yet while these understandings of policy and policy texts are valid, we wish to re-assert the importance of the policy text as centrally important to policy development, and particularly national and state curriculum development. Once the political intent to define a problem requiring policy and policy text has been articulated, work centres on the development of printed or and/or electronic text as a marker of intended finality. Because the development of the text is central to the policy development process, we argue that this necessitates continuing analysis of the discourse of texts. Even if such texts are only emblematic of policy-in-practice, nevertheless their status as symbolic of policy intent is of vital importance. While critical discourse analysis (for example, Fairclough, 2003) provides an important methodological resource for the analysis of policy texts, the linguistic orientation of CDA is mainly structural and syntactic, an orientation that may fail to sufficiently account for important pragmatic dimensions (in a linguistic sense) such as authorial appointment and identity, and writing process dimensions.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN THE UK CURRICULUM

One of the most significant features of change to education in the UK, and public policy more broadly, has been the differentiation that has happened as a result of political devolution in 1999. Since devolution, the countries of the UK have developed their curricula in significantly different ways, while at the same time some common features that can be seen as part of transnational policy are evident. To summarise (see Wyse et al. 2012 for the first book length comparison of curricula in the four nations) a dichotomy now exists between what may be characterised as a command and control culture in England, for example, typified by the national strategies of the New Labour government, and the greater autonomy afforded, for example, to teachers in Scotland.

One of the key variables in national curriculum development in England is the different influences on teacher agency that are related to age phase. At secondary school phase, the development of a new national curriculum that was implemented in England in 2007 gave schools greater freedoms over the curriculum. However, at the same time New Labour's loosening of local authority control through initiatives such as the academies programme (a redesignation of schools through application then conferment by the Secretary of State for Education) began a process that was

intensified once the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition came into power in 2010. This process grants academies greater control over their curriculum but concentrates power over schools away from local authorities and more directly in the Department for Education. However, in spite of freedom from the national curriculum for academies, national curriculum prescriptions are likely to have an affect, even on these schools, as they will be closely linked with statutory assessment that affects all schools apart from independent schools.

As far as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) age phase is concerned, the importance attributed to child-initiated play in the early years is one of the factors that has resulted in some limit on state control of the content of the early years curriculum. However, the introduction of the EYFS and the associated assessment through the EYFS Profile has marked a new inroad by government into the compulsory education curriculum. In common with other Conservative-Liberal Democrat curriculum developments, the recent government commissioned review (Tickell, 2011) has resulted in a streamlined early years curriculum and its assessment. The new EYFS curriculum emphasises physical, personal, social and emotional development, but the primacy of language and literacy is clear in its location and emphasis in the "prime areas" and "specific areas" of the new curriculum, with a corresponding weaker emphasis on the arts and creativity. In the specific areas, mathematics is listed second to language and literacy. Assessment through a new EYFS profile is yet to be published, but this will be a key factor in the nature of the new curriculum as experienced by children in early years settings.

At primary-age-phase, national curriculum development in England has suffered from a lack of rigour, understanding and coherence as a result of poor government interventions. The repeated attempts to change the national curriculum in England reflect these deficiencies. In the summer of 2012, a number of the mistakes that had dogged national curriculum development since the 1980s looked likely to be repeated. The most serious of these were the following: a) the use of elite groups to develop the curriculum; b) insufficient attention to the range of relevant evidence; c) an undue emphasis on comparison with other countries in international league tables; d) dubious public consultations; and e) weak proposals for programmes of study.

Unlike, for example, Scotland's attempts over many years to fully engage society in developing a shared curriculum, from 2010 onwards, ministers in England opted for an expert group to make recommendations to a dedicated group of civil servants in the Department for Education, and hence rejected the opportunity for a more long-term, considered and more democratic process to build a national curriculum fit for the 21st Century. Even accepting many of the recommendations of the national curriculum expert group appointed by education Minister Nick Gibb proved impossible.[1]

The place of language and literacy, or "English", in relation to teacher agency in the curriculum is particularly problematic. The most serious new impediment to teacher agency in England, and something that reflected a historical first, was reflected in the prescription of a single method of reading teaching – synthetic phonics. This directly prescribed the method of teaching, as opposed to just the content of teaching, for the

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[1] As was clearly documented. See http://www.bera.ac.uk/content/background-michael-gove's-response-report-expert-panel-national-curriculum-review-england

first time in England's history. This decision was quickly followed by the implementation of a national screening test to assess children's ability to decode phonemes represented in real words and "non-words". Particularly disturbing was the lack of appropriate consideration of the outcomes of a public consultation. The first problem with the consultation questionnaire design was that it did not include the question: Do you think a phonics screening check should be implemented for all six-year-old children in England? The only question in the consultation that came close to addressing the most important issue of whether the test was desirable overall or not was this one: "Do you agree that this screening check should be focused on phonic decoding? (DfE, 2011, p. 12). The response rates were: Yes: 28%; No: 66%; Not Sure: 6%:" This clearly showed a majority negative response to the main element of the phonic screening check. But in an extraordinary interpretation of the outcome of the survey, the education minister Nick Gibb concluded that "28% of respondents agreed the check should focus on decoding using phonics. 20% respondents argued that children learn to read using a variety of strategies, including using visual and context cues, and the check should take into account these alternative strategies" (2011, p. 4). Therefore, "Taking into account the consultation responses, findings from the pre-trialling and the academic evidence, we propose *to continue to develop the phonics screening check"* (2011, p. 6 [emphasis added]). Surely this kind of interpretation and the resultant policy changes are undemocratic and unacceptable?

More generally, the proposals for new programmes of study for the subject of English in the national curriculum in England (published in summer, 2012) also illuminated many problems. The extent to which they reflected the advice of groups and individuals who were consulted is unclear, but their historically regressive character suggests that at the very least such consultation outcomes were not well used. A particularly serious deficiency was what appeared to be a lack of evidence base for the proposals, particularly the poor reflection of linguistic scholarship.

The article from Sue Bodman, Susan Taylor and Helen Morris in this issue arises from the English educational context, but is referenced to the transnational discourse of standards-based reform. Their contribution explores the implications of such reform for teacher autonomy and professional development. Drawing particularly on the work of Eraut (1994), they argue that in the context of policy-driven curricula, teacher professional knowledge is likely to be "replicative" and "applicative", with teachers reduced to corporate agents. The kinds of knowledge required of teachers in the current moment are "associative" (knowledge drawing not only on knowledge of pedagogy and subject but also intuitive elements of reflection) and "interpretive" (knowledge generated at the point of practice) (Eraut, 1994). They draw on a number of examples illustrating the relationship between professional learning and professional decision-making, arguing that teacher autonomy is crucial in offsetting the negative impact of policy decisions that can disempower teachers and teacher educators. The conclude: "Rather than acting as a performative robot enacting policy, the teacher becomes an 'alchemist', planning and leading learning experiences creatively, flexibly and responsibly and able to do so through informed autonomy."

In an article entitled "English as a site of cultural negotiation and contestation", Anne Turvey, John Yandell and Leila Ali[2] also write out of the English educational context,

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[2] A pseudonym, used to protect Leila, a young Muslim woman at the start of her teaching career.

drawing on the stories and voices of two young teachers to tease out some of the tensions and contradictions in the work of teacher-educators and the work that goes on in London schools. While standards-based reforms are being imposed from above, the lived realities of schools and schooling are profoundly reshaping social relationships and subjectivities. Leila's story, in particular, highlights issues of identity, which are being highlighted in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms by teachers and students alike. The agency exerted by both Leila and Sam in these stories is cause for hope, however. In particular, Leila shows how by drawing on the funds of knowledge of her students (Moll & Arnot-Hopfer, 2005), learning can be made meaningful for them. In the context of this article, Leila's reflexive contribution can be seen as speaking back to the standards-based reforms, offering a very different account of her own learning and that of her pupils.

TOWARDS A MORE PERFECT SET OF STANDARDS: "COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS" IN THE UNITED STATES

In the past three years (2009-12), sweeping changes have been made in educational policy in the US at the federal and state levels – changes whose outcomes are not yet clear to teachers, researchers or even policy makers. Since at least the enactment of the *No Child Left Behind* Act (2001), teachers and students have experienced increasing centralisation of curriculum and assessment. The Act, which mandated that students make continual progress on standardised tests, was signed into law during a groundswell of support for "scientifically based" curriculum (National Reading Panel, 2000), which in turn led to the adoption of narrow, phonics-heavy language arts (literacy) curricula in most US states. Some of the combined effects of these developments were teacher deprofessionalisation, particularly in the areas of curricular and pedagogical decision-making (McCarthey, 2008; Valli & Chambliss, 2007), curricular narrowing (Allington, 2002; Altwerger, 2005), and increased focus on standardised testing in the classroom, to little effect (Ravitch, 2010; Zacher Pandya, 2011). In lieu of renewing the *No Child Left Behind* Act, the Obama administration funded a new program called the "Race to the Top" in 2009[3]. One outcome of the *Race to the Top* has been the near-total adoption of "Common Core State Standards" or "CCSS" (National Governors Association, 2010) in the past three years (since 2009).

The standards have been adopted by 47 of the 50 states (so far). Sponsored by an "initiative" of two state-level bodies (the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers), the standards are not meant to be "national", although that is largely how they will function, due in part to assessments linked to the standards (see below for more on this issue). Adoption of the standards at the state level is a prerequisite to access *Race to the Top* funds, and thus, though they have been presented and are discussed as optional and driven by state needs, their power is tied directly to federal funds. It is no secret that their creation was fuelled by internal pressures to compete in a global market (reflected in the campaign language on education from both US presidential candidates) and to improve the nation's standing on exams like the PISA and TIMMS. The stated goal of the CCSS is to prepare students to be "college and career ready", and, unlike past standards in California and

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[3] See www.ed.gov

many other states that describe year-to-year skill development without a clearly stated set of final goals, they work backwards from a set of "anchor standards" through the grades, from high school graduation to kindergarten, to determine what skills students will need to meet the standards.[4]

The sheer scale, speed and planned implementation of the Common Core State Standards in the US are unprecedented. Within *three years* (2009-12), the "Common Core State Standards Initiative" team had drafted an initial set of "College and Career Readiness" standards, then a set of Common Core English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards for k-12 students. After one round of closed commentary, another of public commentary and some revision, the standards were approved and published by the policymaking bodies that engendered them, and subsequently adopted by a vast majority of states. Then, states were enjoined to choose to belong to one of two assessment consortiums – California, Zacher Pandya's home state, selected the "Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium"[5] and, in the process, agreed to use the assessment procedures tied to the standards developed by the consortium.

In California, the State Board of Education took barely a year to modify the "common core" and produce its own set of standards (85% "Common," 15% Californian[6]. The state took another year to propose a set of English language learner (ELL) modifications and clarifications to the standards, which do not explicitly address ELLs' developmental needs.[7] By 2014, most states will switch partially or wholly over to the new standards (revised from the "common" set to be their own, using the 85/15 ratio described above for California) and new assessment systems.

Who developed the Common Core State Standards? Aside from the "CCSS Initiative", the associations of governors and of state school officers that fostered their development, who actually *wrote* them? They are based on a set of "college and career readiness" standards developed by a non-profit group, Achieve[8], whose board includes the governors of five US states and a handful of former Chairmen of the Board for companies like Intel and IBM[9]. (The Initiative took the standards and worked from them to create the larger CCSS for English Language Arts and Mathematics, which were actually "authored" by two men, "David Coleman, Founder and CEO, Student Achievement Partners and Jason Zimba.[10] The CCSS website[11] stresses the input of "parents, teachers, school administrators and experts from across the country" in this process, but is not specific about exactly how such input was achieved. They also note that "teachers have been a critical voice in the development of the standards" along the way[12]. The National Education Association (NEA), the national teachers' union (the American Federation of Teachers [AFT]), and two content-area organizations, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) were consulted after the standards had been drafted by the initiative. These groups chose to work with the

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[4] See http://www.corestandards.org/)
[5] See http://www.smarterbalanced.org/
[6] See http://www.scoe.net/castandards/
[7] The work is on-going: see http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/documents/overviewpld.pdf
[8] See www.achieve.org
[9] See http://commoncorestandards.com/faq/who-wrote/
[10] See http://commoncorestandards.com/faq/authors-of-the-common-core-state-standards/).
[11] See www.corestandards.org
[12] See http://www.corestandards.org/frequently-asked-questions

CCSS Initiative rather than having no voice at all in the process[13]. These standards were less of a bricolage, then, and more of a straightforward list of skills and dispositions that business and government leaders want future employees to have.

But enough about restricted development. There are potentially positive outcomes of the adoption of the standards:

- Increased emphasis on higher-level thinking skills, especially in literacy and the language arts;
- Increased emphasis on writing (and writing in relation to reading);
- "Foundational skills" such as phonological awareness, phonics and fluency have been separated from "reading" itself and are not meant to be prerequisites to reading;
- More emphasis on literacy across the content areas (especially history and science);
- Less summative, one-right-answer assessment of students;
- More teacher control over pedagogy (if not content and assessment);
- New, less directive and less phonics-heavy language arts curriculum and textbooks.

The standards themselves will not *do* these things, but their adoption has cleared the way for teachers to begin to discuss how, for example, they might go about increasing the complexity of texts in their curricula, how they might background phonics teaching (but still do it), and make time to actually teach writing (to name a few sea changes). In his article in this issue, Robert Montgomery reveals several American high school teachers' lack of attention to the standards in their teaching, and explores the ways the teachers' strong senses of professional identity interact with this lack. He cautions that the Common Core State Standards represent a new and potentially more intrusive turn in the US, one in which teachers and administrators may feel much more pressure to teach and perform to the standards. These pressures may come, he suggest, from the curricular adoptions that will result from the standards, as well as from the funds coming from programs like *Race to the Top*.

In her classroom narrative, Mary Rice, writing from high school classrooms in the US, defines standards as guidelines that are embodied by teachers, particularly as teachers grow and change as professionals. She suggests that they are part of a larger professional development dialogue, and that, while they do help her think about what and how to teach, they do not structure or outline her teaching over time. She also touches on the incoming Common Core State Standards, calling them "the latest set" and musing on how they might, or might not, change her teaching practices in the future.

The assessment consortium chosen by California has recently posted sample test "items" and "tasks" meant to be given on computer adaptive systems, with children (grade 3/age 8 and up) taking tests on computers and receiving questions calibrated to their replies. One question offers a 700-word passage, and then a paragraph from that passage with a word underlined. The question itself asks the student to "Click on two

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[13] For more details, see the open letters to NCTE members posted by the NCTE presidents at http://www.ncte.org/standards/commoncore/).

phrases from the paragraph that help you understand the meaning of ___ [the underlined word]".[14] For US children and teachers used to multiple-choice comprehension questions, this kind of assessment also represents a startling change.

Investigations into the ideologies surrounding their creation and adoption, as well as about their effects, are beginning to be answered by educational researchers (see Ávila & Moore, 2012), but for now the majority of publications about them are in the vein of implementation guidance reports[15]. The effects on teacher agency on student performance, and, perhaps most importantly, on the lived experiences of students and teachers in classrooms whose instruction and assessment are structured by this new "common core" standards system remain to be seen. The development and adoption of the standards was completed with relatively little fuss, since most participating bodies (even those like NCTE that "participated" by commenting on pre-existing drafts) have stated that it was better to have some input than none. The rollout of the standards, assessments, and, of course, new curricula to meet those standards is moving right along, with new assessments beginning for some states as early as spring 2013. The near-passivity of participants is almost shocking – or it would be, if we in the US had time to be shocked. We don't. Instead, we have to learn about the new standards, and plan ways to support our students (k-12 and teacher candidates as well) to learn with them.

...AND HEADING DOWN UNDER

As happened in England, the move to standardisation in Australia and New Zealand began in the early 1990s with curriculum documents that established "achievement objectives" in relation to levels of schooling, thus attempting to establish norms for what children should know and be able to do at every level. These abstracted, one-size-fits-all ladders of outcomes were in defiance of research which suggested that a child's literacy development is anything other than linear and is highly context specific. With such documents in place, the potential was always there for outcomes to become reified into standards against which pupils would be measured and the subsequent results used to "measure" teachers and schools and have the results published in the form of league tables.

This potential has been realised in New Zealand, by a mixture of political stealth and outright governmental bullying. Curriculum levels were used to develop standards of achievement that were required to be reached at the end of the school year in reading, writing and mathematics and were introduced despite protests from schools in 2009. (Some schools are still refusing to cooperate.) Rather than utilising standardised tests, teachers are expected to make "overall judgements" using a range of assessment tools and their own observations. The first "league tables" for schools were published in 2012, despite critics suggesting that the data were incoherent and that there was no consistency between schools in the way judgements were arrived at. Typical of standards-based regimes that focus on "literacy" and "numeracy" only, schools are neglecting areas of the national curriculum such as the arts, physical education and science (see Thrupp, 2012).

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[14] See http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks/).
[15] For example, http://www.reading.org/Libraries/association-documents/ira_ccss_guidelines.pdf

In Australia, as Barbara Comber reports (2011), what counts as literacy has been increasingly "fixed" by the "normative demands of high-stakes, standardised tests" (p. 5). Yet, like New Zealand, the country is becoming increasingly linguistically diverse, with one out of five Australians aged 15-75 speaking English as a second language in 2006 and this trend accelerating. Those in the education sector are currently having to deal with demands of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), and the *MySchool* website where results are reported and which functions as a *quasi* league table. Driving the "neo-liberal rationale for the preoccupation with competitive measurable standards" is "insurance for Australia's prosperity in the context of the financial crisis" (p. 6), a driver that can be found in other Anglophonic settings. As Comber indicates, however, the literature worldwide warns of the dangers of such public accountability technologies: "narrowing the curriculum, curtailing teachers' discretionary judgement, and the possible negative effects of 'labelling' on students' educational trajectories and self-esteem" (2011, p. 9) And as the article we have been citing shows, there are identifiable changes in the way in which teachers' work is being restructured to the detriment of professional autonomy.

The other area where the standards agenda is being played out in the Australian context is teacher quality. Writing in this issue, Susanne Gannon investigates the bureaucratisation of teachers' work that has accompanied the recent development of Professional Standards that regulate the profession with the aim of improving "teacher quality". Gannon contrasts two alternative approaches to standards in Australia, the new, centrally developed National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011) and the earlier profession-developed Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (AATE/ALEA, 2002; Doecke, 2006). It examines the differing designs, contexts and effects of these sets of standards, and maps differences and similarities between them. The second half of the paper then turns to narratives from prominent Australians of their outstanding English teachers in two published texts, reading these narratives through the standards frameworks. The paper concludes that the shift to a regulatory and managerial approach to the teaching profession risks obscuring many of the essential elements of good teaching, in particular the affective dimensions that mobilise and animate teaching and learning.

Finally, in this issue, Muhammad Abdel Latif contributes a study undertaken in the context of standards-based reform in Egypt. The study examines how a standards-based communicative curricular reform in general secondary school English in Egypt has changed teachers' classroom practices, and the factors influencing such practices. The results indicate that the standards-based curricular reform has *not* brought about desired changes in teachers' practices. Teachers were found to allocate much more instructional time and effort to grammar and vocabulary than to other language skill components. A number of factors were found to influence teachers' practices: washback, culture of teaching, inadequate time, students' low English levels, and lack of equipment and materials. What is significant in relation to this issue of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique,* is the suggestion implicit in Abdel Latif's study, that standards-based reforms have the potential to transform pedagogical practice in a positive way, for example, by encouraging the uptake of a communicative competence model of second-language instruction. However, such improvements cannot occur without a parallel reform in the students' examination system. Additionally, other teacher-related and contextual problems need to be addressed.

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