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PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS, TEACHER CAREERS AND THE ENACTMENT OF PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT: AN EXPLORATION OF THE DISCOURSES

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Cast within the context of recent education reform this paper explores the negotiation and enactment of teacher professional standards and their translation into everyday teacher practice. This theoretical paper seeks to explore ways the standards regime may or may not be distorting the way teachers’ practice is evidenced and portrayed. It asks, “what does compliance to professional standards look like?” and “how does the enactment of standards feature in everyday classroom practice?” In exploring this question it is proposed there is a need to delve deeper into how evidence of practice, teacher judgement and expertise is positioned in the current political climate. An alternate view to working with professional standards is proposed arising from the available research. This alternative model positions teacher enactment and interpretation of standards as a dynamic, fluid and ever-evolving construct, one that may be changeable over teachers’ career stages.

Preamble

At the time of writing this paper teachers, particularly in Victoria, have been caught up in a maelstrom of debate and strikes regarding the imposition of national teacher professional standards, and the trialing and negotiation of performance pay aligned to these standards. The timing of this paper comes at a point in the conversation about the enactment of teacher professional standards is at a crucial tipping point: how are teachers positioned in the uptake and enactment of standards and what does this mean for their everyday practice? This paper holds the view that the exercising of teacher professional judgement is central to an authentic, comprehensive view of teacher practice in the current political climate.

Taking the lead from Mockler (2011) this paper explores and extends the assertion that teacher identity and how teachers position themselves as professionals throughout their career is a dynamic, fluid process, changeable over time and is "mediated by a complex interplay of personal, professional and political dimensions of teachers' lives" (p. 518). This paper will first explore the current literature and discourses informing the standards movement in Australia. The second and third sections of the paper will explore the way teacher judgement and expertise is framed and potentially subverted within these discourses. With these views in mind, I will lastly question the utility of mapping linear and fixed teacher career stages to teacher professional standards and propose an alternative interpretation of how to work with teacher professional standards, using teacher judgement as a lens through which teachers have the possibility to map their careers with 'catalytic possibilities' (Kriewaldt, 2008). This alternative model allows for teachers to move, double back, skip and merge across career levels as stated in the national professional standards. This model not only describes teacher career stages but opens up new pathways and avenues for describing and interpreting teacher practice. It is argued that teacher professional judgement is at the heart of this process, acting like a fulcrum, when negotiating and mapping teacher learning across a career.

Background

Understood within broad public sector reform, standards have been borne out of governmental imperatives to be more accountable, requiring systems of regulation and sanctions to ensure compliance. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2009) observe a retreat from a once-within-our-grasp vision of progressive education to safer, more measurable and quantifiable territory. In this time of conservative, neo-liberal, post 9/11 world order, security and risk management have become the main
concerns whereby “common-sense solutions are applied to problems and contexts which are highly complex and ambiguous” (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2009, p.4).

In Australia as well as in other countries such as United Kingdom and United States of America the implications of the neo-liberal and neoconservative governments have not gone unnoticed, particularly the way education reform has been positioned, practised and measured. As in Australia where there are moves to ‘consolidate’ state-based curriculum, testing and reporting into a national system, similar trends can be observed in the USA with the reauthorisation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001/2, known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and in the UK, the Children Act 2004 known as Every Child Matters (ECM). In Australia the centralizing tendencies with regard to not only standards but also to curriculum, assessment and reporting, as well as the devolution of management, placing more site management responsibilities on to school principals have shaped how standards will be envisioned and enacted. Even though education is state and territory responsibility “the Commonwealth is playing an increasingly important role in regard to policy development, funding, and accountability and reporting” (Ingvarson, 2010, p. 50).

In the UK, specifically England, professional teaching standards are mandatory and are linked to pay scales. They describe professional proficiency at five levels, from qualified teacher status to advanced skills teacher. The standards are administered by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) and are underpinned by the five key outcomes for children and young people identified in ECM.

In USA, professional standards for teaching have been developed and “used in quite different ways” (Mayer, 2009, p. 9). Whilst it is compulsory for teachers to be registered by their local state registration bodies, national professional teaching standards are also overseen by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) which provides certification on a voluntary basis. The national professional standards and assessments are structured for reciprocity in certification of new teachers across the states, for the recognition of accomplished teachers or the reviewing and accrediting of teacher education programs. With the NCLB legislation, doubts about the value of teacher professional standards as tools for teacher accreditation were fuelled with verbal ability and subject matter knowledge as the main determinants of quality teaching. The US Government even funded the American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE):

creating an option for prospective teachers to bypass traditional teacher education en route to certification. Those with an undergraduate degree can pay to take an online examination to be ‘certified’ as a teacher. Likewise, programs such as Teach for America in US and Teach First in UK enable high teaching undergraduates with no teacher preparation to enter the profession after a short ‘preparation’ (Mayer, 2009, p. 10).

As evident in UK and USA, public education has been dominated by legal and bureaucratic forms of educational standardisation and managerialism. This has served to potentially weaken the teaching profession, most notably teacher professional judgement. When “teaching is regulated so highly by the state and rewards and sanctions are linked to compliance and non-compliance...such a system does not promote a view of teaching as intellectual work involving professional judgement – the essence of teacher professionalism” (Tripp, 1993 cited in Mayer, 2009, p. 7).

In Australia, since the 1980s there has been a proliferation of professional teaching standards when competency based conceptions of standards were developed by state educational jurisdictions (Louden and Wildy, 1999). For accreditation and certification purposes entry level teaching standards have continued to be developed whereby Australian teachers are required to be accredited by their
relevant state-based body at a basic level of professional competence. Teacher association moves towards establishing professional standards within Mathematics, Science and English have been developing as well as state government, with moves to create teacher bodies focusing on teacher registration, evaluation and accreditation. The strength of these professional associations is worth noting, “in no other country, other than USA, have professional associations mobilised themselves in developing professional standards to the extent they have in Australia” (Ingvarson, 2010, p. 56).

The need nevertheless to unite and coordinate these efforts of different subject associations was recognised in the National statement from teaching profession on teacher standards, quality and professionalism in 2003. This statement recognised the primary “value of standards was to give direction to teacher education and professional development. The profession needed to improve its capacity to assess performance against standards and thereby provide recognition and certification to teachers who attain standards” (Ingvarson, 2010, p. 56). Later, Teaching Australia played an important role in bringing the work of professional associations and standards development work together by acknowledging the need to include early childhood and primary teaching standards. They produced, through its network of professional associations, a set of guidelines for drafting new standards (Teaching Australia, 2009).

The recent development of standards has intensified with standards campaigns “fuelled by research revealing that the quality of teachers is the most important school-based factor in improving outcomes for students” (Darling-Hammond, 1999 cited in Cummings, 2010, p. 2). The dual pronged climax of this movement has been the proposal of Reward Payments for Great Teachers, by 2013 and the release in February 2011 of National Professional Standards for Teachers initiated by Teaching Australia and developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). The development of national standards was “part of an initiative on the part of previous federal governments to introduce performance-based pay for outstanding teachers, one of several current measures to wrest control of education back from state governments” (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2009, pp. 7-8). As will be elaborated upon later in this paper, this development has blurred the conception of standards as both certification gate keeping and performance management criteria.

The national standards describe what is required of teachers at four levels of professional expertise-Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher, across three domains: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement. As described, the standards will publicly articulate what is required of teachers at each level, providing “a common language for professional dialogue between teachers, teacher educators, teacher organisations, professional associations and the public” (AITSL, 2010, p. 3) and According to MCEECDYA (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs) the standards:

make explicit for those within and outside the profession, the knowledge, skills and dispositions required of teachers at each level... The Standards are designed to provide a continuum of capabilities and expectations and a nationally consistent basis for a valid, fair and reliable identification and recognition of those who meet the standards. These standards will also form the basis for accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses, initial teacher registration, and performance appraisal and professional accreditation (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 1)

How is teacher professionalism envisioned within this proposed standards framework? What will constitute as legitimate and valued knowledge for the profession? Warnings about the implementation of standards resound. The concern is that in knowledge-based economies of informational societies (Castells, 1997) knowledge becomes both a commodity and a source of status. A preoccupation with professional standards and accountability prioritises a particular version of ‘quality’ with respect to
teaching and a particular form of teacher professionalism is legitimised (Bloomfield, 2006). The “status of teachers, teacher educators and academics - the knowledge workers – as the primary determiners and ‘legitimators’ of what counts as valued knowledge and how it is selected and disseminated, is under threat” (Blackmore, 2005, p. 453).

For change to occur teachers need to be drawn into seeing the potential and empowering recognition potential of professional standards for their practice and professionalism. Ownership of teacher professional standards is “an indispensable condition for their acceptance and effectiveness” (Ingvarson, 2010, p. 57). Moreover, standards are conceived of as not immutable, they need regular revision in light of professional research and knowledge. This manifests the idea that good teaching is “not just something a person learns how to do over time; that good teaching is not just a bundle of traits. Standards confront the mindset that teaching is just a matter of personal style and doing their own thing” (Ingvarson, 2002, p. 3).

How teacher professional standards in Australia are implemented and translated into practice has the potential to either transform the teaching profession or curtail how teachers enact their professional judgement and sense of professionalism. The existence and necessity of standards is not disputed but how standards are to be conceived and enacted is positioned as central to this paper and will be discussed in the following section.

**Standards**

The concept of a standard or standards can be defined as a quality or level of attainment, “something used as a measure, norm, or model in comparative evaluations” (Cummings, 2010, p. 4). Alternatively one could define standards as, “a set of any agreed upon rules for the production of (textual or material) objects (Bowker and Star, 1999, p.13). In teaching, the objects:

under construction are textual, representations of what teachers know, believe and are able to do, and material, embodied judgements within situated practice. As a set of rules, standards are therefore an ordering tool (Mulcahy, 2008, p.2).

Cummings (2010) makes the distinction between conceptualising standards as a tool to evaluate a teacher or the practice of teaching, a focus on the former can “lead to the competitive classification and ranking of teachers, along with increasing micro-management of their daily work... the latter can lead to the collaborative development of strategies for improving professional practice thereby ensuring the students and their learning remain central to the enterprise of education” (p. 4).

The very terms used to refer to professional standards have become contested and interchangeable (Sachs, 2005) and are thought to “provide the magic ingredient to restructuring education” (Andrew, 1997, p.168). Sachs (2005) makes the point that in literature and policy documents about standards the terms, 'professional standards', 'teacher standards', 'teaching standards', 'teacher professional standards' are used interchangeably but “do not mean the same or do the same conceptual or practical work” (p.2). Distinguishing between teacher standards and teaching standards is important as:

teacher standards are concerned with measuring teacher performance and encompass the work on regulatory standards, while teaching standards are about improving teaching through a developmental approach. Teacher standards place teachers as objects for measurement while teaching standards focus on teaching as a process that can be improved (Sachs, 2005, p.2).
Standards can therefore be viewed as arising out of competing agendas: the use of standards to manage teacher performance and the use of standards as a basis of revitalising the profession (Sachs, 2005). Standards can be seen as regulatory or aspirational, “do they refer to a comparative measure or a level of quality that is deemed to be ideal or highly desirable?” (Cummings, 2010, p. 4). Standards and their enactment may also serve to promote and make what it is that teachers do transparent to the community thus working to “dissuade the notion that teaching is something that anyone can do especially at times when quick-fix solutions” (Cummings, 2010, p. 4). In this way standards can be either viewed as an instrument and a list of behavioural elements describing what they have to do and how, or alternatively, envisaged as a proactive, personal ‘frame of reference for self-regulation’ (Koster and Dengerink, 2008) to be capitalised upon for professional empowerment. Considering the nature of standards on a deeper level, it is also possible to think of standards in a further two senses: first, the sense to which they can be maintained at a certain level indefinitely – that is, are sustainable – and the second, the sense in which they enhance the work and welfare of teachers and students improve the working and learning environment, promote equity and enrich classrooms and schools, that is, are sustaining (Mulcahy, 2008, p. 2).

Standards conceived for as regulatory in their intention, aim “in their most extreme form, to spell out and standardise professional practice in ways which eliminate the legitimacy of professional judgement as well as the need to use it as part of their everyday practice. Regulatory approaches may, at their worst, be seen to deny the creative, intellectual and relational work implicit in good teaching, reducing it to a set of measurable attributes or behaviours” (Sachs, 2005, p. 3).

A regulatory or ‘bureaucratic’ (Cummings, 2010) view of standards embodies a technical conception of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Standards according to this view implies knowledge is an object located in individual minds and manifested in written texts and standards statements. It attends closely to issues of professionalism and professionalization with the intention that the authority and status of teaching is enhanced. Such approaches to standard setting can be used as a managerialist tool for measuring effectiveness and efficiency of systems, institutions and individuals (Sachs, 2005, p. 4).

With the new public administration increasingly informed by audit cultures and discourse of managerialism, Blackmore argues there has been a subtle shift away from the notion of ’being a professional’ that is underpinned by a wider sense of public advocacy and activism and a body of professional knowledge. Alternatively, ‘being professional’ is valued, as demonstrated by displaying expertise and adhering to a set of standards or competence in meeting corporate objectives (Blackmore, 2005). According to Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark and Warne (2002) teachers are thus caught between an ‘economy of performance’ and ‘ecologies of practice’ encompassing the professional dispositions and commitments individually and collectively endangered and accumulated in learning and performing the ‘teacher’ (p. 109).

Dealing with uncertainty and in time of suspicion and global mistrust, a rise of audit cultures and associated ‘rituals of verification’ have thus emerged (Power, 1999). The adoption of “risk as an organising concept in public and private sector thinking...within regimes of audit and accountability is
both a response to uncertainty and ambiguity and a driving force in the diminishment of social trust in judgement” (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2009, p.4). Power (2004) elaborates:

The risk management of everything reflects the efforts of organisational agents previously engaged in collective and pooling of social and economic risks to offload and re-individualise their own personal risk. The result is a potentially catastrophic downward spiral in which expert judgement shrinks to an empty form of defendable compliance (p.42).

Conversely, developmental standards are created out of a sense of social and ethical responsibility by teachers with the aim of ongoing learning, providing opportunities for teachers’ further professional learning aimed at improving quality throughout their career (Sachs, 2005). Or “being a teacher means being able to draw your own map – instead on relying on mass-produced tourist guides” (Ohanian, 1999, p.151).

Standards developed within this perspective:

need to be dynamic rather than static... (in a) fluid policy environment, the rapid explosion in information and knowledge and changing expectations by governments and community regarding teacher quality and performance means that flexibility and adaptiveness to uncertainty are crucial. Accordingly, these standards are responsive to such an environment and as such are never finished and are always evolving and developing (Sachs, 2005, p.4).

Knowledge in such a world view is constituted as a process and is practically and discursively enacted or enactive. Standards therefore co-emerge with the activities by which they are shaped and which they reciprocally shape (Mulchay, 2008, p.5). Importantly they are also context specific and as such a form of situated knowledge, “that is a kind of knowledge defined by and through its relationships and interconnections with its wider social and environmental context” (Greenhough, 2007, p. 1141). Judgements associated with teacher effectiveness within such a view are motivated by a desire to “extend existing skills and capabilities...judging the accomplishments of teachers is a complex process that cannot be quantifiably measured and categorically determined” (Cummings, 2010, p. 9).

Standards have the potential to propel teachers to challenge and to gain professional control over their work by opening up discourse:

by putting teachers at the forefront of change. Robust standards are raised and applied by accredited peers to all members of the profession. Coherent and empowering frameworks of professional learning that embody and advance the standards go beyond courses and workshops to include coaching colleagues, mentoring new teachers, studying new research findings, and writing curriculum materials together (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009, p. 91).

As will be proposed later in this paper, standards can provide a map through which teachers can use to investigate their practice, their knowledge base and their beliefs to enhance their learning in a multitude of ways: “standards are fictions created to simplify and enable action.. paradoxically they narrow our view of the complex nature of teaching but also open up new views” (Popkewitz, 2004, p.243). Indeed standards can complement the work of professional learning by providing a structure that teachers use to analyse their work and that working with standards facilitates the development of shared language which underpins collaboration (Kriewaldt, 2008). Dutch standards developed through a distributive process of backward mapping described as ‘teacher-derived standards’ (Storey, 2006, p.221) are an example of a wider policy shift to a devolved education structure and are a recent example of how standards can be positive and transformative. Participants in the Dutch study said they felt “empowered and professionally enhanced: the standards they and their colleagues had
produced were meaningful to them” (Storey, 2006, p. 231). It is worth noting that standards in this instance were intended for professional learning not performance management.

When evaluating standards it would be easy to assume that “like motherhood, standards are in the best interest of teachers, students and the teaching profession” (Sachs, 2005, p.1). Standards can be easily anointed as a magic bullet (Darling-Hammond, 1999) with the capacity to ‘fix’ educational woes.

Within the Australian context a discourse linking teaching standards to teacher improvement and learning through monitoring via standards is more than ever prevalent. As being played out in the current debate about teacher performance and teacher recognition, a potentially incompatible situation for AITSL has emerged (Ingvarson, 2011), with the introduction of a voluntary, nationally consistent system of certification for teachers on the one hand, and on the other, the proposition of an annual bonus scheme, Reward Payments for Great Teachers, by 2013. This pay scheme will identify ‘top performing teachers’ each year. Such assessments are to be carried at school level by panels and will assess teachers using data such as lesson observations, analysis of student performance (including NAPLAN), parental feedback and professional development and teacher qualifications. Agreeing with Ingvarson, such a scheme:

has to be one of the silliest performance pay schemes...it ignores the lessons from over 30 years of research. The methods listed are completely undeveloped. (They) cannot provide reliable and valid assessments of teaching quality. Nor can NAPLAN be used to evaluate individual teachers. The scheme would be very expensive and a huge burden for schools, and would have a negative impact on staff relationships (Ingvarson, 2011, p.40).

Coupling of standards to teacher quality and the utility of standards in activating this is not new. The federal senate inquiry into teacher education Top of the Class concluded that:

many submissions highlighted the potential of the national professional standards for teaching to provide a means of linking on-going professional learning to career progression (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007, p. 98).

This report identified a prevailing discourse which links teacher professional learning to learning standards. The most common coupling is that of standards’ utility in ‘guiding’ professional learning (Ingvarson and Semple, 2006). Kleinhenz and Ingvarson (2005), argue that standards are politically empowering for teachers and their organisation:

standards-guided teacher education systems.. are rated significantly more highly by graduate teachers... they support the development of professional community in schools ... serve as a powerful vehicle for teacher learning and provide clearer, long-term goals for professional development (p. ii).

It is important to point out that “the standards themselves do not lead to teacher professional learning” (Kriewaldt, 2008, p.12) but rather it is the action undertaken enlivening and enacting standards as well as the opportunity for collaboration and critical reflection when working with the standards that offers the most exciting and positive opportunity for teacher learning and career empowerment. Indeed, the key according to Ingvarson (2011) is to mobilise and exercise one's professionalism, by "defining what you mean by good practice and demonstrating that you can make valid a reliable judgements about whether or not (you) have attained those standards” (p. 42).

This paper has outlined recent thinking about teacher professional standards and the current context of policy reform. What has been outlined above is a review of literature highlighting the positive as well as cautionary aspects of standards, viewed as products of regulatory or aspirational discourses. Most
of these studies are based on anecdotal evidence and observation. There is little contemporary research in the Australian context as to how the standards agenda is actually impacting, if at all, on school-based teaching learning, practice, teacher professionalism and judgement. To what extent has the use and implementation of standards in the Australian context been orientated to compliance and surveillance at the expense of innovation and aspiration? Next I will outline the need for current research into how teacher judgement is to be enacted when interpreting these new standards and address the question: to what extent does this agenda of accountability and performativity shape and subvert professional judgement?

Teacher Professional Judgement

Teacher professional judgement is a “key and critical element of professional practice: the capacity to make wise and sound decisions about learning based upon knowledge of learning itself, knowledge of the student and knowledge of the learning context is core to the carriage of good teaching and learning” (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2009, p. 8). Furthermore, the development and use of teacher professional judgement is inextricably linked to the emancipatory or transformative dimensions of education:

"The essence of emancipation... is the intellectual, moral and spiritual autonomy which we recognise when we eschew paternalism and the role of authority and hold ourselves obliged to appeal to judgement. Emancipation rests not merely on the right of a person to exercise intellectual, moral or spiritual judgement, but upon passionate belief that the virtue of humanity is diminished... when judgement is overruled by authority (Stenhouse, 1979, p. 163)."

For the purposes of this paper the conceptualisation of teacher professional judgement encompasses not only teacher discretion about student scores and assessments but also pedagogical judgement about the how, why (and why not) teachers perform tasks as part of their professional practice. Professional judgement is also viewed to encapsulate notions of risk-taking. As such, teacher professional judgement is advocated to be more than technical decision-making, but a complex, emotional and moral endeavour.

Tensions

The imposition of regulatory teacher standards poses a number of tensions and dangers, such as reduced teacher autonomy and failure to recognise the complexity of teachers’ work (Blackmore, 2005). Drawing on research by Teacher Training Agency in UK, increased levels of regulation and surveillance threatened creativity and adaptability (Mahoney and Hextall, 1997). For Bottery (2004), standardization has consequences for teachers at an individual level. He argues:

"excessive standards through externally-imposed targets can negatively affect the aims and objectives of a school, reduce trust in policy makers, and depress educators’ self-concepts...Not only can targets deflect attention from the prime concern of an educational organization, but because of their ever changing nature, they can prevent people from being satisfied with their efforts (p. 91)."

It is proposed that the imposition of teacher standards informed by a regulatory as opposed to an aspirational agenda clearly has consequences for teacher professional judgement and decision-making relating to their practice. The diminishment of teacher professional judgement has taken place in incremental steps over the past two decades in inverse proportion to the rise in popularity of standardised testing, objective assessment and the codification and quantification of teachers’
knowledge via professional standards. Objective measures as advocated in current common-sense approach to education sits in preference to the ‘fuzzy’ measures represented in the application of teacher professional judgement with the much less ‘desirable and indefensible’ subjectivity (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2009). This dichotomy is neither helpful or accurate, for:

in advocating advancement and development of teacher professional judgement we do so in the understanding that finely honed professional judgement is a tool by which teachers can be held more, not less accountable, albeit to the right ‘masters’, to their students, their colleagues and their communities for the quality and improvement of student learning (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2009, p. 9).

Conceptualised within a managerialist framework, evidence-based teacher judgement is heralded a hallmark of effective professional practice. This view relies upon a causal model of professional action (Biesta, 2007). As in professions such as medicine and law, it is based upon the idea that professionals solve problems by ‘doing’ something or intervene in order to bring about a certain effect. When transferring a causal view of professional action and judgement to education, a number of tensions arise.

Firstly, “being a student is not an illness, just as teaching is not a cure... education is not a process of physical interaction but a process of symbolic or symbolically mediated interaction” (Burton and Chapman cited in Biesta, 2007, p. 8). As much as the managerialist discourse aims to reduce education to a controllable, ‘causal technology’ with a defined set of competencies and criteria, education is “not a process of push and pull... education is an open and recursive system” (Biesta, 2007, p.8).

Secondly, implied within an evidence-based, technical practice such as medicine, there is a clear distinction between means and ends. This is problematic when transferring this view to education. Knowing a particular way to achieve an outcome may not always be the most desirable. The means by which teachers make decisions are not neutral, it is not always the case that “we can simply use any means as long as they are ‘effective’... education is at its heart a moral practice than a technical enterprise” (Biesta, 2007, p.10). The ‘what works’ agenda of evidence-based practice is misplaced in education because judgement in education is not about what is possible (a factual judgement) but what is educationally desirable (a value judgement). Practice based on rationality-based evidence:

neglect they key role played in problem solving by practical wisdom and informal tacit knowledge... by conceiving rationality in terms of means to given ends (it) neglect(s) the ethical-moral dimension of problem solving (Sanderson, 2007, p.340).

What is of critical importance is to consider the kinds of judgements teachers are engaged in, as part of daily practice. Empowered teacher judgement, choosing to act, or not, is at the heart of a teacher’s ability for to make decisions about their practice and their students’ learning. As proposed in this paper, to embody an active sense of teacher professionalism is the ability to make “judgements about the most appropriate course of action in the specific circumstances in a context of informal rules, heuristics, norms and values.. the question for teachers is not simply ‘what is effective’ but... what is appropriate for these children in these circumstances” (Sanderson,2007, p.341). Crucially, placing pressure on teachers to act according to what will be seen as being effective in short, denies teachers the right to not act, if they judge such action is educationally undesirable.

Pressure to conform and comply to the agenda pursued through the imposition of regulatory teacher professional standards is seen as an expression of a discourse of performativity. Performativity disempowers and silences teacher voice. It, “employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a
means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)” (Ball, 2003, p.216).

The issue of who controls the field of judgement is crucial in such a culture of performativity. Ball (2003) asks, who is it “that determines what is to count as valuable, effective or satisfactory performance?” (p. 216). Such an apparent objective and hyper-rational calculation of performativity is misleading as it reduces complex social processes into simplistic figures or categories. Emanating from global managerial discourses Clarke and Newman (1997) refer to the ‘epidemic of quality’ (p.76) which has been thrust into the educational sphere in parallel with its ascendancy in public sector management. Such appeals for quality assurance and quality control in such a discourse raises questions for the success in advocating:

mindless adherence to ideals and virtues elevated with in the corporate sector, where there exists a simplicity of purpose and process, which does not figure in the context of education and the complex business that is teaching and learning (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2009, p. 9).

A further complication arises when unpacking the processes of quality assurance and ‘accounting logic’ (Broadbent and Loughlin, 1997). Such processes are:

- generally focused upon the gathering of evidence to build confidence in the quality of educational services provided..... it is quite possible for quality assurance processes to deal with the construction of the perception of quality rather than the provision of actual quality itself... endless tick boxes and ‘administrivia’ associated with quality assurance provide a wealth of evidence which in turn reportedly has the capacity to build public confidence (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2009, p. 9).

Such a view of standards constructs a “‘myopic’ view of teachers' work, with evidence on particular forms of evidence and not others” (Blackmore, 2005, p.455). Research and evidence primed to reveal ‘truth’ about ‘what will work’ and promote teacher compliance by translating such ‘truths’ into rules for action and criteria for performance rest upon a cookbook approach (Biesta, 2007), the notion that all “teachers need to do is follow these rules without any further reflection” (Biesta, 2007, p. 11). It is therefore evident that performativity brings into being new subjectivities. Policy technologies are mechanisms for reforming teachers and changing what it means to be a teacher, for the “reformation of the capacities and attributes of the (teacher’s) self” (Dean, 1995, p. 567). Reform does not just change what we do, it also changes our social identity (Bernstein, 1996, p.73). It brings about change in our subjective existence and our relations with each other (Rose, 1989, p. ix), “it is the struggle over the teacher’s soul” (Ball, 2003, p. 216).

Within such cultures of performativity how can teachers exercise their judgement? It is proposed that teachers’ judgement may be compromised by the imposition of regulatory rather than aspirational professional standards through the relentless pursuit of quality assurance, quality control and evidence. Ways in which teacher practice is constrained and standards in the dominant culture of compliance are potentially subverted will be outlined below.

**Impression management**

This paper proposes that managing your role as teacher in a performative environment may come at a cost. Teachers are caught in a ‘law of contradiction’ (Lyotard, 1984), between intensification of technologies of reform to complete one’s job, and the costs, in terms of time and energy (Lyotard, 1984). This may endanger ‘ institutional schizophrenia’ (Blackmore and Sachs, 1997) and feelings of ‘ontological insecurity’, with teachers experiencing self-doubt, ‘are we doing enough? Are we doing the right thing? How will we measure up?’ (Ball, 2003).
Ways in which teacher professional standards and the regime of performativity is subverted by teachers is through impression management (Ball, 2003). Paying attention to one’s institutional image and public relations (Cribb, 2009) is evidenced as fabrications, or “versions of an organisation (or person) which does not exist – they are not outside the truth but neither do they render simply true or direct accounts – they are produced purposefully in order to be accountable” (Ball, 2003, p. 223). Fabrications are a process of transfiguration, to be audited, an organisation must “actively transform itself into an auditable commodity” (Shore and Wright, 1999, p. 570). Being ‘seen’ is central to performance-based reforms with teacher evaluations based on the notion of visibility. The “paradoxical result is that while audits are conducted to make visible the inner workings of organisations or individuals, (the) audit is an increasingly private and invisible expert activity” (Larsen, 2005, p. 300). Crucially, in an effort to be more transparent the reality of teachers’ work becomes increasingly opaque – the appearance of what looks good for the sake of meeting standards obscures the genuine view of everyday teaching and learning.

In order to ‘succeed’ in performative school cultures teachers ‘internalise a corporate identity’ (Blackmore, 1996). This involves acting, “so as to experience feelings that are required of the job, such as anger or enthusiasm, coolness or concern” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 840). Under this audit regime, professionalism is valued for spending more time accounting for appropriate skills, knowledge and dispositions. A subtle but vital distinction is revealed, “what becomes more important…is not whether a teacher upholds professional standards but whether teachers can demonstrate publicly that they fulfill accountability expectations” (Larsen, 2005, p. 300).

Ways in which schools and teachers transform themselves into such a commodity through fabrications is evidenced by routine selection of statistics and indicators, stage management of events, teach to the test/target/inspection/performance criteria (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). As Connelly and Clandinin (2006) claim, when developing portfolios based on national standards some teachers developed ‘cover stories’ whereby some of the complexities and challenges of teaching were neglected. Similarly, Robertson, Dale, Thrupp, Vaughan and Jacka, (1997) cite examples of teachers in New Zealand creating artefacts and ritualistic displays of their work along with unreal assessment records and teaching performances. Teacher practices become shaped by the touchstone, ‘this will be good for ERO (reviews), even though teachers often did not believe these practices were in the best interests of the students (Robertson et. al, 1997). What is evident is that if teachers are under pressure “to meet specified standards to which they are not genuinely committed, teachers can be expected to ‘jump through the hoop’ of compliance rather than authentically building them into their practice” (Thrupp, 2006, p. 20).

Such engagement in fabricating evidence and practice may lead to ‘values schizophrenia’ (Ball, 2003), a splitting between teachers’ own judgements about good practice and students’ needs and the rigours of performance” (Ball, 2003, p. 221). For teachers, this is a dilemma between institutional obligations and ‘doing my job’ and ethical dilemmas, ‘doing the right thing’. In wrestling with these dilemmas, “we often find ourselves living with and working through ambivalences and resorting to ironic role distancing in order to manage the pervasive dissonances” (Cribb, 2009, p. 37). Such impression management of performance, is an ‘enacted fantasy’ (Butler, 1990), purely created to be seen and to be judged. The ultimate consequence, is that teachers may be experience personal meaninglessness, “institutionalised existential separation from the moral resources necessary to live a full and satisfying existence” (Giddens, 1991, p. 91).

When engaged in public displays of ‘standard-keeping’, interpersonal relationships between colleagues are thus altered. In an attempt to preserve a professional relationship teachers may display
emotions which differ from their actual emotions, creating emotional dissonance. Fairness and professional detachment disguise any private feelings of pain, despair and uncertainty. How teachers make judgements about how they interact and feel about themselves are molded and changed, “there is a real possibility that authentic social relations are replaced by judgmental relations wherein persons are valued for their productivity alone. Lash and Urry (1994) call this the "emptying out of relationships, which are left flat and deficient in effect” (p. 15). Such fabrications weaken the profession as a whole, whereby “fables of promise and opportunity such as those which attend to democratic education are marginalised” (Ball, 2003, p. 223), there is a “silencing of alternative voices” (Broadfoot, 1998, p. 176) and in doing so professional judgement is "subordinated to the requirements of performativity and marketing” (Ball, 2003, p.215).

It will be recalled the aim of this paper is to demonstrate the need for research into how professional teacher standards shape, both positively and negatively, teacher judgement and professionalism in the Australian context. As will be proposed in the following section, how teacher professionalism and judgement is enacted varies according to context and conceptions of one's career. Furthermore, it highlights the ‘catalytic’ (Kriewaldt, 2012) potential for teacher professional standards and revitalised professionalism for the profession.

Teacher Careers and a Dynamic Construct

Interrogating the usefulness of teacher professional standards when discussing teacher evaluation of practice and professional learning requires an analysis of how the standards are conceived, namely, how standards embody the concept of a teacher's career.

Defining a concept of career may be seen as problematic as a career may come to “mean the opposite of random job mobility...careers imply a long if not lifetime, continuous commitment to moving upwards through a series of related occupations and statuses according to a schedule” (Form, 1968, p. 252). In such a definition any members of a profession who fail to progress upward, refining skills and practice without mobility are not recognised and therefore silenced. Indeed, a model of career advancement linked to mobility also fails to recognise the historical, biographical and situational factors which may shape teacher lives and sense of career (Mockler, 2011; Goodson, 1981). As Lyons and McCleary (1980) found in their research, not all teachers interviewed had a long term ‘career map’ conceived and many aspects of their work were geared towards short-term objectives. Moreover, Nias (1989) proposes that a teaching career “can mean not only progress up a short, narrow ladder but also movement around a web of temporary, short-term posts or the pursuit of parallel occupations” (p, 394).

Most life phase research work has been traditionally biological or psychological in nature. The difficulty when applying such research to educational experience, as Warren observed is that “teachers do not 'mature' in the course of their profession in the same way as do ducklings” (Warren, 1989 cited in Huberman, 1995, p. 194). Running as a common theme through literature of careers and life stages is a notion unquestioned continuity. A comprehensive study of career experience and life-cycle of teachers was most notably researched by Huberman (1989) who describes seven stages of teachers' careers: survival, stabilization, experimentation, stock-taking serenity, conservatism and disengagement. Huberman describes these stages as not automatic or regimentally tied to specific years of service, but more of a guide susceptible to fragmentation and a process “filled with plateaus, discontinuities, regression, spurts and dead ends” (Huberman, 1995, p. 196).
With this in mind, the underpinning principle guiding the national standards' implementation is that teachers have the opportunity over a career, to move through or stay at a phase of the standards and in doing so meet each domain's achievement criteria. Though the national standards are not tied to specific years of teaching they nevertheless embody a linear conception of teacher career progression. Understanding this, and building on the issues of glossification and impression management raised in this paper, there are a number of operational issues when interpreting the utility of the national standards. There does not seem to be any provision for movement between the standards. If rewards or pay bonuses are to be linked to standards defined career stages, pressure to be ‘seen to conform’ may distort the way teachers work and strive to collaborate and ‘improve' their practice. Can teachers slip backwards or skip levels? A lockstep view of teaching careers may intensify the potential pressure to curtail one’s judgement and subvert or develop fabrications in order to ‘meet’ the standard. Nor does it allow for a multifaceted view of practice or a changeable view of teacher identity as proposed by Mockler (2011), taking into account of personal histories, political environment and contextual issues. Within the national standards rubric there is a narrow and limited conceptualisation of a fluid teaching career and little scope for authentic teacher professional judgement to act as a driver of change.

An alternative model is proposed in this paper (see Figure 1) which maps the national standards as a dynamic and fluid entity, rather than in a static rubric organised according to demonstrated, hierarchical principles. A dynamic model more accurately reflects the ebb and flow of teachers' lives, careers and experiences (Mockler, 2011). By mapping teacher practice as a movable web, with each standard on an axis and calibrate each standard's progression point to a layer or ring, it is possible to take a snap shot of teacher professional practice at different points in time (see Map 1 and Map 2, Figure 1) and thus use it as a catalyst for empowered professional judgement and learning by opening up avenues for reflection, reflexivity and collaborative change (Kriewaldt, 2012).

It is proposed that central to the movement, flow and mapping of teacher standards is the enactment of teacher professional judgement and ownership of professional and student learning through deliberate, systematic interrogation and deprivitisation of practice as part of a learning community. In this view, enactment of teacher professional judgement serves as a fulcrum of change. It acts as a way of mapping practice so as to break free from the possible pressures of glossification and subversion and maintain the appearance of complying to standards. Twinned with interrogation of practice such as through inquiry processes and deep reflection through methods such as ‘lesson study’, as described by Kriewaldt (2012), a genuine picture of practice can emerge. Teacher assessments of their own and student learning using this model can slip up and down the axis, skip rings forwards or backwards to reveal an individual map or thumbprint of practice rather than a one-size-fits-all delineation of achievement.

As seen in Figure 1 the map shows two teacher 'webs' at different points in a career. Movement between the standards points on the axis relate to the flux and flow of teacher identity and experience, as a process of constant 'formation' (Mockler, 2011). Moreover, the positioning of teacher experience according to the standards moving through and around the layers or arms gives a spatial dimension when interpreting one's unique 'web'. Following Hargreaves' (2001) notion of emotional geographies as a way of describing interactions, the positioning and spaces within the proposed standards web that are opened-up provide a 'geography of self', highlighting areas of dissonance and congruence and sites for transformation.
Figure 1 - Teacher Professional Standards Web

Source: Adapted from the National Professional Standards for Teachers, 2011.

Underpinning the conception of the enactment of professional standards as envisioned in Figure 1 is an aspirational, developmental view of standards and accountability. By exercising critical judgements, questioning policy and promoting their interests with a strong voice, teachers will be engaging with the paradox existing within the managerial discourse of change. In the ‘name of being professional’ a code of silence is perpetuated by teachers who do not have the language of change and engage in acts of fabrication and impression management. Teachers do so at the expense of deeper human understanding and authentic relationships. They:

- unquestioningly accept the need for ‘control’ and the pursuant demands of complex organisational processes…teachers and leaders must ‘manage’ large numbers of ‘relationships’ everyday….their relationships with each other often fall short of or even compromise each others’ capacity to do this well…this code of silence often precludes the possibility for change….without this communication, they cannot transcend barriers of their separate domains, different knowledges of ‘school’ and of each other…the imperative to retain a professional ‘cool’ often prohibits honest disclosure and buries authenticity in deference to a pseudo rational reality (Beatty, 2000, p. 5).

Under such a discourse the ‘catalytic possibility’ (Kriewaldt, 2008) of mapping standards as a framework for professional renewal and invigoration is inspiring but research investigating school cultures and learning communities working in tandem with standards is an area under-researched. Set within a developmental discourse, teacher collaboration and dialogue with peer assessors holds a strong utility for professional development. Within such a view teacher professional standards complement the work of professional learning by providing a structure that teachers use to analyse their work and facilitate the development of a shared language which underpins collaboration and activities which go beyond dialogue and promotes deprivitisation of practice as part of genuine learning communities (Kriewaldt, 2008).
Such an active view is requires ‘re-positioning’ (Moore, 2004) and engaging in a ‘reflexive project of self’ which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives (Giddens, 1991). This form of reflexivity moves beyond self-evaluation towards a much bigger picture in which:

the practitioner reflects upon the taken-for granted beliefs and assumptions which underpin his/her practical interpretations of professional values and their origins in his/her life experiences and history. (S)he begins to reconstruct his/her constructs of value and discovers that this opens up new understandings of the situation and new possibilities for intelligent action within it (Elliott, 1993, p. 69).

Engaging in this process is a ‘risky discourse’ (McWilliam, 1995) in which its “initial effect is to disrupt and look beneath the cool surface of smug sensibilities of classroom competencies on the part of both teacher and pupil” (Hartley, 1997, p.79). As such, teachers need to be “open to the idea of examining themselves and their classrooms as deconstructible texts, to locate reflection within wider social circumstances, to not “only include in our reflexive effort our own histories… but rather our own histories-in-context” (Moore, 2004, p. 161). This means moving towards a:

‘pedagogy of discomfort’, which is a collective, not individualized, process [that] requires that educators and students learn how to notice how one’s sense of self and perspectives are shifting and contingent...This means leaving the familiar shores of learned beliefs and habits, and swimming further into the ‘foreign’ and risky depths of the sea of ethical and moral differences (Boler,1999, p.177).

Conclusion

This theoretical paper has explored the negotiation and enactment of teacher professional standards and their translation into everyday teacher practice. It explored the discourses informing the implementation of national standards and offered ways in which such regimes may or may not be distorting the way teachers’ practice is evidenced and portrayed. In exploring this question it is proposed there is a need to engage in research to delve deeper into how evidence of practice, teacher judgement and expertise is positioned in the current political climate. An alternate view to working with professional standards was proposed arising from the available research. This alternative theoretical model positions teacher enactment and interpretation of standards as a dynamic, fluid and ever-evolving construct, one that may be changeable over teachers’ careers. It promotes the need for teachers to take ownership of their practice and situate themselves as part of an active, collaborative learning community, one which encourages them to engage in critical inquiry and processes of critical judgement in response to teacher professional standards. The fate of teacher standards and the profession as a whole may rest upon teachers realising their own transformative potential.
REFERENCE LIST


