

## Teacher Professional Learning Under Audit: Reconfiguring Practice in an Age of Standards

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**ABSTRACT:** One of the key tenets of the global education reform movement, professional standards for teachers have reshaped different aspects of teachers' work and learning in many contexts internationally over the past two decades. This paper explores the consequences of neoliberalism for teacher professional learning in contemporary times. The policies and processes built up around teacher professional development and learning as a consequence of contemporary regimes of standards and their dominant conceptualisation of teacher professionalism, constitute particular cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that frame the practice of teacher professional learning. These in turn give rise to some possibilities of practice while limiting others, effectively creating the space within which what counts as 'authentic professional learning' can be enacted. A case study of the interplay between professional standards and professional learning in the jurisdiction of New South Wales, Australia, is presented, via an analysis of publicly available texts generated by the NSW Education Standards Authority explicitly related to teacher professional learning and development. The paper argues that the practice architectures of professional learning in an age of standards work to support instrumental forms of professional learning while constraining the possibility of more authentic or generative forms of professional learning and consequently, teacher professionalism.

**KEYWORDS:** Teacher professional learning, teacher professional development, teacher professionalism, education policy

One of the key tenets of the global education reform movement, professional standards for teachers, have reshaped and reconfigured different aspects of teachers' work in many national and sub-national contexts over the past 20 years. Writing of the Australian experience a decade ago, Connell (2009) argued that standards, with their 'dot-point' approach to teaching practice articulated through the language of managerialism, promoted an auditable form of teacher professionalism that undermined teacher professional judgement, professional community and professional practice. She articulated the 'problem' of standards thus:

The Standards framework embeds the neoliberal distrust of teachers' judgment. What teachers do is decomposed into specific, auditable competencies and performances. The framework is not only specified in managerialist language. It embeds an individualized model of the teacher that is deeply problematic for a public education system. The arbitrariness of the dot-point lists means that any attempt to enforce them, on the practice of teachers or on teacher education programmes, will mean an arbitrary narrowing of practice. (p.220)

For Connell, professional standards and this consequential 'arbitrary narrowing of practice' constituted an example of what she later named the 'neoliberal cascade' (2013) in action: the phenomenon by which the market agenda embedded in neoliberal education policy regimes held significant consequences for teachers and their work. She saw these played out in the Australian context through increasing standardisation and the burgeoning of accrediting bodies that are 'simultaneously a vehicle of surveillance (especially for teacher education and early career teachers) tied into the market regime, and a repository of practical know-how and occupational identity that have quite different bases' (p.108).

This paper uses this notion of the wide-ranging consequences of the ‘neoliberal cascade’ for teachers’ work to frame a discussion about teacher professional learning and development in contemporary times. While the discussion is focused around a case study of the interplay between professional standards and professional learning in the jurisdiction of New South Wales (NSW), Australia, it has international and national resonance, given the place of teaching standards within the broader context of international education ‘policy borrowing and lending’ (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). The central argument of the paper is that the policies and processes built up around teacher professional development and learning as a consequence of contemporary regimes of standards and their dominant conceptualisation of teacher professionalism, constitute particular cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements<sup>1</sup> (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) that frame the practice of teacher professional learning in any given context. These in turn give rise to some possibilities of practice while limiting others, creating the space within which what counts as authentic professional learning might be enacted. This case study of NSW explores the specific arrangements suggested and the consequent space created, arguing that there is, in this case at least, a mismatch between ideas about effective and generative professional learning and the preferred version of professional learning advanced in the standards.

The paper is presented in three parts. After this brief introduction, the analysis is located in the context of the broader discussion of teacher professionalism, professional standards and professional learning and development. The paper then turns to explore the practice architectures of professional learning in NSW, based on an analysis of a range of policy texts. The paper concludes by considering the implications of this analysis both within and beyond the immediate context of NSW.

### **Teaching Standards and the Reconfiguration of Teacher Professionalism**

Teaching standards, or professional standards for teachers, have been part of national and international discourses around teachers’ work since the mid-1980s. In the United States, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was established in 1987, out of the *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* report (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, 1986). *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*, is a set of five core propositions for teaching, first published in 1989 (NBPTS, 2016), which form the basis of the 25 linked teaching standards administered by the NBPTS. In the UK, the first set of ‘teacher competences’, as they were then called, was published in 1984, updated in the late 1980s and early 1990s and reworked into professional standards in 1997, after the election of the Blair Labour Government. After several updates, the current Teachers’ Standards (Department for Education UK, 2012) were developed under the Cameron Coalition Government in 2012, with Smith arguing they represent a ‘throwback to the earlier Conservative competences’ (2013, p.430).

In Australia, the origins of professional standards for teachers can be dated to the late 1990s, when standards were first named as a possible mechanism for raising the status of the teaching profession. The link between standards and teacher registration and accreditation has its origin in the 1998 report *A Class Act: Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession*, with the recommended creation of ‘a national professional teaching standards and registration body to have the responsibility, authority and resources to develop and maintain standards of professional practice’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 1998, p. x). In New South Wales, *Quality Matters: Revitalising Teaching - Critical Times, Critical Choices* (Ramsey, 2000) recast this discussion for the state in the light of the federal government’s referral of the development of professional standards and accreditation back to the states and territories in its response to *A*

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<sup>1</sup> Further discussion of these, and the theory of practice architectures, of which they are a key part, is provided below.

*Class Act* (Commonwealth of Australia Senate, 1999)<sup>2</sup>. Both reports advance the idea of the establishment of an accrediting body (at federal and state/territory levels respectively) and the development of professional standards as a remedy for an ailing or lacklustre profession. In these policy documents, professional standards are positioned as a communicative link between the teaching profession and the public; a tool of greater public accountability; a catalyst for school reform; and a harbinger of enhanced teacher professionalism. In both reports, teachers are positioned as members of a junior profession which may attain adulthood through the quantification, documentation and demonstration of their professional knowledge against standards. Professional standards are presented as both capable of affirming good practices while remedying the bad, and the national/state 'body' as the only means by which teachers can claim a voice and identity as a profession.

While the local circumstances, configurations and requirements of teachers with regard to standards vary greatly across various jurisdictions internationally, in their very nature they share the aim of decomposing teachers work into Connell's 'specific, auditable competencies and performances' (2013, p.220). Further, standards produce a required or 'demanded' (Evans, 2011) form of teacher professionalism, which may or may not be the form of professionalism that prevails in different, more local, contexts. For, as Lingard (2009) notes, there is often a disconnect between the logics of practice of the field of education policy production, i.e. that within which professional standards are configured, and the logics of practice of teachers' work within their system and school contexts. Nevertheless, and regardless of the multifarious ways in which teacher professionalism is enacted, professional standards shape, at some level, a set of norms and expectations around what it is to be a teacher, at the very least laying out the state's preferred version of the professional teacher. Beck (2009) highlights the appropriation of teacher professionalism implicit in the 2007 UK teaching standards, arguing that the standards constitute a form of 'coercive re-professionalisation' (p.10) derived from their underpinnings of managerialism and 'loose behaviourism'. In her 2011 analysis of the same professional standards, using her tripartite model of professionalism, Evans found that the standards disproportionately privileged the behavioural component of teacher professionalism ('what practitioners physically do at work'), at the expense of the attitudinal (relating to attitudes held by teachers) and intellectual (relating to 'practitioners' knowledge and understanding and their knowledge structures') components (2011, p.856).

However, teacher professionalism itself has long been a contested space. Evetts (2009) writes of three contrasting interpretations of professionalism that have developed over time, namely professionalism as occupational value; as ideology or 'market closure'; and as occupational change and managerial control, providing an historical account of the development of thinking and writing about professionalism as it relates to knowledge work. In her survey of historical and contemporary approaches to professionalism, she distinguishes between what she terms 'organisational professionalism', informed by discourses of managerialism and used in tandem with performative accountability mechanisms to control professional work, and 'occupational professionalism', shaped and controlled by practitioners, reaching more toward O'Neill's concept of 'intelligent accountability' (2013). This conceptualisation also resonates with Sachs' (2003) categorisation of managerial and democratic discourses of professionalism which, she has argued (2016), work in tandem with different forms of professional development to produce variously 'controlled', 'compliant', 'collaborative' and 'activist' forms of teacher professionalism.

In addition to the complexities inherent in this contested terrain, it is important to remember that neither the 'demanded' form of teacher professionalism embodied in teaching standards nor the 'prescribed' (Evans, 2011) form advanced by educational researchers and teacher educators

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<sup>2</sup> Australia's constitution, drawn up in 1901, allocated responsibility for the provision of schooling to the states and territories at Federation.

constitutes the whole story. Teachers forge their professional identities, interwoven with their practice, with reference to the contexts in which they practice (Mockler, 2011). Teacher professionalism as enacted by individual teachers, is in its nature grounded in their professional identities, and consequently deeply ontological – about what it is to ‘be’ a teacher – rather than purely epistemological or behavioural. Standards do, however, form an important part of the story, articulating a form of ‘teacher’ advanced by the state as the preferred one against which all teachers must demonstrate their competence.

Standards partly reconfigure professionalism through their reliance on legitimation through audit. Power has observed the complex consequences of the ‘audit explosion’ in terms of both institutional and behavioural effects, contending that it has given rise to a new subject, ‘the auditee’, who simultaneously rejects and embraces the audit culture, ‘skilled at games of compliance but exhausted and cynical about them too’ (2003, pp. 199-200). Power’s argument, then, is that audit cultures reconfigure not only the context and content of work, but also individuals’ positioning in relation to their work. We see this repositioning in the recent work of Holloway on teacher evaluation as an onto-epistemic framework, where she observes that the teachers in her study had come to see ‘the evaluation processes and practices as normal and necessary for being a good teacher, rather than something imposed externally upon good teachers’ (Holloway, 2019, p. 185).

Turning specifically to the Australian context, relatively few studies have been undertaken to date on the role of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2012) in the shaping and repositioning of teacher professionalism. There is a small body of Australian research focusing on teachers’ engagement with various tenets of contemporary education policy, standards among them. For example, Hardy (2018) has explored the relationship between the enumerative logics of practice embedded in the various tenets of the new national system of schooling in Australia and teachers’ work. His research suggests that the unintended consequences of moves toward standardisation of practice include a narrowing of teachers’ practice, and specifically a reduction in teachers’ capacity to understand and employ evidence of practice in expansive, generative ways. Other work (Hardy & Lewis, 2017) has explored the complexities of teachers’ and school leaders’ engagements with neoliberal policy technologies, highlighting the ways in which contradictory positions are sometimes simultaneously held, individually and collectively. Research focused explicitly on Australian teachers’ engagement with professional standards tends to focus on early career teachers and their experiences of accreditation (see, for example, Adoniou & Gallagher, 2017; Swabey, Castleton, & Penney, 2010; Talbot, 2016), and typically draws attention to teachers’ positive and negative perceptions of standards regimes.

Other recent work has explored the discursive positioning of teachers and their work by the APSTs, such as that of Ryan and Bourke (2013); Clarke and Moore (2013; Moore & Clarke, 2016); and Savage and Lewis (2017). This work suggests, congruent with Connell’s original argument, that the vision of teacher professionalism embedded in the APSTs is one of managerialism or regulatory professionalism; that the standards privilege the technicisation and standardisation of teaching and practice; and that their policy frameworks provide a local reflection and reification of globalised education reform discourses around teachers’ work.

### **Teacher Professional Learning in an Age of Standards**

Teacher professional learning and development have long been slippery concepts, representing yet another highly contested space. Once seen as discrete entities, wherein ‘professional development’ was understood as formal, one-size-fits-all ‘in-service’ or conference-style learning opportunities; and ‘professional learning’ as more active, collaborative, inquiry-based activities, over the past two decades the terms have been, somewhat problematically, increasingly used interchangeably (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009). As highlighted in the discussion below, contemporary education policy tends to use the term ‘professional learning’ when referring to ‘professional development’ activities, essentially embedding the

flawed assumption that teacher professional learning – itself widely defined – naturally flows from such activities.

Evans conceptualises professional development as the shaping of teachers' professionalism, 'the process whereby people's professionalism may be considered to be enhanced, with a degree of permanence that exceeds transitoriness' (2019, p. 7). Professional development, then, might be thought of as something that can operate in the service of 'demanded' forms of professionalism such as those implicit in professional standards, or real teacher professionalism, which transcends not only demanded professionalism but also forms of professionalism prescribed for teachers or assumed to be enacted by those external to the profession (Evans, 2011).

Further contested are ideas about what constitutes 'good' professional learning for teachers. Judith Warren Little, whose seminal work in the 1980s and 1990s was key to a rethinking of the nature of teacher professional learning, has argued that:

For more than two decades, research has shown that teachers who experience frequent, rich learning opportunities have in turn been helped to teach in more ambitious and effective ways. Yet few teachers gain access to such intensive professional learning opportunities. More typically, teachers experience professional development (PD) as episodic, superficial and disconnected from their own teaching interests or recurring problems of practice. (Little, 2012, p. 22)

Here she points to some of the characteristics of good professional learning as recognised in the broader (and more recent) research literature (see, for example, Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Evans, 2019; Keay, Carse, & Jess, 2019). These suggest that good teacher professional learning is: differentiated; contextualised; connected to teachers' problems of practice, curiosities and prior knowledge; collegial and collaborative; and encouraging of risk taking and experimentation. Furthermore, it is an active process, engaging teachers in shaping and driving their own learning. It is the diametric opposite of 'one-shot' professional development, which, as Little notes, still proliferates for most teachers, for as Opfer and Pedder (2011) have highlighted, teacher learning is a 'complex system rather than... an event' (p.378). Furthermore, as Gore, Bowe and colleagues (Gore & Bowe, 2015; Gore et al., 2017) have noted in their work with *Quality Teaching Rounds* in Australia, good teacher professional learning has powerful and productive discursive, subjectification and lived effects for teachers. In short, it builds teacher knowledge and practice, is generative of professional culture and community, and supports teachers to develop a robust and informed sense of professional identity (Mockler, 2011).

If professional standards are at least partly about articulating a preferred form of professionalism and professional development is about 'enhancing professionalism', then it stands to reason that there is a key three-way relationship between professional standards, professional development and learning, and teacher professionalism. Indeed, regimes of professional teaching standards come with their own, either implied or explicit, ideas about what constitutes good professional learning in the service of their own embedded 'demanded' teacher professionalism. Often this is constituted as the professional learning that counts toward gaining or maintaining professional registration or accreditation, or if not, toward endless 'lifelong learning' and relentless 'continuous improvement' across the career span. My argument here is that the forms of professional development and learning embedded in professional standards may align more with the managerial or organisational forms of professionalism that underpin said standards than with generative, occupational or democratic professionalism. The question then becomes how far spaces are preserved to allow practices of professional learning that might speak more to occupational than to organisational professionalism to exist, and how far these spaces are, in fact, closed.

By way of exploring these issues, in the section that follows, an examination of the practice architectures of contemporary professional learning in NSW, Australia, will be presented.

### **Professional Standards and the Practice Architectures of Teacher Professional Learning**

Owing to Australia's federated system which sees the responsibility for schooling reside with the states and territories despite the gradual creation over the past half century of a new federal 'field' of education governance (Gerrard & Farrell, 2014; Lingard, 2000), while professional standards for teachers have been developed at a federal level, teacher accreditation is administered by regulators in each of the states and territories. Different states and territories have different accreditation requirements for teachers, among them those related to professional development and learning. In the state of NSW, Australia's most populous state with over 100,000 registered teachers, teacher accreditation is administered by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA), which also develops the school curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 12, registers non-Government schools, and accredits initial teacher education programs. 'Proficient Teachers' (i.e. those who have attained their mandatory teacher accreditation, usually within five years of graduation from an accredited Initial Teacher Education Program) are required to complete 100 hours of professional development over a five year period, including 50 hours of 'NESA Registered PD' and 50 hours of 'Teacher Identified PD'.

At a state-wide level then, a series of 'arrangements' exist, overseen by NESA, that frame and govern the practice of teacher professional learning within NSW. Bringing a practice architectures lens to thinking about teacher professional learning means identifying and considering these arrangements, which are variously cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political in nature (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). These arrangements have broad consequences, for together they enable and constrain different professional learning practices for teachers through the ways in which they shape the 'sayings', 'doings' and 'relatings' bundled together in such practices.

This discussion is predicated upon an analysis of a series of documents that both reflect and dictate the way that teacher professional development is constituted on a state level. These policy texts are, of course, enacted differently in different school and system contexts: this paper is concerned not with local arrangements or policy enactments, but rather the 'top level' arrangements that make the enactment of different practices more or less possible at a local level. The documents selected for analysis included the *NSW Institute of Teachers Act 2004*, which established NESA's predecessor, along with all publicly available texts generated by NESA explicitly related to teacher professional learning and development:

- *Professional Development and Providing Professional Development* sections of the NESA website;
- *Endorsement of Professional Development Providers and Courses Policy*;
- *Maintenance of Teacher Accreditation Policy*;
- *Application to Become an Endorsed Provider of Registered Professional Development*;
- *PD Journey Map*;
- *Teacher Accreditation eNews Bulletin* (18 issues from March 2017 to April 2019 inclusive);
- *Support Guide for Potential and Existing Professional Development Providers*;
- *Find a PD Provider* (last updated March 2018); and
- *Registered Professional Development Promotional Guidelines*.

By way of analysis, each document was read in its entirety once prior to a further three 'passes', each focused on identifying one of the three sets of arrangements suggested in the document. A modified 'table of invention' (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 39), a tool for bringing the conceptual lens of practice architectures to the analysis of text, was used to distil and refine the evidence across the multiple source documents, building a bank of textual extracts and researcher memos, linking across and between the documents for each of the three dimensions. In the account that

follows, structured around the three sets of arrangements, I briefly introduce each dimension before presenting my analysis of the evidence extracted from the documents.

### ***Cultural-discursive Arrangements***

Within the theory of practice architectures, cultural-discursive arrangements are said to be constituted in the following way:

what we can *say* (our sayings), in the *semantic space* we share with our interlocutors, is made possible (or difficult or impossible) by the *cultural-discursive arrangements* found in or brought to a site—that is, by the content and form of shared (or not shared) *language* and *specialist discourses* used in the site. (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, p. 120, italics in original)

Cultural-discursive arrangements are thus about the dominant language and discourse that frame particular practices within a given site, about the definitions of key concepts and what is included and excluded within these working definitions. The question for this analysis, then, is focused on what these texts suggest about the content and form of shared language and specialist discourses around teacher professional development and learning in the ‘site’ of NSW education.

First, *professional development* is strongly positioned in these policy documents as including a variety of *professional learning activities*, such that *learning* is either subsumed into *development* or becomes an assumed consequence of *professional development*. Section Three of the NSW Institute of Teachers Act (2004) defines professional development to ‘include[s] formal and informal learning activities designed to maintain and enhance the knowledge and skills of teachers’. This definition of professional development as a *learning activity* is consistent with that on the NESA website, where teacher identified professional development is said to be ‘any professional learning activity that enhances and strengthens your teaching practice and aligns to the Standards’ (NESA 2019g). The *Maintenance of Teacher Accreditation Policy* similarly notes that ‘Teacher Identified Professional Development can include activities undertaken in or outside a school/service that contribute to teachers’ professional learning’ (NESA 2018b, p. 6). The language in use thus strongly suggests that both professional development and professional learning are constituted as one-off activities rather than processes, which in turn makes possible NESA’s quantification of professional development in the form of required hours, a phenomenon which will be further explored below in the discussion of material-economic arrangements.

Where *professional learning* is used in the documents without *activities*, such as on the NESA webpage regarding promotional materials, it appears to be used as a synonym for *professional development*. Endorsed providers, for example, are registered to ‘provide professional learning’ to teachers (NESA 2019e). Similarly, the June 2018 edition of *Teacher Accreditation eNews* appears to use the two terms interchangeably, calling for participants to complete ‘a survey about the professional development experiences of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers’, with a link provided to the ‘Professional Learning HALT Survey’ (NESA 2018g). In the November 2018 edition of the newsletter, the 2018 ‘Professional Learning Survey’ for all teachers is advertised, noting that ‘We want to hear about your PD experiences and how we can improve our NESA Registered PD’ (NESA 2018h).

In cultural-discursive terms, the defining of both professional learning and professional development as activities ‘provided’ by others rather than ongoing processes negotiated and engaged in by teachers themselves underlines a transactional quality to the way in which professional learning and development are understood by the regulator. This is supported by the use of the language of ‘provision’ and ‘delivery’, whereby ‘NESA endorses providers to register and deliver professional development’ (NESA 2018b), also categorising Endorsed Providers as providing ‘professional learning offerings’.

Second, these documents strongly define professional development in relation to the limits of the APSTs. Professional development is said by NESA to be that designed ‘to extend teachers’ continuous learning and support their ongoing practice against the Standards’ (NESA 2018d). Similarly, teacher identified professional development is said to be ‘any professional learning activity that enhances and strengthens your teaching practice and aligns to the Standards’ (NESA 2019g), and while further study can be ‘counted’ as NESA-registered PD, it ‘needs to relate to at least one Standard Descriptor at or above your level of accreditation’ (NESA 2019c). According to the Maintenance of Teacher Accreditation Policy, ‘NESA endorses providers to register and deliver professional development that contributes to building and improving teachers’ professional knowledge, practice and engagement, consistent with the Standards at Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher’ (NESA 2018b). The ‘PD Journey Map’ (NESA 2018e) clearly indicates identification of standards as the first step in engaging in professional development, prior to ‘identifying opportunities’, ‘engaging in PD’ and ‘recording PD’. In NSW and for the purposes of teacher accreditation, the APSTs thus both define and bound professional development and learning, specifying ‘what counts’ (NESA 2018f) and ‘what is not’ professional development (NESA 2018e).

As discussed above, the limitations of the APSTs, and teaching standards generally, in terms of articulating and representing good teaching practice, are well documented. Given this, alongside the realistic unwillingness of teachers, schools and school systems to support professional development and learning that falls outside the NESA-approved definition, the cultural-discursive effects of this positioning are far more than semantic. NESA’s definition delineates ‘what counts’ as professional development and learning in NSW, privileging ‘activities’ aiming to foster teachers’ development vis-a-vis the Standards, of which actual learning may or may not be a consequence.

### ***Material-economic Arrangements***

Material-economic arrangements enable and constrain ‘doings’, according to the theory of practice architectures:

what we can *do* (our doings), in the *physical space-time* we share with other embodied beings, is made possible (or difficult or impossible) by the *material-economic arrangements* found in or brought to a site—that is, by the content and form of our shared (or not shared) *action* and *work* done amid the objects that exist in space and time in the site. (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, p. 120, italics in original)

Material-economic arrangements are thus those that govern activities and ‘work’ in a material or physical sense, including the establishment of rules and boundaries for compliance. In terms of professional learning, the question then relates to what these documents suggest about the way that professional learning is experienced or ‘delivered’ in the state of NSW.

First, linked to the conceptualisation of professional development as ‘activities’, outlined above, is the organisation of NESA-registered professional development into *courses* representing ‘processes, activities and experiences that provide opportunities to extend teacher learning and support accreditation against the Standards’ (NESA 2019b, p. 10). The notion of *courses* suggests that, in order to ‘count’, professional development experiences will be structured, defined and finite, and obviously, quantifiable in terms of hours. Furthermore, registered courses are ‘delivered’ (NESA 2019b, p. 7) by *Endorsed Providers*, who have ‘completed a rigorous assessment and approval process to provide professional learning that contributes to mandatory requirements for maintaining teacher accreditation’ (NESA 2018c, p. 2). These courses, providers and processes of endorsement all contribute to the material-economic arrangements governing professional development in NSW.

The NESA Endorsement of Professional Development Providers and Courses Policy (NESA 2019b) refers to ten Endorsement Criteria by which applications are judged. Seven of the ten criteria relate entirely to ensuring legal or bureaucratic compliance. Of the remaining three, relating to course content, ‘course presenter/s’ and course quality, two focus on processes,



policies and procedures rather than on the actual experience and qualifications of ‘presenters’ or the actual quality of courses. Furthermore, potential providers are required to provide evidence in their application only that they are a ‘bona fide provider’ (business entity), that their courses are linked to the APSTs, and that they are a ‘Fit and Proper Person’ (via a statutory declaration relating to issues such as bankruptcy and conviction of a criminal or other offence, completed by the CEO of the organisation applying for endorsement). They additionally are required to provide a declaration to NESA that their organisation holds evidence of the remaining seven criteria, to be made available in the event of an audit. The application form requires a reasonable amount of detail about the proposed courses, including a mapping to the Standards and reference to supporting research, but it is clear from both the policy and the application form that beyond the link to the Professional Standards, NESA is interested in little about the PD courses, including the quality of the professional learning that ensues and the qualifications and appropriateness of the people ‘delivering’ them. Appropriate professional development is linked to the Standards, delivered by ‘Endorsed Providers’ who, in a somewhat circular argument, are endorsed largely on the basis that the professional development they offer qualifies as appropriate, with appropriateness resting on links to Standards.

A scan of the 610 registered providers as of March 2018, who at the time were endorsed to provide over 22,000 registered PD courses (NESA 2018a) revealed a wide variety of providers, ranging from not-for-profit organisations such as professional associations and cultural institutions, to for-profit providers, including individual education consultants and large multinational corporations. This proliferation of external providers points to the growing state-encouraged marketisation of teacher professional development in NSW since the introduction of the APSTs and associated professional development requirements. Furthermore, NESA’s ongoing encouragement of schools and school systems to become endorsed PD providers, as highlighted on the ‘Becoming a School/Service Provider’ webpage (NESA 2019a) and in a number of editions of *Teacher Accreditation eNews* (NESA 2017b, 2018i, 2019f) had by March 2018 resulted in the accreditation of a wide range of school systems and schools. The NSW Department of Education, the NSW Association of Independent Schools, all eleven Catholic school systems in NSW, and 68 individual schools were registered to provide PD by March 2018, by way of ensuring that professional development and learning opportunities provided in-house to teachers on school/staff development days would henceforth ‘count’ as NESA-registered PD. This represents a shift in both policy and practice in recent years: the NSW Institute of Teachers website up to 2011 included no encouragement to schools to become registered providers (NSW Institute of Teachers, 2011), and a list of endorsed providers updated in June 2010 (NSW Institute of Teachers, 2010) indicating that of the 112 endorsed providers at that time, only two were individual schools.

While it is impossible to make inferences about the quality of professional development in NSW from the burgeoning number of endorsed providers or the increased number of schools and school systems seeking endorsement for their ‘in-house’ PD, this analysis does point to the emergence of a state-sanctioned formalised market for teacher professional development over the past ten years. Second, the participation of schools and school systems in the process of becoming endorsed to provide NESA-registered PD suggests that it is important to them that their in-house professional development be ‘counted’ as NESA-registered PD, and thus in turn that NESA-registered PD is more valued in practice than non-registered or ‘teacher identified’ PD.

### ***Social-political Arrangements***

Within the theory of practice architectures, social-political arrangements enable and constrain ‘relatings’, governing how human beings relate to others and the world:

how we can relate to others and the world (our relatings), in the *social space* we share with other social-political beings, is made possible (or difficult or impossible) by the *social-political arrangements* found in or brought to the site—that is, by the content and form of our shared (or not shared) relationships of *power* and *solidarity* in the site. (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, p. 121)

Social-political arrangements are about relationships between people and between people and processes that shape practice. For the purposes of this discussion the question then relates to what these texts suggest about the ways in which teachers relate to professional development and learning, and to each other in the practice of professional learning.

Together, the policy documents and their associated processes strongly suggest that ‘professional development activities’, and teachers accounting for their engagement in such activities are of more consequence and higher value than actual professional learning. As noted above, professional learning is assumed to be a consequence of its more easily quantifiable and measurable cousin, professional development. In repositioning professional development, facilitated or delivered by an endorsed provider, rather than professional learning as the overarching aim, teachers’ relationship with their own professional learning is potentially reconfigured.

From mid-2018 all NESA-registered providers were required to use the NSW Government logo in their promotional materials for NESA-registered PD courses (NESA 2019e). The adoption use of the logo lends a political legitimacy to both the professional development activity and the endorsed provider in the public space. In his work on logos, representation and legitimacy, Heilbrunn notes that:

the logo is a particular sign because it has not only a representative function but also a pragmatic function linked to its commercial value, in the sense that it anticipates a reaction on behalf of the receiver in terms of recognition... (Heilbrunn, 1997, p. 175)

The NESA Promotional Guidelines (NESA 2019e) provide the following rationale for the adoption of the NSW Government logo on promotional material for NESA-registered PD:

The NSW Government brand helps communicate the work of the government and increases transparency around how taxpayer funds are spent.

It is unclear how the use of the NSW Government logo on the marketing material of over 600 predominantly private organisations helps to achieve this. It does, however, lend a sense of government sponsorship, both to individual PD courses and to the general idea of teacher professional development and learning as quantifiable, (ac)countable, measurable and certified, both within and beyond the teaching profession. It supports a legitimised distinction between teacher professional learning as an ongoing process and ‘PD that counts’; and represents an example of the conflation of public and private interests in education.

While these texts consistently, and somewhat repetitively, assert the importance of ‘high quality professional development [that] helps teachers to continuously improve and maintain their teaching practice and develop their careers’ (NESA 2019d), there are several points at which they suggest a very different relationship to professional learning and development for teachers. First, the positing of 100 hours of required PD in each five-year accreditation cycle represents far less professional development (as measured by hours) than most teachers in NSW have customarily engaged in. Teachers in most NSW schools are involved in at least five school/staff development days per year, and these alone would constitute somewhere in the order of 150 hours over five years. Where teachers and schools customarily were committed (both in budgetary and other senses) to a range of professional development/learning experiences, including school-based inquiry projects and external conferences, these arrangements suggest that NESA requirements could be more than met without such opportunities.

Secondly, NESA’s willingness to ‘credit’ hours of professional development to teachers for activities that might not be considered to constitute professional development or learning suggest particular social-political arrangements that potentially send a powerful and dangerous message to the profession and beyond about the importance of their ongoing learning. For

instance, the invitation to teachers in July 2017 to participate in the Australian Writing Survey, for which NESA credited teachers one hour of NESA-registered PD in return for the completion of a survey they estimated to take 20 minutes of teachers' time (NESA, 2017a). It is unclear how such moves reflect the 'rigorous assessment and approval process' mandated by NESA for registered professional development (NESA, 2019e) or the broader aims of professional development and learning within NESA's framework. Furthermore, initiatives such as this hold the potential to reshape teachers' relationship with their professional learning and development, such that the required hours might be thought of as an unnecessary burden to be escaped where possible (with the permission of NESA) rather than an integrated, useful and necessary part of becoming and being a teacher.

### ***Shaping the Practices of Professional Learning in NSW***

Together, these arrangements create the official space within which teacher professional learning is practised in NSW. They privilege a very instrumental form of professional learning, contained in courses related to standards measured in quantifiable hours. They assume that learning naturally flows for teachers from development activities and position professional learning not as a source of professional renewal about which teachers make key decisions, but rather as a necessary evil that may otherwise function as a barrier to accreditation. Embedded, reflexive, teacher-driven, practice-integrated forms of professional learning, while still able to be included as 'teacher identified PD', are less likely to take precedence in an environment where schools are endorsed to 'provide' and 'deliver' PD. Anecdotal evidence suggests that only one year after the accreditation of all teachers in NSW,<sup>3</sup> teachers' relationship to professional learning and development is already shifting to a greater focus on activities and hours. Furthermore, the very configuration of these arrangements suggests more a vision of teachers as 'controlled' or 'compliant' professionals than as 'collaborative' or 'activist' ones, to return to Sachs' classification (2016).

Authentic professional learning and development is a critical resource for the teaching profession, particularly in an age of widespread attrition (Gallant & Riley, 2017) and increasing reports of teacher burnout (Lawrence, Loi, & Gudex, 2019). Professional learning experiences that engage teachers in critically developing their practice, working on collective capacity building, sharpening and building confidence in their professional judgement, and so on, are recognised within the research literature as sources of professional renewal and revitalisation for teachers, both individually and collectively (Gore & Bowe, 2015; Little, 2012).

This analysis has demonstrated that the practice architectures of professional learning and development as built by NESA over the past 15 years represent at best a missed opportunity and at worst a significant opportunity cost to the profession. Given NESA's structures and requirements, at this point in time we run the risk that authentic professional development and learning will be side-lined by time-poor teachers who necessarily prioritise the accumulation of hours for purposes of accreditation.

### **Conclusion: Understanding Teacher Professional Learning in An Age of Standards**

This analysis has provided an example, drawn from a single educational jurisdiction, of how regimes of teacher professional standards have the capacity to reshape teacher professional learning through the preferred version of teacher professionalism they uphold and the associated learning they promote in the advancement of that vision of professionalism. While the particular arrangements that sit around teacher professional learning vary greatly across contexts, all professional standards in some way suggest particular architectures of professional learning practices. Consequently, this case study, while drawn from one jurisdiction, has resonances in

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<sup>3</sup> Until 2018, only teachers who entered the classroom in 2004 or later were required to attain or maintain accreditation in NSW.

others where professional standards and/or accreditation link to and govern professional learning and development structures and practices.

Furthermore, we have seen how these new practice architectures have the potential to feed into the formalisation of a new type of educational market and a corresponding commodification of this critical resource that should be about teachers building their collective capacity and developing contextualised knowledge and practices. Teacher professional learning as ‘an individualistic commodity that can be bought and sold in the marketplace’ (Nikolakaki, 2014, p. 57) constitutes another avenue for the commercialisation and privatisation of education, and provides a further example of the entangling of public and private interests in education that are beginning to be well documented (Fontdevila, Verger, & Avelar, 2019).

While it cannot be assumed that the local arrangements in individual schools and systems or networks preclude generative or collaborative teacher professional learning, regardless of the arrangements suggested at a systemic level, the state-wide arrangements presented here suggest that such a positioning would almost equate to an act of resistance on the part of school leaders and school communities. As Perryman et. al. (2011, p. 191) explain,

In schools, resistance to a technology such as performativity is not easy, as it is so rooted within the discourse of what is important, and those in power will often be the defenders of the discourse.

Indeed, practices of resistance in schools require their own particular practice architectures, along with a sense of courage on the part of leaders, and school cultures that privilege and value risk-taking and trust.

The contemporary practice architectures of teacher professional learning presented here are a sobering manifestation of Connell’s prescient vision of the neoliberal cascade in education. While further systematic and empirical research is required to understand these changes and their consequences, the teaching profession needs support from system leaders, educational researchers and policymakers to problematise rather than normalise what, this analysis suggests, is a greatly impoverished vision of teacher learning and career-long development.

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