Teaching Future Teachers

Teaching English Teachers for the Future: Speaking Back to TPACK

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Abstract: This essay presents a critical, reflexive account of a twelve-month collaboration, when a practising secondary English teacher was seconded to work with a team of English teacher educators in a faculty of education in Melbourne. The collaboration was made possible by funding from DEEWR as part of the Teaching Teachers for the Future project (TTF). TTF aimed to produce 'systematic change in the Information and Communication Technology in Education (ICTE) proficiency of graduate teachers across Australia' with a particular focus on 'enabling pre-service teachers to achieve and demonstrate … competence in the effective and innovative use of ICT' in order to 'improve student learning' (ALTC & ACDE, 2011, p. 4). Adopting collaborative, inquiry-based approaches to teaching and learning and research within the TTF project, the authors explored what it might mean to think about and 'do' English teaching and new technologies more critically than the project guidelines recommended. In this essay we report on the practices and relationships negotiated in the TTF project as it was enacted in our particular context. We consider them critically within a broader investigation of standards discourses and practices that are currently impacting on the professional practices of English educators in schools and in universities.

> Systematisation comes upon the scene during an age which feels itself in command with a ready-made and handed down body of authoritative thought. A creative age must first have passed; then and only then does the business of formalistic systematising begin – an undertaking typical of heirs and epigones who feel themselves in possession of someone else's now voiceless word. (Voloshinov, 1986, p. 78)

Introduction

A visit to the newly renovated website for the National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) in Australia (AITSL, 2012) seems intended to show the visitor that 'standards' are intimately connected to all of the liveliest, most engaging and creative dimensions of educational activity in Australian schools. Prominent among the range of photos, graphics and text on the NPST home page is an animated video (accompanied by a funky contemporary musical track), claiming that the NPST offers a 'new approach to teaching standards', one which is 'consistent with the different world in which we live'. Click on another animated video nearby, and you read uncontroversial statements such as, the 'best educators are the best learners', and 'the best school systems are those that recruit and nurture the best learners'. This is followed by the globally familiar, but much more controversial, claim that standards are 'key' to all this. There are links to YouTube and Facebook, and a Twitter feed, which seem to promise dialogic spaces, but which tend to reiterate similarly monologic statements. Across the page, videos detail 'illustrations of practice', and the sceptical visitor is only ever one click away from evidence in the form of the 'seventeen organisations that are piloting the standards'. In the section titled 'Supporting teachers', the visitor can, at a click, 'find out more about how AITSL is supporting teachers through its 'Leading Curriculum Change' program' and the standards-based 'Charter

for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders'. A section entitled 'Celebrating teachers' identifies teachers whom AITSL has recognised for their expert teaching and their 'unwavering commitment' to standards. There are quotes from teachers, researchers and bureaucrats on almost every page of the website reminding the reader of the value of professional standards. And there's a multi-faceted, apparently dialogic 'Teacher feature', which poses questions (and answers!) about standards and their relevance to teachers' practices in different disciplinary and geographical settings across Australia.

Navigating this vibrant new NPST website, one might be impressed by the way the message about standards in education is being communicated through state-of-the-art technologies. If new technologies can play such a lively role in this website, one might infer that ICTs are themselves somehow changing the teaching and learning landscape in Australian schools. And yet while the literature is replete with researchers claiming that technology has been radically 'transforming' teaching and learning for more than a quarter of a century now (e.g., Perelman, 1993; Prensky, 2006), other researchers, especially but not only in the area of English education, remind us that technology-mediated developments are fundamental to all historical perspectives on education (Buckingham, 2007; Bulfin, 2009; Selwyn, 2011). Their argument, broadly, is that technology is hardly just a '21st century literacies' phenomenon (cf. Bulfin & McGraw, 2011; Cuban, 1986; Marvin, 1990). Technologies notwithstanding, what is surely more remarkable about this NPST site is its illustration of the saturation, in just over ten years, of the discourses of schooling and education in Australia by the rhetoric of managerial standards-based reforms (see Darling-Hammond, 2004). Developments in technology have always played a part in teaching and learning; they have always mediated the dialogic spaces in which education takes place. There is nothing 'new' or remarkable there. However, the impact of standards on education and educational practices is, we argue, of a different dimension. The combination of the two – an environment shaped by standards and by technologies – is, it seems to us, a concerning phenomenon. This reflexive essay is intended to explain why and how we are concerned, and to explore how it is possible to speak back to standards-based policy-environments to generate alternative perspectives on education, schooling and technology in teacher education programs. Indeed, writing this essay has been a modest attempt to speak back to standards-based reforms, partly by engaging in rich dialogue – 'speaking to each other' – about how to understand our work better, and partly about putting on record our thinking and concerns and some alternatives to current practices. This writing involves the typically unorthodox 'narrative' beginning to this essay.

As standards rhetoric has become more prominent in the last ten years, there has been a significant and ongoing critique of managerial professional standards in the literature across the world. Some of the many different lines of critique include: e.g., the 'unintended consequences' of standards that seek to empower teachers and increase access to quality education but tend do the opposite (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Tuinamuana, 2011); the preoccupation of managerial standards discourses with 'sameness' in professional practice at the cost of meeting the particular needs of students in diverse contexts (Doecke & McLenaghan, 2011; Kostogriz, 2011); the dangers of deprofessionalisation in prescribing what teachers should 'know and be able to do' (Ball, 2003; Doecke, Locke & Petrosky, 2004; Goodson, 2003; Parr, 2010); the damaging use of professional standards in unsophisticated measurements of teachers' performance (Taubman, 2009). The very ubiquity of the word 'standards' in current policy rhetoric in the second decade of the twenty first century, not just on the NPST website, gives us cause for concern. The more time one spends on the NPST site, the harder it is to remember what it was like to talk about education and to work in schools or universities without references to standards. How was education even possible without 'performance indicators', 'professional learning outcomes', 'student learning outcomes', 'progression points', and the like, language that has now become central to all educational policy pronouncements and debates?

Still on the NPST site, if you click on 'Hot Topics' you are taken to some telling commentary on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Amongst other things, this commentary explains how 'in this digital age' ICTs are 'changing the ways people share, use, develop and process information and technology'. Schools 'already employ these technologies in learning', but they will nevertheless need to 'increase their effectiveness significantly over the next decade' (AITSL, 2012). The clear implication is that standards, and the panoply of standards-based artefacts, texts, regimes and initiatives that have been developed and supported by AITSL and other regulatory bodies, are

merely facilitating the radical transformations that ICTs promise.

In this essay we focus on one of these standards-based initiatives, a federally funded project called *Teaching Teachers for the Future* (TTF), run in teacher education institutions across Australia in 2011. Our essay presents and reflects on our experiences of TTF in one teacher education setting. We inquire into the ways that standards, ICTs and teacher practice/s came together in complex ways in this experience. There are three threads which interweave throughout our inquiry: (1) a critique of the TPCK/TPACK 'framework' that featured in guidelines for the project; (2) an exploration of how deeply intertwined standards-based reforms and ICT have become in education policy in Australia; and (3) a representation of how teacher education can speak to standards-based reforms but also usefully 'speak back' to those reforms. In presenting and reflecting on our own experiences, we wonder about the extent to which standards-based reforms are shaping how other teachers and teacher educators are coming to see, talk about and imagine their work. One particular shaping effect that interests us is the tendency for ICTs to function as proxies for standards-based reforms.

The 'Teaching Teachers for the Future' (TTF) project

Consistent with the rhetoric of the NPST (AITSL) website, the TTF project aimed to produce 'systematic change in the Information and Communication Technology in Education (ICTE) proficiency of graduate teachers across Australia'. It proposed to do this by 'building the ICTE capacity of teacher educators and by developing materials to provide rich professional learning and digital exemplar packages' (ALTC & ACDE, 2011, p. 4). The project aimed to 'enabl[e] pre-service teachers to achieve and demonstrate … competence in the effective and innovative use of ICT' which would 'improve student learning [in schools]' (p. 4). The focus upon building the capacity of the teaching profession through enabling pre-service teachers was in some ways consistent with other government funded projects across the world, such as the 'Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers for Technology' project in the US (see Polly et al., 2010). Generous federal government funding through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) allowed one of us, Natalie, who had been teaching English in a co-educational independent secondary school in regional Victoria, to be seconded to Monash University's Faculty of Education, for two days per week over the course of a whole year. The TTF project classified Natalie as a 'highly accomplished ICT educator' (or 'ICT Pedagogy Officer – ICTPO'), and expected her to collaborate with teacher educators (Scott and Graham) 'to develop and share exemplary ICT curriculum and pedagogy' and 'to contribute to leadership [in the area of English education]' (ALTC & ACDE, 2011, p. 5).

The three of us – Natalie, Scott and Graham – had known each other well before embarking upon this project. For several years we had worked on committees, advocacy groups and professional learning projects for our state and federal English teacher associations. Natalie had been a regular guest lecturer in our English teacher education units, between 2005 and 2010. In the course of twelve months, we three worked side by side in the TTF project as an 'English education team', with Natalie participating in the full teaching and academic life of the Faculty. She was at various times lecturer, teacher, writer, researcher and critical friend. She co-planned workshops, attended and led additional seminars, and was a co-researcher and participant in curriculum development discussions. In one of several reports that Natalie was required to submit to AITSL detailing her work on the TTF project, she described the larger framework for our work:

> The English Education teaching team at Monash viewed the *Teaching Teachers for the Future* project as far more than simply an opportunity to assist pre-service teachers to consider the role of ICTs in their classroom practice. In effect, this project provided an opportunity to reflect on the *process of becoming* a teacher and the role that universities play in this professional learning continuum (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Thus, the approach adopted by the English Education team at Monash aimed to provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to engage in collaborative inquiry into their own curriculum work and developing professional identities, both as *English* teachers and as English teachers who use new technologies. The hope was that such opportunities would enrich their future experiences as teachers in schools, and the experiences of the students in their future classrooms; as such, the emphasis on the 'effective use of ICTs', as articulated in the aims of the TTF project, remained just one piece of the mosaic. (Bellis, 2011)

Looking back on 2011, we have no hesitation in saying that the collaboration made possible by TTF funding was a valuable and generative experience for the three of us as teacher educators and secondary English teacher. If the richness of the contributions by pre-service students to online and face-to-face conversations is any measure of the quality of their engagement

in their learning (and the same can be said of the contributions by a group of English teachers in schools, whom we invited to participate face-to-face in workshops and online conversations), then we might be so bold as to claim that the project was a great success. But to what extent could any success in the collaboration have been due to AITSL's 'new' and 'different' professional standards? Did we develop greater competence with new technologies that enabled us to 'change the ways [we] share, used, develop and process information and technology', as the NSPT website promised? Or could the experience be described in other ways? These are some of the key questions underlying this essay. To answer them, we present a dialogic and reflexive account (Parr, Doecke, Moshinsky & Tumilovics, 2012; see also Davies et al., 2004) of our collaboration over the twelve months. In this account, we step back from making bold claims about the effectiveness of the TPCK or TPACK framework. And we do not spruik the effectiveness of some generic transferable strategies used in our workshops, as if these could be replicated unproblematically in another iteration of this project.

Rather, we want to inquire into the particular, situated nature of some of the experiences we shared (Smith, 2005), the learning we participated in and the teaching knowledge that was generated over that time and in the writing that we have undertaken together during and after the project. Our account involves describing and teasing out the conceptual framework that underpinned the TTF, the so-called Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK) (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) or 'TPACK' as it was first described by Mishra and Koehler in an address to the American Education Research Association (AERA) Conference in 2008.[1] The bold claims made on behalf of TPACK in that 2008 paper illustrate a degree of uncertainty as to how to describe it. At first it is a 'model' (p. 6), then a 'framework' (pp. 10, 11, 12) and a 'landscape' (pp. 10, 12); as if searching for more inclusive language it is described as a combination of 'skills, competencies and knowledge in practice', and for good measure, it becomes the 'Total PACKage' (p. 11). An awareness of the tensions and contradictions suggested by this range of descriptions, and the ways in which the TTF documentation positioned Natalie as ICTPO and Scott and Graham as teacher educators, helps to explain the admixture of opportunities and constraints with which we were grappling in the course of this year-long collaboration.

In this essay, we want to affirm the extraordinary value of this opportunity for an English teacher from a school to work with teacher educators in a faculty of education. It allowed us to engage in a sustained and focused teaching and research conversation about English teaching, ICT and professional practice. Such funded opportunities are rare and we believe they should not to be taken for granted.[2] If our primary goal was, as the TTF *Institutional Guide* stated, to 'enabl[e] pre-service teachers to achieve and demonstrate (upon graduation) competence in the effective and innovative use of ICT in education to improve student learning' (ALTC & ACDE, 2011, p. 4), then we feel we could probably mount a case that this *was* achieved. But to focus just on competence in 'effective and innovative use of ICT' would be to limit this study to a consideration of the 'instrumental – tool focused – view of technology' (Voogt et al., 2011, p. 6), or even to concentrate on the dimension that Mishra and Koehler themselves refer to as the Technological Knowledge which is in fact what some research into TPACK focuses on (e.g., Angeli & Valandes, 2009; Polly et al., 2010).

Beyond the official goals of the TTF project, there were five dimensions to the collaboration as we enacted it:

1. *Professional conversations between project partners*
   In this ongoing conversation the three of us as (i.e., Graham, Natalie and Scott) came together in formal and informal contexts, to share experiences, knowledge and practice and to critically inquire into existing practices and future possibilities.

2. *Curriculum development*
   This involved planning for the week to week teaching and learning in the pre-service teacher education program. We reflected critically upon our existing programs and resources, generated new resources, and experimented with 'new' approaches in lectures, face to face workshops and online environments.

3. *The English education inquiry group*
   This group comprised between 10–20 pre-service students who volunteered to participate in an additional hour-long seminar (once a week, between scheduled classes) and to contribute to an online conversation that grew from these seminars. Sessions were planned and led by Natalie and Scott, to provide students with an opportunity to explore some contemporary digital texts that could be incorporated into English classrooms and to critically reflect on a range of issues associated with

English teaching and learning, ICTs and professional learning.

4. *A wider professional learning community*
   In association with the pre-service teachers' inquiry group, a group of lecturers, pre-service teachers and English teachers in schools met four times during the second semester (July-November) with a similar agenda of critical inquiry through conversation and writing. These teachers also contributed to the online conversation with the pre-service students.

5. *Research agenda*
   As the so called 'ICTPO', Natalie was already required to submit to the funding agency regular written reports of progress and 'outcomes'. The project offered an opportunity for all three of us to learn from and build on Natalie's writing and construct a multi-levelled research project. We began this component of the project by seeking and obtaining ethics approval for our research from the Monash University Human Research Committee at the start of 2011. We proceeded to read and reflect upon a range of literature in the field, and as the project was enacted we archived online conversations and audiotaped over 15 hours of face-to-face conversations in scheduled workshops and focus group meetings (with the permission of participants). This generated over 100,000 words of transcript data, which we analysed through a combination of discourse analysis and narrative-based inquiry methods. Table 1 presents a summary of the data generated.

Table 1: Summary of data generated

	Number of events/activities	Number of participants
Workshops (audio recorded)	12 workshops (13 hours of audio recording)	2 staff and between 5 and 15 students and practising teachers (not all participants attended each workshop)
Focus group discussions (audio recorded)	2 focus groups: 1 with staff and 1 with students (2.5 hours of audio recording)	3 staff and 6 student participants
Online forum	87 (discussion and blog posts, including video posts)	34 (19 pre-service teachers, 10 practising teachers, 5 teacher educators)

Unpacking TPACK

This multi-dimensional enactment of the TTF project was a proactive response, on our part, to aspects of the TTF project that seemed to us to be reductive, internally contradictory and at odds with our understanding of professional knowledge and professional learning. The TTF *Institutional Guide* unequivocally signals its connections to the notion of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), claiming that the TPACK framework 'underpins much of the work of the project' (ALTC & ACDE, 2011, p. 6). The project materials quote Mishra and Koehler (2006) in outlining some basic aspects of TPACK, as follows:

> The TPACK framework 'attempts to capture some of the essential qualities of teacher knowledge required for technology integration in teaching, while addressing the complex, multi-faceted, and situated nature of this knowledge'…. Specifically, it: Highlights the nuanced and complex relationships between the three forms of knowledge: 1. pedagogical knowledge (PK), 2. Content knowledge (CK), and 3. technological knowledge (TK). (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 6)

The relationships are 'illustrated' with the often-cited Venn diagram (see below):

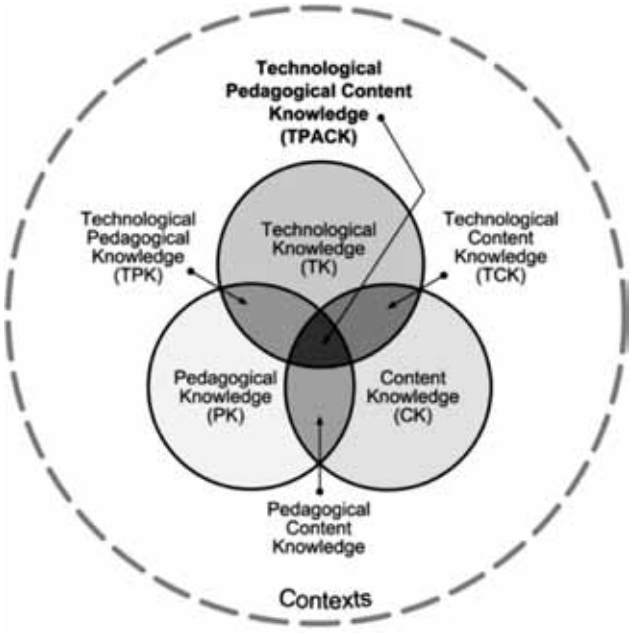

Figure 1: TPACK model, Reproduced by permission of the publisher, copyright 2012 by tpack.org

Our initial concern with this framework was the way it seemed to compartmentalise professional knowledge of English teaching and ICT knowledge into separate 'packages', not to mention the full range of 'seven mutually exclusive domains of TPACK theory' that Archambault and Barnett (2010) draw into question (p. 1658; see also Graham, 2011, p. 1957). Like McEwan and Bull (1991) and Segall (2004) we found the theorising of pedagogy as distinct from 'content

knowledge' to be limiting to say the very least. In our preparation for the project, we sought to better understand Mishra and Koehler's framework and rationale.

We read that the TPACK conceptual framework supported a 'dynamic equilibrium' between the different categories of knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2008, p. 1029), but we were concerned about the contradictory epistemological assumptions that underpinned such a claim. We tended to agree with Graham (2011), who invokes Gess-Newsome's (2002) critique of Shulman's pedagogical content knowledge, pointing out that the language used to describe TPACK is internally contradictory:

> At one end of the spectrum is … the 'integrative' perspective, which defines [TPACK] as the combination or mixture of different types of knowledge. [This is] represented …. [in] a Venn diagram which emphasises areas where different categories of knowledge overlap …. The 'transformative' perspective, at the other end of the spectrum, considers [TPACK] as a new synthesised form of knowledge that cannot be explained by the sum of its parts. (Graham, 2011, p. 1956)

Research interest in the former, integrative perspective, can be seen in those studies of TPACK that seek to better demarcate particular categories of knowledge, in order to identify different and separate constituent elements of such knowledge (see Angeli & Valanides, 2009; Doering et al., 2009; Guzey & Roehrig, 2009; Polly et al, 2010). Other studies, such as Bowers and Stephens (2011), argue that the real value of TPACK is in its representation of a professional 'orientation' rather than as a fixed knowledge base of teaching with technology. Niess (2011) proposes an 'intentionally blurred' alternative to the traditional Venn diagram 'with no domain totally distinct or separate from the other' (p. 305). Our view, similar to that conveyed by Graham (2011), is that although 'TPACK' might be a useful idea to prompt teachers' reflection about their knowledge and practices with respect to technology, it is unfortunately 'built upon an existing theoretical framework [PCK] that lacks theoretical clarity' (p. 1955). However, we do not believe greater clarity can be achieved by increasingly demarcated categories of knowledge.

Mishra and Koehler (2006, 2008), in claiming authorship of TPACK, acknowledge the clear genealogical connections with Shulman's (1986, 1987) notion of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). PCK emerged as a dominant discourse in science teacher education in the 1980s in the US, where the initial focus was on establishing a stable and universal knowledge base for science teaching (see Segall, 2004, p. 490ff. for a survey of key figures in this period; see also Green, 2009). From there, it was a matter of exploring ways for teachers to 'acquire' that knowledge, and then to devise teaching procedures for transferring the content knowledge to students (cf. Ellis, 2007). Since then, the idea of PCK has endured and spread internationally with only occasional and yet trenchant critique of its conceptual foundations (e.g., McEwan & Bull, 1991; Popkewitz, 1991, 1993; Segall, 2004; Sockett, 1987). Over time, PCK has come to influence many subject/discipline/curriculum areas and many western educational systems across the world. Certainly in Australia, PCK's conception of teaching knowledge integrating its different constituent elements (typically represented in Venn diagrams) has been important for many practitioners and bureaucrats[3] in recent years.

One of the conceptual concerns we have with PCK and TPACK is the notion of apparently discrete bodies of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, with the presumption that expertise for subject content and pedagogy lies in different communities. In 1986, Shulman's conceptualisation of PCK portrayed content knowledge as created by authoritative bodies outside of the teaching profession, and pedagogical knowledge as created within the teaching profession. Following Shulman's original formulation, further work by Grossman, Wilson and Shulman (1989) made a similar distinction: 'Scholars create new knowledge in the discipline. Teachers help students acquire knowledge within a subject area' (p. 24). And so, having assumed that discipline knowledge is something that is developed and exists as an entity outside of schooling, PCK characterises teachers' work as 'representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others' (Shulman, 1986, p. 9). Like PCK, the TPACK framework seeks first to demarcate CK, PK and TK, then to integrate them.

The whole project of establishing discrete knowledge domains, before subsequently integrating them, Shulman (1987) argued, was crucial in developing professional standards for teachers. It allowed centralised bodies to categorise and codify teachers' knowledge into unproblematic 'chunks'. This apparently common sense approach to identifying neatly bounded knowledge chunks is seductive to those wishing to articulate discrete professional 'standards' of what teachers need to know and be able to do, which teachers in schools

are then obliged to tick off in the process of demonstrating their professional competence. Such common sense would be compelling, were it not for fundamental flaws in the logic. There are at least four of these that we outline here.

First, it assumes that any 'content knowledge' drawn from outside the profession is neatly bounded, unchanging and widely agreed upon by a homogeneous academy for whom knowledge in their field is not open to serious or ongoing challenge and change. Second, it assumes that a singular and unchanging version of this content knowledge that exists outside the profession will be readily embraced by teachers who apparently have no previous knowledge of other paradigms, or who have no previous experience that might prompt them to challenge or critique the dominant paradigm of knowledge. Third, it fails to appreciate that in the richest processes of teaching and learning knowledge is engaged with, interpreted and reinterpreted, challenged and built upon; new knowledge is often generated dialogically *through* teaching and learning (cf. Mercer 1995; Wells, 1999), knowledge which could never be found in reified bodies of thought that supposedly exist outside of schooling (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; see also Bulfin & Matthews, 2003; Segall, 2004). Fourth, it fails to understand the importance of language in all knowledge building and educative processes. In particular, it fails to understand the complex mediating role of language in the production, communication, interpretation of and engagement with knowledge, and the influence of culture and history in these interrelated processes (cf. Barnes, 1976/1996; Britton, 1970/1993).

Extending this critique, Ellis (2007) points to a broader assumption embedded in some approaches to teacher education which operate under 'an objectivist view of [professional] knowledge as a static and universal commodity that could be fragmented, accumulated and transferred' (p. 1). While Ellis does not name PCK/TPACK, the connections are clear enough. Objectivist views of knowledge are driven by a desire to compartmentalise and finalise knowledge into stable and static 'packages'. These packages rely upon an assumed consensus amongst and between academic and professional worlds about disciplinary knowledge (cf. Popkewitz, 2010, p. 416). This assumed consensus underpins calls in the US and other countries for common 'core' standards and for standardisation of practice. At a time when the world is rapidly changing, when knowledge is changing, and when developments in ICT are proliferating, it is apparently reassuring to imagine a parallel world where there is reassuring evidence of stasis. In this parallel world, the knowledge that matters is knowledge of the past, knowledge that denies the complexity and contested nature of the present. Many ICT developments are valuable in this parallel world because they can provide access for teachers to authoritative and stable bodies of thought and knowledge. This content knowledge can then be effectively transferred, via various ICT and media devices and platforms, 'learning management systems' and applications, to all students irrespective of context, culture and language. Accountability regimes such as standardised tests can easily check to see whether this knowledge has been transferred to students. Teachers' competence can be checked off in lists of professional standards that are constructed in direct relation to reified bodies of content knowledge and pre-determined 'uses' of ICT that all teachers should know and be able to use. In this parallel world the logic of TPACK is reassuring.

However, we were not reassured by the logic of TPACK. In the course of our work on this project we looked in vain for consistency in the theory of Mishra and Koehler's TPCK/TPACK framework. At different moments they proclaim that theirs is a 'new approach toward teacher knowledge' (Mishra & Koehler, 2008, p. 11), and 'a new way of thinking about technology' (Mishra, Koehler & Kereluik, 2009, p. 5), and yet elsewhere they concede it is not so new after all: 'We do not argue that this TPCK approach is completely new' (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 1025). In one publication, they appear to be very interested in the role of language in the development of technological pedagogical content knowledge. They claim TPACK's understanding of technology represents a 'new literacy', 'emphasis[ing] the role of the teacher as a producer (as designer), away from traditional conceptualisation of teachers as consumers (users) of technology' (2008, p. 11). Yet there seems to be no other recognition (in this paper or others they have published) of the role of language or discourse or discourse communities in knowledge or knowledge production. Their descriptions of TPCK/TPACK range from offering guidance for looking at the 'specificity of the relationships between content, pedagogy and technology' (2006, p. 1026), to offering particular 'pedagogical techniques that apply technologies in constructive ways to teach content in differentiated ways according to students' learning needs' (2008, p. 3), to a critique of national technology

standards that 'emphasise [only] current versions of hardware and software' (2006, p. 1031), to suggestions for dealing with the changing nature of knowledge and diverse student needs: teachers should just 'experiment with newer pedagogical techniques' (2008, p. 13). Several critical reviews of TPCK/TPACK criticise its lack of clarity in delineating domains of knowledge (e.g., Angeli & Valanides, 2009; Archambault & Barnett, 2010; Cox & Graham, 2009; Graham, 2011). Angeli and Valanides (2009) complain that the boundaries between most of the domains of TPCK are 'fuzzy, indicating a weakness in accurate knowledge categorisation or discrimination' (p. 157).[4]

What Niess (2011) calls 'the TPACK struggle' describes the efforts of so many practitioners and researchers to clarify these boundaries, and thus enable them to accurately measure the improvements in that one knowledge domain they had achieved through a particular intervention. Our project wanted no part of that struggle. In a sense we were critical of the conceptual looseness of TPCK/TPACK, but for us the solution was not to tighten up that looseness. Actually, in the context of a government funded project that made specific and sometimes prescriptive requirements of the ICTPO teachers and the teacher educators, the fuzziness that others have lamented was somewhat of a relief to us. Beyond the bureaucratic constraints that such a project imposed on its participants, the fuzzy and ill-conceived TCPK/TPACK framework provided us with the freedom we desired to explore aspects of the program that were amenable to more dialogic notions of teacher knowledge and professional practice than might have seemed possible on first encountering the TPACK framework.

Having outlined the TTF project and our multi-levelled enacting of it, and having critically inquired into the TPACK framework that apparently underpinned the project, we now turn to some particular experiences of TTF.

Inquiring into practice

In this section we present data from two different aspects of the project, which speak to the issues we have raised thus far in this essay. We begin with experiences involving the pre-service English teachers (and their lecturers) and move onto a discussion involving the practising English teacher group.

1. Pre-service teachers' inquiry group

In the first excerpt below, Peter (all participant names are pseudonyms) is responding online to one of a collection of vodcasts published by his peers in a unit called 'English language and literacy education'. These 5–7 minute videos, in the form of conversations between Natalie, Scott and individual pre-service teachers, were opportunities to reflect on aspects of a five week teaching practicum, undertaken during the final year of teacher education. All 75 pre-service teachers enrolled in 'English language and literacy education' were asked to respond to at least one vodcast.

> There are a number of ways we can 'encourage students to see writing as a means of actively participating in their local community and the larger society.' One way is to include more creative tasks that encourage students to use formats that are prevalent in modern society. This can include creating blogs, newspaper op-eds (and then possibly sending them to newspaper), songs, advertisements, drama productions, etc. and then making their work available to the public either on the internet (i.e. film their advertisements and put the video on youtube) or through some sort of public performance (i.e. community drama night, or talent show for the songs they wrote). This also has the advantage of connecting their school work to their life outside school. These ties can be strengthened further if these creative tasks can be intertwined with social issues that the students are involved with like a song protesting Australia's treatment of refugees or a PowerPoint montage about the dangers of climate change. These are merely a few suggestions. The possibilities with modern technology are almost endless. (Peter, pre-service student, April 2011)

Peter's posting is part of an extensive online conversation that developed in response to the videos. These video texts prompted a lively range of responses, many of them demonstrating a level of professional engagement similar to what Peter shows here. In his comments, Peter is responding to a particular vodcast by Rebecca. In her video, Rebecca reflects on the ways another teacher during her practicum was able to draw on his students' interest in hip hop culture; she was impressed by the way the teacher encouraged his students to compose rap songs about the injustices of the diamond mining industry in Africa. While viewing the vodcasts students were invited to consider how they might 'encourage students [in schools] to see writing as a means of actively participating in their local community and the larger society'. Peter shows he is interested in a wide range of writing 'products' – including digital, non-digital and hybrids of both. He is interested in their potential for generating and communicating language and ideas in diverse and only sketchily defined 'genres' such as blogs, videos,

songs, advertisements, and drama productions. And he shows an interest in exploring and utilising various social communities – offline and online – that might be a basis for encouraging students to see writing as participation, rather than more conventional framings of writing as simply encoding or as a technical skill.

Other students who posted to these discussions used the space to engage with a range of issues they had confronted during teaching placement. These issues included assessing student writing, collaborating with colleagues, helping students to engage with literary texts, and the relationship between students' out-of-school lives and the English classroom. Although the discussions were open to all students, it became apparent that the more frequent and more searching postings tended to be from those students who were attending the voluntary inquiry group workshops scheduled outside of 'official' classes. The focus of these inquiry group meetings was not simply about developing the technical capabilities of these pre-service teachers (their 'technological content knowledge' as TPACK proponents might suggest) but about providing opportunities to explore some of the complexities of online communication and new media that raise all sorts of interesting possibilities for English teachers and the young people they teach.

One such workshop explored the social media site twitter, focusing on how individuals choose to represent themselves online through language and other means. The workshop participants examined and discussed extracts from the twitter streams of the 'celebrity couple' Shane Warne and Liz Hurley. They wondered whether there is a place for texts like these in the English classroom and what teachers and students might 'do' with them. The discussion began with an examination of some of the features of 'twitter discourse' such as the use of markers like hash tags and 'retweet' symbols, but soon the discussion moved beyond the mechanics of twitter to questions of cultural value and meaning making through texts. Below is an extract from the conversation during the workshop:

> *John:* I do remember watching a British comedy show talking about the way the BBC news has gone interactive. So it turns out that the aliens have arrived. We're all being enslaved and so and so … Slough says, 'Well, bloody good because it's about time! These Tories have done nothing. I say, up with the aliens!' … and it's like, you know, what's it got to do with anything?
>
> *Elise:* Yeah, but you can't discount it all.
>
> *Sally:* It's about democracy, to an extent, or you hope it is.
>
> *Scott:* Or a gesture towards it. …. I think for me it forces questions of value. It forces you to confront how do you make an evaluation and a judgement? So it has the potential to force us to clarify what we see as important, what we see as …
>
> *Paul:* But a lot of your students might surprise you with a logic that makes sense as to why it's valuable. You might not have thought of it, you might not see any value in it but if you pose that question to them, they might surprise you.
>
> *Sally:* That's critical engagement isn't it? Evaluate it, thinking critically about it. That's a good thing.
>
> *Natalie:* And making the familiar strange too. When you take a step back and you analyse a text that is part of your everyday behaviour that you never think about. It's amazing what insights you get into these big issues about identity and community and how people relate to each other and how people use language in ways that they're not even consciously thinking about.
>
> *Nina:* In a lot of ways it's kind of a cultural studies kind of perspective.
>
> *Elise:* Yeah.
>
> *John:* … That's what makes this space so interesting I think, that you can get those different ideas butting up against each other and really requiring you to develop a perspective on what you think is important in the classroom.
>
> (Extract from inquiry group workshop, October, 2011)

Whereas Mishra and Koehler's (2008) TPACK framework appears to define the disciplinary knowledge of English teachers and the digital 'tools' that they might use in the classroom as partially discrete entities, pre-service teachers and teacher educators in the extract above variously present a view of language, communication and technologies as complex and intertwined – even as necessary conditions for the existence of the other. There is little or no sense that these pre-service teachers are developing 'content knowledge' divorced from 'technological knowledge' as they draw on a range of discourses in their attempts to inquire into these new media artefacts and the complex social interactions which shape them.

The rather simple technicist notion of technology 'enabling' learning in the classroom, as much of the discourse associated with TPACK suggests, is somewhat at odds with the conversation represented here. Such a notion would not seem to allow for the myriad ways in which new media artefacts like a twitter feed might be utilised in an English classroom to explore issues as fundamental as identity, narrative and even democratic participation. It is worth noting that this

inquiry-based but critically focused conversation is mostly driven by the students, as they draw the conversation one way and then another in response to their peers' or their lecturers' input. These students are just embarking on their journey as teachers, but clearly they are bringing diverse knowledges and critical lenses to their teacher education experiences, and one could argue that they are collectively generating new knowledge through their dialogue and lively exchange of ideas and perspectives. This is a far cry from the notion of a teacher's expertise involving representing and formulating the given subject matter so as to make it comprehensible to students in classrooms, as elements of PCK/TPACK suggest.

2. Practising teachers' inquiry group

This group of fulltime practicing teachers came together every 4 to 6 weeks during the second semester and also engaged in rich dialogue that troubled the neat definitions of content knowledge (CK), pedagogical knowledge (PK) and technological knowledge (TK) that make up the TPACK framework. The extract below is drawn from the group's first meeting, where these teachers, along with the English Education team, explored the digital text *Inanimate Alice*. After spending time in pairs on laptops, the conversation shifted to critical reflection on how such texts might be used to open up discussions about 'narrative' in their classrooms:

> *Mary:* I don't think that [our students are] really interested in the linearity or non-linearity of narrative, because I think they've moved beyond that. That's an argument that we have as teachers, but … because they are more used to gaming and those kinds [of texts], I think that question of 'this is a narrative, this isn't a narrative', actually doesn't really occur to them in the way it does for us. Because they're more used to non-linear, three dimensional [texts].
>
> …
>
> *Paul:* And then you actually begin to give them a language [to talk about narrative construction]… And then eventually they start to have a sense of how stories work, and how they are constructing the stories rather than just extracting the story which is in the text. I mean to me that's where the value of this sort of an activity might be.
>
> *Natalie:* I've worked with a small group of Year 9s on a task that I called writing an unconventional narrative, and thinking about what that might mean. And I was kind of relieved when they asked, 'what is a conventional narrative anyway?' – I just assumed that because of the school background they'd think, well, it's got to have a beginning, middle and end. I was assuming they would be stuck into those preconceived ideas far more than they were. And the work that they produced was amazing in terms of its variety. One student created this sculptural thing with five different texts … Another student wrote a narrative all out of song lyrics, and then paired it with their own illustration: the illustration sort of told the story. And another student created a more typical … point-and-click kind of game-based narrative, like *Kings Quest* … where you clicked on different things and solved a crime along the way … And they found it challenging, and I found it challenging too. But it was just fascinating what they came up with in the end.
>
> …
>
> *Scott:* It's a very powerful thing … because instead of saying here's this text which is really complex, can you guys work it out – we're saying these are the really complex texts you are making, let's just enjoy making them, and realise that you guys are so capable of this complexity creativity, and then let's afterwards talk about it … And that's shifting the way that they understand schooling and have been led to think that schooling is all about, which is: 'We're introducing this stuff which is probably just above [you]…. Can you jump up high enough to be able to do this?'…. [Instead, its] saying actually 'No, you guys have got the potential, the creativity, the complexity, and then ….'
>
> (Extract from 'Practising teachers' inquiry group' workshop, August 2011)

These teachers came together from a variety of different work/school contexts. Some were immersed in their first year of teaching and others had been in the classroom for several years. Some worked in the independent sector and others taught in government schools. One was a faculty leader. One thing that these teachers shared was a rich appreciation for the process of meaning-making that they and their students were engaged in, a process difficult to make sense of using discrete labels or categories.

The extract above suggests that the teachers appreciate their conversation as a collective enterprise, one which allowed them to develop their perspectives on the text and other broader issues together. It is a process that we believe most other accounts of teachers' practice embedded in TPACK fail to capture. In the classrooms referred to in the extract above, any notion of CK (content knowledge) or TK (technology knowledge) as discrete, pre-determined bodies of knowledge simply cannot do justice to the complex interplay between students' lives both in and outside of school, their varied textual worlds and the textual worlds of their teachers. Mary and Paul's contributions suggest that their classrooms are dialogic spaces, where their students' voices have as much currency as any

understanding of narrative embedded within school curriculum documents. Within the descriptions that Natalie provides of her students' work (see above), the sheer variety of her students' creative approaches is a salient reminder that contemporary English classrooms are not spaces where knowledge can be neatly defined before, during or after students 'get to work'; rather, they are spaces where shared knowledge is constantly evolving through the relationships between the texts that students encounter there, and the texts that they create themselves, along with a complex interplay of local and 'extra-situational' factors which fan out beyond the classroom (cf. Dyson & Genishi, 2005). These classrooms are not reified by pre-determined outcomes, or standards for students to 'jump up to' or over.

Beyond the 'ready-made and handed down body of authoritative thought'

It seems fitting for us to end where we began, with the words of Voloshinov (1986). We have no wish to understate the destructive effects of standards-based reforms on the work and lives of Australian teachers and their students. The 'ready-made … body of authoritative thought' embodied in TPACK and other standards-based 'initiatives' is seductive in its simplicity. Typically, such neatly packaged initiatives promise solutions to the challenges of the work that goes on in school classrooms and university workshops and lecture theatres that have eluded all others before them. The simplicity of educational initiatives can be a powerful selling point, and yet it is where the greatest danger lies for English teachers. Even when, or especially when, they are dressed up as new technologies, such initiatives are dangerous if they are allowed to take hold, and limit the way that teachers and teacher educators can talk about, understand and imagine their classrooms.

But when standardised 'initiatives' like TPACK are commandeered, packaged and marketed by bureaucratic organisations the dangers are amplified. Reductive practices can become reified in ways that restrict other possible ways of knowing and practising, especially for new teachers, for whom current conditions can seem natural – as if 'it has always been this way'. But as we have shown here, when space and resources are provided for teachers in schools to work collaboratively with teacher educators and pre-service teachers, in ongoing professional networks, it is possible to speak back productively to the standards-based rhetoric. Of course, this should not be radical news for English teachers in Australia. Ten years ago, the STELLA project showed how generative and valuable such relationships can be (see Doecke, 2006).

And so while we remain deeply concerned about the dangers of standards-based reforms and standardised teaching packages, including the way that these are often linked to uncritical uses of new technologies, we believe there is some cause for optimism. We ourselves are optimistic when we write about the voices and the dialogue of the teachers represented in the inquiry groups here. We are optimistic when we consider the stories of lively English classrooms and the creativity of students in those classrooms, and when we hear how some teachers still work together collaboratively and in collegial ways to make sense of the complex nature of their work. Despite the march of standards-based reforms that threaten to intellectually stifle the English teaching profession, it would appear that the profession's 'creative age' has not yet passed.

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Notes

1 We note that the earlier acronym adopted for references to Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge, in papers published prior to 2007, was 'TPCK'. In 2007, this morphed into 'TPACK', when Thompson and Mishra (2007) announced that TPCK would thereafter be referred to as Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge or TPACK. The claim that TPACK is the 'Total PACKage' first began to appear in publications the following year, 2008 (e.g., Niess, 2008; Koehler & Mishra, 2008).

2 We are conscious that research is emerging from other participants in the larger TTF project. These researchers have their own reasons to celebrate some of the learning and development they believe was achieved from their particular perspectives (see Henderson et al., 2012; Romeo et al., 2012).

3 An early iteration of the National Professional Standards for Teachers in Australia actually specified PCK as crucial 'theory' for all teachers to know and understand.

4 Angeli and Valanidis (2009) propose to solve the problem of accuracy by providing more specific directions in the form of the acronym-rich 'ICT-TPCK framework'. Their ICT-TPCK model details how particular 'tool affordances can transform content and pedagogy' (p. 157).

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