Towards a new approach to developing professional teaching standards:
Enacting relations of responsibility in educational research

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Abstract
Professional teaching standards are consequential for a range of stakeholders and central to a program of education reform which has been active in a range of countries for almost two decades. This paper explores the extent to which these standards can capture the actualities of teaching practice and thus become not only compelling representations of teachers’ work but also resources that can sustain this work. Adopting a practice-based perspective on teachers’ work and using concepts drawn from actor-network theory, it is argued that standards are primarily to be seen not in terms of the intrinsic capabilities or potentialities of teaching professionals but rather performances of teaching and learning in networks of practice. Concerned with answering normative questions, standards are also a fruitful site for exploring issues of sustainability in teaching and responsibility in research. Utilising video case data collected over the course of ‘capturing’ accomplished geography teaching, the practice of teachers as they go about their everyday work in classrooms is juxtaposed with accounts of this practice by classroom participants, as well as with published standards statements. The claim is made that juxtapositionary practices afford a glimpse of the conditions of possibility of a new approach to developing and using professional teaching standards. This is an approach that inhabits tense spaces of precarious categories, spaces from which learning that sustains teaching can emerge. These spaces provide for the recognition of radical difference and propel a politics that seeks to make use of this difference. Implications for the field of standards research are discussed.

Introduction
For a decade or more, successive Australian governments have taken a variety of initiatives towards improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Part of neo-liberal education policy reform, professional teaching standards are seen to have an important role to play in producing this improvement. Driven by a diverse range of concerns including the demand for greater teacher and school accountability, the perceived need to improve the quality of teaching, the interest in the link between quality teaching and quality learning and the introduction of teacher performance appraisal (and, more recently, performance-based pay), these standards have been developed nationally by professional associations and state education authorities. Typically, they seek to articulate what is valued about teaching and describe the critical features of what teachers know, believe and are able to do. Providing opportunities for teachers to open up the ‘black box’ of teaching and learning, and explore these reciprocal processes in an explicit way, they constitute a key element in the nation’s aspirations to develop world-class standards of classroom teaching.
In what follows, issues of responsibility in research are explored via a case study of the development of professional teaching standards. This study forms part of an Australian Research Council project on the relationship between professional teaching standards and teacher professional learning in the context of the development of standards for teaching school geography. A key impetus for the project is the so-called geography wars (Ferrari, 2006). Along with some geography teachers, academics, and professional geographers, Federal politicians in Australia have raised concerns that geography has become too generalist and issues-led. A recent report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Erebus International, 2008, p.6) has found that the discipline of geography is facing challenges inasmuch as the incorporation of geography into broader curriculum groupings ‘has meant a loss of much of the content, rigour and skills when geography was a separate subject’.

Concerned with answering normative or moral questions, standards are a fruitful site for exploring issues of sustainability in teaching and responsibility in research. With respect to the former, we can think about standards in at least two senses: the sense in which they can be maintained at a certain level indefinitely – that is, are sustainable – and the sense in which they enhance the work and welfare of teachers and students, improve the working and learning environment, promote equity and enrich classrooms and schools – that is, are sustaining. It is the second sense of standards that concerns me here. By definition, a standard is ‘any set of agreed-upon rules for the production of (textual or material) objects’ (Bowker & Star, 1999, p.13). In the case described here, the objects under construction are textual – representations of what teachers know, believe and are able to do – and material – embodied judgments within a situated practice. As a set of agreed rules, standards are an ordering tool: they ascribe value to some points of view and not others. They are caught up in a politics, both a ‘politics of who’ and a ‘politics of what’ (Mol, 2002) – a ‘politics that seeks to make use of – rather than patronising, tolerating or ignoring (or most likely all three) – differences and different ways of enacting things (be they a body, a disease, a climate, [a set of standards])’ (Bingham & Hinchcliffe, 2007, p.2). In the following, attention will be given initially to established ‘stories’ of standards and emerging concepts of responsibility in research. On the one hand, I investigate teaching standards as representing a single debate around a multiplicity of objects (eg. standards as an object; standards as a process). On the other, I discuss, most particularly, Law’s (2007b) notions of empirical and performative responsibility.

Teaching standards and standards development: A concern multiple

What are the currently established stories of teaching standards and standards development? What ways of understanding teaching and being accomplished are made available through them? In attempting to address these questions, and to do my research work in a responsible way, I need to acknowledge the political nature not only of the object of my inquiry but also of inquiry itself: put my own position and commitments on the agenda from the start. Accordingly, I argue that no version of

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1. Spanning 2007-2010, this Linkage Project is being conducted in association with the Australian Geography Teachers’ Association (AGTA) with affiliates in five major Australian states, including Partner Investigator status for the Geography Teachers’ Association of Victoria (GTAV) and the teacher registration authority in Victoria (Victorian Institute of Teaching). Commencing in September 2007, it is at an early stage.

2. In the case under consideration here, the politics of who concerns contestations over the authority to set standards. Who has this authority: the teaching profession? system officials? field-specific academics? school administrators? learners?
professional standards – neither the well-established version where teaching standards assume the form of statements of what teachers know, believe and are able to do, nor the less visible version where they take the form of ‘wisdom of practice’ enacted in actual teaching work – needs to and ought to prevail. In practising a ‘politics of what’, radically different ways of ‘doing’ accomplished teacher and standards of accomplished teaching are possible and to be preferred. In other words, in working the empirical material, I seek to learn ‘how we might better articulate (and articulate together) manifold modes of living’ (Bingham & Hinchcliffe, 2007, p.2) accomplished practice. I claim throughout that conditions of possibility of a new approach to professional teaching standards include the recognition of different modes of organising standards and involve a politics that seeks to make use of different ways of enacting them. In what follows, I tell two contrasting tales of teaching standards. I begin by describing the shifting object of concern: teaching standards as first and foremost a policy strategy for implementing education reform – ontological shift – teaching standards as teachers’ embodied action in everyday practice. Various other tales can be told: the usual health warnings attach to this (poststructural) telling. It treats teaching standards in a particular way and enacts a particular version of the difference between ‘standards as a language of practice’ and ‘standards as practice’.

Standards as a language of practice: A realist reform story

In this story, teaching standards describe the critical features of what teachers know, believe and are able to do. A problem is perceived to exist regarding the ‘black boxed’ character of classroom teaching and the quality of this teaching. Teaching standards are the seeming solution to this problem. Told principally by policymakers and peak professional bodies, this tale takes it that teaching is the type of activity that can and should be codified in standards. ‘Standards were invented to develop the capacity to have direct knowledge and access to what was previously opaque’ (Popkewitz, 2004, p.245). Brought together at a single site, they are commonly conceived as the result of the thinking of individuals such as teaching professionals, system officials or field-specific academics and organised into categories and sub-categories (eg. capabilities, descriptors). Having a wide reach or scope, I term this version of standards travelling standards. By way of illustration, the National Professional Standards for Teachers of History read:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional knowledge</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers know their subject</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Teachers know how students learn to be historically literate</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Teachers know their students</td>
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<tr>
<th>Professional practice</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Teachers plan for effective learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Teachers establish and maintain a challenging and effective learning environment</td>
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<td>3. Teachers assess and review student learning in history</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Professional engagement</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Teachers demonstrate a commitment to the teaching and learning of history</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Teachers continue to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teachers are active members of the professional and wider community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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http://www.historystandards.com/content/view/25/37

3 A product of an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant (2003-2004), these standards are modelled on an earlier set of standards, Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia or STELLA, also developed through an ARC grant. See: http://www.stella.org.au/.
In the continuing debate about the nature of a knowledge base for teaching (see, for example, Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002), teaching standards can be viewed as the practical articulation of the knowledge base of the profession. As Yinger and Hendricks-Lee (2000, p.95) state, ‘For this knowledge base to be created, a discourse language must be created that connects abstract knowledge and theory to the demands and realities of practice. Research and knowledge-based standards can serve in this manner by creating a shared and public “language of practice” (Yinger, 1987)’. Notably here, knowledge is conceived as external to practice − ‘this abstract knowledge base is generated … primarily by the academy’ − and standards are constituted as neutral carriers of this knowledge. ‘Standards, in and of themselves, are broad and benign. It is in the use of standards that conflicts and tensions arise’ (ibid., p.99).

This story of standards implies that knowledge is an object located in individual minds and manifested in written texts (standards statements). It attends closely to issues of structure, that is, issues around professionalism and professionalization such that the authority and status of the teaching profession is enhanced. Arguably, it gives priority to relationships and activities that are embedded in the language and assumptions of groups that sit ‘outside’ everyday teaching practice (eg. policymakers, professional associations, education researchers). It is not concerned to catch the messy and distributed character of the processes that make up the reality of accomplished teaching, including the learners’ frame (Scanlon, 2004) regarding this teaching. Or, to catch the idea that standards are always in-the-making. It can serve to displace the interests of classroom teachers whose experience-based expertise leads them to see standards as other than an abstract set of statements. As Ohanian (1999, p.151, original emphasis) comments: ‘Being a teacher means being able to draw your own map – instead of relying on mass-produced tourist guides’ and ‘understanding that the best map you draw still is not the territory’.

Standards as practice: A relational research(er) story

In this story of standards, knowledge is constituted as a process or better perhaps, a complex set of socio-material practices. In other words, it is practically and discursively enacted and enactive. Here, standards (which articulate knowledge) co-emerge with the activities by which they are shaped and which they reciprocally shape. They are a form of situated knowledge, that is ‘a kind of knowledge defined by and through its relationships and interconnections with its wider social and environmental context’ (Greenhough, 2007, p.1141). Told principally by teaching practitioners and researchers given to practice-based theorizing (Gherardi, 2000), including actor-network theory (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992, 2008; Law & Hassard, 1999), this tale takes it that standards are not so much descriptors of accomplishment ‘out-there’ − what teachers know, believe and are able to do − as practices performed and performing, within, and between, classrooms and other places and spaces.

A focus on ‘how’ allows for a less static and singularising understanding of standards and affords close study of their constitutive relations and effects, for example, how currently established standards discourses and practices silence their ‘consequential

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4 Teachers would tell this story using terms other than I use here. See, for example, the account made by Susan Ohanian (1999) who ‘is a teacher writing straight from the classroom’ (Ayers & O’Brien, 2004, p.259).
stakeholders’ (Groundwater-Smith, 2005) – young people/learners/students. Rather than a passive structure, in this story standards demonstrate the characteristics of an *assemblage*: ‘a process of bundling, of assembling … in which the elements put together are not fixed in shape, do not belong to a larger pre-given list but are constructed at least in part as they are entangled together’ (Law, 2004, p.42). It attempts to hold onto the idea that standards *emerge* from everyday practice. They are not things as such; they are reflected in the judgements that are made (Winch, 1996).

In a relational understanding of teaching standards, emphasis is placed on classroom pragmatics. Standards can assume the form of written statements and/or take an embodied and emplaced shape. The education researcher, Robert Yinger (1987), goes some way towards providing a socio-material and relational account of standards when presenting the view that ‘effective teaching relies upon the development and use of a professional pattern language – a language of practice’:

Experienced teachers use powerful patterns in the form of activities and routines. … A language of practice for teaching must be a language of action, a language of practical action. … It must weave … components together as integrated patterns that illustrate practice as an artful combination of ends and means (1987, p.313).

Thinking standards in a relational way, I seek to give attention to this language while extending its remit. Whereas the teaching profession assumes that teachers have, in principle, the capacity to ‘speak’ a language of practice, this capacity is not intrinsic to the teacher but is an effect of the institutional and professional assemblages of which she comes to play a part. Challenging the modernist, individualist model of teacher who necessarily has particular qualities or capabilities, the teacher here is an *effect of*, for instance, professional knowledge and professional language. Students also contribute to the use of this language, and can contribute to its development, as do materials and environments (eg. school and home environments). Standards are primarily to be seen not in terms of the intrinsic capabilities or potentialities of teaching professionals, or in terms of an extrinsic language of practice, but rather performances of teaching and learning in networks of practice, which, in all likelihood, will include these capabilities and this language. To speak of standards as a socio-material practice is to begin to speak of the general and the local, the singular and the multiple, the codified and the embodied, the travelling and the embedded, in the same breath. In a relational story of standards, standards and teaching are at once constituted and constituting.

In telling my two stories of standards, I have attempted to work the notion of ontological multiplicity (Carolan, 2004). Standards take on different identities; they can assume the form of a multiplicity (knowledge representations, knowing practices; standards statements, wisdom of practice) and a singularity: ‘the essential characteristics of the teachers who create value-added learning’ (Lasley, Siedentop, & Yinger, 2006, p.13). And, rather than reducing standards to a singularity, acknowledging the assemblages of standards will give greater purchase on and multiplicity and dimension to standards research and development work.

5 The sense of unitary modern subject is strong in standards statements: teachers are framed as stand-alone, knowing subjects – teachers ‘know their subject’; ‘know how students learn’; ‘know their students’. It is the work of the standards developer to describe well the capabilities of accomplished teaching: these capabilities are thought *to inhere in the teacher*.
The ‘responsibilities of research’ question: Modes of responsibility

According to Fraser (2006), interest in ethics is proliferating across the social sciences. This interest stems in part from the increasing difficulty of disentangling domains of reality (e.g. nature) from the sphere of politics in the contemporary context of complex techno-scientific controversies (e.g. climate change). Responding to this difficulty, Latour (2004) has been concerned to explore the relation between ‘matters of fact’ and ‘matters of concern’. Commenting on the character of contemporary social critique, he raises the issue of whether, in contrast to ‘trying to detect the real prejudices hidden behind the appearance of objective statements … we now have to reveal the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the illusion of prejudices?’ and laments: ‘The question was never to get away from facts but closer to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the contrary, renewing empiricism’ (Latour, 2004, pp.227-231, emphasis in original). Law (2007b) too makes a case for dealing with facts. In his view, politics or power has now become foundational. Given this situation, he suggests that responsibilities might be a better word than politics for describing what one does in research work and argues that we ‘have a simultaneous responsibility both to the real and to the good’ in undertaking it (Law, 2007a, p.15).

Firstly, according to Law (2007b), we need to exercise empirical responsibility: respect the relations that make the real. This entails doing more than deconstructing knowledge claims through, for example, identifying the tropes and aporias that exist in them. As opposed to being critical through deconstructing, debunking, and/or demonstrating the lack of scientific certainty in the construction of facts (Latour, 2004), we need to enact respect for facticity in our research processes and accounts. As Bruni, Gherardi and Parolini have it, facticity concerns the ‘situated production of knowledge’ (2007, p.85). Accordingly, one way of enacting respect for it may involve working with the situated shapings of knowledge as actor-networkers commonly do through their empirical case-studies and ethnographic work.

Secondly, and alongside empirical responsibility, we carry a responsibility to the good. To what end is the work being done? What are our ethical/moral/political commitments in undertaking our research work? In the case considered here, this involves questioning the way in which established stories of standards can make invisible how standards are achieved everyday in classrooms, that is, standards as a local, embodied and emergent practice. And, make inconsequential elements of knowledge which remain specific and tacit, resulting in a ‘thin’ version of standards with the potential to hurt rather than help practitioners. ‘The limitations to making tacit knowledge explicit are formidable … . The probability is that “thick” tacit versions will coexist alongside “thin” explicit versions: the thick version will be used in professional practice, the thin version for justification’ (Eraut, 2000, pp.134-5).

Relations and realities (of standards and accomplishment) are being enacted not only ‘out-there’, but also ‘in-here’ in our writing (Law, 2007b). Writing responsibly involves, among other things, acknowledging that we are ‘irredeemably embedded in

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6 The latter term is used by Latour ‘in contrast to “matters of fact” and as shorthand for refusing the distinction between what is controvertible (e.g. values) and what is not (e.g. observational data)” (Whatmore, 2006, p.608).

7 This mode of responsibility is being taken up in various forms across the social sciences. For example, geographers are pursuing questions of responsibility through notions such as ‘caring at a distance’ and ‘geographies of responsibility’. See in particular Barnett and Land (2007) where the concept of generosity (which is thought of primarily as a political concept) is discussed.
messy, distributed, heterogeneous and specific practices, so our responsibilities, empirical and performative, are similarly distributed and heterogeneous’ (ibid). Writing in the context of investigating material politics (which is quite like a ‘politics of what’), Law and Mol (2008, p.142) ask: ‘How might writing be done in a way that opens up a space of contestation rather than closing it down?’ and add instructively: ‘What otherwise appears to be self-evident may be undermined through articulation. … Articulation requires that practices are put into contrast with their others. If other equally possible ways of ordering are presented along with those under study, this helps open up a space of contestation’. Turning now to the empirical research, and building on the stories of standards told earlier, I attempt to open up just such a space.

The project in question: Data and method assemblage

The first empirical phase of the project described here seeks to study what ‘accomplished’ geography teaching is by documenting what geography teachers, who are deemed accomplished, do. Data are being sourced from teachers and students via video recordings of accomplished teaching. In an effort to ‘capture’ the specificities of practice, including the flow of teacher action and embodied judgement, the approach adopted uses technically complex methods for video recording classrooms and supplementing the video records with post-lesson video-stimulated interviews with students and the teacher. My particular interest resides in the implicit or tacit competence and creativity of the teacher and the embodied judgements she makes as she goes about the lesson. Like Latimer (2004), I take it that these judgments are made and made visible through material practices and arrangements as much as talk.

Taking two ‘windows’ onto teaching standards – moving between the experiences of a teacher and her students as they go about a geography lesson and juxtaposing this in situ picture of standards with standards statements – I attempt to gain a complex and differential understanding of how teaching standards are enacted and explore their politics. This exploration is used to stage a discussion of how juxtapositionary practices afford a glimpse of the conditions of possibility of a new approach to developing and using professional teaching standards. The empirical material that informs these data stories (Lather, 1991) was gathered in October 2007 and consists of eight interviews which were conducted face-to-face, four with the classroom teacher and four with individual students (including two interviews with one student). Using the video record as a ‘trigger’, the teacher and the students were invited to make a reconstructive account of the lesson events deemed critical to the learning that occurred in the lesson. Observations were made over the course of a sequence of two lessons, each lasting for approximately fifty minutes. Place locations and names of teacher and students have been altered for reasons of confidentiality.

8 I take it that accomplishment is materially and discursively produced. The teacher/subject is produced within an institutionalised and relational use of terms such as ‘accomplished’, ‘quality’, ‘advanced’ and ‘great’. As the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has it, ‘Every child deserves a great teacher’; see http://www.nbpts.org/. Methodologically, purposeful sampling is being used to identify accomplished teachers. Members of the Australian Geography Teachers’ Association and its affiliates are being invited to nominate teachers who are widely regarded professionally, using various criteria eg, reputation for accomplishment within the field of Geographic Education; years of experience teaching school geography.

9 For each of ten classrooms in three major Australian states, two lessons, each lasting around 50 minutes, are being videotaped using three cameras. One camera focuses on the teacher, a second on individual students as part of a working group, and a third on the whole class as seen from the front of the room. Using as catalyst the video record from the whole class camera, with the teacher camera image inserted as a picture-in-picture image in one corner of the display, teachers are invited to make a reconstructive account of the lesson events deemed critical to student learning. Similarly, students are invited to make an account of lesson events, using as stimulus the video record from the teacher camera, with the individual students’ camera image inserted as a picture-in-picture image in one corner of the display. To date, two case studies (4 lessons altogether) have been conducted.
Assembling the accomplished teacher: Standards-in-practice

Caroline’s story: ‘Taking geography … to a different level’

Deemed by her peers to be an accomplished geography teacher, Caroline is about to commence a class in which the Year Nines are to be introduced to Geelong, Australia’s largest regional municipality and ‘Home of the Cats’, an Australian Rules football team which, after forty-four years, has finally managed to win a premiership. Teaching at an all-boys’ school where sport, most particularly football, has a large and fanatical following, 10 she aims to take ‘geography a little bit to a different level, so looking at the geography of sport and then we are going to actually map where the goals were kicked and the behinds were kicked using the choropleth technique and then we are going to do a ray diagram (looking at) where the players come from, to go to play for Geelong’. Evidently, teaching and learning are socio-material matters: ‘So we’re going to do lots of skills but through something that hopefully will appeal to the boys because, with them, you’ve got to have something interesting. They don’t like going into classes where they have textbooks so they just read through it and answer questions’. The interessement device 11 used to get the boys negotiating the terms of their involvement in learning is a laminated ‘data broadsheet’, on which an image of a premiership poster appears (see Figure 1). A brief exchange around the poster takes place as Caroline delivers the datasheet to a desk at which a pair of boys sits:

**Figure 1: WEG premiership poster**

![WEG premiership poster](http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/shop)

Pointing at the image of the poster repeated on the broadsheet, David says to his partner at the double desk – ‘She had to put that in, didn’t she’. Commentary on the poster continues:

**David**: Miss, is that really necessary?

**Caroline**: Absolutely … necessary and I’ve put it in twice just to reinforce the fact that Geelong won in 2007.

**Zac**: Why?

**Caroline**: Because we’ve been waiting a very long time!

Apparently, accomplished teaching is not only a matter of ‘mind’ (eg. ‘looking at the the geography of sport’) and ‘hand’ (eg. ‘map(ping) where the goals were kicked’) but also of ‘heart’. A self-described ‘Cats’ tragic’, Caroline performs a distinctive form of teaching work: ‘Good teaching is to do with teachers’ values, identities, moral purposes, attitudes to learning (their own as well as those of their students), their caring and commitment … their enthusiasm and their passion’ (Day, 2004, pp.15-16).

The curriculum materials that Caroline has prepared afford an opportunity to consolidate relationships with students and, at the same time, extend their understanding of the subject matter. One of the boys at interview, Jack, comments on

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10 Not uncommonly, for an elite, private boys’ school, sport is a compulsory part of school. ‘We all have to do sport at this school. We all have to give up Saturdays’ (Caroline).

11 In ‘first wave’ actor-network theory, interessement concerns attempts that actors such as teachers make to lock others into place by coming between them and their alternatives. See in particular ‘Some elements of a sociology of translation: Domestication of the scallops and the fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay’ by Michel Callon (1986).

Caroline’s relaxed relationship with her students in this way: ‘She’s like a good teacher, laid back, like she’s serious in a way but she can have a joke’. Having a joke enters into the organisation and production of the subjectivity of accomplished teacher and of standards of teaching. The materials involved (eg. poster, teacher gestures and vocal emphasis – ‘Because we’ve been waiting a very long time’) render the making of teacher judgement and decisions, and the standards that they imply, visible and, to some degree, contestable: ‘Miss, is that really necessary?’ Humour (and irony) are part of the agreed-upon rules for the reality of classroom learning. In conjunction with the boys, Caroline is engaged in standards setting, articulating the norms or rules that are used in school geography for determining levels of achievement in the subject. Significantly, these norms are heterogeneous; they involve an entanglement of behavioural, cognitive and ethical elements. Parsing the lesson, Caroline begins a sequence in this way:

Looking at the handout please gentlemen, take that in front of you. We’re going to work through the different questions quite slowly today so that we’re really learning the correct way to do some answers and the first one we are going to look at is the map which is labelled A, alright, so it’s showing the location of Melbourne and then Geelong. It’s the very first map; could you all look at that please. (It’s labelled) A. Now if we look at our handout, the written answer one, it says (reads aloud) ‘this data broadsheet introduces us to a range of what we call geographic media’. Now in Year 12, they have to have a range of media in order to present their work. And they’re tested at Year 12 and 11, we test the ways that they can present information. So I’ve given you a selection of media here to show data about Geelong. So look through the data A-S, which you’ve just done, to get a feel for the characteristics of Geelong. Now the first one A is what we call a thematic map. Looking at the map A (reads aloud) ‘name the main land use which is shown on the map’. Now where would a good place be to find that answer if you’re looking at a map? (Student response in the background.) The legend. Have a look at the legend, sometimes it’s called the key and what is it actually telling us? …

Behavioural elements such as ‘Looking at the handout please gentlemen’ are directed at keeping the class on task and focusing attention on salient features of the content under consideration. Cognitive elements such as the selection of media that Caroline has provided by way of the broadsheet conform largely to existing versions of professional standards which are ‘usually organised by categories which represent the critical elements that must be brought together for accomplished teaching’ (Teaching Australia, 2007, p.8), the critical elements here being teacher preparation/planning, teacher subject knowledge, teacher commitment to student learning, and so on. What I will call the codified version of teaching standards where ‘categories are intended to capture under broad headings what is expected of teachers’ (ibid) is usefully compared with the embodied version of teaching standards. While categories are readily apparent, standards in situ are not categories, or capabilities, or sets of descriptors. Rather, they are embodied actions or, embedded ‘sets of collective acts’ (Verran, 2002, p.758): ‘Looking at the handout please’; ‘Have a look at the legend’.

As Hiebert et al (2002, p.8) comment, ‘teaching is such a complex activity that it must be parsed in some way to study it’ and to undertake it. From my observation of the lesson under discussion here, this parsing involved a sequence of: initial revision of the previous lesson; question and answer eliciting prior knowledge of the new topic; formalisation and extension of this knowledge through the introduction of the data broadsheet; skill-based learning orchestrated via a handout; direct instruction using the whiteboard and so on. Each of these sequences can be understood as a pedagogic assemblage.

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Standards are everywhere apparent – ‘Come on you guys, hurry up and go to class’; they are built and practised – ‘We’re going to work through the different questions quite slowly today so that we’re really learning the correct way to do some answers’; and they are held by both teacher and students – ‘I think that’s why these lessons take a long time on the questions because we’re trying to be as concise as we can’ (Chris). They also demand physical work, certainly on the part of the teacher, who regularly walks around and helps those who needs assistance. Bodies (and the spaces they inhabit) are central to achieving accomplished teaching.

Describing standards-in-practice affords an understanding of the multiple and complex decisions that teachers take in their everyday work such as is evidenced in Caroline’s shift in the above when invoking practices of geographic education in Year 12: ‘Now in Year 12, they have to have a range of media in order to present their work. … So I’ve given you a selection of media here’. In my reading of these data, Caroline is taking an opportunity to shape the subjectivity of the Year 9s, to streamline their choices of school subject and to fashion a future for them as would-be geographers. Her ethical/political decision making and identity work also extends to sensitising the boys to the dynamics of locations ‘other’ than capital cities.\footnote{Caroline is aware that her students pass through Geelong on the way to the surf coast where their families have holiday houses. This passing through does not constitute a situated knowledge of Geelong?}

I’m hoping that they (the boys) will get a better understanding of what Geelong’s like … that they’re not always thinking that (metropolitan) Melbourne is the best place to be.

Caroline is committed to raising awareness of rural life – ‘There are opportunities down there in terms of work and education’ – as well as the profile of the sub-field of regional geography. The elements that in the codified version of standards are differentiated and discrete (what teachers know, value and do) are intermingled or enmeshed. To teach well here is to teach subject matter in a serious but not overly severe way – ‘It doesn’t matter what town you are going to look at, there are certain aspects of geography that you can apply to any location or any part of the world that you want to analyse’ – and, at the same time, teach students who, apparently, are now of the view ‘that everything can relate back to geography; you can map anything; you can graph anything’. ‘Before I started geography I thought it was just like colouring in … but she’s brought a different thing to it’. Standards of accomplished teaching emerge as the active outcome of the collective work of people, processes and things.

\textbf{Chris’s story:} \textit{‘If you asked me now I could probably tell you properly’}

\footnote{‘Chris’ is a composite figure. This account is largely informed by the views of one student; salient points raised by the other two students have however, been added and acknowledged.}

In association with arrangements, tools and materials, students act to produce teaching and learning and their embedded standards. The material practices that generate the social and organisational life of the classroom are very apparent in this account given by Chris, one of Caroline’s Year 9 students:

At the start of most lessons we get our sheets … so normally she’ll (Caroline) compile lots of stuff into these sheets and questions, sort of comprehension questions. We get a broadsheet, something like that, or maybe a map or notes we’ve taken from a previous lesson from a video, sort of stuff like that, that we
normally do. It’s sort of handy as well. Because (as) you can see (pointing to his accompanying folder), I’ve got lots and lots of these in my folder. We get a heap of these sheets. And I think they are handy because they really work well; it’s to the point. And at the end of the year, you can look at exactly what we’ve done.

Teaching standards are not only to be seen in terms of intrinsic capabilities or potentialities of teachers (that can be categorised and circulated as standards) but also as socio-material practices that come into effect and play their part relationally. Students are well able to articulate what is valued about teaching and describe the features of what good teachers know, value and do in order to help on their learning. As Scanlon (2004, p.106) comments ‘If we listen to students it is possible to isolate from specific instances what they identify as essential to their learning’.

I’ve learned probably six words just in that lesson and how to, like any situation … how to describe a pattern on a map. If someone asked me (before the lesson), I’d say ‘it’s colourful’, but if you asked me now, I could probably tell you properly.

The problem with this sort of method (presentation) really is that a lot of kids, they’ve done all the work and now kids are just talking up front. … Presenting on a big piece of paper up the front probably wasn’t ideal. Too many kids muck around. … But then again, I like to work on my own, so. You really do gotta cater for everyone. Other kids would probably want to have someone else talk out the front because it’s easier for them.

Sometimes it’s easier to relate to someone who is the same age, or if they are good friends or something. It’s kinda like peers can help you learn as well as the teacher (David).

Tracked by the teacher with respect to the disciplinary discourses of school geography – ‘Left-hand corner … is there a way we can say that more geographically … north-west, yes’ – they have a strong sense of standards, here, ‘proper words’:

We go through everyone’s answer. Everyone will have a different answer but every one will be sort of different. So, if we can get sort of the correct answer, if we all can agree on something, we’ve got a good clear and concise answer, which we can study off. It’s much easier. Instead of, in other classes, we get one person’s opinion and it’s not exactly right and you might think ‘I’ve got something different to that, I’m not exactly sure’. When you go back and try and study on something like that around about now, it’s not exactly easy. You’ve sort of got one person’s sort of guess and they’re not exactly sure of what they’re talking about, whereas if you’ve got a combined group answer, it’s sort of much easier to analyse. I think that’s why these lessons take a long time on the questions because we’re trying to be as concise as we can.

Also it (the booklet) helps, because we go through not only just our answers, if we are doing it as a group, we can get the correct phrasing which will help come exam times, instead of sort of just having our guess and check and our close enough. We’re getting the proper words, right, you know ‘scattered’ and ‘the Melbourne region’ instead of just Victoria which a lot of kids put down and it wasn’t Victoria because it’s at Healesville. So we’re learning certain words and stuff that otherwise you wouldn’t have done. I think that’s a key point, learning all the separate words. And the booklet seems to help.
Attention to the ‘correct answer’ is not unexpected in an elite private school with a strong academic tradition and a respect for teachers as subject experts and professionals. The geography curriculum is organised along academic lines, disciplinary knowledge being privileged over ‘guess and check’. The methods used by the teacher such as ‘working in partners’ and the standards that accompany these methods underscore the curriculum on offer and apparently accord with the preferred ways to learn of the students:

Working in partners you can kinda talk about what your thoughts on the actual thing are … If you get someone else’s opinion, like you might not be sure on something, if you get someone else’s opinion, you can determine whether you’re right or wrong (David).

I thought it (the lesson) was good ’cos we did it like as a group. … If we are by ourselves, people will like muck around (Jack).

While the teacher acts as an external arbiter – ‘She’ll tell us if like it’s wrong or tell us to add something in’ – what emerges as standards is determined by various agents, including students – ‘peers can help you learn as well as the teacher’ – and materials: ‘We get a heap of these sheets. … they really work well’. In emphasising the relational and material character of teaching standards in these data stories, I have attempted to open up a space for thinking teaching standards differently. Thinking standards as embodied action (rather than as representations) restores a sense of their complexity. As Law (2003, p.6) states, ‘it is in the specific and the concrete that complexity is located’. Standards are a network or, better perhaps, a meshwork (Thrift, 2006) whose various elements define and shape one another. Thinking standards as meshwork affords a sense of collective responsibility. Standards are no longer the exclusive concern of the teacher or of the school. They are embedded in distributed, heterogeneous and specific practices, so responsibilities for developing and maintaining them are similarly distributed and heterogeneous.

**Towards a new approach to developing teaching standards**

Mobilising elements of the neo-liberal philosophy that now dominates educational policy formation in Australia (Hilferty, 2008), the prevailing reality of teaching standards privileges public accountability of teacher performance and the improvement of teaching quality through accounts of the ‘foundation areas of expertise expected for … advanced teaching’ (Teaching Australia, 2007, p.5). Providing for increased public understanding of the content or categories of teaching work, this accounting of accomplished teaching is professionally and politically useful. Standards statements can travel widely and render precise the elements or attributes of quality teaching. However, other ways of articulating standards, and other styles of standards, should not drop from view. As Law has it (2007a), knowledge lies in exemplars and words are never enough.

I propose that a useful methodology for developing professional teaching standards involves achieving a useful symmetry (Verran, 2002)\(^\text{16}\) or a tense juxtaposition (Law, 2007c) between different versions and modalities of standards (eg. teacher version, 

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\(^{16}\) A ‘useful symmetry’ is a symmetry which allows epistemic differences to stand, here the difference between standards as abstract representations of practice and standards as socio-material practices which are carried out.
Juxtapositionary practices afford a glimpse of the conditions of possibility of a new approach to developing and using professional teaching standards. This is an approach that inhabits ‘tense spaces of precarious categories’ (Singleton, 2005, p.785) and precision only in part: spaces from which learning that sustains teaching can emerge. Thus, the accounts made of learning by Chris and his fellow students have the potential to enhance the work of the classroom teacher and improve the working and learning environment. More importantly, they promote reciprocal relations between teachers and students and empirically responsible relations of standards work. The teacher and students in the standards-as-practice data story who, along with other entities, co-produce a practice of accomplished geography teaching can be said to occupy tense spaces whereby radical differences are allowed to stand. Conditions of possibility of a new approach to professional teaching standards include the recognition of these differences and provoke a politics that seeks to make use of them.

The data assembled to tell this story afford an understanding of the contingent character of standards and an awareness of elements that may contribute critically to them but elude the categories that are commonly used to organise them. Thus, teacher mobility and humour feature strongly but do not correspond with categories of teacher knowledge, skills and dispositions, certainly not in any clear-cut way. It is Chris’ prior experience of the regional centre of Geelong and the economic and cultural capital that underwrites this experience that secure ‘successful’ learning in the geography classroom and, I would suggest, successful geography teaching: ‘We’ve got a holiday house down on the Surf coast. So, I sort of know a little about some of the things, the pier, Yarra Street … the carousel. … I’m pretty familiar with Geelong’.

Told infrequently, this situated story of standards affords an opportunity to make visible the invisible work of a range of actors, which I deem to be one way of enacting relations of responsibility in classroom research. It also affords an understanding of teaching standards as other than the paper products produced by what is now a vast standards production house. In Australia alone, national standards have been developed for Dance, English Language and Literacy, History, Library and Information Services, Mathematics, Modern Languages, Music, Science and so on. Once articulated as national professional standards, teaching standards can ‘clot’ and appear to be self-evident. Categories become hardened and create certain effects (eg. objectivity and certainty become the sole arbiters of the truth of standards). Other articulations of standards can promote other effects (eg. subjectivity, entanglement).

**Enacting relations of responsibility in educational research**

Throughout this paper, I have deployed the ‘foundational’ features of standards statements and the individualist model of teacher and teacher accomplishment as a foil. I have attributed a particular view of reality to those engaged in processes of developing teaching standards as part of policy and professional work. In invoking the idea of a codified version of teaching standards where categories are intended to capture what is expected of teachers in their professional work, I have not sought to lift the negotiations and contestations that go into this capturing (Pence, 1998) to view. In the life of the project presented in this paper, this story remains to be told.

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17 I am not alone in this. Pence (1998, p.66) urges those who ‘truly want educational reform’ to ‘wrest standards out of the positivist paradigm and rescue them from the rhetoric of crisis and accountability’.
The second empirical phase of the study involves panels of teachers who will meet to engage in discussions about criteria for accomplished teaching using video excerpts, including excerpts from the case study recounted here, and ultimately to develop a set of standards. Like the version of accomplished practice presented above, this version relies on various technologies (the social technology of panel discussion; the literary technology of descriptors of accomplishment)\(^\text{18}\) in order to establish the facts of the matter of accomplished teaching. Unlike the version above, the techniques through which these standards are produced tend to disappear from view.

Respecting the relations that make the codified version of teaching standards will involve giving attention to the discursive and material practices by which they are produced towards offsetting the possibility of them being seen as natural and inevitable. Decisions will need to taken about the degree to which the projected contestation about the content of standards for teaching geography can, and should, be shown in the product of the work, that is the standards. These decisions are consequential not only for the stakeholders involved but also the embryonic field of teaching standards research.

In presenting my empirical material, I juxtaposed or moved between the experiences of teacher and students towards gaining a distributed understanding of how teaching standards are enacted and exploring how they may need to be ‘done’ differently or be other than they are. I took it that an account made by research participants whose knowing locations are radically different would yield greater understanding of the epistemic and normative issues attached to standards. As Anderson (2002, p.309) argues in the context of occupying a ‘third space’ positioning when researching, oscillation between two apparent opposites has ‘the potential to invoke useful insights not only into the research subject but also the process of the research itself’. Articulating fundamentally different accounts (of standards) and articulating them together – maintaining the tension between the multiple and the seeming singular – provides a good guiding rule for how to go on in educational research.

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\(^{18}\) I am drawing here on Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer’s (1985) description of the experimental programme of the 17th century natural philosopher, Robert Boyle, where three technologies were utilised for producing matters of fact.
References


