The visual metaphor that you find on the cover of this issue, designed as always by the talented Stacey Zass, resonates beautifully for me with our special theme of teacher education and professional learning. The ‘somewhere’ in Stacey’s explanation of her design recognises the ineffable and unexpected dimensions of learning. No lesson plan, no matter how precise or detailed, has ever quite captured (for me at least) just what happens in the intense relational and textual spaces of classrooms. Where we are, at the end of an engaged and dynamic lesson, may be a rather different and more surprising place than my students and I had anticipated. No professional learning program, no matter how instrumental its intent, is quite as narrow in its training and registration in the profession, and though we are ‘framed’ by particular institutional contexts, the ‘red thread’ of professional identity is in flight beyond these to unexpected climes. Before beginning the journey of this particular issue of *English in Australia*, I’d like to map out some of the terrain over which that duck is flying with the red thread in her mouth.

Beyond the cliche of life-long learning, there are considerable bodies of literature around professional learning and teacher education. Arguably the most significant context through which pre-service teacher education and ongoing professional learning can be understood in the present is that of Professional Standards, that are themselves just one part of a complex policy ensemble that is reshaping education in various locations (Ball, 2006). Initial teacher education courses are increasingly framed by whichever set of Standards is relevant to the jurisdiction and ongoing professional learning opportunities are increasingly pitched towards the Standards so that teachers are able to efficiently record their learning and represent themselves in alignment with the Standards. The pace of ‘standards-based reform’ within neoliberal or managerialist reform agendas has been recent, rapid and relentless and, as we are inculcated into the requisite modes of thinking and speaking that are demanded by the apparatus of mandatory Professional Standards, it becomes increasingly difficult to think and speak outside them. The papers in this special issue could be considered, despite (or perhaps because of) their diversity, to be responses to this context.

Beginning teachers are of particular interest to the many readers of *English in Australia* who are mentor teachers in schools, faculty heads or supervisors, teacher educators in universities as well as early career teachers themselves. Currently in NSW, for example, provisionally accredited Graduate Teachers are expected to work towards Professional Competence (and full accreditation) during their first year. They become adept, with the help of their supervisors, at mapping themselves convincingly against the grid provided by the NSW *Professional Teaching Standards*.

Yet there are other ways of considering the early careers of teachers. For example, a large study of beginning teachers in England and Scotland suggests that much of the professional learning of early career teachers can be best understood as ‘identity’ work. Early career teacher identities are uncertain and unstable requiring ‘juggling between various ‘economies of performance’ (exam results, league tables, state-prescribed curriculum and pedagogy; set pace of learning) and ‘ecologies of practice’ (such as vocational commitments, sense of identity, institutional ethos)’ and they lead to a ‘shifting, plural and contradictory sense of the professional self’ (Stronach, 2009, p. 101). In contrast to more seamless accounts of professional learning, including those that are represented in our tidy lists of Professional Standards, Stronach argues that early professional learning is experienced as a ‘rather unpredictable and individualistic collision of foreknowledge and afterthought wherein forewarned is never quite forearmed’ (Stronach, 2009, p. 104). Rather than continuing to ‘over-define and over-specify abstract lists of competencies’, he argues that professional learning for new teachers should be contextually specific and localised, and recognise that new teachers are ‘learning to be and become as well as to do’ (2009, p. 121).

Ongoing professional learning for English teachers can also be understood beyond the grid provided by the Standards. Collaborative and collegial opportunities are enabled by the state English Professional Associations that together make up the membership of the Australian Association of Teachers of English. The regular ‘Around the States’ column in *English in Australia* details the breadth and diversity of professional learning opportunities that contribute to the communal sense of professional learning.
identity of English teachers within each state and local branch. The effectiveness of a ‘specific’ and ‘localised’ approach to professional learning that Strohac advocates for beginning teachers is also supported by research in Australia with experienced teachers. In his meticulously detailed longitudinal case study of collaborative inquiry on the impact of theory on the teaching of English literature, Parr eschews managerialism, such as that embodied in Professional Standards, in favour of a dialogic, collaborative and critically engaged approach to professional learning (2010). He concludes with a set of principles that might be used for planning powerful professional learning. He suggests it should incorporate ‘multiple places and spaces’, it should value ‘wondering, flexibility and interdiscursivity’, it should begin with a ‘provisional focus’ open enough for teachers to ‘frame their specific situated problems’, it should focus on ‘reading, sharing and interpreting diverse artefacts’, it should ‘ground inquiry in classroom practice’, it should encourage ‘teachers to generate written and/or multimodal texts … as critical dialogic accounts of their learning’, and finally, he suggests that professional learning should be recognised ‘more as interconnected aspects that have been the ‘cornerstone’ of her teaching practice in Passion, pedagogy and the political: Looking back, looking forward. As she elaborates how each of these interconnected aspects manifests in practice she incorporates memories of childhood and anecdotes of recent teaching experience alongside references to the diverse texts that she explores with her students. She considers elements of the national educational reform agenda, stressing the role of the teacher as mediator between curriculum documents and contexts of practice and on the English teacher’s role as inevitably political, particularly in the face of a lack of attention to equity issues in the Australian Curriculum for English. In another international contribution, Canadian poet and English teacher educator Carl Leggo reviews his life as a passionate reader in Longing for Books: Reasons for Reading Literature. The paper is not a ‘typical research essay’ but, as he says, ‘a kind of sharing, and a kind of performance’. It is a ‘personal, autobiographical and ruminative’ essay and an open-ended invitation (or perhaps provocation) for readers to join in the ‘slow and sensuous task’ of reading and to engage in their own reflections on reading literature as a ‘passionately political’ practice. Considering these two papers through Parr’s positioning of professional learning as ‘dialogic’, both Wilkinson and Leggo engage in multidirectional and intertextual dialogue with the books they have read, the students they have taught and their past and present selves, including the child selves who surface in their memories.

The following pair of papers mobilise affect and metaphor differently again. Presenting their paper Mythopoetics in the English classroom in epistolary form, Rachel Cuneen and Steve Schann explore the idea that English enables a ‘mythopoetic sensibility’ that differs from the ways of...
knowing available in other disciplines in schools. It is in English, they argue, that story, narrative and imagination are privileged and nurtured and where these can be deployed by students and teachers in ways that honour mystery and allow for uncertainty. They weave philosophy, cultural theory, poetry and story through their dialogue and provide numerous examples from school and university classrooms. The implications of mythopoiesis for teacher education are considered as the authors reflect on the contraction of subject English into the Australian Curriculum for English and the rubrics and outcomes that are representative of a ‘pseudo-scientific’ discourse that is colonising education. They want to retain the ‘wondering, flexibility and interdiscursivity’ that Parr talks about. An intensely embodied classroom space is also the focus of Philippa Wintle’s paper Finding yourself in Poetry: A reflection on how to encourage student ownership through risk taking and shared learning. This reflection on teaching a Year 12 poetry unit explores how integrating contemporary poetry by rapper Sage Francis with Beat poet Alan Ginsberg assisted students to see poetry as interesting and relevant to their lives. Wintle describes how she supported students to take greater responsibility as they prepared for the literary analysis component of their external examination in a New Zealand school. Furthermore, through creating conditions that enabled students to engage more deeply and personally with the texts, Wintle found that her relationships with students were enhanced and her experience as a teacher was more rewarding. Her paper reminds us that ongoing teacher professional learning is an everyday experience, where inquiry is grounded in classroom practice, as teachers and students take risks and learn alongside each other.

The final papers also focus on work that grounds professional inquiry in school contexts. Elaine Sharplin’s paper addresses the dilemma of teacher identity in How to be an English Teacher and an English Teacher Educator: Spanning the boundaries between sites of learning. Sharplin details a partnership that led her from her university location back into a school where she co-taught a Year 9 English class for one term. As well as enabling her current teacher education students to observe and critique her pedagogy and planning, the experience enabled Sharplin to reconnect with a context that she had missed in her usual university teaching and to appreciate again the collegial atmosphere of an effective school English faculty. She concludes her paper by surveying some of the institutional and attitudinal obstacles to collaborative school-university partnerships in teacher education. The paper that closes this issue Education Policy Mediation: Principals’ work with Mandated Literacy Assessment, by Barbara Comber and Phil Cormack, interrogates the effects of high stakes testing on Australian schools. Their methodological framework brings Critical Discourse Analysis together with institutional ethnography, enabling them to look closely both at texts (i.e. website, handbooks, memos) and at lived experience (i.e. an account from the Principal of a disadvantaged school of NAPLAN in that site). They trace contradictions in official discourses around NAPLAN and everyday practices at the school, where ‘strategic exclusion’ of students whose performance is likely to detract from the overall school results is becoming normalised. The paper brings this issue of English in Australia full circle as it turns head on to face the wave of neoliberal policies of audit and measurement that are reshaping teaching and learning in reductive ways. The authors conclude that in Australia, as our local variations of these policies roll out, we can recognise opportunities ‘to witness and capture how these practices evolve and the effects that they have in different kinds of school communities … before they become taken for granted as the way things are and therefore less visible to scrutiny …’

The papers in this special issue, most of which were submitted in response to the theme of teacher education and professional learning, despite their variations in style and focus, have all incorporated some mention of broader national policy contexts. Although the call for papers for this issue did not position this as a policy-focused issue, in various combinations and contexts and to greater and lesser degrees, many of the papers have addressed one or more of the Australian national curriculum for English, Professional Teaching Standards, NAPLAN tests or MySchool. Despite their recent arrival, these reforms have seeped thoroughly into educational discourses and practices in Australia. They tightly frame teacher education and professional learning and are making it increasingly difficult to see beyond them. The papers in this issue of English in Australia bring those frames into sharp relief and they take us on flights to multiple ‘somewheres’ beyond them.

Notes

1 Professional Standards are managed at state level, though in the near future they will be replaced by National Professional Standards (AITSLE). AATE is one of many Professional Associations that is, by necessity, involved in trialling and refining the standards to ensure that they are as relevant, useful and feasible for English teachers as possible.

References

