When Worlds Collide: ICTs, English Teachers and High Stakes Assessment
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Abstract

This article is based on work carried out in completion of a Doctorate of Education. It explores the degree to which high-stakes assessment for qualifications, such as New Zealand’s National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), a system of standards based assessment for qualifications for upper secondary school students, can act as a barrier to secondary English teachers’ use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) with their students. Although the focus here is on high-stakes assessment for qualifications, other factors which might also facilitate or hinder English teachers’ use of ICTs, such as professional development and infrastructural, technical and access issues, are considered.

The literature review summarises the factors which tend to constrain or encourage teachers’ use of ICTs, with a special focus on the considerable constraint placed on secondary teachers by their role in preparing and assessing students for high-stakes qualifications. The literature review also reveals that, in the subject English, there is some evidence of a positive impact when appropriate ICTs are used by well-trained teachers in appropriate contexts.

Key NCEA foundation and implementation documents and publicity, achievement standards (the standards based outcomes written for different subjects) and assessment activities were analysed to ascertain the degree of official endorsement for the use of ICTs in secondary schools and English programmes in particular. To gauge the perceptions of New Zealand English teachers about the constraints and encouragers of ICTs in their teaching, all NCEA level one English teachers were surveyed. This was followed by face-to-face and online focus groups in which trends revealed in the survey were explored.

Document analysis revealed considerable official optimism that the flexibility and internal assessment components of the NCEA would enable teachers to make greater use of ICTs. The achievement standards and supporting assessment activities however, tend to situate ICTs at the margins of English programmes as optional extras which, if used at all, tend to reinforce current practice. The focus groups confirmed survey findings that, although English teachers are significant users of ICTs in their personal and professional lives, although they believe in the educational advantages of ICTs and although they work in schools and departments which generally support the classroom use of ICTs, they face
significant constraints which prevent them making as much use of ICTs as they would like in their teaching. Most significant among these constraints is pressure of course coverage and lack of class time (largely attributable to the need to prepare students for high-stakes assessments). Other constraints include lack of adequate access to ICTs and technical support, and lack of appropriate professional development and time to learn about ICTs.

Based on the literature review and research findings, recommendations are provided for schools and policy makers. Key among these is the need to acknowledge the profound influence of high-stakes qualifications on secondary schools and teachers and evolve such qualifications to encourage and enable desired innovations. It is recommended that ICTs could be infused into flexibly structured English courses and eventually, inter-disciplinary programmes, through the creation of innovative, ICT infused achievement standards which better meet the needs of twenty first century students.
**Introduction**

Schools are confronted with an ongoing tension between the ideals of teaching and learning and what Larry Cuban terms their ‘situational constraints’ (Cuban, 1986). One of those ideals, vigorously promoted by governments, corporates, communities and many educators world-wide, is the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into teaching and learning. Many view ICTs as crucial in ensuring individuals, communities and nations are not left behind in a digital age in which, it is argued, knowledge is becoming the most valuable international commodity, creating the necessity for computer literate graduates. Schools and teachers are also pressured by educators, academics, consultants and administrators to promote higher-order thinking, creativity, authentic, real-world, student-centred learning and information literacy. Again, ICTs are seen as a key lever to achieve these goals. Others promote ICTs as a way to make schooling more economic, efficient and productive (Cuban, 2004a).

Within this context, secondary teachers of English in New Zealand and elsewhere are left with multiple challenges generated by different agendas. They often find it difficult to address these challenges due to the situational constraints under which they operate. This article, which is based on research carried out from 2002-2005 in completion of a doctorate of education, examines these constraints, focusing particularly on the impact of high stakes assessment for qualifications in the form of the New Zealand National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). Specifically, the research attempted to reveal:

- the degree to which secondary teachers of English utilise ICTs in their programmes;
- the factors which facilitate that use;
- the factors which inhibit that use;
- whether the NCEA acts as facilitator or inhibitor of ICT use.

The article makes recommendations for ways through the dilemma outlined above.

**Literature Review**

The literature review focused on the pressures on schools to utilise ICTs, the constraints and facilitators of ICT use in secondary schools in particular, current access and hardware issues in schools in NZ and elsewhere and professional development considerations. It also summarised research on the impact of ICTs in enhancing student learning - especially in English. The literature mentioned in this article focuses on the latter.

A key concept from the literature was that of the *situational constraints* faced by teachers who, according to Cuban (1986), “face 30 or more students in a
classroom for a set period of time, (need to) maintain order, and inspire the class to learn content and skills mandated by the community” (p.81). He argued that widespread adoption of new technologies will only happen when teachers are convinced that these technologies will help them achieve the intensely practical objectives of order, engagement and achievement. Radio, film and television all failed to have a major impact because they were not seen by teachers as particularly useful in achieving these objectives, because they were too passive to encourage real learning and the content was often divorced from the daily curriculum.

In comparison, the technologies/teaching aids which have endured (books, overhead projectors, VCRs and audio cassette players, black and white-boards) have done so as they acknowledge what Cuban called the situationally constrained choices teachers face, that is, they meet teachers' needs for versatility, reliability, durability and control. Cuban viewed these technologies as underpinning, “the persistent core of practices that teachers have found to be efficient and resilient, engineered to fit the physics of the classroom” (Cuban, 1986, p104). Tyack and Cuban (1996) term this the “grammar of schooling”. It includes, “age-grading of students, the division of knowledge into separate subjects, and the self-contained classroom with one teacher” (p. 9). In secondary schools, this is especially evident in the focus on single subject prescriptions (and associated subject compartmentalisation), the focus on the mastery (often memory) of a body of knowledge, along with high-stakes accountability for success.

As mentioned, this research had a particular focus on a key situational constraint affecting secondary schools in particular – the need to prepare students for high stakes assessments for qualifications. These are assessments which have a powerful impact on an individual, school or system. High-stakes assessment for qualifications and accountability can impact on a student’s life-chances, a secondary school’s reputation or, especially in the US, a school’s level of funding.

The powerful impact of high-stakes assessment on pedagogy has been noted by many commentators with Black's (2001) report on the NCEA for the NZ Ministry of Education highlighting it as a threat to the possibility of the NCEA achieving more “enlightened educational outcomes”.

Harlen and Crick (2002), in their meta-analysis of the impact of high-stakes assessment on student motivation, found “high weight” evidence that teachers adopt a more transmission model of knowledge, with highly structured activities, when assessment is high-stakes. They found that the latter favour only those students with “certain learning dispositions” and that in this situation, “high-
stakes tests can become the rationale for all that is done in classrooms” with “a
great deal of time being spent on practice tests, the valuing of test performance
and undervaluing of other student achievements, with teachers’ own assessment
becoming summative in function rather than formative” (p. 4). They recommend
the development of assessments “that will enable all valued outcomes of
education, including creativity and learning to learn, to be assessed” (p.5).

Other commentators have also focused on the important influence of both low
and high-stakes assessment on classroom practice with most noting that the
higher the stakes, the more conservative the impact on classroom practice
(Aitken, 2000; Burger, 2003; Crooks, 1988; Cuban, 2004b; Hacker & Rowe,
1997; Linn, 2000; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1998). It is important to
note that much of this research not only deals with the immediate impact of
high-stakes assessment on the teaching of students who are to undergo such
assessment, but, through what is sometimes called the “wash-back” effect, the
conservative influence on junior classes in secondary schools (and even senior
primary/elementary classes) whose teachers and schools have their “eyes on the
assessment goalposts”.

The result is often that pedagogy, especially in the senior school, tends to be
tightly focused on preparing students for assessment for qualifications in as
efficient manner as possible. Given the large amount of content (both skills and
knowledge) to be covered in most subjects and the time pressure they are
under, teachers, understandably, often revert to pragmatic models of lecturing
and information dissemination, even when they are aware that such models do
not necessarily promote engagement with the subject, deeper learning or higher-
order thinking.

The literature review also focused on the impact of ICTs on learning and
achievement in the subject English. The weight of evidence suggests that, in
English, selected ICTs, in the hands of well-trained teachers, used in the right
contexts, can have a positive, although not necessarily large impact on student
learning. ICTs can motivate students and may help them become more critical
thinkers and better communicators (Bramald, Bramald, Halligan and Hardman et
al.,1999; Cook, Goldberg and Russell,2003; Cox, Abbott et al, 2004a; Cox et al.,
2004b; Prain and Hand, 2003; UK Department for Education and Employment,
2003). Such conclusions are, by necessity, tentative and, as argued by Andrews
et al (2004), highlight the twin problems in ascertaining the educational impact
of ICTs in English: the fact that conventional learning outcomes for the subject
cannot adequately evaluate the educational impact of ICTs and that ICTs
themselves are rapidly changing the nature of the subject.

**Methodology**
Key NCEA foundation and implementation documents and publicity, achievement standards and assessment activities were analysed to ascertain the degree of official endorsement for the use of ICTs in secondary schools and English programmes in particular. To gauge the perceptions of New Zealand English teachers about the constraints and encouragers of ICTs in their teaching, all NCEA level one English teachers were surveyed with approximately 600 returns (an estimated response rate of 42%). This was followed by several face-to-face and online focus groups in which trends revealed in the survey were explored more deeply.

**Results**

Document analysis revealed that the Qualifications Framework - especially the internally assessed components of the NCEA in secondary schools - were heralded by politicians and those implementing the new system as providing potential flexibility for programme and pedagogical innovation, enabling increasing infusion of ICTs into senior secondary programmes. However, because of both teacher and community concerns about the impact of the NCEA, there is a calming and conservative tone in official *implementation* documents. Most importantly, the English achievement standards and assessment activities reflect a pedagogical status quo which may ensure the NCEA English, in its current form, is unlikely to be a lever for change in teaching approaches. Internal assessment is not enough on its own to leverage change and, as can be seen from the Results chapter, it may be that the workload and time-pressure associated with both internal assessment and pressurised coverage to prepare students for external examinations (along with the other situational constraints discussed) may ensure that, in its current form, the NCEA may be a neutral influence at best.

A key finding, represented in figure 1, was the significant gap between the personal use of ICTs by English teachers and their use of ICTs in the classroom. Whilst 70 per cent characterised themselves as either frequent or confident personal users (with none saying they never use ICTs) only 29 per cent said they were confident or frequent users of ICTs in *their English classrooms*, with 64 per cent characterising themselves as limited users.
Figure 2 tends to contradict the view of some commentators’ that secondary teachers are educational dinosaurs. These results show that New Zealand English teachers believe in the impact of ICTs and work in schools and departments which share that belief. Many of them know how to utilise ICTs in the classroom.
However, Figure 3 shows clearly that lack of course time and lack of personal time to learn about ICTs were important situational constraints to classroom use of ICTs, closely followed by lack of access to the ICTs and lack of technical support. In their accompanying, explanatory comments, it became clear that the requirements of qualifications were the key contributor to course time constraints.
Figure 3

Factors Discouraging ICT Use by English 1

The part of the survey that delved more deeply into the impact of the NCEA produced somewhat mixed results. Although more English teachers are optimistic about its current and future impact than are pessimistic, almost a third claim that the NCEA has had no impact to date. However, over 40 per cent believe that, once the change is fully embedded (and presumably when other constraints such as barriers to access to ICTs are removed), they will be able to make greater use of ICTs within the NCEA.

As a way of drawing together and making sense of the data from the survey and focus groups, three profiles were developed to represent a typical respondent, a respondent making high use of ICTs in their teaching and a respondent making low use.
Profile 1, the majority respondent (representing approximately 64 per cent of respondents), is a blend of a typical survey respondent. Participants in both focus groups were near unanimous in agreeing that this was a fair summary of a typical English teacher’s thoughts about the use of ICTs.

I am 47 years old and have been teaching for 20 years, most of which has been in mid-decile\(^2\) schools. I hold a management unit on top of my full teaching load. I have no formal qualifications in the use of ICTs in education and although I have undertaken some professional development in the use of ICTs for learning and teaching, these have rarely been focused on English specifically.

I make considerable use of ICTs in my personal life as well as for administration and lesson preparation. However I make very little use of ICTs in my day-to-day teaching.

I work in a school and department which is generally supportive of and encourages the use of ICTs for learning and I personally would like to make more use of these tools. My impressions from my reading, interacting with colleagues and from my limited opportunities to utilise these tools or informally observe their use by other teachers, makes me think that they are motivating for students and that they have the potential to improve learning. I do have a few ideas about how I could use ICTs in my English programme, but I do still need more convincing about their educational effectiveness.

However, despite this encouraging environment and the potential of ICTs, I am frustrated. I get encouraged, from all quarters, to integrate ICTs into my English programme but how can I when there is so much to cover in my courses, especially NCEA courses. There is no time to try to bring yet another thing into my pressured programme. And in any case, the computers are corralled into suites, access to which is dominated by subjects other than English. Even when I do occasionally gain access, invariably technical problems intrude to frustrate both me and my students. I also need time to learn about ICTs – to be confident with them when working with a class. At the moment I hardly have time to breathe.

As far as ICTs in English go, I’m left feeling a little frustrated and even inadequate – caught between the promise and the reality.

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\(^2\) The New Zealand system for ranking the relative affluence of parents in different schools. Decile 10 schools service the most affluent communities and decile 1 schools service the least affluent. The system is used to determine differential levels of government funding with schools in poorer areas receiving more funding.
Profile 2 represents the approximately 4 per cent of respondents who are making little or no use of ICTs in class:

I am 47 years old and have been teaching for 20 years, most of which has been in mid-decile schools. I have no formal qualifications in the use of ICTs in education and although I have been exposed to some professional development in the use of ICTs for learning and teaching, I could not see their relevance to English.

I make some use of ICTs in my personal life as well as for administration and occasionally, lesson preparation. However I hardly any use of ICTs in my day-to-day teaching – unless you include the overhead projector and VCR.

I work in a school and department which is generally supportive of and encourages the use of ICTs for learning but there are a number of reasons why I’m reluctant to jump on that band-wagon.

For a start, courses are just too full and structured to introduce yet another gimmick. I reckon I can get the kids to where they need to be (especially for NCEA) through traditional methods. Chalk and talk, the OHP, text-books and group work are much more effective in covering what needs to be covered and much less stressful. There simply isn’t the time to try other things, especially when I still need plenty of convincing about their educational effectiveness. My observation is that ICTs tend to encourage superficial learning, indiscriminate cutting and pasting from the internet and pretty but pointless Powerpoint presentations. I’ve yet to see examples of real or deep learning with ICTs but I do have an open mind and am waiting.

Even if I was convinced about their educational impact, there are so many barriers to their use in my school. The computers are corralled into suites. Access is dominated by subjects other than English. My colleagues who do use ICTs are always moaning about technical problems. Most of all, where am I supposed to find the time to fit in what are still non-essential aspects of English? And who is going to show me how to use them with a class?

As far as ICTs in English go, I’m not too bothered by them. First, convince me of their educational effectiveness, then give me the course time to use them, and the professional time to learn about them, then give me decent access to computers and sufficient technical support and we might be in business. But I don’t expect any of that in a hurry.
Profile 3 represents the significant and growing minority of English teachers (approximately 29 per cent of respondents) making significant use of ICTs:

I am 47 years old and have been teaching for 20 years, most of which has been in mid-decile schools. I have no formal qualifications in the use of ICTs in education, although I have undertaken some professional development in the use of ICTs for learning and teaching, the best of which have focused on English specifically.

I could not operate without ICTs in my personal life as well as for administration and lesson preparation and, as a department, we are making increasing use of the intranet to share resources and plans with both teachers and students. This year I have set up a blog for each of my classes to share resources and facilitate communication. Whenever possible and appropriate I try to utilise ICTs as a tool in my classroom programme - although there are barriers!

I work in a school and department which is very supportive of and pushes the use of ICTs for learning and I personally would like to make even more use of these tools. At the moment, my classes use ICTs for internet research, for presentation of seminars (Powerpoint), for word processing of writing and, now and again, I use specific software packages, mainly to improve skills such as reading comprehension or spelling. Some of my students have also published their work online. I would like to make even more use of some of the more exciting and interactive ICT options for example, using and creating webquests and joining collaborative projects, publishing more writing on the internet, promoting the use of blogs by students, developing podcasts, creating and using digital learning objects, using discussion groups beyond the classroom. And I will once some of the existing barriers are overcome.

I know that there is no strong research base which shows ICTs as improving learning in English, but my personal experience shows that they are really motivational for most kids. When they are motivated they write more, they’re on task more so I guess they will learn more. ICTs are especially good for struggling kids – not just with motivation but also because they allow them to present work at the same level as other kids. ICTs also provide ways of presenting abstract concepts in concrete, highly visual forms. Some software packages provide students with the sort of structured repetition of skills which I can’t provide in the normal classroom. I enjoy the fact that ICTs allow me to get beside kids and groups to help them more individually rather than always having to be the performer trying to hold the attention of the whole class. I view ICTs as
another tool in the English teacher’s arsenal but a very much more powerful one than anything we have had to date.

Despite this I sometimes get frustrated. Access is an ongoing problem with the computers being corralled into suites, which are dominated by subjects other than English. Even when I do gain access, technical problems sometimes frustrate both me and students – although between us we are getting better at trouble shooting. Most importantly, there is so much to cover in my courses, especially NCEA courses, that there is little time for the experimentation and creativity which the use of ICTs invites. I’d always like more time to learn for myself – there are so many aspects of ICTs I’d love to explore.

As far as ICTs in English go, I’m positive, I’m motivated by the response of my students and I will use them more but I do need more course time, flexibility and access to help me do this.
**Recommendations to Increase Educational Uses of ICTs by English Teachers**

The research described above gave rise to a number of recommendations for schools and policy makers.

For schools, these included specific recommendations covering improved technical support, a description of the sort of English classroom they should be working toward, better school-wide access to ICTs and improved models of professional development.

For policy makers, recommendations focused on professional development and, most significantly in terms of the focus of this article, on the evolution of the NCEA.

One of the “founding fathers” of educational computing, Seymour Papert, in discussing technologies, schools and change asked us to:

> Imagine an early nineteenth century engineer concerned with the improvement of cross-continenal transportation. Someone comes to them with a design for a jet engine. “Great” the engineer says, “we’ll attach this to the stagecoaches to assist the horses.” When they try, they soon see that there is a danger that the engine would shake the vehicle to pieces. So they make sure that the power of the engine was kept down to a level at which it would not do any harm (Papert, 2004, p.1).

In many ways, this could be seen as an analogy for the NCEA and new technologies. The key question raised in Papert’s analogy is whether evolution of the NCEA will enable the transition from our nineteenth century model of secondary schooling to a twenty-first century model, or whether we need something more radical. Given the educational change wariness of the community and the change weariness of New Zealand secondary teachers, evolution is the only way forward but that evolution needs to be encouraged by intelligent design.

Given that, how then might the NCEA evolve to become a more flexible and enabling influence on our secondary schools?

*Recommendation: Enhance Community Connection, Authenticity, Information Literacy and Thinking through NCEA English Standards*

Any evolution of the NCEA should aim to increase emphasis in the achievement standards and assessment tasks on originality, higher-order thinking, information literacy, problem solving, team-work and connectedness to the community and
the world of work. In an age when students are confronted with a growing mountain of digital information, they also need to be equipped with the skills of accessing, sifting and evaluating that information. ICTs themselves do not equip students with the skills of ascertaining relevance and finding connections and coherence. Such skills need to be developed in students by skilled teachers.

These skills may be developed in the process of the creation of authentic products (which might be digital where appropriate) to be shared with (and sometimes evaluated by) audiences beyond the classroom.

During the early phases of the future of NCEA English, an English achievement standard might require an outcome such as, \textit{Research a significant community issue and publish a report, including recommendations, to a specified audience}. Initially, this might involve combining various traditional English skills such as close reading, report writing, interviewing, research and presenting results in an appropriate format (which, depending upon the degree of teacher expertise and technical infrastructure, might range from a written report or seminar to a poster or website). Reports might be presented to an audience such as a community board (or local council), board of trustees or local company. Later, that achievement standard could be further evolved to encourage exploration of not only the issue being researched but also the most effective means of bringing it to the attention of the right audience and hence effecting change, for example, \textit{Research a significant community issue and select and utilise the most effective method of communicating the findings to the relevant audience}. At higher levels, such a standard could reward a student’s ability to not only alert the target audience to the issue but to influence them to an action or point of view. Such an achievement standard would not prescribe the media to be used but would certainly enable and encourage the use of ICTs in many situations.

A selection of such achievement standards which allowed for and encouraged the use of ICTs could be developed and offered in the short-term (1-2 years), enabling those English departments and teachers who were professionally ready, to offer them to their students. Other such standards might require students to, for example, \textit{Publish a piece of creative writing to a real-world audience} on, for example, \textit{Writers’ Window on English Online} (Unitec New Zealand, 1998) or \textit{Maintain a blog which records your opinions about important issues in your school, community or country}. Others might focus on other aspects of English, for example literary studies could be the focus of a standard such as, \textit{Use words and images to depict the socio-cultural influences on a character from contemporary or historical literature}.

\textit{Recommendation: Increase Curricula Integration in the NCEA}

A longer-term vision, predicated on increasing curriculum integration, is offered in Queensland’s New Basics project which has three key aspects. The focus of
**Curriculum Organisers** is what is taught including life pathways and social futures, multi-literacies and communication media, active citizenship and environment and technologies. **Productive Pedagogies** focuses upon classroom strategies including recognition of difference, connectedness, intellectual quality, and a supportive classroom environment. Most pertinent in terms of this article are **Rich Tasks** which are assessable and reportable assessment activities which ‘are intellectually challenging and have real-world value’. These make use of ICTs where appropriate, are cross curricular and may offer a promising model for the ongoing structural evolution of the NCEA.

Cross-disciplinary standards which encouraged the development of similar rich tasks, could be developed for use in the longer-term in most secondary schools and almost immediately in those schools which have already embraced such approaches. These would enable and encourage teams of teachers to work with groups of students to help them address the linguistic, scientific, environmental, mathematical, sociological, historical and financial aspects of an issue, event or topic. The difficulties of such cross-disciplinary cooperation and planning in the currently balkanised secondary environment should not be under-estimated but nor should the leveraging power of high-stakes standards to encourage and enable such cooperation. Students might use ICTs to access, evaluate and sift the growing amount of primary and secondary material available online and triangulate this against more traditional sources of information. They might use ICTs to collaborate with other groups of students or experts in their own and other communities (anywhere) working on similar issues to share ideas and solutions. The final result might be in the form of a multimedia or oral presentation, a wiki, web site or a written report, depending upon the issue and the needs and location of the intended audience. Again, selection (and justification of that selection) of the most appropriate method of communicating results would be part of the assessment, with the final product being presented to or made available to the target audience, which might be asked to be a part of its evaluation.

*Recommendation: Prepare for the Implications of NCEA Evolution*

To accommodate such an evolution, secondary schools would need to be supported to evolve. There would need to be a re-thinking of their structure and the way they are timetabled. The concept of changing rooms and subject focus every forty five minutes or hour, the concept of schools being a 9.00am to 3.30pm operation and grouping by year levels, are administrative conveniences but learning barriers which would need to be reviewed. Most importantly, English (and other) teachers would need to further develop as guides, resource experts and facilitators, as well as explainers and instructors.
If the NCEA is to be used as the key lever for energising secondary education, the accompanying resource provisions, both infrastructural and in terms of professional development, would be substantial. Such innovations would, initially at least, need to be presented as options for those teachers and schools with the capability to implement them. If the integration of ICTs is as important as official rhetoric suggests, consideration should be given to making at least one of the more innovative, ICT-infused English achievement standards mandatory. Such a move would need to be clearly signalled to schools so that, in three years time, they would be expected to offer at least one of the more innovative standards which enabled and encouraged ICT use in English.

**Conclusion**

This research showed that minimal innovation in secondary schools is not due to innate teacher conservatism. Teachers operate under severe situational constraints which include lack of appropriate professional development, lack of time, lack of sufficient technical infrastructure and access and, crucially in secondary schools, the direct and indirect influence of high-stakes assessment for qualifications. Unless these constraints are acknowledged and addressed, then there will be ongoing disappointment at the lack of progress in the use of ICTs to support learning in secondary English programmes.

There are avenues of progress available to schools, teachers and policy makers. These include realistic funding to ensure schools have the capacity to provide the classroom and technical infrastructure and access which will enable them to move toward greater ICT integration at classroom and whole school level. That funding needs to be accompanied by models of professional development which acknowledge principles of adult learning, which model curriculum integrated uses of ICT and which borrow from models used in business, especially just-in-time and ongoing support.

Increased funding, better access and better professional and technical support will not, on their own, bring about changed practice. There is clear evidence that secondary schools mirror high-stakes qualifications in terms of their structures and in curriculum organisation, coverage and delivery. The NCEA, although a distinct improvement on its predecessor, has the same conservative influence. As evidenced from criticisms it has received from proponents of change as well as defenders of the status quo, the NCEA is a political and pedagogical compromise and its designers cannot be blamed for that. If it is retained long-term in its current form, it will probably have minimal, if any, impact on the infusion of ICTs into secondary schools. If secondary schools are to be part of the transformation of New Zealand into a ‘knowledge society’ then the NCEA must be viewed as *the* key lever to drive that change. The impact of high-stakes
qualifications on teaching and learning must be openly acknowledged and, building on that acknowledgement, there needs to be frequent, strategic and timetabled reviews of the English achievement standards and their supporting assessment activities. Such reviews should aim to ensure that the standards evolve to encourage the use of ICTs firstly within subject areas such as English but eventually across subjects. Initially, new English achievement standards should be offered which provide the flexibility and choice for the most innovative teachers and their students to demonstrate what can be achieved within a high-stakes system. If the reality of ICT integration is to match the rhetoric, such standards should eventually be mandated to ensure entitlement for all New Zealand students.

Currently, secondary English teachers face rapidly rising expectations in terms of ICT integration on the one hand but, on the other, are compelled to prepare students for qualifications which, for the most part, do not encourage such innovative practice. Unless that dilemma is addressed through the evolution of our qualifications system, then change will be minimal, teachers, students, parents, communities and politicians frustrated and our secondary education system will continue on the road to irrelevance.
References


