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Selling tech to teachers: education trade shows as policy events

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ABSTRACT

Digital technology is an expanding area of education policy. There is growing interest, therefore, in how networks of corporate and state policy actors implicit in the formation of (inter)national education technology agendas intersect with local school systems and teachers. In particular, this paper explores the significant policy work that takes place outside schools and classrooms through education trade shows. Based on an in-depth ‘event ethnography’ of one large Scandinavian educational technology show, the paper details how these events function as sites of policy interpretation – ‘sharing’ (or more accurately ‘selling’) global ideas and imperatives to local schools and teachers. These findings highlight the role of trade shows in consolidating policy networks, subsuming public education interests into corporate concerns, and differentiating teacher subjectivities and encouraging teacher entrepreneurship. The paper problematizes the ways in which teacher agency is shaped and controlled by the discursive, material and affective dimensions of such events.

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Introduction

School teachers encounter and engage with education policy in a variety of ways. Policy researchers over the past thirty years have highlighted how teachers are implicated in education ‘policy cycles’, ‘policy circuits’ and ‘policy flows’. Underpinning these different accounts is acknowledgement that policy is not simply passed down and ‘implemented’ by teachers and schools. Instead, policies are (re)written and (re)interpreted continuously at different levels, throughout any education system. In this way, as Stephen Ball and others have detailed, education policy ideas and imperatives are encountered and ‘enacted’ by teachers in different ways during the course of their work in school. Crucially, this involves teachers interacting and being inter-connected with ‘diverse actors, texts, talk, technology and objects which constitute ongoing responses to policy, sometimes durable, sometimes fragile, within networks and chains’ (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 3).

To augment the growing empirical literature on school-based policy enactment, this paper considers the outside-school spaces where teachers come together to ‘do’ policy and/

or have policy ‘done to’ them. In particular, the paper explores policy-work that takes place through large education trade shows that are now held in many countries and regions. These shows can be seen as significant policy events where (inter)national networks of corporate and state policy actors intersect with local school systems, schools and teachers (Ball 2012). While ostensibly concerned with marketing and selling of resources, these shows are important sites of policy work. These shows, we argue, are an integral part of policy interpretation and relay at the national and local levels – shaping how the interests of global policy actors are ‘sold’ on to local schools and teachers. These shows therefore constitute an extension of the global policy networks that now shape many aspects of education (Ball 2016; Menashy 2016). While an academic ‘Event Studies’ literature has developed in disciplines such as organizational studies and tourist studies, trade shows have rarely (if ever) caught the critical attention of education researchers. The present paper seeks to address this shortfall by focusing on trade shows related specifically to digital technology and education.

Digital technology as an area of contemporary education policy

The use of digital technology in schools is an increasingly complex area of policy work. A number of studies have mapped out the variety of policy actors and networks implicit in the formation of technology-related ideas and imperatives. For example, Ben Williamson (2016) has shown how ‘digital education’ policy increasingly takes the form of a ‘network governance’ influenced strongly by decentralized, flexible partnerships between public/private cross-sector organizations. Thus recent agendas such as ‘learning to code,’ ‘one-to-one’ and ‘BYOD access’ have been initiated and supported by think-tanks, advocacy and campaigning groups (see Williamson 2016; Selwyn et al. 2017). Other work by Player-Koro (2014) and Selwyn (2013) has also explored the increased involvement of business, social enterprise and philanthropic organizations in the way that IT education policies are produced and translated into action.

These accounts are echoed in Spring’s (2012) mapping of the national and global networks of ‘educational corporatism’ underpinning the push for technology in US schools. Here, Spring and colleagues detail ‘the networks and alliances that [form] to promote the use of technology and related services in American K12 education’ (Picciano and Spring 2013, 2). These authors point to the complex ‘coincidence of interests’ (17) between technology vendors, government agencies, charitable foundations, venture philanthropists, think-tanks, media companies and for-profit education providers. Thus technology use in public schools is shaped by a combination of local interests and international corporations working with each other to construct nationally appropriate agendas. This has prompted concern over what Picciano and Spring (2013, 38) term the ‘Swiss-cheese government’ that has grown up around education technology policy-making. Put simply, it is increasingly being argued that state education authorities (as well as schools themselves) are losing the ability to regulate (or even keep abreast of) these essentially ‘privatized government services’.

These shifts in governance are linked closely to the increased commodification and marketization of education technology. As such, digital technology has become an important constituent element of the ‘trade’ that now underpins the organization and provision of many aspects of public education. Education technology agenda-setting and governance is increasingly played out through the buying and selling of goods and services. It is estimated, for example, that US schools spent \$13.2 billion on computer hardware and software in 2015

(Molnar 2017). Thus, as Picciano and Spring (2013, 173) continue, education technology is developing into an area of education shaped by the profit-driven activities of ‘a shadow elite moving between government, for-profit companies, trade associations, foundations and think-tanks’.

The increasing role of business and trade in education policy work has been well-noted in this journal and elsewhere, particularly in terms of the changing ways and places that education policy is ‘done’. In particular, it is important to consider how these changes feed down to the local school level. As Gary Anderson (2009, 90) detailed with regard to the New York City department of education, ‘moneys have been shifted from the public to the private sector by essentially dismantling the school district and replacing it with a services mall’. All told, there is a need for further empirical investigation of these processes as ‘new’ areas such as education technology become increasingly prominent aspects of contemporary school reform efforts.

Schools and technology as a site of education policy work

Schools and technology is an area of education that is increasingly shaped by globally circulating policy discourses and knowledge rather than prescribed policy programs and formal initiatives. Thus in this paper we are interested specifically in ‘policy knowledge’ relating to schools and technology – that is, ‘expertise or experience-based know-how about policies, policy-making, implementation, and best practices’ (McCann 2011, 109). In particular, we are interested in how ideas about schools and technology are formed, reformed and eventually consolidated into orthodoxies. In this sense, we turn to the notion of ‘policy networks’. This has proven a useful means of making sense of contemporary policy formation in education, especially in terms of the movement (global/local) of policy knowledge, the role of different policy actors (public/private) and the interactions, interdependencies and exchanges between these actors. As work by Ball and others has shown, policy networks are not simply sets of static connections where policy is ‘moved’ between policy sites and actors. Instead, policy networks are sustained by the continual work (or labour) of networking, which is primarily social in nature. As Ball (2016, 550) observes:

Networks are not just a set of connections between sites but are also a history of on-going effort, and are animated by social relations and performance. ... Network nodes are the focus for various forms of local activity, animation and discourse proliferation.

The work within any policy network involves various forms of relationship building and exchanges amongst policy actors. These activities increasingly take place online in the form of websites, reports, blogs, video talks and social media exchanges. Yet many of these activities are more traditional in nature – such as board membership, awarding of funding and grants, press releases and media pronouncements. In particular, there is a continued importance of face-to-face ‘network events’ such as meetings, summits, conferences and other forms of ‘coming together’ in person.

The events and occasions when policy networks meet in person can therefore provide rich insight into the nature of contemporary policy-work – especially the nature and form of relationships, exchanges and interactions between different policy actors. Indeed, it is important to recognize the diversity of policy actors now working in education policy contexts, as well as the nature of the relationships between them. This includes the increasing influence of transnational corporations, philanthropic organizations, foundations, think

tanks and other non/for profit interests. It also involves what McCann (2011, 114) identifies as ‘new specialist elites’ of policy experts who work to frame knowledge, codify information and focus attention toward particular policy models. These actors ‘range from international management consultants to small self-employed entrepreneurs, ... conference organizers, people in marketing, public relations and software development’ (McCann 2011, 114).

Conversely, it is also important to consider the shifting role of individual teachers within these networks and flows of policy discourses and knowledge. It is tempting to see teachers as agentic policy actors who receive and reconstitute policy knowledge to best fit their own needs. Yet, it is increasingly recognized that teachers often have little agency in determining ‘what can be said’ and ‘what can be thought’ about education policy (Ball et al. 2011b, 611). At best, the role of teachers in policy networks is as relays/interpreters to ‘think about, perceive and act towards policy in particular ways in local circumstances’ (Ball et al. 2011b, 611). All told, it is worth exploring further how teachers and schools play are involved in the policy work surrounding an area such as educational technology.

The significance of trade events, shows and conventions as sites of education policy work

One space where many of the policy actors involved in education and technology come together is at trade shows. In an era of online marketing and retailing, one might presume face-to-face trade shows to be of declining importance. Yet trade events are flourishing in prominence and popularity, particularly in industries related to digital technology services and products. Trade shows, exhibitions, fairs, conventions, congresses and conferences are recognized as integral to the ebb-and-flow of public and private sector activity, offering spaces for professionals to come together regularly and interact around their specialized interests. Alongside the actual exchange of goods and services between suppliers and customers, academic researchers in the area of ‘Event Studies’ have focused on the role of trade shows in supporting learning and knowledge exchange. Some commentators celebrate trade shows as temporary ‘ecologies of learning’ (Rüling and Pedersen 2010, 319) and ‘short-lived hotspots of intense knowledge exchange, network building and idea generation’ (Maskell, Bathelt, and Malmberg 2006, 997). Others stress the specific role that these events play in facilitating the translation of global knowledge into local practice – functioning as ‘translocal knowledge platforms’ (Bathelt and Cohendet 2014, 869).

However, from a policy network perspective, these events and conferences ‘constitute important arenas in and through which both the mobilizing and embedding of policies can occur’ (Cook and Ward 2012, 137). Such events are integral elements of policy mobilities, providing a time and place for the ‘social’ dimensions of policy work. McCann (2011) describes conferences and events as key sites of policy learning and transfer – where strategic ‘naming and framing’ of policy takes place, and where policy stories are told to audiences predisposed to be convinced and persuaded. As Stephen Ball (n.p) continues, these events can be seen as

moments of *meetingness* when network members from a range of backgrounds come together, where stories are told, visions are shared, arguments are reiterated, new relations and commitments are made, partnerships are forged, and where a form of ‘buzz’ (is) generated.

In this sense, trade shows are best understood as sites of symbolic, performative and practical policy work.

Understanding the role of trade shows in terms of educational technology policy

These discussions therefore lead to the central concern of this paper – i.e. exploring the policy significance of educational technology ('Ed-Tech') trade shows as moments when IT industry actors, technology advocates, policymakers and other 'influencers' come together with teachers. While exact numbers are difficult to ascertain, considerable numbers of Ed-Tech trade shows are held annually around the world. The most-celebrated of these is the BETT event – started in 1985 as the 'British Education Training & Technology' show in London and now franchised in the guise of annual 'BETT Asia', 'BETT Middle East' and 'BETT Latin America' shows. Recent BETT London shows have been self-styled as 'The World's Leading Education Event', taking the form of annual four-day events attracting 700 exhibitors and 34,000 attendees. As with many similar events, BETT features keynotes from leading educational personalities and national politicians. Participants attend seminars, training, product demonstrations as well as interact with exhibitors and fellow attendees. As David Buckingham (2007, 1) observed, activities at these shows adhere to an overarching aim of 'selling technology solutions'.

Alongside BETT are dozens of equivalent annual events held around the world – from the large 'EDUCAUSE' and 'SXSWedu' shows in the US, to 'EdTechXAsia' and the large 'EduTech' congresses in Australasia. As argued above, these shows constitute 'policy events' where teachers interact with broader networks of interest and influence. In terms of our preceding discussions, there is clearly scope to make better sense of the interplays and relations of power between different elements of the networks that these shows bring together. The remainder of this paper will therefore explore how policy work takes place at Ed-Tech trade shows – addressing implicit issues of power and agency as teachers participate in such events. In this sense, the following questions frame our inquiry:

- How do teachers experience an Ed-Tech trade show?
- What exchanges of messages, ideas and imperatives take place?
- How are teachers positioned as policy subjects within the policy networks that are being mobilized during an event?

Research methods

These questions are addressed through an ethnographic study of one large Ed-Tech trade fair in Sweden – the 'Scandinavian Educational Technology Transformation' show (SETT). Since 2011 annual SETT shows have been held in the cities of Stockholm, Malmö and Oslo. The unwieldy name is a deliberate evocation of the successful, established BETT shows in London. While run by an organization with no connection to BETT, the SETT show is framed implicitly as a Scandinavian counterpart striving to promote 'modern and innovative learning'. This paper is the third in a series of studies 'following' the involvement of edu-business in Swedish IT-education policy-making. Previous papers have analysed and mapped the formation of these policy networks through the use of networked ethnographic methods (Player-Koro 2014; Player-Koro and Bergviken Rensfeldt 2017). Social network analysis was used in these previous papers to construct the network structure through which organizations and individual actors were shaping Swedish educational policies – thus mapping a field of study encompassing multinational corporations, local technology

and education companies, (quasi)government agencies, teacher organizations and local municipalities. The present paper examines engagements between this policy network and Swedish schools and teachers through the case of the 2016 SETT trade show.

In order to explore the 2016 SETT show in Stockholm as a policy event, this paper draws on detailed ethnographic accounts of teachers' participation in the show. As demonstrated in this journal and elsewhere, ethnographic approaches offer a rich means of developing knowledge about the meaning-making processes in the enactment of education policies (Beach 2010; Hammersley *forthcoming*). A small number of ethnographies in the 'event studies' literature also point toward the benefits of this approach in bringing depth of insight into the 'lived experience' of attending such events (Stadler, Reid, and Fullagar 2013; Mair and Frew *forthcoming*). In this spirit, our approach to studying SETT 2016 was deliberately exploratory. As Atkinson (2015, 65) reasons, if there is ever a specific 'research question' for ethnographic investigation then it is simply: 'What is going on?'. Thus in the specific terms of this paper we were interested in asking simply: 'What policy-work was going on at SETT?'.

The remainder of this paper therefore examines the experiences of teacher attendees through extended fieldwork before, during and after the SETT 2016 show in Stockholm. There were two elements to our empirical approach. Firstly, Author#1 registered, attended and fully participated in SETT as a paying teacher attendee. Author#1 has long experience of being a teacher in Swedish state schools, being a teacher educator and in conducting critical ethnographic research on the digitalization of schools and education. She has, in other words, a historical, practical and contextual understanding of being a technology-using teacher, as well as previous experience of attending similar events in roles other than an academic researcher. Author#1 acted as a participant observer, becoming immersed in pre-registration activities, attending and fully participating in SETT as a paying 'teacher' attendee. This involved doing all the things implicit in an *in situ* ethnography – including attending the three-day event, roaming the exhibition floor and engaging with exhibitors, attending sessions, meeting and demonstrations. Fieldwork involved participant observations, accompanying teachers participating in the study (see below), while also chatting with other participants, taking photographs, eavesdropping and general 'hanging around'. This element of the research also involved analysis of social media, online advertising and media coverage accompanying the show.

Secondly, to complement these first-person accounts, the authors also conducted repeated interviews (pre-, during- and post-event) with two groups of teachers attending the show. These were two clusters of teachers from different schools in Sweden (one group of 3 teachers and another of 5 teachers) who had got to know each other through professional networks in the area of education technology. These teachers were recruited informally through personal contacts arising from the authors' own work in teacher education. Both groups were already planning on attending the SETT show together, and volunteered to spend time with us reflecting on their SETT experiences. All these teachers had visited SETT at least twice before (with two teachers having attended each of the five years that the show had been running), and had incorporated visiting the 2016 show into their professional schedules.

Findings

Pre-show configurations

The SETT show commences well in advance of the actual show dates. Webpages, Facebook and Twitter are used to provide a steady stream of pre-show publicity, shaping expectations and understandings of what the show is. The conference title ('Scandinavian Educational Technology Transformation') and tagline ('the meeting place for innovative and modern education') explicitly position the event in terms of technology-based change and improvement. Alongside these connotations, the notion of the event being a 'meeting place' is another recurring claim of the pre-show publicity. As one preview article circulated on a number of Swedish education websites puts it:

This meeting place is about inspiration, increased curiosity and knowledge about how we can use new ways to work toward higher achievement in all school levels. (Anderson 2016)

This 'meeting' description is used to specifically suggest that teachers attend the show in order to obtain information and establish contacts with others. This is not a meeting that teachers are expected to lead or actively contribute to. Instead, as pre-show publicity makes clear, teachers are framed as coming to SETT in order to gain 'ideas and solutions':

What does your school need right now? Is it new ideas and solutions? Is it new contacts?

SETT is where discoveries are made. Discoveries that give you the tools to move from words to action, and meet the current and future skill needs of students.

To truly transform education through technology, we need to learn from experts, suppliers, and not least from one another as educators. (Anderson 2016)

This invitation to 'learn' and 'discover' is translated into a set of explicit instructions for teachers attending the event. Pre-show publicity reminds teachers that the success of their visit depends on their individual efforts and preparation – 'It is obviously important to get as much as possible of such a trip'. Attendees are reminded of the basic tenets of networking ('ALWAYS have current contact information with you') and the benefits of planning in advance. As attendees are advised:

Make a checklist of everything you want to experience and contribute, your desires and expectations, the results you want. This makes you focus on the 'right' things at the fair. Where focus goes, energy flows. This way, although it is arranged by someone else, you take personal responsibility for the outcome of your visit! (Anderson 2016)

These warnings certainly were heeded by many teachers who were attending SETT. As our interviewed teachers told us before the event commenced:

We're not at trade shows because it's a fun thing ... we always have a plan (interviewee#1)

You Google everything before you go, just to get a picture of what is going on ... it's how you prepare (#2)

We check the program in advance ... on Twitter, Facebook (#3)

You have to be well prepared ... you cannot be ignorant when you go to a fair ... you have to be familiar (#4)

On the floor of the exhibition hall

I walk from the metro station up toward the exhibition centre. Streams of people are moving in the same direction. Most are in small groups, talking and laughing with each other. Arrive at the Exhibition Centre and I'm taken aback by how crowded it was. Outside it is full of people and it's hard to get through the doors. The feeling is more like being in a rock concert than an education conference. (Researcher field notes)

The show is held in a modern exhibition centre located in Stockholm's 'Science City' district which is home to more than 500 IT companies. The large box-like building is much like most glass-fronted corporate architecture of the past 20 years. The centre hosts events from technology, retail, logistics, pharma and catering industries. Posters in the lobby inform us that immediately prior to SETT was the 'Stockholm Electronics Event'. Scheduled straight after SETT is the 'E-Commerce' show. Later on in the year are events such as 'Digi.Gov' and 'Comic Con'. Once through the main doors, attendees find themselves in a large atrium. Here attendees are funnelled through a series of checks and registration stages where credentials are checked, additional payments taken and color-coded badges and lanyards are distributed. Attendees in the designated 'Teacher Track' are branded orange and grey for the 'Management Track'. After queuing for the cloakroom, attendees join a throng of people edging their way onto the central escalator leading up to the main exhibition hall.

The 15,000 m² exhibition hall is carefully laid out yet also feels slightly chaotic. There are lots of people crammed into the crisscross of corridors formed by the exhibitor booths. For the first few minutes it feels as if most of the show's 9000 attendees are in the hall at the same time. Some people are wandering slowly while others stride with purpose. Tech company representatives bustle around, many wearing branded short-sleeved polo shirts and lanyards. A few exhibitor booths feature staff in fancy-dress costumes (for example, Vikings, bananas and furry monsters). In contrast, most attendees look like public sector educators – wearing sensible clothes suited to a day traipsing around a convention centre. The mood is upbeat and efficient, yet as time progresses people do seem a little wearier and harried.

In terms of visual appearance, the hall is a very busy space that is decorated with logos, banners and screens. Booths hosted by large companies (such as Microsoft, LEGO and Dell) feature bold sloganeering and primary colours. Booths from smaller start-up companies tend to be compact and tastefully arranged – their graphics and fonts sometimes drawing on pop culture and 'hipster' aesthetics. Public sector booths are more sober and staid, with noticeably less money spent on design and styling. Alongside this visual overload the hall is also incredibly noisy. The high ceilings echo with the hub-bub of hundreds of different conversations taking place. Many exhibitors have video screens repetitively blaring commentaries and music, as well as noisy demonstrations of robots and computer games. With over 200 exhibitor booths these sounds multiply into a crescendo that never fully subsides and seems to peak at mid-morning and early-afternoon. While people soon become inured to the noise and visual stimulation, every so often one is suddenly struck by the overload, excess and spectacle of the event. Despite the mundanity of the subject matter, this element of the show is reminiscent of an amusement fair.

The exhibitor booths are a central feature of the hall. As with most trade shows, these booths are not being used to directly retail products to the public. Instead, some show-case a few specific products while others simply promote a brand or provide information about a

specific school or municipality. Company reps stand around trying to make contact, while most attendees shuffle around in a non-committal and slightly awkward way. The layout of the exhibition hall is carefully choreographed. While public sector exhibitors such as the municipalities and unions have the largest stands, the most advantageously placed booths are those run by large corporate interests. For example, the booth that greets everyone entering the hall belongs to Tieto (one of Europe's largest IT service providers). The booth that faces audiences exiting the largest lecture theatre is occupied by Promethean (owned by multi-billion Chinese mobile internet firm Netdragon). The premium-cost corner booths are home to corporations such as Microsoft, Lin Education, Dell and Atea. Scattered around the periphery of these premium locations are smaller Swedish education technology companies, publishers and teacher associations.

Regardless of their positioning, most booths are simultaneously promoting brands and recognizable ideas. Exhibitors seem keen to hand out brochures, free USB sticks and balloons, but many are also keen to associate their product/service with an education-related issue or imperative. Thus there is a preponderance of sloganeering around the theme of computer programming and coding. Lego prominently associates itself with 'Programming and coding - accessible to all' (Programmering och kodning - tillgängligt för alla). Elsewhere, Code Monkey draws attendees' attention to the connection between 'Writing Code' and 'Saving the World' (Skriv Kod / Fånga bananer / Rädda världen), with many booths also affiliating themselves with the '#SETTkodar' tag. Other firms pitch themselves around non-technology related educational issues. For example, Pearson's booth exhorts visitors to 'Improve Student Grades'. Even the smallest firms try to make connections between their products and issues such as 'Dyslexia' and 'Inclusion for Immigrants'.

The architecture of the exhibition centre dictates that all attendees are obliged to walk through the hall several times a day regardless of their interest in the booths. Yet most teachers seem happy to spend time engaging with these various forms of marketing. All of the teachers that we interviewed spent considerable amounts of time walking through the lines of booths, feeling obliged to pay attention to what was being communicated. While most of these teachers had no direct authority to purchase products or services, the main aim of these encounters was described as intelligence gathering and getting a general orientation of current thinking and ideas. One teacher's stated aim of walking the hall was to 'glean ideas from vendors ... I don't like when they foist things on me ... I want to work things out for myself' (#5). Others described themselves as looking for 'tips and tricks' that could be used in the classroom. That said, the size and scale of the exhibition space made this a tiring experience: 'sometimes I get tired ... I hate being pushed around' (#4). As another teacher reflected toward the end of the event:

It's too much ... there are so many companies here that they blur into one! ... Obviously they're offering new ideas ... but you become blinded by all the gadgets as well ... You think 'This looks like fun ... but how should we use it?' (#6)

Demonstrations, workshops and discussions

So what to do? Attendees can certainly spend much of their time at the show wandering around and taking in the lines of booths. However, SETT is organized to keep teachers engaged in a number of other ways. An important aspect of Swedish culture is 'fika' (morning/ afternoon coffee and pastries) and the exhibition hall features three café spaces located

in different segments of the hall. These cafés are run (or at least sponsored) by different groups. The ‘Café RAU’ is facilitated by the large education consultancy group responsible for running SETT. During our time at the show this space seems to be reserved for ‘VIP’ attendees. A popular teacher Facebook group has attached itself to a second café space with the intention of hosting face-to-face meet-ups of its members. Elsewhere is a Fairtrade café sponsored by a large teaching union (Laraforbundet). Throughout the show we choose to frequent the latter option as this does not require any proof of affiliation or accreditation.

Besides coffee, great emphasis is placed on the practical activities put on by exhibitors. As the show publicity boasts, these include ‘product demonstrations / practical workshops ... exhibitor talks, pop-up classes, discussions and competitions’. Most of these activities take place to the side of the main exhibition booths. As might be expected at a technology show there is a preponderance of ‘hands-on’ demonstrations of new hardware and software:

I wander around the exhibition hall and note the inflated mood. I ought to look at something. I go up to the LEGO booth and think that I should try to run a robot car. An energetic representative immediately comes up to me and asks what I want. ‘I do not know’, I answer, ‘I just want to look around’. I see the representative’s gaze wander ... we can talk more, you can get price quotes here ... I will not buy anything I say. He’s already reached the next person. I stay and try on my own to get the robot car running ... it is just going round and round in a circle...not so good. Another participant stops and says: ‘Do not buy those ... they are very expensive!’ (Researcher field notes)

Other exhibitors host mini-lectures and talks, hoping to steal a march on the much larger and grander presentations in the lecture theatres surrounding the exhibition hall. The cramped conditions and surrounding hub-bub give these presentations a feel of impromptu soapbox speeches, although most are carefully prepared and presented. The booth run by the Stockholm Municipality, for example, holds its own sessions on the topic of ‘computational thinking’. These talks feature selected teachers from the city of Stockholm talking about how they had integrated ‘computational thinking’ and ‘learning to code’ into their classrooms. The speakers are introduced as ‘ordinary’ teachers and attract considerable audiences of attendees, alongside representatives from the Ed-Tech companies whose products they are talking about. While these talks contain a great deal of practical experience and classroom advice, while also highlighting the links within the ‘Ed Tech’ community represented in the hall:

(Researcher field notes from Stockholm Municipality presentation)

The speakers show text on the screen that presents their operational model of ‘computer science thinking’ – a simple three-stage model of Cause, Effect, Consistency. Before they move onto about the benefits of this model, they speak about the cooperation they have had with different companies:

Speaker 1: We got the opportunity in cooperation with companies to test LEGO robots. We monitor the terrain. We as teachers must be able to position ourselves among all products.

Speaker 2: Yes, for sequential analogue programming ... next week we will start with the Blue Bot which is part of the Scratch package. And over here are the company representatives.

(both speakers point to some men in the audience ... they smile)

Speaker 1: But we are critical of what we buy.

While clearly associated with some of the exhibitors at the show, these teachers were careful to repeat the message of ‘we are critical of what we buy’ throughout their twenty-minute lecture – presenting themselves as a real-life example of commercial products being implemented in a public school context. These presentations are very popular with attendees, who seem appreciative of practical advice being passed on by ‘authentic’ peers. Indeed, one of the shared understandings over the three days is the value of peer advice and networking. As one teacher that we meet at another side-show presentation explains:

The exhibition [booths] in all their glory certainly have a lot of ideas and new stuff ... but the most important thing with SETT are the talks from teachers who can talk about how we can use technology in the classrooms. That is valuable ... at least to me (#7)

Lecture sessions

I try to join a lecture that was part of the ‘Management Track’ but there are stewards at every seminar so it’s impossible to sneak in on a lecture that is not paid for. (Researcher field notes)

While small talks and presentations continue across the main exhibition space, SETT’s official lecture sessions take place in six separated lecture rooms to the side of the bustling hall – a large 1000 seat auditorium and five other halls ranging from 280 to 500 seat capacity. These are diligently stewarded events that can be attended only if wearing the correct coloured lanyard. As orange branded ‘Teacher Track’ attendees there are a number of events that we cannot gain entrance to – primarily ‘Management Track’ and ‘VIP’ sessions. Even sessions that are open for teachers are difficult to bag a seat for. Many of the speakers are well-known within education circles and attract large audiences. There is clearly a ‘buzz’ surrounding some speakers that means they pack out even the largest 1000 seater hall. As our field notes describe:

A strong impression from the day ... there is no time for reflection. Everything is done at a furious pace. ‘Rock stars’ are clearly where the talks are crammed and where you are lucky if can find a seat. Rumours spread ... she’s good. Why? I think it ... it’s easy ... she gives ‘solid advice’. (Researcher field notes)

The most prestigious and largest of the sessions take place in the ‘big hall’ and features what were considered to be marquee ‘names’. These are invited keynote speakers. The roster includes a broad range of speakers, often from outside the immediate education community. These included a former government minister as the main guest presenter, alongside a celebrity judge from the ‘Swedish Idol’ TV show, and another TV presenter known for health and fitness shows. The content of these talks usually focuses on big issues and broad topics – such as ‘Preparing Children for a Participatory Society’ and ‘School for Community Interaction’. Elsewhere a superintendent from a Californian school district presents on ‘Transformational Teaching and Learning for Every Student, Every Day’, and the organizer of TEDxYouth Stockholm talks about inclusion, youth and school.

While every presenter that we see in these sessions is engaging and professional, the most enthusiastic receptions are afforded to the notably charismatic performers. These individuals are referred to during the show as ‘Rock Star’ presenters and attract large audiences of people familiar with their work and/or persona. These are presenters with high media profiles, writing books and columns in national publications and regularly giving talks on the keynote circuit. All the ‘big’ sessions are slickly presented and often moderated by journalists, local

TV presenters and other professional facilitators. They have the look and feel of corporate ‘TED talk’ style presentations – face-microphones, tastefully arranged flower arrangements, a big-screen broadcast of the presenters and an emphasis on personal narrative.

Significantly, many of these presentations are facilitated through a fully immersive headphone system. This requires all of the audience members to listen to the on-stage presentations through closed-circuit headphones that are handed out prior to each session. This ‘silent lecture’ arrangement is now a popular feature of large conferences as it ensures that only correctly badged delegates can access the content. Yet it also has the effect of stultifying any audience interaction and preventing spontaneous questions being asked and conversations being entered into. While these large lectures are pitched around the idea of provocative, sparky, inclusive conversations, if one removes the headphones then the feeling is one of participating in a mass séance or meditation session.

Complementing the main keynotes is a track of equally popular ‘teacher’ presentations. These are all speakers positioned as ‘real life’ practitioners dispensing tips, tricks and other forms of useful advice. In reality, these presenters also enjoy considerable recognition and kudos amongst attendees. Many have written best-selling books and resource packs. Most are prominent bloggers and producers of YouTube videos, and well-known for their social media presence on Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr. While some of these presenters are still employed as teachers, many also work as free-lance consultants and advisors. As the online publicity for one of these talks puts it:

Tablets in the Classroom – Why?

Camilla Askebäck Diaz and Lena Shrill Hagen lecture at SETT 2016 on how tablets can be used in teaching. Camilla works as the leading teacher of digital tools in Södermalm School and Lena works as a process manager at the Educational ICT unit. Together they have written the book ‘Tablets in Teaching’ which came out in August 2015. It is aimed at teachers who want to get inspired to work with the tablet in their teaching, mainly for grades 4–9.

Content of the lecture:

What is the purpose of my activity or lesson? Can truly digital approaches simplify, deepen and enrich teaching and learning? What is the role of the teacher? What tools and apps can facilitate, organize and enhance learning and teaching quality?

Camilla and Lena build on research on learning and give a lot of inspiring examples of practical teaching. You meet them in SETT on 27 April.

These sessions are also often over-subscribed and difficult to gain a seat for. The content and form of these presentations shares many common features. For the most part, emphasis is placed firmly on ‘what works’ and ‘how to’ do it. Ideas are presented as common-sense and based on the speakers’ own classroom experience and experimentation. A few speakers make vague allusions to ‘evidence’ – sometimes their own research, sometimes ‘big names’ (such as the like of Howard Gardner, Ken Robinson, Michael Fullan) and occasionally references to specific academic studies. Most talks are replete with recommendations for software, Apps and devices – usually a mix of freely available and commercial products. Speakers also make links with their books and websites, although usually taking care to stress their impartiality. As one teacher talking about his book repeated: ‘This is not a commercial’. The breadth of lecture content is reflected in our field notes from another of these sessions:

(Researcher field notes from Sara Bruun session - title: Digital Work in the Classroom)

Go home and tell the headmaster to give you time for the ICT development ...

I'll tell you how teachers can streamline their own time ... so here you can do to become effective teachers ... You can give verbal feedback to students via various digital tools: All using Google Drive ... via Chrome ... it's free

Sara then shows how to add a movie into a Google drive Document

[...]

It's faster than writing so I have streamlined my time

Sara then shows the 'Explain Everything' tools.

[...]

Now we move onto Quizizz.com - a competition quiz in the style of Kahoot! You get a quick overview of what students can ... Quizizz.com – a competition quiz like Yahoo ... creating a quiz you can make a quick formative assessment of each class are. I find that Feedback increases motivation. Quislet is my favourite

[...]

Book me as speaker through Gothia training. Buy my book with all my thoughts at Booth A54 ... Read my blog

The teachers that we interviewed seemed well-aware of the hierarchy of presentations, and spent a good deal of time selecting the sessions that they attended. Most valued were presenters who offered 'common-sense' and useful advice – 'successful methods that can be used directly when you come home' (#3). Most teachers we spoke with were wary of presenters whose 'name is hyped' (#8) and who were perceived to be closely aligned to large companies, seeing this to diminish any claims to be 'real' teachers:

Yeah, you know, she's one of them that you should try to avoid. One of 'What If' teachers. Certainly a good teacher, but she has got a lot of technology from Apple that she will push (#9)

Post-show reflections

The three days of SETT are both energy-filled *and* energy-sapping. Engaging in the event is an exhausting and slightly disorientating experience. Despite this, most teachers were very pleased with their attendance and felt that they had benefited greatly from the event. Echoing the pre-show publicity, teachers agreed that 'the fairs are super important meeting places' (#10). As another teacher reflected, 'the meetings are important. Extremely important to network so you can connect with others' (#11). Tellingly, while interviewees could not always say exactly who they had met and made genuine connections with, this sense of networking related to a sense of coming together with other like-minded professionals:

We all understand each other here ... we want to move forward ... This is the best meeting place ... we can finally come together and share ideas without having to explain to recalcitrant colleagues (#1)

Sometimes, this networking was expressed in specific terms of interacting with teachers from other schools and localities, thereby gaining a sense of 'a national perspective' (#12). For some teachers, SETT was a regular part of their working year:

Yes, we usually go every year ... then you know what's going on ... We can make sure that the school and our colleagues can keep up with what to do (#9)

All the teachers that we spoke with were in agreement that they had gained new 'ideas'. While teachers valued 'tips and tricks' that could be used in the classroom, our post-show

discussions also considers the broader messages that had been conveyed throughout different aspects of the show. For this year, the main 'take home message' was largely agreed to be the need for schools to teach computer programming and 'learning to code'. As one teacher reflected:

What I intend to pass on to my colleagues is coding and programming ... we'll certainly be on the bandwagon! (#2)

Reflecting the rushed nature of the show, this imperative was understood and reported in urgent terms – 'it's the future ... it's everywhere' (#13), 'its modern' (#9):

Coding and programming is what's put to the forefront now ... it feels like Sweden is a little behind and now we get started ... that was the main message ... it feels really like it comes from all sides now, and who is the foundation of it ... I do not know ... but there is a lot of programming in general. (#13)

Alongside these newly gained understandings, another commonly agreed outcome of the show was an increased familiarization with the workings of commercial actors. As such, the show was welcomed as reducing the distance between classroom and corporate perspectives:

Yes we have been talking a lot about the interdependence that exists between the market and practitioners [teachers] ... We're dependent on each other ... we must pull together to make it good. For without them, we have nothing (#9)

One should not see them [companies] as a threat ... but as assistants ... because they work for us and depend on us ... So we should interact with them so they understand what is going when it comes to educational ideas and values so they are not late on picking up on trends ... they need us to tell them what's going on (#10)

That said, our post-show conversations with teachers did reflect some critical awareness – both in terms of the ever-changing nature and the impracticalities of what was being show-cased at SETT:

Well you get new ideas too ... last year it was QR codes ... and so we bought it ... and we have had courses with other teachers ... but this year no one [at SETT] was talking about QR codes (#14)

So here it is ... you listen to somebody and you think it's great and so I think now I'll do this ... And I will come home to my own school and it does not work ... you get very inspired [at SETT] and then you come home to reality and then nothing works ... there are colleagues who do not understand why things from SETT don't work at school ... 'it's our children' ... 'they've got their needs' ... 'it's the environment' ... 'we cannot work that way and fail after all' ... 'it does not work' ... So even if we get a lot of inspiration [from SETT] it cannot be used in teaching anyway (#7)

For the most part, however, it was accepted that SETT was not an arena for critical reflection or engagement with the compromised nature of everyday schooling. One teacher characterized the show presenters, exhibitors and organizers as a confirmatory community: 'mutual admiration ... they're like a bunch ... it feels like everyone is friends with each other' (#5). As another teacher put it:

These are people I've listened to quite a few times, and I become more disappointed every time. It becomes very thin in the end ... But as you're leaving the big lectures you can ask others who were also in the audience: 'Well do you think this was good?' ... everyone will agree, you'll hear a lot of 'wasn't that great or what?' (#9)

Another teacher justified the show's use of the silent-lecture headphones as in keeping with the general 'top down' nature of the event:

You cannot have a space for critical reflection in a show like this ... if you are critical then it becomes as if you are questioning the whole concept ... you cannot find a balance ... it's hard to find a fruitful discussion ... Any debate becomes more of a question of whether you are 'For' or 'Against', and that's not good (#15)

Discussion

Like any trade show, one's first impressions of SETT tend to be a rush of colour, sound and sloganeering. Yet this event is clearly a significant element in the maintenance of policy networks relating to education and technology. As such, our findings offer insight into the (re) circulation of global policy ideas and imperatives at national, regional and local levels within the Swedish education system. At this point, therefore, it is important to reflect further on what SETT tells us about education policy work at the 'local' level of teachers attending a national trade show. To return to the research questions posited at the beginning of the paper, it is worth reflecting on the nature of the event as an exchange of messages, ideas and imperatives with regard to how technology could be used in schools. Moreover, is the ways in which teachers experienced SETT and how they were positioned as policy subjects within the policy networks that were being mobilized during the event. In particular, we focus on four specific areas of discussion.

Education trade shows as a 'relay' of policy knowledge

One immediate observation is how SETT was predicated around the top-down delivery of messages rather than the mutual sharing of emergent knowledge. In particular, SETT provided a forum for the articulation and mobilization of pre-formed ideas about contemporary education. A deluge of buzz-phrases and tag-lines echoed throughout the event that all coalesced into a few dominant orthodoxies. Thus specific ideas and practices (such as currently 'hot' ideas such as 'Koding') were circulated alongside more general sensibilities about technology-based education reform. The messages and ideas that were prominent during SETT therefore 'tack[ed] back and forth between specificity and generality, relationality and territoriality' (McCann 2011, 109). While it was difficult to specify the origins of these over-riding messages, their tone and intent was clear enough. One dominant discourse was the primacy of technology as a mechanism for change, improvement and solving of problems. This is a long-standing feature of the 'selling' of education technology. As David Buckingham observed of SETT's British equivalent in the 2000s, 'there are no problems [presented] at ... only solutions' (2007, 6). Accompanying this technological 'boosterism' (Bigum and Kenway 2005) was a discursive construction of schools, teachers and education that neutralized (and often valorised) key characteristics and sensibilities associated with reform of education along neoliberal lines. These messages included the desirability of education 'creativity', 'innovation' and 'disruption', alongside the efficiency of market forces, conditions of performativity and individualization of teachers and their practices.

As with all sites of discursive construction, it is also worth paying attention to what was *not* being said at SETT. For example, throughout the event there was little (if any) acknowledgement of the struggles of being a classroom teacher, or problems of market-related inequalities and student indiscipline that currently blight Swedish education. Conversely, the show was characterized by a tacit privileging of corporate interests and commercial

thinking. While the show's exhibitors included state municipalities, teacher unions and other public sector actors, its execution was a model of public/private cooperation. This was an event where state and commercial actors were taking great care to not challenge or impede each other. This was also an event where companies and corporations were working hard to legitimize their products and services as part of everyday classroom life (cf. Hogan, Sellar, and Lingard 2016). Thus, at its heart SETT was a demonstration of predefined policy ideas and imperatives about 'modern' education in a corporatized, marketized age.

Following this line of argument, SETT is perhaps best understood as a 'relay' rather than 'exchange' of ideas. In one sense, the show functioned as a mechanism through which teachers were co-opted into bringing actionable ideas and persuasive messages back to their schools. Throughout their attendance, most teachers found themselves cast as conveyors (rather than constructors) of policy knowledge – what could be described as passive policy subjects. Teachers certainly saw themselves as translators of the policy for their school – e.g. coming back from SETT with tangible ideas, products and resources to allow for an imperative such as 'Koding' to be enacted by their less interested ('recalcitrant') colleagues. It is important to remember that SETT was attended by a self-selecting sample of technologically-interested professionals – echoing McCann (2011) description of 'fellow travellers'. In one sense, then, teachers attending SETT were volunteering to act as relays between global and local levels of 'Ed-Tech' – as Ball et al. (2011a, 631) put it, making digital technology in schools 'meaningful and doable'.

Education trade shows as sites of policy network reproduction and teacher differentiation

It is understandable that SETT seemed to be an event where little actual trading is done or deals brokered. Instead, these events act as 'a constitutive mechanism for translating periodic local encounter into the reproduction of an entire global industry's network' (Panitz and Glückler 2017, 163). SETT could certainly be seen to play such a role in sustaining the Swedish 'Ed-Tech' marketplace. As in many countries, the growing use of digital technology in Swedish schools has prompted the growth of national and regional 'edu-business'. These are local consultants, technology and infrastructure suppliers that have become influential actors in national IT education policy through dint of their connections with global policy networks (for example, authorized as Apple Distinguished Educators or part of the Microsoft Educator Community). SETT can therefore be seen as a key forum for these 'local' interests to coalesce and (re)constitute themselves – maintaining the roster of policy actors and interests working to ensure the reproduction of global/international relations in a Swedish context (c.f. Arreman and Holm 2011).

One important aspect of the (re)configuration of these networks at SETT was the differentiation of actors in terms of power and influence. This was made explicit in the positioning and privileging of some organizations and individuals over others – most evident in logistical aspects of the show such as the scheduling of presentations or the prestige positioning of booths in the exhibition hall. Perhaps more subtly, SETT also functioned to produce differentiated forms of teacher subject. Our fieldwork highlighted ongoing distinctions being made of teachers in terms of their economic, social and cultural resources. This was evident in whether an attendee was badged as a 'Teacher' or 'Manager', as well as who was given a microphone and who was handed a pair of noise-cancelling headphones.

Some teachers attending the show were working hard to perform in ways that created a favourable impression of themselves. Yet many others exerted little control over the role that they played in the show – being handed an orange lanyard at the registration desk and subsequently being denied access to VIP sessions and café areas. This was an event where not all ‘participants’ were equal.

Education trade shows as sites of teacher performativity

As such, SETT was a context within which teachers were explicitly made aware of their status while also implicitly shown how to improve their standing in the professional ‘Ed-Tech’ hierarchy. Our data illustrated various aspects of the event that functioned to define (and differentiate) teachers as entrepreneurial professionals. Of course, many teachers will attend a show like SETT with modest hopes of career-building – perhaps establishing contacts, building networks or gaining professional knowledge (Mair and Frew [forthcoming](#)). Yet while SETT was clearly an opportunity to build networks and gain new knowledge, implicit throughout the show was a commodification of teachers’ professional-selves and professional identities. This was evident, for example, in the ways in which the show foregrounded exemplars of ‘Rock Star’ teachers and ‘best practice’ demonstrators. These showpiece individuals were central to the performative aspects of SETT, as well as being important sources of local policy labour in ‘shaping flows of knowledge’ about education technology policy (McCann 2011, 108). In contrast, most teachers attending the event were implied to not fit such categories, and instead were positioned as passive audiences for these performances of ideal types and aspirational role models.

All told, SETT can be seen as reinforcing prevailing conditions of performativity that now run deep throughout many school systems. As Stephen Ball (2003) observes, individual teachers are now compelled to ‘promote’ and ‘organize’ themselves as successful, excellent and high-performing in all aspects of their professional lives – ‘the new performative worker is a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion for excellence’ (215). SETT certainly celebrated self-promotion and construction of a successful ‘professional self’, especially in terms of the contemporary digital milieu that many of the show’s younger, technology-savvy attendees were immersed in. Thus the show seemed to privilege teachers who had gained a degree of ‘micro-celebrity’ through social media. The ‘Rock Stars’ were teachers who had become well-known (or ‘internet famous’) on Facebook and Twitter for their online professional personas as successful technology-users. As with the phenomena of micro-celebrity in other areas of online life (see Marwick and Boyd 2011), SETT celebrated these individuals’ authenticity (as ‘ordinary’ teachers) while also highlighting their aspirational qualities through extraordinary uses of technology. The SETT show, it seems, was an event where these online constructions were being reproduced ‘in the flesh’ with the intention of motivating and inspiring change.

SETT could therefore be described as both a reflection and reinforcement of the changing nature of teacher-work under conditions of neoliberal reform. The need to develop an ‘entrepreneurial mind-set’ is foregrounded increasingly as a necessary characteristic of precarious employment conditions (Ikonen 2015). While some teachers clearly relished taking on the position of presenter, consultant, guru and celebrity, such characteristics were off-putting for others. Many attendees (including teachers we followed in our study) appeared uncertain or unconfident how to respond to the evident pressure to use the show

as an opportunity to perform and self-promote. Ball highlights the double-edged nature of such conditions – giving some teachers ‘an opportunity to make a success of themselves, for others it portends inner conflicts, inauthenticity and resistance’ (Ball 2003, 215).

Education trade shows as a form of affective governance

This sense of unease reflects the underpinning affective dimensions of SETT. Much of the policy work that was taking place at SETT was highly personalized and heightened in affect. For many actors, SETT was experienced as a succession of affective demands – making social connections, pitching ideas, persuading others and/or being persuaded, story-telling, relating personal testimonies and so on. Our fieldwork found lived experiences of the show to oscillate between excitement and exhaustion; fascination and boredom; discomfort and relief. While these feelings are common to most trade events in other industries, the three days of the SETT show certainly acted to amplify the intensities of how educational technology was being experienced. Indeed, our research shows how teachers were constantly being managed and shaped by the show’s ongoing regulation of affect. SETT was configured to be an intentionally visceral experience – from the anticipatory buzz of walking into the exhibition centre through to the considerable emotional labour of sustaining one’s conference ‘persona’. Attendees experienced disorientating feelings of being buffeted around the heightened noise, colour and spectacle of the exhibitor hall, and later then being plunged into the darkness and isolation of the ‘silent’ keynote. In all these ways, SETT was designed to elicit embodied experiences and bodily responses (from feeling ‘butterflies’ of anticipation through to weary legs and minds).

There is growing recognition of the importance of emotion and affect in policy work. As such, SETT was a gaudy example of the ‘emotional forms of governance’ that increasingly underpin policy-work with teachers that is, the ways in which the work of state agencies, for-profit actors and public services ‘always involves emotional negation, excess, dilemma, rhetorical fantasy, as well as emotional celebration and commitment’ (Pykett, Jupp, and Smith 2017, 4). While they might appear trivial, such affective aspects of SETT should be understood as a significant form of control over teachers. Indeed, the ability of the body to ‘to affect and be affected’ (Semetsky 2006, 57) is foundational to Deleuzian understandings of the formation of subjectivity and the functioning of modulatory power. Following this line of thinking, SETT can be seen as a series of affective orchestrations designed to shape teachers’ sense of self and subjectivity. In short, SETT might have made attendees feel thrilled by technology but was also intended to leave them feeling in thrall to technology.

While this emotional governance was being experienced on an individual basis, there was a clear collective dimension, with SETT establishing a common ‘mood’ or ‘affective atmosphere’ which was uncomfortable to be ‘out of tune’ with (Ahmed 2014). Although one was not always conscious of this collective disposition, although it was clearly up-beat, optimistic and on-message about the benefits of technology in education. Some of our interviewed teachers were clearly struggling with the considerable ‘emotional work’ involved in attempting to ‘clos[e] the gap between how one does feel and how one should feel’ (Ahmed 2014, 21). Indeed, there were signs of dissonance and discomfort with the ‘emotional habitus’ (Gould 2009) of SETT not accommodating feelings of critique, dissent, boredom or disappointment. While the teachers in our study were repeat attendees who did not feel sufficiently uncomfortable to stop attending altogether, this may well not have been the case

for others who had not attended SETT2016. This was not an event in which teachers could push back. This was an event where teachers were compelled to go along with the flow.

Conclusion

This paper provides some initial insights into how large education trade shows function as sites where policy networks come together – especially in terms of ‘relaying’ global ideas and imperatives to a local level of schools and teachers. The paper adds to the current state of the literature by providing empirical insight into what was described earlier as the ‘work of networking’ – in particular the mundane policy networks activities that take place beneath the high-level negotiations of more powerful policy actors. In terms of policy research, we hope that our empirical approach further justifies the strength of education policy research that ‘focuses on the very local of the local–global policy relationship [and] pursu[es] policy analysis at a smaller scale’ (Thomson et al. 2010, 639). In conceptual terms, while trade shows play an important role in consolidating hierarchical policy networks, our findings are perhaps significant in highlighting the problematic ways in which teacher agency is shaped and controlled by the discursive, material and affective dimensions of such events. These are clearly events where dominant neoliberal views of the primacy of competition and individualization in education are reinforced and extended.

The key question that therefore arises from these exploratory investigations is how alternate opportunities might be created for teachers to engage with policy knowledge in more empowered and more resistant ways. Where might opportunities arise for the genuine exchange of ideas, supporting sustaining dialogue and debate over the meaning and values associated with digital technology use in Swedish schools (and beyond)? Where might teachers and other stakeholders come together to acknowledge and explore the struggles of technology use in schools – especially the realities of imperfect, harried and under-resourced classrooms? What opportunities might there be for better social integration and solidarity amongst teachers?

All these challenges point to the need for further work in this area. It is worth exploring how efforts could be made to open up (or perhaps disrupt) a trade show like SETT as a site of genuine dialogue and debate about technology and education. Event organizers and sponsors might be lobbied to actively seek practitioner input on establishing more realistic themes for events. Conversely, one might imagine organizing counter-events (an ‘anti SETT’ perhaps?) with alternate discursive, material and affective dimensions. Another obvious space for counter-narrative could be social media, although there was disappointingly little critical commentary about SETT on social media at the time of our research. These might all appear to be impractical and ineffective alternatives to slickly executed, well-funded ‘shows’ such as SETT that thousands of educators are seemingly happy to pay to attend. Yet it is necessary to address the practical implications as well as the theoretical complexities of our research. Indeed, the difficulties of ‘thinking otherwise’ point to the underlying hegemonic nature of how digital technology is implemented in contemporary school systems. It remains difficult to imagine alternatives to an event such as SETT because it embodies the dominant common-sense way of ‘doing’ Ed-Tech. The ideological nature of the ongoing but ever-shifting imperatives of digital education needs to be better recognized and then resisted by teachers and policy researchers alike.

Notes

Direction quotations from teachers are numbered 1 through 15:

Interviewee number	Interviewee description
#1	Secondary teacher – with IT advisor status for school district A, female
#2	Pre-school teacher, male
#3	Pre-school teacher, female
#4	Secondary teacher – with IT advisor status for school district B, female
#5	Secondary Teacher, female
#6	Secondary Teacher, male
#7	Primary teacher, female
#8	Secondary teacher – with IT advisor status for school district C, female
#9	Secondary school teacher, ICT Development Manager, female
#10	Secondary school teacher, female
#11	Secondary school senior teacher, female
#12	Primary school headteacher, female
#13	Primary school teacher, female
#14	Pre-school teacher, male
#15	Secondary school teacher – with IT advisor status for school district D, female

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