

# **OFSTED, Inspection and the Betrayal of Democracy**

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*Drawing briefly on the quite different discourses of schooling-as-performance and education-as-exploration, the paper opens by exploring some of the consequences of the distinction between schooling and education for any system of school inspection. The second section of the paper examines the conceptual and practical inadequacy of 'accountability' as an agent of reciprocal public engagement in a participatory democracy. In its stead a more robust, more open notion of 'reciprocal responsibility' is offered as a more fitting means of professional and communal renewal. Section III focuses on the relationship between means and ends that is at once central to democracy and so conspicuously absent from current inspection arrangements. The short conclusion suggests we need a radical break from OFSTED if we wish to approximate more closely to our democratic aspirations.*

Recent philosophical work on inspection (e.g. Richards, 2001) provides us with some uncomfortably insightful reminders about the extent and depth of our national obsession with measurement of schools' collective performance; about both the omnipresent and variable quality of judgements which contribute to it, and about the pressing need to be at once more modest, more truthful and more thoughtful about the use to which we put the apparatus of inspection. Such examination is as welcome as it is long overdue. Too often advocated with a convenient mixture of populism and arrogance, the system for inspecting schools in England carries with it an over-confident and brusque carelessness born of too much power, too much questionable data and too little thought.

In the first section of this article, 'Education, Schooling and the Eradication of Exploratory Discourse', I explore some of the consequences of the distinction between schooling and education for any system of school inspection. The continuity of that distinction remains central to a companion set of parallel concerns that cluster around the quite different discourses of schooling-as-performance and education-as-exploration. The second section of the article, 'The Democratic Deficit', examines the conceptual and practical inadequacy of 'accountability' as an agent of reciprocal public engagement in a

participatory democracy. In its stead a more robust, more open notion of 'reciprocal responsibility' is offered as a more fitting means of professional and communal renewal. Section III, 'Relating Means and Ends: On the Necessity of a Personalist Dialectic', focuses on the relationship between means and ends that is at once central to democracy and so conspicuously absent from current inspection arrangements. These two matters — a more fitting account of accountability and a more insistent symbiosis between our intentions and the ways we make them real in our daily lives — are explored a little more extensively, since they seem to me to go to the root of OFSTED's difficulties, which this article argues are inevitably problematic and, hopefully, terminal. The short 'Conclusion' suggests we need a radical break from OFSTED if we wish to approximate more closely to our democratic aspirations.

## **I EDUCATION, SCHOOLING AND THE ERADICATION OF EXPLORATORY DISCOURSE**

### *A framework for 'education' or a framework for 'schooling'?*

The first, brief but basic, point that any regime of inspection has to face concerns the distinction between education and schooling. Whilst this is standard philosophical fare it does not make such a demarcation any the less important. Even though there are encouraging signs that the new OFSTED framework is beginning to take account of wider aspects of education, not merely the more easily accessible and measurable components of schooling, it still needs to be held to account for its willingness or otherwise to fashion a framework that is explicit in its *educational* aspirations. Were it to do so it would not only make clear the difference between the two, it would also help us to understand the inevitably triple task to which any educational framework would have to be committed. First, it would seek to give an account of what it conceived education to be; second, it would attempt to articulate how it intended to gain access to and gain an understanding of the school's realisation of those intentions in a manner that was itself educative of those involved (e.g. the young people, their teachers, those conducting the inspection); and, third, it would endeavour to make clear how it would engage in a mutually educative dialogue with the communities to whom it was responsible and on whose behalf it undertook its work.

Frameworks are not neutral either in their construction, their operation or their impact on those who are required to submit to their requirements (Power, 1994, 1997; Troman, 1997). The purposes of education and schooling are related but different; inevitably the frameworks designed to audit their effectiveness will also differ in their intentions, their language, their processes and their approaches to the making of meaning and the commitment to subsequent action.

*'Schooling-as-performance' or 'education-as-exploration'?*  
*How language shapes realities*

The issue of language is crucial in a double sense, both because concerns about accessibility are central to any process of accountability that seeks to involve the wider public and also because its orientation to either schooling or education will inevitably affect the substance and the texture of its engagement.

One of the issues on which Colin Richards (Richards, 2001) takes OFSTED to task is its refusal to properly acknowledge or understand that the embrace of ordinary, readily accessible language carries with it a companion set of dangers as significant as the positive intentions behind their laudable desire to communicate with clarity. The gist of Richards' argument is to point out that value judgements still find their way into the process in ways which are not comprehended in enough depth or faced with enough honesty.

I agree with his point: it is high time the value-laden nature of judgement within the OFSTED lexicon was properly acknowledged. And yet, there is another more intractable issue about the *telos* of the language of inspection that a number of writers (e.g. Fielding, 1994, 2001a; Frowe, 2001; Smith, 2001) have recently been wrestling with. Put bluntly, does the desire to be transparent and accessible in written communication lead inexorably to the ubiquitous banality of bullet-point thinking that has for so long bruised our imagination and bullied our prose into a debilitating and impatient brevity? Is there an inevitability to the losses incurred by the insistent, often petulant, discourse of managerialism that now infects the rhythms and realities of our daily work?<sup>1</sup>

The overarching point here is that language is not a peripheral issue: one does not need to be a Foucauldian to understand the strength of the view that language both enables and constrains. Public education remains under siege from a reductionist populism that deploys a false clarity under the rallying cry of a largely manufactured common sense (Fielding, 1994), aptly described by Henry Giroux as 'the politics of erasure' (Giroux, 1992). Oppositional or even mildly interrogative voices are no longer heard, or, what is worse, no longer understood beneath the incessant onslaught of government edict and media barrage. This assault amounts to a form of linguistic robbery that not only deprives us of a means of expression, but also diminishes the possibility of our understanding and critiquing the world in a particular way. It eradicates the credibility of the conceptual story that our stolen language attempted to give voice. This is not a matter of mere frustration or disappointment; it is, as Richard Smith reminds us:

a matter of *justice* . . . [Contemporary exhortation and required practices in education] simply fail to do justice to the world as I experience it. More than that, they often appear obdurately resolved to ignore or betray that world, to refuse to represent its contours and nuances (Smith, 2001).

If the language of inspection is reduced and confined to the language of school performance then it must inevitably be a prisoner of its own myopia. If it embraces the language of education as a creative, exploratory process then it has to find other ways of addressing the quite proper requirement of a communal, democratic responsibility that is honest in its intentions and forthright in its judgements

## II THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

One of the most perplexing things about the ebb and flow of debate surrounding the adequacy or otherwise of OFSTED as a means for holding a school system accountable to the society it serves is the virtual absence of any sustained exploration of the specifically democratic aspirations of our social and political arrangements. In other words, what evidence is there that OFSTED is the product of a democratic society?<sup>22</sup> If we dig beneath the surface and excavate the felt realities as well as the public pronouncements of OFSTED inspections, what traces can we find of any recognisable deposit of democratic practice? And, given the change in government from right-wing Conservative to an avowedly centre-left Labour since OFSTED was first introduced, is there any evidence that different models of democracy have left recognisably different strata within the archaeological sites of accountability?

One of the things that philosophy could usefully contribute to an engagement with these issues is to say something about the kind of evidence one might expect to encounter. At least part of our task of making sense of what we find would be to see if there were some kind of connections between the emerging evidence and the aspirations of, say, a participatory tradition, a more conservative élitist tradition, or more market-led model of democratic society. The broad and important general point here is that the link between schooling and a democratic way of life needs to be re-established. Its virtual absence, or its de facto integration into the hegemony of the quasi-market, is an indictment of our integrity and our vigilance as democratic citizens.

For those of us who aspire to a participatory tradition it seems to me that there are at least two tasks we might usefully attend to. The first concerns the distinction between accountability and responsibility; the second, later explored in Section III of this article, concerns the relationship between ends and means.

### *On the self-serving smugness and indolent promiscuity of accountability*

The distinction between accountability and responsibility, is made, for example, by Fred Inglis (Inglis, 1989, 2000) when wrestling with the managerialism which is so conspicuously and disfiguringly central to OFSTED. This distinction is one I want to pursue with a mixture of hesitancy and tenacity. First, the underlying point. What I take Inglis to be arguing is that the political, moral and existential qualities of these

two notions are importantly different, if not inherently so, then certainly within the currently dominant neo-liberal economic framework. His philosophical criticisms of accountability relate to the form which it takes at present in England: Inglis's engagement is with the brute realities of a brutalising régime.

With regard to accountability, there are two main points I wish to offer as a playful, but nonetheless purposeful, heuristic. The first concerns the predominantly contractual flavour of its discourse and the second concerns the largely lopsided nature of accountability both within contemporary inspection régimes and within the quasi-market framework from which they draw their legitimacy.

Accountability has the feel of bureaucratic rationality about it: it is, as Inglis reminds us, 'legal not moral' (Inglis, 2000, p. 422). The 'principle of bureaucratic rationality' that animates the practical articulation of accountability:

holds that duties are subordinate to rights, and the determination of rights-fulfilment is only secured by tabulation. A right is satisfied when evidence is produced not so much that duty has been done, but that the documentation on hand codifies its doing (ibid.).

Accountability is socially and politically at home in predominantly contractual arrangements that lay down clear requirements for the accomplishment of certain tasks and outcomes. It tends to operate in hierarchical regimes where those who are accountable bear virtually all the contractual weight of whatever is specified. Motivation tends to be extrinsic to the task in hand and the sustainability of the required work-rate or specified outcomes has more to do with the threat of penalties than the fulfilment of internal satisfaction or moral obligation.

In sum, accountability tends to be a largely negative instrument of social and political control; it eschews any form of serious moral engagement in favour of a contractual or technical agreement; it operates most effectively within a psychological ambience of apprehension; and, since the locus of control rests primarily with those whose requirements form the *raison d'être* of the work in hand, it is particularly susceptible to the culture and practice of blame: 'Rights command duties, trust is dissolved by surveillance, deceit and mendacity have their hour. Weber is right and Durkheim is wrong' (ibid., p. 423). Accountability is, in other words, the apotheosis of a morally gelded rights-based discourse that either defers proper engagement with the duties of those whose rights are under consideration or effectively severs any serious engagement with duties altogether.

My second point about the largely lopsided nature of accountability arises from this last argument about inequities of power between those who are accountable and those to whom they are answerable. If it is combined with a quasi-market framework that encourages the virtually unimpeded championing of the customer we end up in a situation where the customer/purchaser/client not only holds sway, but does so in ways

which do not bind them into any substantial set of accountabilities they are themselves required to take heed of. The cult of the customer is one which sanctions an ever-expanding set of demands: accountability becomes not only promiscuous in its inclinations but lazy, or even dismissive of its obligations, something which should hardly surprise us since the legitimacy of obligations in anything other than a contractual sense is virtually ruled out of court. Accountability within this kind of framework is unidirectional: customers have and feel no obligation to play an active part in the accountability process other than to apportion blame or praise in a way which carries consequences only for those who receive it; hence the charge of laziness; hence the feeling that is the providers' job to ensure and 'deliver' quality and the customer's job to merely receive it; hence the virtually complete abrogation of customer responsibility within the accountability process and its transfer to a centralised body such as OFSTED; hence the increasingly prevalent culture of blame that figures so strongly within the current debate about public services in the UK. As Fred Inglis insists so elegantly and with such terrifying insight '“Accountability” is, after all, not the same thing as responsibility, still less duty. It is a pistol loaded with blame to be fired at the heads of those who cannot answer charges' (ibid., p.424).

### *Renewing the moral resonance of reciprocal responsibility*

Whereas the discourse of accountability has no real place for the enduring mutuality of human engagement, within an aspirant democracy the notion of responsibility accords it a central significance. Because responsibility is primarily a moral, not a technical or contractual notion, it both elicits and requires a felt and binding mutuality that does not depend upon the hierarchical arrangements so typical of accountability. Motivation tends to be intrinsic, both to the general requirements of the practice<sup>3</sup> under consideration and to the specific tasks or intentions in hand. The sustainability of the required work-rate or specified outcomes owes more to those general, often professional and sometimes moral, obligations and aspirations positively embraced as part of a community of practice than they do to the striking of bargains or the minutiae of job descriptions.

In sum, responsibility tends to be a largely positive, morally resonant means of encouraging mutually supportive endeavour to which both, or all, parties feel reciprocally and interdependently committed. Whilst responsibility is as serious as contractually animated arrangements are about getting worthwhile things done, it rejects the psychology of deference and fear, preferring instead a binding desire to achieve shared aspirations and emulate what is worthy of respect and generative of delight. Its response to failure is not to blame, but to require restitution and redoubled commitment within the context of appropriate support willingly given.

In the current contexts that give this debate about inspection its resonance and relevance, the distinctions between accountability and responsibility point to two contrasting realities and intentions. When we

hold each other to account we do so in ways which tend to underwrite existing inequities of power and foreground a set of dispositions and motivations that presume human weakness and elicit blame. When we hold each other responsible we do so in ways that tend to re-inforce the necessity of reciprocal engagement and foreground a set of dispositions and motivations that presume a human desire to do what is right and celebrate what is creative and joyful in each others' endeavours. The discourse of the former encourages us to see education as a commodity and is best suited to the self-interested calculus of the market: the discourse of the latter sees education as a communal process of becoming persons and is more appropriate to the educative intentions of participatory democracy.

It is for these latter reasons of educational and democratic aspiration that we ought to consider a linguistic shift from accountability to reciprocal responsibility: a discourse of responsibility takes us away from the disengagement and easy self-congratulation of our contemporary practices and encourages us in the direction of a more overtly educative and thereby more demanding form of engagement. Just as, within the specific circumstances of late-nineteenth century England, William Morris and fellow socialists like Walter Crane argued against the moral repugnance and human destructiveness of competition (see Fielding, 1976; 1996), so, within the specific circumstances of early twenty-first-century England, following Inglis, I want to argue against the moral insouciance and human destructiveness of accountability. For Morris and Crane emulation provided a vibrant, fulfilling alternative to competition. For Inglis and myself reciprocal responsibility, appropriately enriched and extended to be at once more robust and more demandingly inclusive, provides an equivalently creative and inspiring alternative to accountability.

People will, of course, continue to use the term 'accountability' and often in ways that pick out intentions and processes that are entirely laudable. My point remains valid nonetheless. We have to do something that reminds us of the power of language to shape us as well as be shaped by us. We have to remember that a discourse is more than a semantic configuration: it both enables and circumscribes practices. If we disrupt that discourse and intervene in ways that interrogate the status quo by offering different conceptualisations and priorities, then we will stand a chance of changing not merely our habitual descriptions of what we do and how we do it, but also those things themselves. Conceptual developments and realignments associated with the notion of 'reciprocal responsibility' can generate and sustain new constellations of practices which give a proper place to the necessity of mutual engagement. New hope needs new language to name new realities.

### **III RELATING MEANS AND ENDS: ON THE NECESSITY OF A PERSONALIST DIALECTIC**

I have suggested thus far that OFSTED fails to live up to even minimal

credentials that anyone arguing from the standpoint of participatory democracy would insist on. The cumulative weight of many of the examples referred to — in particular, the preference for narrow forms of schooling rather than expansive possibilities for education and the valorisation of accountability over responsibility — adds up to a substantial millstone around the neck of any society wishing to involve and educate its citizens in the values, dispositions and practices of democratic living.

Underlying these failings is not so much a failure of consistency or intention — OFSTED is eminently consistent with the demands of international capitalism and the frameworks of performativity (see Gleeson and Husbands, 2001) which guide its intellectual and practical expression. Rather it is a triple failure to be either explicit or honest about its real aspirations; a failure to properly articulate its theoretical assumptions; and, above all, a failure of imagination. In sum, it is either intellectually disingenuous, theoretically opaque, or existentially destitute: as a variation/combination of all three, it is pervasively and persistently reprehensible.

Arguably, OFSTED's most fundamental failure is intellectual. Its model of inspection is blighted with the same desultory superficiality as the model of 'school effectiveness' on whose presumptions much of what passes for 'effective' teaching and learning in England is judged. Along with other frameworks of 'good practice' and surveillance operating in a number of professional fields, both OFSTED and 'school effectiveness' are ontologically and axiologically bereft: neither has a considered view of what it is to be or become a person outside a *de facto* presumption of atomistic individualism; neither has a set of values that would enable it to make judgements about, for example, what might constitute 'effectiveness' in other than market terms, and neither has a grasp of the proper relationship of means to ends.

Whilst my main concern with OFSTED and similar régimes of inspection is intellectual, it is not merely intellectual: my argument is not primarily about intellectual good housekeeping. Intellectual frameworks have practical consequences and my worry about OFSTED and 'school effectiveness' is that their implicit (and, presumably, unwitting) anthropological and value preferences link them too closely to positions that are at best manipulative and at worst totalitarian.

Why do I claim this? The answer lies in what I take to be OFSTED's view of the interconnections between the two fundamental forms of relationship that characterise our human being; the functional and the personal. Functional or instrumental relations are typical of those encounters that help us to get things done in order to achieve our purposes; indeed, functional relations are defined by those purposes. When I buy a train ticket to travel to the seaside, my relationship with the person that sells me the ticket has solely to do with an exchange of money and a subsequent right to travel from *A* to *B* on the train. We do not reveal our deeper fears and aspirations to each other. By contrast, personal relations exist in order to help us be and become ourselves in



and through our relations with others and part of that becoming involves our mutual preparedness to be open and honest with each other about all aspects of our being. In these kinds of relationships, as, for example, in friendship, we do, of course, do things together. However, these joint activities or encounters do not define the relationship; they are expressive of it. Going by train to the seaside is not the purpose of our friendship; the day out is an expression of our care for and delight in each other.

In the view of John Macmurray, from whom this argument is derived,<sup>4</sup> whilst the personal is through the functional — concern, care, delight become real in action through practical expression — crucially *the functional is for the sake of the personal*. Thus, economic activity (the functional) is only legitimate insofar as it helps us to lead more fulfilled lives (the personal); schooling (the functional) is for the sake of education (the personal). I would want to augment and extend this line of thinking<sup>5</sup> and argue that not only is the functional for the sake of the personal, and the personal through the functional, but the influence of the personal on the functional is transformative of it: the functional should be expressive of the personal. Ends and means must be inextricably linked; the means should themselves be transformed by the ends by which they are inspired and towards which they are aiming. Thus, the functional ways in which we work together in schools to achieve personal, communal and educational ends should be transformed by the moral and interpersonal character of what we are trying to do.

Taking the ontological and axiological building blocks of John Macmurray's position it is possible to construct a fourfold typology — the elements of which can be described as 'impersonal', 'sentimental', 'high performance' and 'person-centred'. These elements are basic value positions associated with corresponding orientations on the part of schools (see Figure 1). The first two orientations, namely, the 'impersonal' and the 'sentimental', take diametrically-opposite stances on the relation between the functional and the personal. The *impersonal* standpoint marginalises the personal. It results in a mechanistic organisation that is primarily concerned with efficiency. In contrast, the *sentimental* standpoint valorises the personal at the expense of the functional. It has little time or patience for the functional or organisational arrangements needed to translate the warmth and deeply-held emotional commitments into practical realities that help young people learn in a variety of ways.

The two orientations particularly relevant to this paper concern the school as a high-performance organisation and the school as a learning community. Both share a commitment to young people's achievement, but take very different stances towards the conceptualisation and realisation of that achievement within the context of a school. In the *high performance* school, which is the kind of school that is embodied in the approach of OFSTED and of 'school effectiveness', the personal is used for the sake of the functional: community is valued, but primarily for instrumental purposes within the context of the market place. Here the

Schools as IMPERSONAL organisations	Schools as SENTIMENTAL communities	Schools as HIGH-PERFORMANCE learning organisations	Schools as PERSON-CENTRED learning communities
<i>The functional marginalises the personal</i>	<i>The personal marginalises the functional</i>	<i>The personal is used for the sake of the functional</i>	<i>The functional is for the sake of/ expressive of the personal</i>
Mechanistic organisation	Self-indulgent community	Learning organisation	Learning community
Community is unimportant/ destructive of organisational purposes	Community has no organisational consequences or requirements	Community is a useful tool to achieve organisational purposes	Organisation exists to promote community
Efficient	Complacent	Effective	Morally and instrumentally successful

Figure 1. The Organisational Orientation of Schools: Understanding the Relation between Functions and Persons

activities and worth of the school as a high-performance learning organisation are dominated by outcomes in the form of measured attainment. Its form of unity is collective, rather than personal or communal, and it is here that earlier charges of totalitarianism begin to resonate. The significance of both students and teachers is derivative and rests primarily in their contribution, usually via high-stakes testing, to the public performance of the organisation. Field data beginning to emerge conveys the differing attitudes of contrasting groups of students. Some students complain that the school is only interested in them because they are the likely bearers of A\* grades (Fielding, 2001b), whilst others complain that their low grades lead them to feel utter despair. One primary school pupil, frighteningly reported that she felt 'a nothing' (Reay and Wiliam, 1999). Such remarks are, of course, unusual. More often than not internalisation of the high-performance model of schooling ensures the psychology of compliance. As either a student or a member of staff your contributions are enhanced through your carefully managed 'ownership' of what others desire for you; hence the earlier charges of manipulation. OFSTED may be more complex than Macdonald's and a touch less enjoyable, but its exploitation of the personal for the sake of the functional, its formulaic superficiality and its despoilation of the hinterland of indigenous professional judgement invites a more than passing comparison.

In contrast to the exploitative axiology of the high-performance school, in the *person-centred* school the functional is both for the sake of and expressive of the personal. Its outcomes are widely and imaginatively conceived and its success is as satisfying morally and interpersonally as it is instrumentally (cf Elliott, 2001a). Its form of unity is communal and person-centred,<sup>6</sup> rather than collective and outcomes driven. If we apply this framework to schools, not only will they become more overtly educative in their intentions and their daily work, but the arrangements we devise to enable the schools to fulfil and demonstrate their democratic responsibilities towards the communities they serve will also be educative, engaging, inclusive and imaginative. OFSTED does none of these things. Its engagement is conceptually thin and practically perfunctory; it is anti-educational; it not only excludes the very things that are generally agreed to be most important and most enduring but also is substantially and dispiritingly dull.

We need to counter the current move towards what John Elliott (2001a, b) calls the 'evaluative state' and reaffirm and re-articulate the case for the 'democratic state'. In the evaluative state government becomes a purchaser rather than a provider of public services. Having set the standards it requires, it holds providers contractually accountable by evaluating their performance, thereby indirectly influencing and shaping the 'quality' of provision. In a careful, eloquent exposition and unpicking of such an approach Elliott lays particular emphasis on the corrosive consequences of 'the separation of means from ends in the policy making process' (Elliott, 2001b) and goes on to cite the recent work of Michael Jacobs, who argues that different approaches to public-sector provision 'create a different kind of society.' Outcomes cannot be divorced from the means of achieving them 'since the outcomes must include the nature of the social relations and values which different policy approaches embody' (Jacobs, 2001, p. 74). If Jacobs' (and my own) line of argument is correct, so too is the drift of Elliott's conclusion that 'the more successful the evaluatory state becomes in regulating public service provision to achieve its targets the more it will generate outcomes that undermine the public realm and the social value embedded in it' (Elliott, 2001b).

If we are serious about democracy as an animating force that informs the mechanism of communal responsibility, rather than performative accountability, then we need quite different educational arrangements to those we currently allow. School improvement and community renewal should be seen as both a reciprocal responsibility and a symbiotic necessity. This requires the transformation of what schools are about and how they relate to their communities (Bentley, 2001). It also requires a transformation of how communities see themselves, how they energise and renew themselves and how they see schools becoming places and processes that express and extend their aspirations. Practical examples are there to be adapted,<sup>7</sup> further developed and, if appropriate, transformed. The imperative must be both insistent and creative: the future of our society as a developing democracy depends upon it.

#### IV CONCLUSION

If Fred Inglis is right in arguing that ‘the preposterous edifice of auditing, the mad rout of acronyms — HEFCE, TQM, OFSTED, TTA — blinds vision and stifles thought’; if he is right in suggesting that ‘their most certain consequence is to make enquiry servile, knowledge instrumental and, above all, to make all of us, teachers at whatever level, boring, exhausted and hating the job,’ (Inglis, 2000, p. 428) a re-appraisal of the present arrangements for school inspection now seems in order. The main burden of my argument goes beyond Inglis’s insistence that the very people whose work it is designed to improve seem diminished and betrayed by its distorting and desultory influence. I also insist that the set of interests that animate the intellectual origins and political dynamics of OFSTED have little to do with a view of either education or democracy fit for the twenty-first century.

The Situationist writer Raoul Vaneigem argued in the late 1960s that ‘a minute correction to the essential is more important than a hundred accessories’ (Vaneigem, nd, p. 5). It is important that the growing body of literature critiquing OFSTED does not become too preoccupied with ‘accessories’. If we want to remind ourselves, despite the raised eyebrows of postmodernity, what kinds of things count as ‘the essential’, the concluding lines of Richard Sennett’s inspiring, often beautiful book *The Corrosion of Character*, provide a good starting point:

If change occurs it happens on the ground, between persons speaking out of inner need, rather than through mass uprisings. What political programs follow from those inner needs, I simply don’t know. But I do know a regime that provides human beings with no deep reasons to care for one another cannot long preserve its legitimacy’ (Sennett, 1998, p. 148).

Writing of this quality is rare and we should cherish it when we find it. The beauty and felt humanity of his prose mirror the depth of his understanding and the wisdom of his humility.

We must not only break with OFSTED, but break the mould. Our faith, our hope and our intellectual and practical energies would be better directed by developing a form of reciprocal engagement between schools and communities that has within it the capacity to not only renew but transform both.<sup>8</sup> In so doing we would contribute to the furtherance of a democratic society more worthy of the name than the one we currently live in.

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## NOTES

1. This is not self-indulgent hyperbole. As I finish this paper the front cover of the *Times Educational Supplement* headlines ‘Young Staff flee factory schools: rising number quit in face of “aggressive” senior managers who want results at any cost’ (Mansell, Williams and Learner, 2001).
2. Much the same points can be made about other key elements of our education system, such as the training of headteachers. What, for example, are we to make of the marginalisation of the work of Patricia White (e.g. White, 1982) who argued over twenty years ago that we should explicitly address matters of democratic aspiration within the training of headteachers.
3. In a MacIntyrean sense.
4. For an early, very clear exposition see Macmurray 1941(a–e). For Macmurray’s philosophical *magnum opus* see his 1953/1954 Gifford Lectures later published as *The Self as Agent* (1957) and *Persons in Relation* (1961). For an exposition and interpretation of Macmurray’s person-centred philosophy of community see Fielding, 2000a.
5. This section of the paper draws heavily on Fielding, 2000b. For a more extended philosophical exploration of a personalist account of education see Fielding 2000a.
6. It is important to emphasise that the person-centred school and the philosophical work of John Macmurray to which it owes so much is not individualistic in either its philosophical orientation or its practice. Rather it rests upon individuality as an essentially communal notion. As Macmurray eloquently argues:

The self is one term in the relation between two selves. It cannot be prior to that relation and, equally, of course, the relation cannot be prior to it. ‘I’ exists only as a member of the ‘You and I’. The self only exists in the communion of selves (Macmurray, 1933, p. 137).

Or, as he put it 30 years later in *Persons in Relation*, the second of his Gifford Lectures:

We need one another to be ourselves. This complete and unlimited dependence of each of us upon the others is the central and crucial fact of personal existence . . . Here is the basic fact of our human condition (Macmurray, 1961, p. 211).

Macmurray’s philosophical position is best summed in his ‘Introductory’ to *The Self as Agent* when he suggests that ‘All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, all meaningful action for the sake of friendship’ (Macmurray, 1957, p. 15).

7. Any move forward needs to take account of the re-emergence of the literature on school self-evaluation (e.g. MacBeath, 1999; MacBeath *et al.*, 2000). The work of Stuart Ranson has patiently argued the case for the revival of local democracy in unpropitious times (e.g. Ranson, 1993, 2000; Ranson *et al.*, 1997). The literature on community education is, of course vast. A useful practical source of ideas is the Community Education Development Centre (CEDC) at Coventry (see e.g. Bowring-Carr *et al.*, 2000 for a recent attempt to reconcile community education and school improvement and Rennie, 1999, for the place of schools in community regeneration). My feeling is that, in the UK at any rate, we are still largely operating with an anachronistic notion of schools and much of the literature is still too school-centric. The ubiquitous and increasingly mindless ‘standards’ agenda has much to answer for here.
8. A key North-American text, unfortunately encountered too late to incorporate in this paper, is Thomas Sergiovanni’s *The Lifeworld of Leadership* (Sergiovanni, 2000). Sergiovanni covers similar ground (though he uses Habermas rather than Macmurray as his key philosophical source) and comes to broadly similar conclusions.

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