Please Show You're Working: A Critical Assessment of the Impact of OFSTED Inspection on Primary Teachers

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ABSTRACT *Education policies introduced in the last two decades necessitated the adoption of a managerialist discourse in the restructuring, running and inspection of schools. In this paper we critically review the nature of such discourse and outline the historical conditions that contributed to the establishment of OFSTED. Having set the scene, we report on the experiential impact of managerialist discourse on the lives of primary school teachers in the period running up to, including, and in the year following OFSTED inspections. Exploring the accounts of teachers we draw attention to the affects of intensified control on the overall well being of teachers and, by implication, the quality of classroom experience for children. Foucault's notions of the `disciplinary regime' and `normalizing judgement' prove useful in framing teachers' descriptions of themselves feeling professionally compromised, intimidated and stressed by the inspection process. Despite the evident intensity of the OFSTED experience, teachers in our study uniformly indicate that, one year after inspection, it has had no lasting impact on what they do in the classroom. If OFSTED has questionable direct influence on teaching practice outside nominal compliance with its formal procedures in the run-up to and during the inspection visit, we are left to question what purpose it actually serves. Our conclusion is that just as teachers `stage manage' a performance for the visiting inspectorate, the whole OFSTED apparatus itself is little more than a grand political cipher created and maintained to satisfy the imagined scrutinising gaze of a wider public. In short, OFSTED is stage-managed public `accountability'.*

Introduction

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the UK public sector has been the scene of radical organisational change. Policy innovations introduced by consecutive Conservative governments have compelled various state run institutions to look for ways of gaining efficiency savings and enhancing performance. Driven by right-wing laissez faire ideology, the basic argument is that market rigours lead private enterprises to operate along more effective and cost-efficient lines and that, by implication, the introduction of similar `disciplines' into public service organisations will have an equally inspiring effect on their operations. According to many observers (see, for example, Pollitt, 1990; Exworthy and Halford, 1999a) at the heart of these politically motivated changes to the public sector – the intensity of which has not abated with the advent of a Labour Government in the UK– lies the widespread adoption of `managerialist' ideology. Given the political value placed on the management of private enterprise firms, the logic is that what is good for the commercial organisation is also good for any organisation, whatever its notional status or raison d'etre. It follows that popular managerial innovations and techniques can be grafted wholesale onto public sector organisations on the understanding that improvements will necessarily follow. This has resulted in a series of performance enhancing initiatives and restructuring exercises being introduced across the public sector.

In the area of state funded education, issues of `quality and standards' takes on a particularly emotive tone. This paper seeks to outline the history of creeping managerialism within the UK state education system, giving particular attention to primary schooling where, arguably, government policies continue to have a deleterious impact on morale and performance. Having outlined the political context and history of the issues we examine the micro-sociological affects of management control mechanisms that have been widely adopted in state primary schools. In particular, we consider how the operation of a government inspection system co-ordinated by the Office For Standards in Education (OFSTED) impacts on teachers' working and social lives. To facilitate this

critique of OFSTED we report on a small-scale empirical study of primary teacher response to the inspection process.

The Language of Managerialism

In their respective overviews of changes in the UK public sector during the 1980s and 1990s, Pollitt (1990) and Exworthy and Halford (1999b) point to a series of sector-wide themes that have significantly changed relationships between stakeholders of publicly funded organisations. These include: the pursuit of continuous improvement defined economically in terms of `productivity'; imposition of stricter financial accountability and measures of performance `effectiveness' and `efficiency'; the `marketisation' of structural relationships between the providers and purchasers of public services; and the marketisation of relationships *within* organisations, that is, the application of purchaser-provider models. These shifts in relationships owe much to the adoption of a managerialist discourse and the corresponding re-disciplining of workforces within the public sector. It is a matter of transposing the language of organisation from what we might think of as traditional public sector *administration* to what Clarke and Newman (1993) refer to as `new managerialism'.

Insofar as language acts as a form of `symbolic action' (Burke, 1968) and carries with it implications for the manner in which objects and subjects in the world are socially constructed, it is important that we pay close attention to the forms of language deployed in a given social milieu. That the language of `professional administration' in schools has been ousted in favour of a new managerial lexicon leads us to ponder the connotative logic of this move and its implications for work relationships. For it is through the analysis of situational language use that we can examine the moral implications and consequences of a given discourse for protagonists, objects and subjects alike. So in the case of school organisation, `head teachers' are encouraged to redefine their role as

potential `managers'[1]. 'Performance indicators' and measures of various sorts, (league tables based on Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), the publication of OFSTED inspection reports, mandatory `benchmarking' of individual pupils and so on) replace professional peer or collegial accountability and assessment. There occurs commodification of the educational process as the language of `attainment' replaces that of learning and personal development; `market competition' replaces collaboration (Hatcher, 1994) and, as a result of marketisation, `parents' and `children' become potential `customers' or `clients' in contractual relationships (Menter et al., 1997; Menter and Muschamp, 1999). Each one of these linguistic innovations carries subtle or not so subtle implications for social conduct and relationships within schools only a few of which we can hope to take up in any depth here. Before we consider some of the specific implications of the managerialist discourse for primary school teachers it will be helpful to define more precisely what we take `managerialism' to mean and to specify how it finds structural expression in the education sector.

Pollitt (1990, p.1) opens his extensive thesis on the subject by defining managerialism as, `a set of beliefs and practices, at the core of which burns the seldom-tested assumption that better management will prove an effective solvent for a wide range of economic and social ills'. It is an ideology, he suggests; a conceptual theatre within which is played out a drama of heroism and villainy, of perpetrators and victims. In this dramatic structure managers embody, by association, the principles of lean and ruthless efficiency – the mythical hallmark of the commercial sector – and are presented as heroes[2] of the hour, able to cut through the layers of fat in pursuit of organisational fitness. To be effective in its own terms, moreover, this new managerialism requires that incumbent managers be afforded the space and `right to manage', that is, a licence to take `executive action' in pursuit of top-down defined ends (Grey, 1996).

[1] Stephen Ball (1990a, p.67) observes that: `The model of organisation which the ERA [1988 Education Reform Act] implies is clear; it is that of governors as Board of Directors and the headteacher as Chief Executive'.
[2] Pollitt is careful to point out that, `there is an important gender issue here because, by media image and by statistical estimate, most of them *are* heroes – white middle-class heroes – and not heroines' (1990, p.8, original emphasis).

In raising the issue of managerialism, then, we are primarily concerned to question the legitimacy of importing commercial management practices into an area of social life – schooling - that has not heretofore been subject to its economically driven disciplines and imperatives. Certainly, from the perspective of staff the imposition of managerialism within schools has compromised their professional status and altered role relationships (Jeffrey and Woods, 1996; Ozga, 1995; Woods et al. 1997; Woods and Jeffrey, 1998). Many head teachers (although not all) are uncomfortable viewing themselves or being viewed by others as `managers' rather than as leading a group of fellow professionals. Yet they have little choice in the matter. The establishment of an officious *external* surveillance and control system in the form of OFSTED ensures at least some degree of compliance with government demands for the implementation of a managerialist agenda. With any command and control structure there are always interpretative gaps, as we shall see shortly from our own data, but no state school can completely escape gravitational pull of this new discourse.

We are left with some questions to ponder: Does the implementation of managerial techniques and technologies of control improve the education process? Who or what actually benefits from the introduction of management practices? Children? Parents? Tax payers? Teachers? Managers/head teachers? Her Majesty's Inspectors? Obviously, these are highly provocative and contentious questions all of which are ultimately value-driven and selective aspects of which are aired and contested in popular media, professional and academic publications. Plainly, on the one hand it is possible to present arguments that construe management practices as efficacious to society whilst, on the other, they can be rhetorically derided to the point that they appear vacuous or downright destructive. Ultimately, the matter reduces to one of moral value however else it may be publicly framed.

As an ideology, of course, managerialism relies entirely on the *de-politicising* of value questions. It seeks deliberately to colonise debate with what it asserts to be a `value-neutral' and merely `functional' vocabulary of `productivity', `value-for-money', `resource efficiency' and so on. Our

aim here is to expose that particular rhetorical move as deceptive and to provide some evidence of the debilitating effect that direct managerial control and enforced accountability via OFSTED is having on teachers. Personal experience and empirical research suggests that the specific manner in which managerialism has taken a hold in state schooling has *at the very least* a deleterious affect on the morale of teaching staff and, from the subjective reports of professional teachers, on their effectiveness in helping children to learn. Before we move to a consideration of the data, however, it will be helpful to provide some background information on the inspection process at issue.

OFSTED Inspection in Historical Context

The inspection of state schools has a lengthy history (Select Committee on Education and Employment, 1999). In 1839 the first two of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) were appointed. Their role was, in effect, to inspect to ensure that the money the government was beginning to invest in education was being used effectively. However, in the 1840s and 1850s `the tradition developed that HMI should not be mere functionaries but should be regarded as autonomous professionals giving their expert advice which should not be misused by politicians or civil servants' (Lawton and Gordon, 1987, p.9). The introduction through the Revised Code in 1862 of 'payment by results' for teachers changed the role of inspector from that of advisor to that of tester and enforcer of the standards of achievement required of pupils, the outcome of which had a direct effect on the grants which schools received and the pay of teachers. The repeal of the Revised Code in 1895 provided the opportunity for HMI to return to a less punitive role in advising schools and developing teaching. This was no easy task in that the regimentation of classroom practice and behaviour which the Code inflicted had become so ingrained in many teachers, lasting even into the 1930s, that HMI was seen almost as too progressive in fostering innovative and good practice.

The 1980s Rayner report examining the work of HMI summarised the role of the inspectorate as it developed during the twentieth century as:

> (a) to assess standards and trends throughout the education system and to advise central government on the state of the system nationally on the basis of its independent professional judgement.
>
> (b) to contribute to the maintenance and improvement of standards in the system by the identification and dissemination of good practice; by bringing to notice weaknesses which require attention; and by advice to those with a direct responsibility for the operation of the service… (DES/WO, 1982, para 2.4)

In essence the inspectorate had developed five main functions (Dunford, 1998), some of which have carried through into the 1990s:

- To inspect individual schools and colleges in terms of all or aspects of the quality of their work, which in the 1990s has become its central function;
- To advise, based on evidence, professionalism and experience, on the state and development of the education service and aspects of it, which it has continued to do;
- To write reports and memoranda, covering the wide range of HMI's work, the wider publication of much of which has only developed in the last twenty years;
- To train and update itself as well as teachers, heads, advisors and others through in-service courses, the latter function of which has declined in the last ten years;
- To act in an executive function in approving courses, a function which was passed to other bodies in the 1980s.

Dunford (1998) contends that HMI was much admired both within the education service and beyond for its impartial and professional advice, its supportive way of working to extend good

schools and to raise the standards of weak schools. Such goodwill continued broadly until 1988 at which point its work informed both the introduction of the national curriculum and the national testing of pupils in the core subjects. This proved a watershed, because the government identified the need to monitor schools to ensure that the new curriculum requirements and school management approaches were being introduced. The outcome was the 1992 Education (Schools) Act which defined the responsibilities of the Chief Inspector of Schools as to:

- inform the Secretary of State about the standards of education in schools;
- manage and regulate the national inspection system by independent inspectors;
- produce and publish reports on schools, including an Annual Report.

This Act also saw the setting up of the Office For Standards in Education (OFSTED) as a non-ministerial department into which all HMI were incorporated. Thus, OFSTED came into existence to inspect schools against specified criteria with judgements rooted in evidence drawn from a variety of sources, including classroom observation, interviews with teachers, heads, parents and governors, and curriculum and management documents produced by the school. While prior to the 1990s schools were selected for inspection, from 1992 the intention was to inspect every school (some 24,000 in England) every four years. The process began with secondary schools in 1993, with primary and special schools following in 1994 (Wilcox and Gray, 1996). By the end of the 1997-8 academic year the first round had been completed for primary schools. The second round of inspections began in September 1998 though the timescale had moved to inspection every six years.

To facilitate the process of inspection, OFSTED published the *Handbook for the Inspection of Schools* (OFSTED, 1993), in which the inspection requirements, criteria and methods are set out in detail. A revised version followed in 1995 (OFSTED, 1995). The initial 1993 Handbook focused on the standards of achievement and the quality of learning of the pupils and on the efficiency of the school, in effect 'value for money' (Levacic and Glover, 1997). In essence the emphasis was on

pupils' knowledge and understanding, basic skills (i.e. literacy and numeracy), learning skills (eg information gathering and problem solving), attitudes to learning and their progress in learning. Inspections also examined the quality of teaching, the nature and subjects of the curriculum, assessment, recording and reporting, pupils' personal development, behaviour and attendance, special education provision, school management and financial efficiency and resource quality and management, and links with parents and agencies in relation to educational welfare and support. Much of this was retained in the revised 1995 Handbook, but there was a shift of emphasis from pupils' learning to the quality of teaching. Further revisions introduced the use of a seven point scale for rating teachers' quality of performance (the mid-point of which is 'satisfactory', with 1 'excellent' and 7 'very poor') (OFSTED, 1997a, 1998). In other words, the emphasis moved from a focus on pupils to a stronger *scrutiny of teachers*, that is, from learning to teaching, harking back to the days of the Revised Code and to 'payment by results'. This change in perspective is further reinforced by the proposals in the 1998 Green Paper, *Teachers Meeting the Challenge of Change* (DfEE, 1998), which links appraisal more closely with teachers' pay. It argues that the appraisal process should take pupils' progress into account (DfEE, 1998, para 80).

Clearly, OFSTED has become a key component in the managerialist agenda of the 1990s. Lawton and Gordon (1987, p. 149) conclude their study of HMI with a warning: `One danger to be avoided is that of becoming more bureaucratized… As education becomes increasingly politicized, the independent professional voice of HMI will be needed more than ever'. This is not, however, what has come to pass. In 1999, the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment (1999, para 10) noted that: `Over recent years, there has been a growing expectation on the part of the public that public services will be more directly answerable to those who use them'. The members of that committee see OFSTED as contributing clearly to the 'audit society' (Power, 1997), providing information on performance which can act as a basis for further improvement. They note that there is a clear difference of perception among schools over whether

inspection is about increasing *accountability* or enabling *development* (House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, 1999, para 11*)*.

While noting that for many schools inspections are professionally conducted, the Select Committee commented in their Report that `*inspection by OFSTED can all too easily be perceived by the teacher as an inspection of the quality of the teacher him/herself, rather than of the snapshot of lessons observed that week*…We have no doubt that this perception magnifies the critical aspects of inspection felt by many teachers' (*ibid*., para 74, original emphases). Furthermore, `… it was acknowledged that the majority of teachers felt that the detrimental effects of inspection outweighed the benefits and, with heads, they felt that accountability was not improved through inspections' (*ibid*., paras 80-81). Some reasons for this negative impact of inspection on many teachers are offered by the Select Committee. These include: the transfer of pressure and workload to staff by a school's management team; the lengthy lead-in time of many inspections (recently shortened); the failure to plan supportively and effectively in some schools for inspection; the inability of the inspection process to take into account a school's own self-evaluation; concern about the grading of individual teachers, whose self-critiques may well lead them to consider they will be given moderate grades (*ibid*., para 78). `To these can be added the argument that teachers see inspections as a distraction and interference in their work, diverting attention from effective planning, teaching and assessment to meet an external agenda. Indeed, the Select Committee note that many schools see the inspection reports as uninformative and the follow-up actions as formalities rather than developmental' (*ibid*., para 82).

What emerges from the Select Committee's Report is a concern about the low level of confidence teachers place in the process, supporting earlier research and analysis (Laar, 1997; Ouston, Fidler and Earley, 1997; Fidler, Earley, Ouston and Davies, 1998; Maw, 1998) and born out by our own empirical work. The replacement in the 1990s of a well respected HMI process by what has come to be perceived strongly as an OFSTED approach designed to find 'what is wrong' with schools and

'weed out' poor (whatever that means) teachers - against criteria which, although published, many teachers have never seen and about which they remain unclear - has settled in place a perception that criticism, rather than a critique, is the purpose of inspection. Thus, it is not surprising that among the recommendations in the Select Committee Report is a strong statement that the Chief Inspector should work hard to promote the confidence of teachers and boost morale in the profession, seen as vital to improving standards, by promoting a positive and purposeful approach to school inspections.

Two conclusions from this brief outline of OFSTED's background can be drawn. First, OFSTED's role in reporting on `value for money' through the inspection of schools resonates with the rationale for setting up HMI in 1839. Teachers and schools must be seen to be accountable to government. Second, the approach to inspection is undermining the confidence and commitment of teachers. In the latter part of the nineteenth century teachers were demoralised by a system of inspection which claimed to concern itself with raising the standards pupils were required to meet, because - regardless of the impact of the teacher - school funding was determined by the achievements of pupils. At the end of the twentieth century when the determination to ensure that pupils' achievements are, once again, centre stage, many teachers feel equally undermined by the inspection system. While claiming to be robust, it has become bureaucratic. While purporting to make rigorous judgements that, in turn, have far-reaching consequences, it is perceived to be punitive and to base its assessments on far too narrow a set of evidence.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century teachers felt demoralised not only because of the impact of inspection under payment by results but also because many assistant inspectors were recruited to test the pupils and, in effect, make decisions about teachers' competence. To enable the mass inspection of schools in the 1990s a large army of contracted inspection teams was recruited. To attempt to ensure the integrity of the inspection process, OFSTED introduced a code of conduct in 1993 explicitly incorporating a `respect for persons' ethic. Yet by 1995 it was noticeable that

`respect for the integrity of teachers, pupils, parents and governors' and `sensitivity to the impact of judgements on others' had fallen by the wayside (OFSTED, 1993, 1995). Perhaps it is hardly surprising that there is a loss of faith in a system, even if it judges most teachers well, when bureaucracy and managerialism dominate.

Field Work and Discussion

In an attempt to articulate the relationship between the macro policy concerns that spawned OFSTED and the micro dynamics of classroom experience, we report on a qualitative study conducted by the authors. Ethnographic method was used to collect data over a three-year period with one of the authors acting as a participant observer in 3 different schools. Field notes were complemented by in-depth key informant interviewing (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984) of six teachers and two head teachers. Two focus group meetings were conducted with two groups of teachers (six in each) from two schools, approximately two terms after their experience of inspection. These meetings were recorded and transcribed. Follow-up telephone interviews were pursued with the focus group members individually one year after inspection. In total, the teaching staff consulted as part of this research represented OFSTED inspection experience in ten schools from three different Local Education Authorities.

Fears, Tears, Apathy and Resignation

> When I think about my future, it's totally changed what I'm going to do. When I first started I was going to be a head teacher, have my own school! And now I'm going to retire and move to a farm in Wales in two years time, as soon as I save up the money. I don't want to know about teaching, I don't want to know about anything. It fucking ruined my life! (Clare, three years into her career)

The teachers we observed and interviewed expressed a uniform dislike and distrust of the OFSTED process in general. Levels of stress reported appeared to increase from the announcement of an up-coming inspection and intensified throughout the run-up period. For example, in commenting on this phase Isobel said, `The build up of pressure started when we found out that OFSTED were coming and we felt we had to make ourselves into this perfect school, which put *tremendous* pressure on everybody. As time went on we all got *absolutely exhausted*, ratty with each other and the children. And the jobs just *didn't* stop coming. In the last term we were working day and night to get ready.' During the week of inspection itself, teachers spoke of `sleepless nights', `feeling a failure', `letting the side down' and being `just absolutely mentally and physically exhausted'. Apathy, anger and frustration were commonly expressed responses. For instance, Teresa said, `I felt like shit… I was less enthusiastic 'cause I was tearful. A couple of things went wrong the first day… of course [the next day was a] super stressed day. They were with me from nine o'clock right through to the end of the day. I thought if any one speaks to me I'll burst into tears.' Striking a similar note Christina described the OFSTED experience as a, `waste of time, waste of resources, energy and morale. The morale I think was the worst bit. I felt we were in a downward spiral. Everybody hit rock bottom - it was really sad.'

The fact that teachers may eventually have received an overall `satisfactory' `good' or `excellent' from inspectors – as many of the teachers reported on here did – and were perceived as `successful' from the system's point of view made little difference to the poor self-image that many developed during the inspection itself. For instance, Jenny, graded `good' by OFSTED, observed, `I felt I had underachieved and felt Christ, I'm a rubbish teacher- went really low.' Jenny also worried that, `Everyone else is so bloody good and I'm going to let them down.' A sense of fear, sometimes almost debilitating, pervaded most schools in the run-up to the inspection and throughout the week itself. Even though staff may reasonably have anticipated a `good' report for themselves and the school, teachers still experienced a high level of anxiety:

> No, we knew from the outset that we weren't going to fail, and if they'd said in September we're coming tomorrow, we couldn't have failed. But we really wanted the school to do very well. It was a collective fear… It was also that ultimate fear of failure for you as a teacher, so it was like, a double fear. Also I had the fear that if I fuck this up, I'm letting the whole school down, and that was a *horrible* fear. (Christina)

Teachers in our study commonly spoke of stress resulting in increased levels of illness and absenteeism. For instance, Isobel observed, `An extraordinary number of teachers have had time off from teaching, temporarily or giving up, because of the stress. They can't physically cope with it any longer. I did!' It was also not uncommon for teachers to contemplate and openly rehearse the idea of resignation or premature retirement. Anita typifies this response when she says, `Up until the OFSTED thing I loved teaching, and I still love teaching now, but at points last year I was planning to leave'. The prospect of further OFSTED inspections prompts equally strong reactions. Here are Rebecca's thoughts, `If we were going to have another OFSTED soon, I wouldn't stay. And if I was going for another job and I knew that they had an OFSTED coming up I wouldn't go for it. No way.' Allison, a NQT, felt deceived after taking up her first appointment: `I took the job, and the school knew there was going to be an inspection but they didn't tell me. If I had known I wouldn't have taken it. Not as my first job… I don't know how to say this, but I've been put off teaching…. Really been put off carrying on with teaching since last year.' Likewise, one year after inspection Liz reflected, `it took me three terms to recover. I couldn't function. I was slightly depressed and low. I just didn't have the enthusiasm for the job. I had a good, successful report that said lots of good things about me, but afterward I was so exhausted and came down with a bang. I felt like I should leave teaching because I couldn't do the job as well as before OFSTED.'

Several studies have considered the manner in which recent educational reforms have resulted in the effective `deprofessionalisation' of teaching. Jenny Ozga (1995), for example, explores the historically changing patterns of professionalism within teaching from a labour process standpoint. She concludes that the status of teachers at any given time depends on the form of structural control being exerted by the state. In the period 1929-1988, approximately, because it suited the establishment to remove the threat of socialist influence on curriculum content, teachers were granted a good deal more autonomy and discretionary power. However, the pendulum of professionalism swung too far the opposite way for the establishment's comfort in the post-war period leading up to the 1970s, with teachers imparting liberal values and `humanist educationalists' experimenting with the delivery of state schooling. Educational reform can thus be understood, in part, as a structural response on behalf of the New Right to such `liberal humanism', one consequence of which has been the effective deprofessionalisation of teaching and a return to more centralised control.

The notion of deprofessionalisation is not simply a structurally useful explanatory concept. It is acknowledged as part of the contemporary teacher's day-to-day experience and is reflected in phenomenological accounts of their working lives. At this level deprofessionalisation covers a range of symptoms associated with: (1) the removal of discretionary power in the area of pedagogy, and; (2) constraints imposed on teaching practice by having to meet the exacting bureaucratic criteria of OFSTED in the area of school development plans, policies, schemes of work, planning documentation, benchmarking and so forth. All these measures, according to our own and others' recent research result in teachers feeling that their professional status is under threat (see, for example, Jeffrey and Woods, 1996; Woods et al., 1997; Woods and Jeffrey, 1998). They also see the new managerialism as the introduction of a set of alien values that conflict with their own.

This is particularly true in the area of pedagogy and teaching methodology where teachers in our study felt themselves to be in conflict with the overall inspection process, if not the individual inspectors. Pedagogy is an issue with which teachers personally and emotionally identify (Nias 1989, Nias et al., 1989). Pursuit of a career in teaching is, after all, a vocational calling for most and hence criticism of teaching style and method is akin to *personal* criticism. As Rachel put it, 'It's just wrong, because people go into teaching because they are compassionate and they want to help. You wouldn't put up with the pay scale and having to do a four year degree and the changing conditions unless you were compassionate. Yet we're losing all that to the bureaucracy and having to do as we're told.' Others felt that bureaucratic imperatives and having to do things `by the book' has, 'taken all the creativity out of teaching' and 'it feels like you won't get creative teachers anymore, they'll get told "you can't do that, it's more important to keep your paperwork up-to-date"'. As Anita remarked, 'I certainly felt the creativity being stifled. After training and establishing what you believe, then you get into teaching and OFSTED and feel like *this* is totally contrary to what I believe in. Everything you trained to do, everything you practised, everything you believed in has changed in the last few years.'

Many teachers in our study commented openly on the frustration and resentment they felt as qualified and often highly experienced professionals being inspected by, as they saw it, 'outsiders'. This sense of being professionally compromised is illustrated well by a remark of Rebecca's: 'I felt like, hang on, I've got my degree, my qualification and years of experience, why do I have to be 're-qualified' here six years on – *six years on* - it's ridiculous.' Similarly, Teresa commented, 'Most teachers are so professional, and that's what I really hated, that they forget that we are professionals, why do they feel they need to come in, trying to find things that were not happening'.

Please Show You're Working

> [T]he regime of disciplinary power… brings five quite distinct operations into play: it refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of a rule to be followed. It differentiates individuals from one another… It measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the `nature' of individuals. It introduces, through this `value-giving' measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved. Lastly, it traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal… In short, it *normalizes*. (Foucault, 1977, pp. 182-3, original emphases)

The `normalizing gaze' of the Inspector. One of the most prominent aspects of the inspection process is its ability to engender a heightened sense of accountability amongst teaching staff. This is hardly surprising given that the instrumental procedures are *designed* to bring classroom teachers to account. From our standpoint, however, what is interesting is that whilst these measures do *appear* to work at one level (inspections occur, individual teachers and schools get graded, reports get written), this apparent functionality exacts a high price from those under scrutiny and, at the end of the day, has questionable consequences for teaching practice and the educational process. Following Ball (1990b, 1994) and Popkewitz and Brennan (1998) we find it useful to adopt a Foucauldian perspective in the interpretation of educational reform and the implementation of new managerial practices in general and the control technologies that accompany OFSTED `inspection' in particular. Foucault's (1977) concept of `disciplinary power' and the role of attendant notions, such as `panopticism' and `the examination', in bringing about `power effects' within the subjects of a given discourse, may be applied directly to an understanding of teachers' experiences of the inspection process. According to Ball (1990b, p.157), it is necessary to view managerial reform of schools as the imposition of an `imperialistic discourse'. `The language of management' he maintains, `deploys rationality and efficiency to promote control; it is a regime of "jurisdiction" and "verdiction"… it eschews or marginalizes the problems, concerns, difficulties, and fears of "the subject" – the managed.' As we have already established, most teachers are reluctant subjects of

this new discourse yet find it impossible to disentangle themselves from it entirely, short of resigning their posts.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault makes much of the `normalizing gaze' and `the examination' as a surveillance technique which, `establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them' (1977, p.184). The whole purpose of OFSTED inspection is to objectify the process of teaching; to make teachers *qua* subjects visibly accountable and comparable. For, `In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them' (*ibid.*, p. 187). Giving grades to teachers and schools makes them calculable and potentially subject to disciplinary measures. For example, OFSTED reports make explicit use of disciplinary language in the form of `the failing school' These individual assessments are reported to the head teacher who, in principle, has power to discipline teachers judged to have fallen below the norm. There have also been indications that the language of the `failing school' might soon extend to the assessment of individual teachers with OFSTED's Chief Inspector, Chris Woodhead, having been famously publicised[3] as referring to `failing teachers' (OFSTED, 1997b).

Self-Reflexive Stage Management. In our study, teachers themselves were not oblivious to the fact that they were being *made visible.* Clare, for example, observed that, `OFSTED just seems to pull together all the political crap that goes on, all the teacher bashing in the media, all the changes, literacy hour, SATs… and *you've got to be seen to do it all with OFSTED*' (authors' emphases). Teachers responded to the normalizing gaze, perhaps predictably, by preparing and delivering what they took to be more `formal' lessons than they would otherwise have done (see also Brimblecombe et al. 1996, p.130). A secondary consequence of the self-consciousness resulting from inspection, however, was that teachers became reflexively aware that they were involved in what many described as kind of `staged performance' for the inspectorate during the event itself; a phenomenon

also commented upon by Woods and Jeffrey (1998, pp.565-6) in their study. Erving Goffman (1969, 1972, 1986) famously employed dramaturgy as an analytical framework for explaining and interpreting social organisation. In the context of our study, however, dramaturgical awareness is something displayed by the teachers *themselves*, rather than an analytical concept invoked by the sociological observer. It is the teachers who make recourse to the theatrical metaphor with its associations of performance, staging and `inauthenticity'. Referring to the inspection process our interviewees made such observations as: `the whole thing felt really false, staged', `it was like a stage set', `[it was] stage managed; a bit false.' Allison describes a particularly burlesque moment during a class assembly: `I felt I had to pray – even though I'd never done it – and the children were really flummoxed because we never did it but I'd just spoken with the inspector who said the school should be seen to do prayer out loud.' So while the inspection process unquestionably subjects teachers to a Foucaudian disciplinary regime with which they outwardly comply, they are able at times, rather like the patients in Goffman's (1982) `total institution', to distance themselves from the bureaucratic requirements and thus maintain a sense of personal and professional integrity. In other words, they employ role distance in order to reintroduce a sense of personal autonomy and control over events.

Paperwork. Foucault (1977, p.189) point outs that, `The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them'. A recurring theme in teachers' accounts of the OFSTED inspection process was the onerous amount of paperwork, as they saw it; activities such as the duplication of levels of long-term planning, overly detailed assessment and record keeping and excessive lesson-by-lesson planning. Teachers made sense of this additional administrative work by viewing it as part of the `stage management' of their performance for the inspectorate. The detailed

[3] `Woodhead wants to see more sacked', *Times Educational Supplement*, 18th July, 1997

paperwork acted as visible `proof' that they were carrying out their duties[4]. As Julia pointed out, however, this preoccupation with record keeping directly impaired her teaching: 'There was an obsession with recording everything in writing so you could prove that you'd done it. And that's just not how we teach best. Something that might normally have been just a practical activity had to have some element of it written down.' In many cases this conflicted with priorities the school had set for its own development. Head teachers were observed to change tack and, in some cases, contradict themselves entirely as inspection loomed. Alice described one meeting, 'where the head teacher said we're not going to do all this. We're not going to go mad. We're just going to show the things we're good at, but once the pressure hit we did it all. And that caused the tension. We wanted not to have to come up with all the pretentious crap in the paperwork- lots of it was just bullshit- we didn't believe it but we knew we had to do it.' Liz felt the additional paperwork compromised her home life, 'I don't understand why they just can't watch you teach a good lesson, with assessment and continuity in place, and just accept the fact that as professional teachers with experience we are good enough, we don't need to write it all down. That's what takes your home life away. That's the stuff you're doing at night when you should be with your family. I don't know how many times I wrote things down like that and found it months later, knowing I never looked at it again!'

Intensified Accountability. The effects of accountability have intensified as a direct result of alterations to OFSTED policy which have seen a shift from the whole-school/group level to teacher/personal levels of formal assessment and the instigation of reporting individual teacher grading from 1997. Now, in primary schools, each lesson, or partial lesson, observed is graded on a

[4] There are obvious parallels here between OFSTED inspection and reports of `quality' initiatives in other organisations. The introduction of quality standards in commercial companies seeking BS5750 or ISO9000 accreditation for example, the fashionable appeal of Total Quality Management or the `paper chase' commonly experienced by university academics and administrators in the run-up to QAA evaluation all speak to an intensification of accountability translating into bureaucratic procedure (Kelemen, 1999; Power, 1994; Tuckman, 1995). While some argue that we are entering a `post-bureaucratic' era (Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994) we contend that, on the contrary, formal rationality is most definitely on the increase in the contemporary world (see, for example, Ritzer, 1993, 1998; Power, 1997; Porter, 1997) and seems likely to intensify with the advent of ever more sophisticated surveillance technologies (Bogard, 1996).

scale of 1-7, all teacher gradings reported to the head, and a short verbal feedback interview given to teachers at the end of the week (OFSTED, 1997a). Experienced teachers in our study noticed and remarked on this change in OFSTED procedure and suggested that anxiety heightened considerably as a result; a point also born out by the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment (1999) who point to there being little faith in the grading process because of its limited and questionable evidence base. As well as feeling personally 'under surveillance' and correspondingly evaluated, they also felt increasingly responsible for the whole-school grading. Often teachers felt that this shift in the level of perceived responsibility had been imposed from within the school. While discussing this issue, Clare said, 'I felt that *that* [whole school] responsibility was *made* mine, I wouldn't normally feel that way. And I don't think that was right from a management point of view. It was given to *us*, much more than it should have been'. Some head teachers appeared to have used the inspection process as an opportunity for implementing substantial overhauls to their policies and systems. This injected further tension into relationships between staff. Isobel recalled that, 'The head said, by way of explanation, when it was suggested we were preparing too much and everyone was cracking up, that "we're only just doing things we should have done before" even though he didn't acknowledge the fact that he had never thought it important to do them or planned for them to be done before. I really thought I was picking up the pieces from several years of mismanagement'.

Power Effects. Members of teaching staff also expressed confusion over the apparent contradiction between trying to `please OFSTED' whilst maintaining culturally embedded `whole-school values'. Julia describes her frustration, 'It used to be that, for example, SATs tests were just something we *did*, but didn't believe in, because we had to. But now, the head teacher says that you've go to do these *optional* Year 4 SATs-like assessment tests. And I'm thinking, "I thought you didn't *like* tests". But she's obviously got pressure on her to perform and to produce those benchmarking tables [for every year group], but then I think, we're not meant to be that kind of school.' What we see here is a perfect example of the `micro-physics of power' (Foucault, 1980) working to bring about

`power effects'. The disciplinary regime of OFSTED acts to transform or *translate* a previously quasi-stable set of relationships into a new set of relationships. This shift, moreover, is effected through the kind of complex semiotic interchange that Julia's observation neatly summarises. The regime redefines the meaning and relational role of head-ship vis-à-vis other staff; the introduction of instrumental measures of assessment and evaluation of children and staff redefines the meaning and relational role of teacher vis-à-vis pupils and other colleagues, and so on. These translations do not escape the conscious reflection of those implicated. They are at once *subjected-to* the power effects of the regime, *compliant-with* that regime, *aware-of* its effects in some degree and, occasionally, *resistant-to* the discipline. Having said that, in the case of recent educational reforms `compulsion' and `compliance' have outperformed `resistance'.

Conclusion: Longer-term Affects of the OFSTED Regime

In assessing the affects of OFSTED on teachers and teaching practice we are left to ponder something of a paradox. As our study shows, OFSTED has definitely had a substantial and often traumatic impact on the lives of many in the teaching profession. It has unquestionably changed relationships between staff and between teachers and pupils *in the phase running up to and including the inspection visit*. Our evidence also suggests that inspection has a negative affect on teaching practice in the post-inspection period. The fatigue produced by preparing for inspection actually *reduces* teaching effectiveness for a significant period of time following the visit. One year on from inspection Rebecca remarked, for example, that: `it's caused a lack of inspiration. You know those moments with the children when you take them that step further and it's magical and you know exactly where each child's at and how to take them on? All that's gone. Now it's just the basics because we're so knackered.' In a similar vein Liz said, `I think that the process overall has had a very detrimental effect, especially for the first two terms [after inspection] because of long-term fatigue. I felt cheesed off and demotivated. And *I* got a good grading and our school got a good report'. Typically teachers spoke of it taking 'a year to recover' after the inspection.

In the longer term, one might have expected the inspection process to alter teaching practices, or at least to result in the adoption of new forms of record keeping encouraged by OFSTED. However, when asked in focus groups and follow-up interviews `if' or `how' OFSTED had changed their day-to-day teaching practice in the long term teachers resoundingly and universally reported that it had had either minimal or no impact at all. Typical responses to direct questions about its affects included, `none whatsoever', `no, I just carried on with what I was doing before – so did everyone; that's what made all that extra effort so pointless'. Rebecca answered, `I've just gone back to doing what I did before – those things I'd already identified as useful. All the other stuff was a total waste of time'[5].

Our research data derive from successful schools and successful teachers by OFSTED's own standards. Teachers in these schools categorically assert that their effectiveness, and the corresponding achievement of their pupils, did not rise as a result of inspection. On the contrary, they claim it fell significantly due to the negative influences of what they perceived to be heavy-handed and excessive accountability. If these teachers are, indeed, successful, then we might reasonably assume that they are in an excellent position to evaluate teaching standards and pupil learning and that, accordingly, their voices should be attended to.[6] The amount of time the inspection affected the lives of children taught by the teachers in our study is not insignificant. Taking into account all the phases of the process (pre-inspection, inspection and post-inspection), we note that a single OFSTED inspection resulted in as much as a three-year disruption of teaching practice. For some children on the receiving end of the process this amounted to more than forty percent of their primary school career. If the reports of decreased teaching performance and quality

[5] A similar picture emerges from National Primary Centre research on the views of head teachers (Pyke, 1998). 60 percent of head teachers consulted felt staff morale was damaged, 53 percent said they'd learned nothing from the process and 53 percent felt they had been set back. Only 13 percent thought OFSTED had improved the school significantly. The Select Committee note the latter reaction in their report (House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, 1999).

[6] It is interesting to note that certain of the disquiets aired by teachers, headteachers and also noted by the House of Commons Select Committee report (1999) have been addressed by changes in OFSTED policy since our research was undertaken. In 1999 we witnessed a decrease in the amount of notice given to schools and an implementation of 'light touch' inspections for schools with a successful first report (Cassidy, 1999). Amongst other things, these innovations

are taken to be indicative of a broader pattern, it seems reasonable to suggest that the OFSTED regime amounts to a case of large-scale social experimentation with potentially very high costs indeed.

Although detailed, the relatively small-scale of our study places limits on the generalisability of the findings. However, our strong suspicion from anecdotal evidence is that the experience and accounts of the participants represented here are not atypical. According to Chief Inspector Chris Woodhead, the raison d'etre of OFSTED is to 'help define the school's agenda for the future', and in doing so, `make an important contribution to higher standards' (Woodhead, 1999). That OFSTED is altering the present and future `agenda' of schools is not in question. In marked contrast to Woodhead's second proposition, however, our study suggests that, far from improving performance, OFSTED is actually having a detrimental impact on the well being of teachers, the education process and hence the *qualitative standard* of schooling. This is also born out by parallel studies. While Woodhead would contend that inspection is having a positive impact in raising standards and that this must continue (OFSTED, 2000), Ferguson et al. (1999) challenge the claim that inspections `are primarily concerned with school improvement' (p.248). Indeed, the contention raised here that the affect of an inspection in lowering morale, exhausting teachers and leading to a lull in post-inspection development in school has a prolonged impact in many cases (Brunel University and Helix Consulting, 1999). Inevitably, less enthusiastic, tired and poorly motivated teachers provide less good teaching. This is not to say that representatives of OFSTED cannot appeal to the rhetoric of the formal `report' to argue that the inspection process `works' (OFSTED, 1999). The key question is *for whom* is it seen to work?

We speculate that in one crucial sense, OFSTED is little more than a grand political gesture or kind of cipher set up to *signify* that state education in the UK is being *held to account*. Just as classroom

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are intended to decrease in the amount of preparation schools can undertake and lessen stress for teachers in the run up to inspection.

teachers understand themselves to be stage managing a performance for OFSTED inspectors, so we might understand the entire OFSTED regime as performing `educational accountability' for the imagined gaze of a wider public. Although Woodhead would probably challenge this interpretation, it is precisely born out by the substance of the Chief Inspector's annual report (OFSTED 2000). The information and evaluation provided by an OFSTED inspection may form the diagnosis for school improvement (Ferguson et al., 1999), yet a strong perception of inspection being essentially about accountability persists. This may indeed `be counterproductive to school improvement' (Hopkins et al. 1999, p. 688). Indeed, in their study of an accelerated inspection programme Hopkins et al. (1999) conclude that, whereas trust between the school and OFSTED inspection system is vital, that is exactly what is missing for many teachers and schools.

Understood as an act of signification, OFSTED's existence depends substantially on exploiting and, in turn, contributing to a complex nexus of `victimisation' of the teaching profession. An interesting line of future sociological and media studies research might analyse the conditions that have facilitated this climate of victimisation. For our immediate purposes it is important to understand that the rhetoric of OFSTED *qua* `accountability cipher' by necessity *must* obfuscate, disguise and selectively disregard certain aspects of its affects on educational practice. To be a positive vehicle of discipline OFSTED must accentuate the negative. Above all else, it must show *it's* working.

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