

Governing By inspection: insights from international studies

Seminar organised by the Centre for Citizenship Identities and Governance and the Centre for Research into Education and Educational Technology

Friday 28 March 2014, 10:00-15:15

The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

Location: Christodoulou Meeting Rooms, Room 15

Maps and Directions: <http://www3.open.ac.uk/contact/locations.aspx>

Programme:

- 10:00-10:30 Registration and coffee
- 10:30-10:40 Welcome and introductions-Dr Jacqueline Baxter- Convenor
- 10:30-11:15 Dr Melanie Ehren - The Institute of Education: The Impact of School Inspections on Improvement of Schools.
- 11:15-12:30 Professor John Clarke -The Open University UK: The Uncertainty Principle: governing schooling through inspection.
- 12:30-13:15 Lunch
- 13:15-14:00 Dr Andrew Wilkins - The University of Roehampton: The Shadow of Inspection: School Governance, Accountability and Governing Practices
- 14:00-14:15 Coffee
- 14:15-15:00 Dr Jacqueline Baxter - The Open University UK: Working knowledge: shifting criteria in inspection
- 15:00-15:15 Summary and Close

Abstracts

Dr Melanie Ehren – The Impact of School Inspections on Improvement of Schools: Describing and Testing Assumptions on Causal Mechanisms

School inspections are assumed to have a great impact on what students learn and how they learn it but the intermediate steps between inspection and eventual student learning outcomes are vague. It remains largely unclear how various levers of change employed by inspectorates interact with each other to influence schools, and whether particular approaches and methods are more effective than others.

The research examines the program theory of Inspectorates of Education in six European countries (the Netherlands, England, Sweden, Ireland, Austria, and the Czech Republic) and the extent to which the common mechanisms in these program theories are supported by principals in primary and secondary education in these countries.

The program theory of these six countries includes a description of the common mechanisms through which Inspectorates aim to affect school improvement. The results indicate that inspection does result in significant impact on schools where clear expectations, norms and standards are set and where stakeholders are knowledgeable about and engaged with the process.

Inspection expectations may however also have some negative impact; principals indicate that new teaching approaches and curriculum experimentation may be hindered by concerns about these distracting from concentration on meeting the expected standards.

Professor John Clarke: The Uncertainty Principle: governing schooling through inspection.

Uncertainty runs through the work of school inspection in England as a linking thread, organising both practices and relationships between the different actors in the field. It underpins the threat/promise of inspection, since inspection creates uncertainty about the outcome for those being inspected. It is increasingly significant to the process, through the principle that the moment of inspection should not be anticipated or expected (to avoid 'gaming' by schools. However, inspection is also intended to reduce some types of uncertainty - of the performance gap between schools that might work against parents and children; and of variations in judgement between inspectors and inspecting teams. Both school performance and inspection performance should be of a comparable quality. Finally, inspection as a mode of governing is also the site of uncertainty: in austere times, does it have a future? How might that future be secured?

I will suggest that this widespread production and distribution of uncertainty creates sets of affective dynamics in the process and practice of inspection, which go beyond a well-established view of inspection evoking stress and anxiety towards a more troubled and troubling field of relationships.

Dr Andrew Wilkins: The Shadow of Inspection: School Governance, Accountability and Governing Practices

In England today public sector education is shaped by four interconnected, overlapping, contradictory trends: decentralization, responsabilization, marketization and re-regulation. The exponential rise of academies and free schools coupled with the ‘hollowing out’ of local government capture a rapidly changing and unstable education landscape characterized by shifting alliances, power struggles, new regulatory incursions and claims of a democratic deficit. Recent announcements and statutory guidance from the DfE (2013) and Ofsted (2011) highlight the huge liabilities and responsibilities to be undertaken by school governors working within such a ‘high stakes’ environment. In this role school governors are summoned to perform responsibilities and duties previously carried out by local government, namely to ensure strategic oversight and accountability. Effective governance therefore concerns managerial and technical compliance on the part of school governors, which include providing rigorous and regular finance, performance and risk assessment. To ensure schools are sufficiently business driven and intelligible to the market, school governors must periodically undergo training, audit and inspection as well as privilege particular forms of knowledge, participation and self-understanding. In this paper I draw on interview and observation data to consider: 1) the disciplinary practices and discourses through which school governors are summoned to respond to a regime of inspection and performativity, and 2) the impact of these trends on school governor relations and subjectivities.

Dr Jacqueline Baxter- Working knowledge: shifting criteria in inspection

National and international changes in the ways in which education is governed provoke tensions between regulation constituted as performance monitoring through target-setting and benchmarking and promotion of self-evaluation and ‘light touch’ inspections in a move towards self-improving systems. I argue that, in these conditions, knowledge becomes a resource for governing (Ozga, Grek, & Lawn, 2009), and as a result, inspectorates are currently subject to substantial pressures in terms of the ways in which evidence and expertise are defined and deployed in order to define notions of excellence and failure in education.

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<http://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/events/governing-by-inspection-insights-from-international-studies>