

The Uncertainty Principle: Governing Schooling through Inspection

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Governing Schooling through Inspection

UK/Swedish research project (2010-2014):
Three inspection regimes (England,
Scotland and Sweden) plus
Europeanization.

Why Inspect?

Why still Inspect?

Why Inspect in this way?

Inspection as Governing

- 1. it is ***directly observational*** of sites and practices. That is, in the case of schooling, inspectors are empowered (and required) to enter the world of the school and observe what takes place within.
- 2. it is a form of ***qualitative evaluation***, involving the exercise of judgement rather than the calculation of statistical regularity/deviation. Judgement is at the core of the activity and thus raises questions about the articulation of knowledge and power.
- 3. it is ***embodied evaluation***: the inspector is a distinctive type of agent whose presence is required at the site of inspection and who embodies inspectorial knowledge, judgement and authority.

The Uncertainty Principle

Producing
Distributing
Resolving
Uncertainty.

A field of uncertainty

And I do feel that we've got to the point about four, five years ago, that was the last time where, the Ofsted regime was more of a process where you discussed things, you showed evidence, you generally agreed on (those) things and there was a level of honesty and openness, that we got to, (it was) quite healthy. That's gone now. That's gone because of the uncertainty, it's gone because of the inconsistency in inspection, and also, because the framework's changed. And I think the bar has been moved up, maybe rightly so, people are more concerned about what the outcome is gonna be, rather than the process being supportive and, helping schools move forward. So it's become like it was 15 years ago, where it's, Ofsted are the enemy again. And that's a real shame. It's a real shame.

(Head Teacher_0008, December 2013)

The uncertainty principle?

Ofsted has been moving towards a position of unannounced school inspection over a period of years. I believe the time is now right for us to take that final step and make sure that for every school we visit inspectors are seeing schools as they really are in the corridors, classrooms and staffroom.

Sir Michael Wilshaw

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jan/10/schools-no-notice-ofsted-inspections?INTCMP=SRCH>

Distributing Uncertainty

We've already moved to say that outstanding schools don't need inspecting...

... so on the plus side they are saying 'we trust you', if you want to ... we trust you. I think that's great. I do think if senior leaders and heads change that, well we should be risk assessing. But then at the other end of the scale, we are saying we don't trust you, satisfactory, we don't trust, you at the bottom line they are saying we don't trust you and satisfactory's not good enough..... [P4: lead inspector]

Resolving uncertainty?

Now if Ofsted say no we are not signing it off, then it becomes a key performance indicator failure for the provider, so they are paranoid about this because they get slapped, you get contract action notices.....so you get tied up in these knots and in the end what inspectors are doing is saying ok well I have to follow this rule....there isn't a rule but I have to follow it.... [EPA02]

Producing consistency?

there is a dilemma here: those at the top in Ofsted talk about the freedom to use a rich lexicon, a broad vocabulary, about not being constrained but then when it comes to the QA of reports, and at present every school report is QA 'd by an HMI, whether written by an HMI or agency inspector, it is at that level that you get that sort of mentality..... This is a report that I did well over a month ago and it is still being changed, the wording is still being changedso you go on to the Ofsted website , search for reports written by me and I look at them and I think...mmm I didn't write that. Ok I did write it , but the language is very different, very different [L13]

A field of paranoid relationships?

The proliferation of uncertainty

A system of mistrust

Principal-Agent relationships

Ofsted suspects schools, teachers and LAs
and contracted inspections
and gaming, coasting, and wrong attitudes

Schools suspect inspectors, Ofsted and the
CHMI

Ofsted's Affects: 1

I know you're nervous but so am I. Your nervousness is well founded. You know my judgments are going to affect your future – and might put you out of work if things go badly.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2013/feb/02/what-really-thinking-ofsted-inspector>)

Ofsted's Affects: 2

Usually the anticipation of an event is worse than the event itself. This is not my experience of Ofsted inspections. This is my fifth full inspection as a head and still my anxiety levels are high each time. I didn't sleep that night.

The hardest part of any inspection in some ways is the days that follow, with all the staff feeling shellshocked and exhausted. I could hardly string a sentence together. We are left dazed and battered in their wake.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/dec/17/headteacher-on-a-knife-edge?INTCMP=SRCH>

Ofsted's Affects: 3

...one of the things we find is that people drop out of inspecting because, well it is very onerous, the task of looking a Head in the eye and saying no this school is inadequate is one of the most daunting jobs you could do in education because the chances are that if that head has been leading the school for some time then that head will go and that's what the statistics tell us.

Head of Inspection Services

Governing and Affect

- Governing Affect
- Governing through Affect
- The Affects of Governing

Wrestling with Uncertainty?

Producing and distributing uncertainty in inspection

Uncertain futures:

schools,
systems,
inspection

Unstable Affects

Governing By Inspection: The Project

Sotiria Grek and Joakim Lindgren (eds)
Governing By Inspection. Routledge,
forthcoming, 2014)

www.governingbyinspection.com