



The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity

Stephen J. Ball

To cite this article: Stephen J. Ball (2003) The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity, Journal of Education Policy, 18:2, 215-228, DOI: [10.1080/0268093022000043065](https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043065)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043065>



Published online: 09 Nov 2010.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 62043



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 555 View citing articles [↗](#)

The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity

Stephen J. Ball

This paper is the latest in a short series on the origins, processes and effects of performativity in the public sector. Performativity, it is argued, is a new mode of state regulation which makes it possible to govern in an 'advanced liberal' way. It requires individual practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations. To set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation. The new performative worker is a promiscuous self, an enterprising self, with a passion for excellence. For some, this is an opportunity to make a success of themselves, for others it portends inner conflicts, inauthenticity and resistance. It is also suggested that performativity produces opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organizations take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of fabrications.

In a recent newspaper article addressing the increasingly dominant role of numbers and statistics in modern society, Boyle (2001) made a simple but telling point: 'We take our collective pulse 24 hours a day with the use of statistics. We understand life that way, though somehow the more figures we use, the more the great truths seem to slip through our fingers. Despite all that numerical control, we feel as ignorant of the answers to the big questions as ever'.

Education reform is spreading across the globe, as in Levin's (1998) terms, like 'a policy epidemic'. An unstable, uneven but apparently unstoppable flood of closely inter-related reform ideas is permeating and reorienting education systems in diverse social and political locations which have very different histories. This epidemic is 'carried' by powerful agents, like the World Bank and the OECD; it appeals to politicians of diverse persuasions; and is becoming thoroughly embedded in the 'assumptive worlds' of many academic educators (see Ball 2001). The novelty of this epidemic of reform is that it does not simply change what people, as educators, scholars and researchers do, it changes who they are.¹

In various guises the key elements of the education reform 'package' – and it is applied with equal vigour to schools, colleges and universities – are embedded in three interrelated *policy technologies*; the market, managerialism and performativity. These elements have different degrees of emphasis in different national and local settings but they are closely inter-dependent in the processes of reform. When employed together, these technologies offer a politically attractive alternative to the state-

Stephen J. Ball is Karl Mannheim Professor of Sociology of Education and Director of the Education Policy Research Unit at the University of London, Institute of Education. He writes on education policy and social class and his latest book is *Class Strategies and the Education Market: the middle class and social advantage* (RoutledgeFalmer).

centred, public welfare tradition of educational provision. They are set over and against the older policy technologies of professionalism and bureaucracy. In more general terms, the new technologies of reform play an important part in aligning public sector organizations with the methods, culture and ethical system of the private sector. The distinctiveness of the public sector is diminished. Indeed, such alignments create the pre-conditions for various forms of 'privatization' and 'commodification' of core public services.

Policy technologies involve the calculated deployment of techniques and artefacts to organize human forces and capabilities into functioning networks of power. Various disparate elements are inter-related within these technologies; involving architectural forms, functional tests and procedures, relations of hierarchy, strategies of motivation and mechanisms of reformation or therapy.

When deployed together, the new technologies produce what the OECD (1995) calls 'a devolved environment' which 'requires a shift by central management bodies toward setting the overall framework rather than micromanaging . . . and changes in attitudes and behaviour on both sides' (OECD 1995: 74). The changing roles of the central management agencies in this new environment rest, as the OECD (1995: 75) put it, on 'monitoring systems' and the 'production of information'. It is with these aspects of reform, monitoring systems and the production of information, that this paper is primarily concerned. They engender what Lyotard (1984) calls the terrors of performativity.

What do I mean by performativity? Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement. The issue of who controls the field of judgement is crucial. One key aspect of the current educational reform movement may be seen as struggles over the control of the field of judgement and its values (see *Guardian Education*, 9.01.01, extracts quoted below). Who is it that determines what is to count as a valuable, effective or satisfactory performance and what measures or indicators are considered valid? Typically, at least in the UK, these struggles are currently highly individualized as teachers, as ethical subjects, find their values challenged or displaced by the terrors of performativity. Some ephemeral examples:

What happened to my creativity? What happened to my professional integrity? What happened to the fun in teaching and learning? What Happened? (G. E. Johnson).

I find myself thinking that the only way I can save my sanity, my health and my relationship with my future husband is to leave the profession. I don't know what else I could do, having wanted to teach all my life, but I feel I am being forced out, forced to choose between a life and teaching (Name supplied).

I was a primary school teacher for 22 years but left in 1996 because I was not prepared to sacrifice the children for the glory of politicians and their business plans for education (Christopher Draper).

It's as though children are mere nuts and bolts on some distant production line, and it angers me to see them treated so clinically in their most sensitive and formative years (Roma Oxford).

The ground of such struggles is often highly personal. Expressed in the lexicons of belief and commitment, service and even love, and of mental health and emotional well-being. The struggles are often internalized and set the care of the self against duty to others.

Despite all of this, the technology of performativity appears as misleadingly objective and hyper-rational. Central to its functioning is the translation of complex social processes and events into simple figures or categories of judgement. What one wants to attempt here is to 'get behind' the objective facade of this aspect of public sector reform and its technical rationalities of reform to examine the subjectivities of change and changing subjectivities which are threatened or required or brought about by performativity. I shall argue that the policy technologies of education reform are not simply vehicles for the technical and structural change of organizations but are also mechanisms for reforming teachers (scholars and researchers) and for changing what it means to be a teacher, the technologies of reform produce new kinds of teacher subjects. Such reform changes – one's 'social identity' (Bernstein 1996: 73). That is, education reform brings about change in 'our subjective existence and our relations one with another' (Rose 1989: ix). This is the struggle over the teacher's soul. Thus, I am concerned with a sense of who teachers are in relations with students and colleagues. The focus will be primarily upon performativity, but I shall also refer at times to the other policy technologies of reform identified above.

The appearance of freedom in a 'devolved environment'

The scope and complexity of the reform agenda is breath-taking. It relates markets to management, to performativity, to changes in the nature of the State in a policy discourse, as noted already, which foregrounds 'devolving authority' and 'providing flexibility' (OECD 1995: 29). The reforms are, thus, presented as giving 'managers and organizations greater freedom in operational decisions and remove unnecessary constraints in financial and human resource management' (OECD 1995: 29). However, crucially it is a mis-recognition to see these reform processes as simply a strategy of de-regulation, they are processes of *re-regulation*. Not the abandonment by the State of its controls but the establishment of a new form of control; what Du Gay (1996) calls 'controlled de-control' and indeed a new kind of state. In this way, the state also provides a new general mode of less visible regulation, a much more 'hands-off', self-regulating regulation. This is a new 'regulative ensemble' (Aglietta 1979: 101) which is an improvised mix of physical, textual and moral elements which 'make it possible to govern in an "advanced liberal" way' (Rose 1996: 58). Within this ensemble, teachers are represented and encouraged to think about themselves as individuals who calculate about themselves, 'add value' to themselves, improve their productivity, strive for excellence and live an existence of calculation. They are 'enterprising subjects', who live their lives as 'an enterprise of the self' (Rose 1989) – as 'neo-liberal professionals'. As Bernstein (1996: 169) puts it 'contract replaces covenant' or putting it another way, value replaces values – commitment and service are of dubious worth within the new policy regime.

Policy technologies

As has been indicated, the particular focus here is not primarily upon structures and procedures, but upon the re-forming of relationships and subjectivities, and the forms of new or re-invented discipline to which this gives rise. Within each of the policy technologies of reform there are embedded and required new identities, new

Table 1. Discursive interventions into the public sector.

subject positions	market	management	performance
	consumers	manager(s)	appraisee
	producers	(managed)	comparator
	entrepreneur	team	competitor
discipline	competition	efficiency/	productivity
	survival	effectiveness	targets
	income	corporate culture	achievement
	maximization		comparison
values	competition	'what works'	the performative
	institutional		worth of
	interests		individuals
			fabrication

forms of interaction and new values. What it means to teach and what it means to be a teacher (a researcher, an academic) are subtly but decisively changed in the processes of reform.

Table 1 gives some indications of the sorts of discursive interventions that the new policy technologies of education reform bring into play; it is not exhaustive. Throughout the installation of these technologies into public service organizations, the use of new language to describe roles and relationships is important, the reformed educational organizations are now 'peopled' by human resources which need to be managed; learning is re-rendered as a 'cost-effective policy outcomes'; achievement is a set of 'productivity targets', etc. To be relevant, up-to-date, one needs to talk about oneself and others, and think about actions and relationships in new ways. New roles and subjectivities are produced as teachers are re-worked as producers/providers, educational entrepreneurs and managers and are subject to regular appraisal and review and performance comparisons. We learn to talk about ourselves and the relationships, purposes and motivations in these new ways. The new vocabulary of performance renders old ways of thinking and relating dated or redundant or even obstructive. We must become adept at presenting and representing ourselves with this new vocabulary and its prescribed signifiers and the possibilities of being 'otherwise' to or within it are extremely limited (as the teachers quoted above and below found). This speaking of the vocabularies of reform texts is, as Morley (unpublished observations) describes it, a form of ventriloquism.

Furthermore, new ethical systems are introduced within the new regulative ensemble, based upon institutional self-interest, pragmatics and performative worth. This involves 'the ideological co-optation of the moral and ethical consciousness of the teachers' (Smyth *et al.* 2000: 86). The reform technologies play their part in 'making us up' differently from before by providing new modes of description for what we do and new possibilities for action. This re-making can be enhancing and empowering for some (but this has to be set over and against the potential for 'inauthenticity'; see below). The ethics of competition and performance are very different from the older ethics of professional judgement and co-operation. A new basis for ethical decision-making and moral judgement is erected by the 'incentives' of performance. Teachers are 'deprofessionalized' and 'reprofessionalized' (Seddon 1997). There is 'the possibility of a triumphant self' of becoming a new kind of professional or of entry into the ever expanding ranks of the executors of quality. We learn that we

can become more than we were and be better than others – we can be ‘outstanding’, ‘successful’, ‘above the average’. All of this involves, in one way or another, ‘intensive work on the self’ (Dean 1995: 581). This is work which some caught up in the struggle over what it means to be a teacher are unwilling to undertake (again see *Guardian Education*, 9.01.01).

The installation of the new culture of competitive performativity involves the use of a combination of devolution, targets and incentives to bring about new forms of sociality and new institutional forms. In education, the impact of such ideas is evident in the myriad of ‘institutional devolution’ and ‘site-based management’ initiatives being introduced in public sector organizations around the world. These institutions are encouraged to make themselves different from one another, to stand out, to ‘improve’ themselves. In effect, they are to take responsibility for transforming themselves and disciplining themselves and their employees; in the same way ‘employees are simultaneously required, individually and collectively, to recognize and *take responsibility* for the relationship between the security of their employment and their contribution to the competitiveness of the goods and services they produce’ (Willmott 1993: 522). Organization cooperation and older forms of collective relations among workers are replaced by performative competition.

Thus, the work of the manager, the new hero of educational reform, involves instilling the attitude and culture within which workers feel themselves accountable and at the same time committed or personally invested in the organization. These new managers, in part at least beneficiaries of reform, are the ‘technicians of transformation’ (May 1994: 619), or what Foucault calls ‘technicians of behaviour’, their task ‘to produce bodies that are docile and capable’ (Foucault 1979a: 294). In Bernsteinian terms, these new invisible pedagogies of management, realized through appraisals, performance reviews and forms of performance related pay, ‘open up’ more of the managed to control. The weaker frames of new managerialism enable a greater range of the workers’ behaviour and emotional life to be made public (Bernstein 1971: 65).

The act of teaching and the subjectivity of the teacher are both profoundly changed within the new management panopticism (of quality and excellence) and the new forms of entrepreneurial control (through marketing and competition). Two apparently conflicting effects are achieved; both an increasing individualization, including the destruction of solidarities based upon a common professional identity and Trade Union affiliation, as against the construction of new forms of institutional affiliation and ‘community’, based upon corporate culture. This involves a re-working of the relationships between individual commitment and action in the organization.

Again such developments are deeply paradoxical. On the one hand, they are frequently presented as a move away from ‘low-trust’, centralized, forms of employee control. Managerial responsibilities are delegated, initiative and problem-solving are highly valued. On the other hand, new forms of very immediate surveillance and self-monitoring are put in place; e.g. appraisal systems, target-setting, output comparisons. Troman’s (2000: 349) recent case-study work in UK primary schools found ‘low-trust’ to be in the ascendant in most of those studied, together with a proliferation of formal ‘security-seeking’ tactics, with resultant physical and emotional damage to teachers and high levels of ‘existential anxiety and dread’ (see also Chadbourne and Ingvarson 1998).

The struggle over visibility

As noted already, in the language of the OECD, at the centre of the reform of the public sector are 'monitoring systems' and the 'production of information' (OECD 1995: 75). It is the data-base, the appraisal meeting, the annual review, report writing, the regular publication of results and promotion applications, inspections and peer reviews that are mechanics of performativity. The teacher, researcher, academic are subject to a myriad of judgements, measures, comparisons and targets. Information is collected continuously, recorded and published – often in the form of League Tables, and performance is also monitored eventfully by peer reviews, site visits and inspections. Within all this, there is a high degree of uncertainty and instability. A sense of being constantly judged in different ways, by different means, according to different criteria, through different agents and agencies. There is a flow of changing demands, expectations and indicators that makes one continually accountable and constantly recorded. We become ontologically insecure: unsure whether we are doing enough, doing the right thing, doing as much as others, or as well as others, constantly looking to improve, to be better, to be excellent. And yet it is not always very clear what is expected. Indeed, Shore and Wright (1999: 569) argue, in relation to UK Higher Education systems of accountability, that there is an undeclared policy 'to keep systems volatile, slippery and opaque'. Not infrequently, the requirements of such systems bring into being unhelpful or indeed damaging practices, which nonetheless satisfy performance requirements. Organizations will do whatever is necessary to excel or to survive. In other words, these policy technologies have the 'capacity to reshape in their own image the organizations they monitor' (Shore and Wright 1999: 570).

Increasingly, the day-to-day practice is flooded with a baffling array of figures, indicators, comparisons and forms of competition. Within all this, the contentments of stability are increasingly elusive, purposes are made contradictory, motivations become blurred and self worth is uncertain. We are unsure what aspects of work are valued and how to prioritize efforts. We become uncertain about the reasons for actions. Are we doing this because it is important, because we believe in it, because it is worthwhile? Or is it being done ultimately because it will be measured or compared? It will make us look good! Do we know we are good at what we do, even if performance indicators tell a different story. Do we value who we are able to be, we are becoming in the labyrinth of performativity? Again, much of this reflexivity is internalized. These things become matters of self-doubt and personal anxiety rather than public debate. Smyth *et al.* (2000), discussing teachers' anxieties about their ability to cope with the multiple demands on their time, quote Mandy, who says of her colleagues:

... they're not coping very well, I think a lot of teachers blame themselves. It depends how confident you are I suppose, and if you know what you are capable of. I think a lot of people even subconsciously stop doing things to make it easier for themselves.

Constant doubts about which judgements may be in play at any point mean that any and all comparisons and requirements to perform have to be attended to. Selection and prioritization becomes impossible and work and its pressures intensify. In these ways, 'the capacities, conduct, statuses and duties of individuals are problematized and worked on' (Dean 1995: 565).

It follows then that these technologies have an emotional status dimension, as well as the appearance of rationality and objectivity. Thus, responses to the flow of performance information can engender individual feelings of pride, guilt, shame and envy. Quoting an English primary school teacher who appears in Jeffrey and Woods' (1998) powerful, moving and terrifying book *Testing Teachers* which deals with the UK regime of School Inspections (which may be an extreme case) and examines 'teachers experience of the inspections as a conflict of values, a colonization of their lives, and de-professionalization of their role' (back cover).

I don't have the job satisfaction now I once had working with young kids because I feel every time I do something intuitive I just feel guilty about it. 'Is this right; am I doing this the right way; does this cover what I am supposed to be covering: should I be doing something else: should I be more structured; should I have this in place; should I have done this?' You start to query everything you are doing – there's a kind of guilt in teaching at the moment. I don't know if that's particularly related to Ofsted [Office for Standards in Education, the agency responsible for the Inspection of Schools in England] but of course it's multiplied by the fact that Ofsted is coming in because you get in a panic that you won't be able to justify yourself when they finally arrive (Jeffrey and Woods 1998: 118).

Here then is guilt, uncertainty, instability and the emergence of a new subjectivity.² What Bernstein (2000: 1942) calls 'mechanisms of introjection' whereby 'the identity finds its core in its place in an organization of knowledge and practice' are here being threatened by or replaced by 'mechanisms of *projection*', that is an 'identity is a reflection of external contingencies' (Bernstein 2000: 1942).

Furthermore, the work of performativity produces what Lyotard calls *the law of contradiction*. This contradiction arises between intensification – as an increase in the volume of first order activities (direct engagement with students, research, curriculum development) required by the demands of performativity – and the 'costs' in terms of time and energy of second order activities that is the work of performance monitoring and management. The increases in effort and time spent on core tasks are off-set by increases in effort and time devoted to accounting for task work or erecting monitoring systems, collecting performative data and attending to the management of institutional 'impressions'. As a number of commentators have pointed out, acquiring the performative information necessary for perfect control, 'consumes so much energy that it drastically reduces the energy available for making improvement inputs' (Elliot 1996: 15; see also Blackmore and Sachs 1997). Survival and competitive advantage in the economy of education rests equally upon the energy of first order activities and the energy of second order activities (see below on *fabrications*) – producing the potential for what Blackmore and Sachs (1997) call 'institutional schizophrenia'.

There are other 'costs', as indicated already – personal and psychological. A kind of *values schizophrenia* is experienced by individual teachers where commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance. Here there is a potential 'splitting' between the teachers own judgements about 'good practice' and students 'needs' and the rigours of performance (see Bronwyn below). This can be illustrated again quoting teachers from Jeffrey and Woods (1998: 160) study of UK primary school Inspections. Veronica talked about resenting 'what I've done. I've never compromised before and I feel ashamed. It's like licking their boots; and Diane talked about a loss of respect for herself.

My first reaction was 'I'm not going to play the game', but I am and they know I am. I don't respect myself for it; my own self respect goes down. Why aren't I making a stand? Why aren't I saying, 'I know I can teach; say what you want to say', and so I lose my own self-respect. I know who I am; know why I teach, and I don't like it: I don't like them doing this, and that's sad, isn't it?

There are indications here of the particular performativity – the management of performance – which is ‘called up’ by Inspection. What is produced is a spectacle, or game-playing, or cynical compliance, or what one might see as an ‘enacted fantasy’ (Butler 1990), which is there simply to be seen and judged – a fabrication, as is referred to below. And, as the teacher also hints, the heavy sense of inauthenticity in all this may well be appreciated as much by the Inspectors as the inspected; Diane is ‘playing the game’ and ‘they know I am’. The teacher that is inspected here is not Diane. It is someone that Diane knows the Inspectors want to see and the sort of teacher that is hailed and rewarded by educational reform and ‘school improvement’. Being this ‘other’ teacher creates ‘costs’ to the self and sets up personal, ontological dilemmas for Diane. Her identity is called into question. Cloe, another teacher in Jeffrey and Woods (1998: 131) study explained:

You are only seen as effective as a teacher by what you manage to put into children’s brains so they can regurgitate in an examination situation. Now that’s not very satisfying to one’s life . . . My age group came into teaching on a tide of education for all . . . But I don’t care any more. I think that’s why I haven’t found my self because I do in fact care . . . I don’t feel that I’m working with the children, I’m working at the children and it’s not a very pleasant experience . . .

Again, Cloe is having real problems in thinking of herself as the kind of teacher who simply produces performances – of her own and by her children. This is not ‘who she is’ and in the heat and noise of reform she cannot ‘find herself’. Her commitments to and purposes for teaching her reasons for becoming and being a teacher have no place. Her relations with children are changed by reform, are *at* them rather than *with* them. These relations seem to her to be inauthentic. What Smyth *et al.* (2000: 140) call the ‘primacy of caring relations in work with pupils and colleagues’ has no place in the hard world of performativity. The discursive resources which made Cloe an effective teacher in her own eyes have been made redundant. Like the performative institution, the ‘reformed teacher’ is conceived of as simply responsive to external requirements and specified targets; and to paraphrase Bernstein (1996: 73), one can ask; ‘If the identity produced by [performativity] is socially “empty”, how does the actor recognize him/herself and others?’ This is exactly Cloe’s problem. Cloe’s story is a not uncommon one in the UK as the regime of performativity drives increasing numbers of teachers out of the education system (as above). Writing in a language of extremes, of conflict, a 56 year old, 30 year veteran, Head of Drama, accounted for his reluctant decision to leave teaching in a recent *Guardian Education* article (09.01.01), in this way:

Education has traditionally been about freedom. But there is no freedom any more. It’s gone. Initiative and resourcefulness are banned. Every school has become part of the gulag.

Again, the alienation of self is linked to the displacement of individual qualities, mechanisms of introjection, by responsiveness, external contingencies, the requirements of performativity. The result, inauthentic practice and relationships. Teachers are no longer encouraged to have a rationale for practice, account of themselves in terms of a relationship to the meaningfulness of what they do, but are required to produce measurable and ‘improving’ outputs and performances, what is important is *what works*. As another of Jeffrey and Woods’ (1995) teachers put it:

I never get the chance to think of my philosophy any more, my beliefs. I know what I believe but I never really put them into words any more. Isn’t your philosophy more important than how many people get their sums right? (Bronwyn).

This structural and individual schizophrenia of values and purposes, and the potential for inauthenticity and meaninglessness is increasingly an everyday experience for all. The activities of the new technical intelligentsia, of management, drive performativity into the day-to-day practices of teachers and into the social relations between teachers. They make management, ubiquitous, invisible, inescapable – part of and embedded in everything we do. Increasingly, we choose and judge our actions and they are judged by others on the basis of their contribution to organizational performance, rendered in terms of measurable outputs. Beliefs are no longer important – it is output that counts. Beliefs are part of an older, increasingly displaced discourse. Put another way, teachers like Bronwyn are seeking to hold onto knowledges about themselves which diverge from prevailing categories. These are now seen, in Foucault's terms, as 'knowledges inadequate to their task ... naïve knowledges ... disqualified knowledges' (Foucault 1980: 81–82). A new kind of teacher and new kinds of knowledges are 'called up' by educational reform – a teacher who can maximize performance, who can set aside irrelevant principles, or out-moded social commitments, for whom excellence and improvement are the driving force of their practice. Under a regime of performativity, 'identity depends on the facility for projecting discursive organization/practices themselves driven by external contingencies' (Bernstein 2000: 1942).

Embedded in almost all of the examples quoted are a set of dualisms or tensions. Tensions between belief and representation. On the one hand, teachers are concerned that what they do will not be captured by or valued within the metrics of accountability and, on the other, that these metrics will distort their practice. Alongside this is a further tension, indicated already, between metric performances and authentic and purposeful relationships.³ Again, this goes to the heart of what it means to teach. A Special Needs Teacher quoted by Sikes (2001) feels that her⁴ work is especially vulnerable to misrepresentation and distortion, again meaninglessness, and/or non-representation.

I know that they've made all sorts of noises about acknowledging the sort of work that we do, and so on and so forth but, on one level, that almost makes the whole thing meaningless. It's certainly patronising in my view. Because we can work and work with a kid and at the end of the period of time, what it is, a lesson, a week, a month, a term, a year, years, whatever, there's no discernible change ... so much about teaching is about relationships and there's something pathological about managing relationships; I think there is anyway. And what sorts of things can you measure? By and large things that don't matter – and I think that is particularly true of some of the kids that people I know work with.⁵

The other problem for teachers like this, working within a performative culture, is that their sphere of activity is unlikely to attract investment from performance managers. That is to say, if this teacher's school managers wanted to extract increases in performance as measured against external targets or competitive averages they would be unlikely to 'invest' in work with children with special needs where the margins for improved performance are limited.⁶ In the hard logic of a performance culture, an organization will only spend money where measurable returns are likely to be achieved. This is the conclusion of the research by Gray *et al.* (1999) that performance management is most likely to encourage a search for tactical improvements which result in short-term improvements.⁷ In this way, performativity not only engenders cynicism but has social consequences arising from the distribution effort and investment.

Crucially then, these new forms of regulation have both a social and interpersonal dimension. They are folded into complex institutional, team, group and

communal relations and penetrate mundane day-to-day interactions in such a way that the interplay of their collegial and disciplinary aspects become very murky indeed. Both the interactions and relations between colleagues and those between teachers and students are affected. In terms of the former, there are pressures on individuals, formalized by appraisals, annual reviews and data bases, to make their contribution to the performativity of the unit. In this, there is a real possibility that authentic social relations are replaced by judgemental relations wherein persons are valued for their productivity alone. Their value as a person is eradicated. This contributes to a general 'emptying out' of social relationships, which are left 'flat' and 'deficient in affect' (Lash and Urry, 1994: 15). Again, performance has no room for caring. These are not simply things done, as in previous regimes of power. These are things that we do to ourselves and to others. What is seen here is a particular set of 'practices through which we act upon ourselves and one another in order to make us particular kinds of being' (Rose 1992: 161).

Even so, while we may not be expected to care about each other we are expected to 'care' *about* performances and the performances of the team and the organization and to make our contribution to the construction of convincing institutional spectacles and 'outputs'. We are expected to be passionate about excellence. Our performances and those of the organization cannot be constructed without 'care'. Presentation, 'front' impressions 'given' and 'given off' must be carefully crafted and managed. They are part of the currency and substance of performance. As individuals and organizational actors the performances must be constructed or fabricated with artifice and with an eye to the competition. These things cannot be left to chance either in relation to the publication of performance indicators, the response to official judgements of quality, or the choices of clients and consumers. The term fabrication seems to capture the sense of deliberation involved here, sometimes involving 'bought-in' professional support, and the specificity or purposefulness of the intended effects and the almost inevitable element of cynical compliance inherent in making up responses to performativity.

Fabrications

The fabrications that organizations (and individuals) produce are based upon one, or some, of a possible range of representations or versions of the organization or person (see Ball 2000 for an extended discussion). These versions are written into existence in performative texts. They involve the use and re-use of the right signifiers. Complex organizations like schools and universities are multifaceted and diverse, indeed they are sometimes contested and often contradictory. Within a performative regime, it is likely, however, that the choice of those representations which are to be privileged and cultivated will be 'informed' or driven by the priorities, constraints and climate set by the policy environment – examination results, retention, racial equality, social participation. Performativity is promiscuous. Fabrications are versions of an organization (or person) which does not exist – they are not 'outside the truth' but neither do they render simply true or direct accounts – they are produced purposefully in order 'to be accountable'. Truthfulness is not the point – the point is their effectiveness, both in the market or for Inspection or appraisal, and in the 'work' they do 'on' and 'in' the organization – their transformational and disciplinary impact. That is to say: 'To be audited, an organization must actively transform itself

into an auditable commodity' (Shore and Wright 1999: 570). To put it another way, 'Colonization through audit fosters "pathologies of creative compliance" in the form of gamesmanship around an indicator culture' (Elliott 2001: 202). Significantly (Gray *et al.* 1999) also quote a headteacher who describes his use of tactical improvements as 'the improvement game'. Diane, the teacher quoted earlier, also uses this metaphor. Fabrications conceal as much as they reveal. They are ways of presenting oneself within particular registers of meaning, within a particular economy of meaning in which only certain possibilities of being have value.

However, such fabrications are deeply paradoxical. In one sense, organizational fabrications are a way of eluding or deflecting direct surveillance they provide a facade of calculation between the organization and its environment. However, in another sense the work of fabricating the organization requires submission to the rigours of performativity and the disciplines of competition. There is a surplus of meaning in such exercises. A surplus which spills over into the everyday life of the organization. Fabrications are both resistance *and* capitulation. They are a betrayal even, a giving up of claims to authenticity and commitment, an investment in plasticity, as the teachers quoted earlier indicate.

... the generalization of an enterprise form to all forms of conduct may of itself serve to incapacitate an organization's ability to pursue its preferred projects by redefining its identity and hence what the nature of its project actually is (du Gay 1996: 190).

Crucially, acts of fabrication and the fabrications themselves become embedded in and are reproduced by systems of recording and reporting on practice. They also work to exclude other things which do not 'fit' into what is intended to be represented or conveyed. They may be reactive or defensive or satisfying, as suggested above, or innovative and proactive or differentiating. They must render the organization into a recognizable rationality which is underpinned by 'robust procedures', punctuated by 'best practice' and always 'improving', always looking for 'what works'.

There is a second paradox which arises here. Technologies and calculations which appear to make public sector organizations more transparent may actually result in making them more opaque, as representational artefacts are increasingly constructed with great deliberation and sophistication. This arises in part from the gamesmanship noted above, from 'creative accountancy' and on occasion from more straightforward misrepresentation or 'cheating' as teachers and principals find themselves under pressure to perform or 'improve' in a competitive environment.

Within all this, organizations in different market positions are likely to arrive at different forms of strategic response. Those in a weak 'market' or performance position may well submit to becoming *whatever it seems necessary to become* in order to survive. Performance improvements may become the only basis for decision-making. The heart of the educational project is gouged out and left empty. Authenticity is replaced entirely by plasticity. The organization becomes an 'auditable commodity'. For others, in a stronger 'market' or performance position the impact of performativity may be different; either forms of complacency or reinforcement and/or the possibility of retaining commitment to non-performative values and practices. Elite institutions are the best places to evade the judgements of the 'technicians of transformation'.

Increasingly, public sector institutions are also required to construct a variety of formal textual accounts of themselves in the form of development plans, strategic

documents, sets of objectives, etc. (as are individuals in the form of annual reviews and appraisals). Symbolism is as important as substance here. Such texts symbolize and 'stand for' the corporate consensus of the institution, and indeed these exercises in institutional extrapolation can also work as a means of manufacturing consensus – the focusing of activities around an 'agreed' set of priorities (Ball 1997). They provide a touchstone of shared endeavour which displaces or subsumes differences, disagreements and value divergencies. Again, while fabrications are at their most obvious in the form of major events, glossy publications and formal plans, they are also part of day-to-day social relations and practices and the routine selection and manipulation of data (see Ball 1997, for examples) and the selection of effort. The ethical practices of teachers and managers are a second order casualty in all of this. Effectivity rather than honesty is most valued in a performative regime.

The performative society

It is not that performativity gets in the way of 'real' academic work or 'proper' learning, it is a vehicle for changing what academic work and learning are! At the heart of Lyotard's thesis is his argument that the commodification of knowledge is a key characteristic of what he calls 'the post-modern condition'. This involves not simply a different evaluation of knowledge, but fundamental changes in the relationships between the learner, learning and knowledge, resulting in 'a thorough exteriorization of knowledge' (Lyotard 1984: 4). Knowledge and knowledge relations, including the relationships between learners, are de-socialized. It is this externalization and de-socialization that the teachers quoted early are struggling with and against.

Underlying this is the dissemination of 'marketness' (Robertson 1996) or the enterprise form as the master narrative defining and constraining the whole variety of relationships within and between the state, civil society and the economy. As the OECD (1995: 89) explain it, 'Reform must also address other aspects of the performance of the public sector, including its wider role in the economy and in society generally. Pushing current reforms further, monitoring and evaluating progress, and managing the evolving role of the state must remain broad priorities'.

Within the public sector, the process of 'exteriorization' also involves a profound shift in the nature of the relationship between workers and their work – 'service' commitments no longer have value or meaning and professional judgement is subordinated to the requirements of performativity and marketing – although I have noted the element of 'cynical compliance' in play in the processes of individual and institutional fabrication. This is part of a larger process of 'ethical retooling' in the public sector which is replacing client 'need' and professional judgement with commercial decision-making. The space for the operation of autonomous ethical codes based in a shared moral language is colonized or closed down. This, thus, plays its part in what Sennett (1998) calls the 'corrosion of character' and what Power (1994) terms a 'regress of mistrust'. The policy technologies of market, management and performativity leave no space of an autonomous or collective ethical self. These technologies have potentially profound consequences for the nature of teaching and learning and for the inner-life of the teacher. They 'are not simply instruments but a frame in which questions of who we are or what we would like to become emerge' (Dean 1995: 581).

Notes

1. This paper is the third iteration of a series on performativity (Ball 2000, 2001). This version draws on but develops the previous ones. This version has also been re-worked from papers given at national conferences in Argentina, Finland and Portugal.
2. Subjectivity is:
patterns by which experimental and emotional contexts, feelings, images and memories are organized to form one's self image, one's sense of self and others, and our possibilities of existence (De Lauretis 1986: 5).
3. Although, as various commentators have pointed out, it is not impossible to conceive of a system of benign or progressive metrics, related to reducing social inequalities for example. The question is whether the form and substance of performativity can be separated out. I have my doubts.
4. It is almost certainly not by chance that almost all of the teachers quoted in this paper are women. The gendered nature of educational reform and of performative technologies and its encounters with a gendered teacher professionalism and discourses of commitment and care needs further attention – 'New educational structures and modes of regulation must therefore be assessed in order to expose their gendered manifestations' (Dillabough 1999: 390). It is also important to begin to situate Inspectorial gazes within broader feminist analyses of 'the gaze'.
5. Of course, the other aspect of this sort of talk is the issue of teachers' expectations and the way in which for some children relationships can become a substitute for performance.
6. As Lazear (2001), among others, notes, there are also distributional effects to be attended to here.
7. Unless that is a complex metric is designed to target these low margin areas: see for example Lavy's (2001) account of teachers' performance incentive tournaments in Israel.

References

- AGLIETTA, M. (1979) *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: the US experience* (London: New Left Books).
- BALL, S. J. (1997) Good school/bad school, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 18(3), 317–336.
- BALL, S. J. (2000) Performativities and fabrications in the education economy: towards the performative society, *Australian Educational Researcher*, 17(3), 1–24.
- BALL, S. J. (2001) Grandes políticas, un mundo pequeño. Introducción a una perspectiva internacional en las políticas educativas, in M. Andrada, M. Narodowski and M. Nores (eds), *Neuvas Tendencias en Políticas Educativas: Alternativas para la Escuela Pública* (Buenos Aires, Granica), 103–128.
- BERNSTEIN, B. (1971) On the classification and framing of educational knowledge, in M. F. D. Young (ed.), *Knowledge and Control* (London: Collier-Macmillan).
- BERNSTEIN, B. (1996) *Pedagogy Symbolic Control and Identity* (London: Taylor & Francis).
- BERNSTEIN, B. (2000) Official knowledge and pedagogic identities: the politics of recontextualising, in S. J. Ball (ed.), *The Sociology of Education: major themes* (London: RoutledgeFalmer).
- BLACKMORE, J. and SACHS, J. (1997) *Worried, Weary and Just Plain Worn Out: gender, restructuring and the psychic economy of higher education*. Paper presented at the AARE Annual Conference, Brisbane.
- BOYLE, D. (2001) *The Observer Review*, 14 January, 1.
- BUTLER, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge).
- CHADBOURNE, R. and INGVARSON, L. (1998) Self-managing schools and professional community: the professional recognition program in Victoria's schools of the future, *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 25(2), 61–94.
- DEAN, M. (1995) Governing the unemployed self in an active society, *Economy and Society*, 24(4), 559–583.
- DE LAURETIS, T. (1986) Feminist studies/critical studies: issues, terms and contexts, in T. de Lauretis (ed.), *Feminist Critical Studies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press).
- DILLABOUGH, J.-A. (1999) Gender politics and conceptions of a modern teacher: women, identity and professionalism, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20(3), 373–394.
- DU GAY, P. (1996) *Consumption and Identity at Work* (London: Sage).
- ELLIOTT, J. (1996) Quality Assurance, the Educational Standards Debate, and the Commodification of Educational Research, *Paper presented at the BERA Annual Conference*, University of Lancaster.
- ELLIOTT, J. (2001) Characteristics of performative cultures: their central paradoxes and limitations as resources of educational reform, in D. Gleeson and C. Husbands (eds), *The Performing School* (London: RoutledgeFalmer), 192–211.
- GIDDENS, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity).
- GRAY, J., HOPKINS, D., REYNOLDS, D., WILCOX, B., FARRELL, S. and JESSON, D. (1999) *Improving Schools: performance and potential* (Buckingham: Open University Press).
- JEFFREY, B. and WOODS, P. (1998) *Testing Teachers: the effect of school inspections on primary teachers* (London: Falmer Press).
- LASH, S. and URRY, J. (1994) *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage).

- LAVY, V. (2001) *Evaluating the Effect of Teachers' Performance Incentives on Pupil Achievement*. Unpublished paper, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- LAZEAR, E. P. (2001) *Paying Teachers for Performance: incentives and selection*. Unpublished paper, Hoover Institution and Graduate School of Business, Stanford University.
- LEVIN, B. (1998) An epidemic of education policy: what can we learn for each other?, *Comparative Education*, 34(2), 131–142.
- LYOTARD, J.-F. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge*, vol. 10 (Manchester: Manchester University Press).
- MAY, T. (1994) Transformative power: a study in a human service organisation, *Sociological Review*, 42(4), 618–637. *OECD Countries* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).
- POWER, M. (1994) *The Audit Explosion* (London: Demos).
- ROBERTSON, S. (1996) Markets and teacher professionalism: a political economy analysis, *Melbourne Studies in Education*, 37(2), 23–39.
- ROSE, N. (1989) *Governing the Soul: the shaping of the private self* (London: Routledge).
- ROSE, N. (1992) Governing the enterprising self, in P. Heelas and P. Morris (eds), *The Values of the Enterprise Culture* (London: Routledge), 141–164.
- ROSE, N. (1996) Governing 'advanced' liberal democracies, in A. Barry, T. Osborne and N. Rose (eds), *Foucault and Political Reason: liberalism, neo-liberalism and rationalities of government* (London: UCL Press), 37–64.
- SEDDON, T. (1997) Markets and the English: rethinking educational restructuring as institutional design, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 18(2), 165–186.
- SENNETT, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character: the personal consequences of work in the new capitalism* (New York: W. W. Norton).
- SHORE, C. and WRIGHT, S. (1999) Audit culture and anthropology: neo-liberalism in British higher education, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 5(4), 557–575.
- SIKES, P. (2001) Teachers' lives and teaching performance, in D. Gleeson and C. Husbands (eds), *The Performing School: managing teaching and learning in a performance culture* (London: RoutledgeFalmer), 86–100.
- SMYTH, J., DOW, A., HATTAM, R., REID, A. and SHACKLOCK, G. (2000) *Teachers' Work in a Globalising Economy* (London: Falmer Press).
- TROMAN, G. (2000) Teacher stress in the low-trust society, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21(3), 331–353.