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# SISYPHUS 1

## FRAMEWORKS OF REGULATION: EVIDENCE, KNOWLEDGE AND JUDGEMENT IN INSPECTION

*Edited by*  
JENNY OZGA & MARTIN LAWN



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*Sisyphus – Journal of Education* aims to be a place for debate on political, social, economic, cultural, historical, curricular and organizational aspects of education. It pursues an extensive research agenda, embracing the opening of new conceptual positions and criteria according to present tendencies or challenges within the global educational arena.

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# Frameworks of Regulation: Evidence, Knowledge and Judgement in Inspection

Introduction by Jenny Ozga & Martin Lawn (Editors)

## INTRODUCTION

This issue of *Sisyphus* draws on work in the research project ‘Governing By inspection: school inspection and education governance in England, Scotland and Sweden’<sup>1</sup>. That research seeks to fill a gap in the literature on the governing of education by examining the ways in which inspection regimes may be understood as *governing* education—in this case in the three national education systems of Sweden, England and Scotland. There has been an increase in inspection activity throughout Europe (SICI, 2008), indeed there are increasingly coordinated efforts for the internationalisation of inspection outcomes in and beyond Europe as a consequence of the policy drive to improve the performance of education systems in Europe and globally, given added urgency by anxiety about the Lisbon objectives and the impact of economic crisis (Grek, Lawn, Ozga & Segerholm, 2013). In this fluid and uncertain context, there is a search by those ‘doing’ governing for more effective means of governing complex education systems (OECD, 2012), a search that is pre-occupied with

<sup>1</sup> Governing by Inspection: Education Governance and School Inspection In England, Scotland and Sweden funded by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) and the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (Bilateral RES 062 23 2241A). The authors acknowledge the support of their respective research councils.

establishing transferable models of governance that are effective in education systems characterised as ‘increasingly complex’ and as requiring a ‘knowledge system’ to support the effective governance of complexity. Inspection may be an element of such a system, or it may be threatened by the ubiquity and apparent reliability of data on performance: this is one of the questions that we set out to explore in our research. Indeed, it was and is our aim to locate inspectorates in the changing landscape of education, to explore the governing work that they do, and to seek to conceptualise their role in transnational and national education governance.

OECD defines the problem of governing education in terms of the need to respond to pressure from ‘below’: change is required, they say, because parents have become more diverse, individualistic and highly educated, and because the rise of data on school and pupil performance (strongly promoted by OECD’s PISA), has made stakeholders ‘more demanding’. In this framing of change, increased school autonomy is presented as a consequence of ‘demand sensitivity’ and competition that has apparently arisen spontaneously. The tensions that OECD and national governments identify as needing to be addressed through better modelling follow, in this analysis, from the combination of a need to ensure high quality, efficient, and innovative education in building a strong knowledge economy while operating under the condition of increasing complexity. This formulation presents ‘complexity’ as a naturally-occurring state, and obscures the extent to which the pursuit of neo-liberal principles of system re-design has contributed to the construction of complex, and possibly contradictory governing processes and relations, including increased individualisation and competition, and the entry of new actors-including commercial agencies, into the governing arena.

The papers in this collection all address the complexity of changes in education governance, but do not take complexity as a given. They implicitly relate increased complexity to the nature of the neo-liberal project: this is, indeed, a project that generates complexity, consisting as it does of a combination of so-called ‘market forces’, accompanied by absences (of state responsibility) and enabled through a battery of regulatory instruments and management practices. Furthermore, neo-liberalism has changed its shape over time, moving from a predominantly economic doctrine to one that encompasses political and social life; from a set of principles that guide key political actors to a programme for the creation of the conditions in which markets could most effectively function. Some key aspects are worth underlining here: firstly the

structural tensions in neo liberal system design between the fundamental commitment to reducing the role of the state and enabling system and self regulation through the market, and the need to use state regulation in order to get the market to function ‘properly’ as a distributor of goods (including ‘public’ goods). This creates constant pressure for increased regulation and centralization (for example in England in the centrally-driven push to create different kinds of schools, including Academies and Free Schools). Secondly, there is a commitment to information as the key to a well-functioning market driven society: the provision of information is necessary in order to encourage intelligent choice making and rational action, including investment in education to reduce risk and manage the future. This creates problems in terms of the management of information: complex performance data do not flow freely and require management at the very least, and possibly even ‘translation’.

Inspectorates are often translators of data-based system knowledge into actionable or practical knowledge for their national governments, as well as-in varying degrees-for schools, teachers and pupils. In fact inspection offers a key location for the exploration of governing tensions: yet inspection as governance is relatively under-researched: existing work is largely located in the national both methodologically and theoretically. It is often normative (either seeking ways to improve the relationship between inspection processes and continuous improvement or critical of the perceived negative effects of inspection on teacher/school/local autonomy). The work reported here comes from a different perspective: it is informed by earlier research on the role of data in system steering and governing (Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm & Simola, 2011) and by contemporary scholarship on the changing nature of governance (see, for example Clarke, 2008, 2009; Jacobsson, 2006). This study moved the lens of enquiry from data and their associated technologies to the key system actors-the inspectorates of education-who carry a complex mix of responsibilities and who might be said to embody the current tensions in governing. Inspectorates stand in a particular relation to ‘governing knowledge’ (Grek, Lawn & Ozga, 2009). They combine embodied and encoded knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991) by bringing their expert judgement and objective data into relationship with one another; they have responsibility for ensuring that knowledge about system performance is translated into use by policy makers at all levels, and by practitioners; and they are also — to different degrees — engaged in building improvement and knowledge about improvement within



and across systems. At the same time Inspectors are responsible for ensuring that (sometimes shifting) accountability requirements are met: to greater or lesser degrees they claim independence from central governments, and offer public judgements about the performances of education systems that have political implications (Clarke, 2004).

The selected national sites in our study and their interconnections are particularly productive for the exploration of the governing work that inspectors do in their national contexts and across Europe. As indicated earlier, there is growing activity by the Standing International Conference on Inspectorates (SICI) in Europe and beyond to assert and expand the role of inspectorates in mediating data and in promoting transnational policy learning in the European education policy space (Grek et al., 2013). Furthermore the three national systems in our study — England, Scotland and Sweden — offer a range of contrasting approaches to inspection, all of which have been subject to major change during our period of study (2010-2013). There is a continuum from the centralised and highly regulatory policy space of Ofsted in England, to the re-regulated space of Sweden, where inspection was reintroduced in 2003, to Scotland, which promotes its model of self-evaluation and ‘learning’ throughout Europe and beyond. Productive contrasts between Scotland and England exist in the histories and practices of inspection, and these contrasts are sharpened within the UK by increased education policy divergence following political devolution, especially since the election of a Scottish national party government in Scotland in 2007 and 2011, and the arrival of the UK coalition government in 2010 (Ozga, Baxter, Clarke, Grek & Lawn, 2013). The changing politics of Sweden also provide an important element in our study (Rönnerberg, 2009) and help explain the uneasy blend of old and new practices in the re-formed Swedish inspectorate. We turn now to a brief discussion of the research methodology.

## GOVERNING BY INSPECTION: THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Inspection is not new, but the contexts in which it now operates greatly extend the demands upon it, and requires attention to the work of inspectorates in doing governing work. In this edition of *Sisyphus*, our primary focus is on exploring the relationship between knowledge and governing, as illustrated by inspection. So we are drawing here on those aspects of our research that



deal with the forms of knowledge that are prioritized in inspection events, in reports and training, and our evaluation of the relationship between judgement and evidence in these processes. We have considered the extent to which the introduction of private sector practices and commercial partners changes the nature of the knowledges that are prioritized in inspection, and we have attempted to highlight differences and similarities in the knowledge forms in play across the three systems. Methodologically, we focused our enquiry on the incidence and management of the ‘tensions in governance’ that are encapsulated in inspection, with particular attention to the ways in which these tensions play out in the relation between ‘judgement’ and ‘evidence’ in the inspection process.

In the following paragraphs we provide some background information on the overarching project methodology, as a guide to the data gathering and analysis that informs the papers presented here, as we did not want to repeat this information throughout the collection. In carrying out the investigation the following research questions guided the enquiry:

*At the (inter)national/national interface:* Is there an emergent European Inspection policy and how is it constructed? How do global/European ideas of inspection practice and processes for compulsory schooling enter the three national policy-making spaces?

*At the (intra) national/local interface:* What are the key characteristics of the three national systems of Inspection, and to what extent are they divergent or convergent? What forms of knowledge do they prioritise, and what is the relationship between judgement and evidence in these processes?

*At the (inter)national/local/school interface:* How do local inspection processes enter school policy? How are they negotiated? What are the characteristics of inspection processes and what constitutes evidence and judgement in the operation of inspection?

The research was divided into three phases. The first mapped European contexts of inspection through a review of relevant policy literature, official texts and web-based information to study trans-national influences on inspection in the national policy contexts, with particular attention to the agenda setting and policy learning capacities of SICI. We carried out interviews with national



actors in all three systems (30 in total) with responsibilities for ‘brokering’ international and European policy influences plus 10 interviews with policy actors responsible for European developments in inspection, including senior SICI personnel. The second phase mapped Intra-National and National Inspection Regimes through a study of the background, training, experience and ‘assumptive worlds’ of each national Inspectorate, their claims to expertise and their modes of operation. Data were gathered from published official documentation and also from the inspectorates themselves. The third phase, Mapping Inspection Practices, involved case studies of a sample of inspection ‘events’ (4 in each system) and their consequences at national/local and municipal levels through interviews and the study of local responses to inspection recommendations. Data were gathered from two sources: (i) the documentation required for inspection, including self-evaluation reports, inspection reports and post-inspection development plans (ii) interviews with key system and school level actors at (20 interviews in each system, 60 in total). We also undertook a detailed analysis of a large sample of inspection reports.

## EVIDENCE, KNOWLEDGE AND JUDGEMENT IN INSPECTION

In the papers in this issue, we focus particularly on illustrating the tension that we discern between the regulatory function of inspection in the context of growing ‘complexity’ caused by information and competition, and the translation and developmental roles of inspection, that is, the work that inspectors do in providing a national (and international) picture and in supporting improvement in schools. In different ways, the papers here address some of the problems that are now embedded in inspection processes, and the three national contexts from which we draw also offer different ways in which these problems are being addressed—though it should be noted that they also illustrate the extent to which the framing of these problems is shared and distributed across Europe.

In Paper 1 *Knowledge, Inspection and the Work of Governing*, Jenny Ozga offers a discussion of the relationship between knowledge and governance and of approaches to inspection as governing work. The paper argues that a new relation between governing and knowledge can be identified in the ways in which expertise now moves beyond the traditional task of policy-informing,



conventionally done through elite or professional knowledge production in bureaucratic, hierarchical relations, towards 'applied' or integrated expertise in the formation of policy in a more complex form of governing. The paper consider a number of ways in which the transformation of knowledge and the transformation of governance are conceptualized, and suggest the interdependence of these developments, before offering some exemplification of this governing-knowledge relationship and its development drawn primarily from data from England.

Paper 2 *Travelling Inspectors and the Making of Europe: Education Policy Learning and the Case of the Scottish School Inspectorate* by Sotiria Grek examines education policy learning in Europe and argues that, contrary to dominant assumptions, education is a fruitful area for the analysis of Europeanising processes. Through examination of the case of the Scottish school inspectorate's 'European' exchanges a new level of 'political work' (Smith, 2009) is identified: that of exporting, internationalising and then importing afresh one's local/national knowledge, once it has successfully gone through the international 'test', and is therefore still relevant and future-proof (to the nation).

Paper 3 *Seeing Like an Inspector: High Modernism and Mētis in Swedish School Inspection* by Joakim Lindgren uses John C. Scott (1998)'s ideas to discuss how the Swedish state sees education, as it relies upon its technical and juridical rationality. Drawing on cross-case study data from inspection processes, it is suggested that inspectors' work involves a dual optic. On the one hand, regular supervision is explicitly conformed to a regulatory evidence-based model derived from ambitions to develop universal, objective, and neutral judgements. On the other, the concrete work of inspectors does entail modification, adaptation, and mediation of rules, templates, schemes, and standard procedures.

In Paper 4 *Outsourcing the Governing of Education: The Contemporary Inspection of Schooling in England*, Martin Lawn explores the privatization of the schools inspection service in England and the private companies who manage it, through contracts. These companies hire flexible and part time inspectors who may be led by a small number of permanent HM inspectors. This shift in the highly regulated inspection service has introduced new methods of operation, market based behaviours and commercial confidentiality into the education sector and contrasts with the older, elite, judgement-based advisory work of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI).

Paper 5 *Knowledge, Authority and Judgement: The Changing Practices of School Inspection in England* by Jacqueline Baxter and John Clarke looks at the ways in



which inspection frameworks in England involve the construction and mobilisation of particular conceptions of knowledge, judgement and expertise that have changed over time and between different inspection regimes. In the work of Ofsted, these changing constructions and mobilisations of knowledge are also linked to the changing practices and criteria used in the evaluation of school performance: most dramatically the reclassification of the evaluation grade of 'satisfactory' to 'requires improvement'. The paper explores the political and governmental pressures that drive changes in the construction and mobilisation of knowledge in school inspection and consider what new problems may arise as a consequence of such changes.

Jenny Ozga  
Martin Lawn

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## **KNOWLEDGE, INSPECTION AND THE WORK OF GOVERNING**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the relationship between knowledge and governing as exemplified by the governing work of school inspection. We argue that there have been changes in the practices and processes of both governance and knowledge in recent years, and suggest that these changes are interdependent, contributing to a new relationship between governing and knowledge. The interdependence of governing and knowledge may be identified through attention to the ways in which expertise, especially expertise in developing 'practical knowledge' has moved from the traditional task of *policy-informing* conventionally carried out through elite or professional knowledge production in bureaucratic, hierarchical relations, to the 'applied' or integrated use of expertise in the *formation* of policy in a more complex, networked form of governing. The paper discusses approaches to conceptualising these transformations of governance and of knowledge, before offering some exemplification of the governing-knowledge relationship and its working in practice that draws primarily on data on inspection in England, but with some contrasting points from Scotland. For more detailed discussion of the knowledge-governing relationship and its impact on inspection in Sweden see Lindgren 2014 (in this issue).

### **KEY WORDS**

Knowledge; Governing; Inspection; Regulation; Meditative governing.



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# Knowledge, Inspection and the Work of Governing

Jenny Ozga

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with the relationship between knowledge and governing, as illustrated by our<sup>1</sup> current research on the work of the inspectorates of schools in England, Scotland and Sweden<sup>2</sup> Details of the project methodology are given in the introduction to this issue. Put briefly, our hypothesis is that, as governing has changed to become more networked, less bureaucratic, more flexible and interrelated, so too has knowledge changed, moving from its traditional construction and location in disciplinary silos into a more problem-based form, involving new actors in its production, working in new ways. We suggest that these changes have the effect of reconstituting knowledge as policy-forming rather than policy-informing and that attention to the shifting forms of knowledge and knowledge production is informative in enabling better understanding of the contemporary governing of education. In examining the role of knowledge in the work of the inspectorate, we

1 This paper draws on the collective work of the project team: Jacqueline Baxter, John Clarke, Sotiria Grek, Agneta Hult, Martin Lawn, Joakim Lindgren, Linda Rönnerberg, Christina Segerholm — so I use the term ‘we’ throughout.

2 Governing by Inspection: Education Governance and School Inspection In England, Scotland and Sweden ESRC Bilateral RES o62 23 2241A. The author acknowledges the support of her research council.

draw on earlier work in which some members of the inspection project team were involved, work that interrogated the relationship between knowledge and policy<sup>3</sup> Referencing ideas developed by colleagues in that project, we take knowledge to be socially constructed (Smith-Merry, Freeman & Sturdy, 2008) and to emerge in close proximity to social, economic and political contexts (Grundmann & Stehr, 2012, p. xiii). We shall attempt to illustrate this argument later in the paper, through close examination of some elements of the work done by and in the processes of knowledge production in the school inspectorates of England and Scotland. Before moving to the empirical data, however, we first need to discuss the approaches to knowledge and governance that inform our work.

## GOVERNING KNOWLEDGE

Governing knowledge has developed in relationship with the growth of performance management regimes, alongside decentralisation and deregulation: in these regimes data enable goal-governed steering of outputs and outcomes, accompanied by the monitoring of targets. This is a repertoire that reflects the global circulation, adoption and adaptation of neo-liberal principles in the design of ‘reform’ and restructuring programmes across all social and public policy fields. Policy and provision have been distributed or decentralised to a range of actors and agencies, including, in some cases, private companies (Ball, 2012; Ball & Junemann, 2012). Government now presents itself as the ‘enabler’ of provision and the ‘ringmaster’ of internal markets. In England — a leading exponent of neo-liberal principles — repeated attempts to engineer competition in education and elsewhere have produced waves of market-oriented reforms combined with increasingly centralised prescription of school policies and direct technical, rather than political accountability to the centre (Ozga, 2013; Ranson, 2003). Figure 1 (below) summarises our understanding of the changes in governing with which we are concerned here.

The key element of these developments on which we focus in this paper is the centrality of knowledge and information (especially information about comparative performance) to the neo-liberal project (Hayek, 1969). In the neo-liberal imaginary, society is organised in networks held together through the

3 See [www.knowandpol.eu](http://www.knowandpol.eu).

BUREAUCRACY	POST-BUREAUCRACY
State-centred	Polycentric
National	Inter, trans, sub, national (Europeanisation)
Main actors: formal policy-makers, professionals [academics]	A greater diversity of actors
Actors/organisations clearly defined by state and sector	Permeable boundaries, more interdependent
Hierarchical organisation and formal regulation	Hierarchy partially blurred. More involvement of non-formal actors
Action through norms (+ incentives) seeking mainly to change the rules	Action through knowledge (reflexivity) also changes understanding of problems and relations

FIGURE I (ADAPTED FROM DELVAUX AND MANGEZ, 2008)

flow of comparative knowledge and data, and standards, benchmarks and indicators serve to manage some of the tensions that arise between centralised and decentralised levels of governance, deregulation and (re-) regulatory instruments of governance. The complex landscape created by neo-liberalism's adherence to the principle of diversity in provision (so that choice and competition can operate appropriately) produces an increasingly varied set of activities and institutional arrangements. Public-private hybrids offer education services, provision is shaped by parental choice and other new public management methods, and this 'systemless system' (Lawn, 2013) requires the production and circulation of apparently objective data that conceal the 'messiness' and complexities of national and local education practice through 'thin descriptions' making statistical data a key governing device (Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm & Simola, 2011). In this respect, the policy technologies in play in education reflect Grundmann and Stehr's assertion that, in current conditions, knowledge claims are most powerful if they are trans-historical and trans-situational, and that:

the decline or loss of the context-specificity of a knowledge claim is widely seen as adding to the validity, if not the truthfulness, of the claim (Grundmann & Stehr, 2012, p. 3).

Through these developments, the nature of knowledge is altered, as the explosion of knowledge production in recent years combined with its increased capacity to travel at speed produces a more intense and intimate relationship between knowledge and governing. As a recent OECD publication puts it: «the key question

posed is: how do governance and knowledge mutually constitute and impact on each other in complex education systems?» (Fazekas & Burns, 2012, p. 6). In this mutually-constitutive relationship, policy problems do not appear in the external environment but rather are called into being (Stehr, 1994, p. 10) through their statistical representation from which solutions are (apparently) also derived. As Grundmann and Stehr suggest, knowledge becomes relevant when «it includes the policy options that need to be manipulated» [and such] «practical knowledge (...) provides knowledge that identifies the levers for action» (op cit., p. 179). The need to identify levers for action acts to change the processes of knowledge production and circulation in governing networks. This ‘practical knowledge’ is activated and transferred in situations that are not fully defined through routine processes, where precedent is not referenced and institutional memories are absent or excluded. Knowledge in this mode is equated with and promoted as creative problem-solving and optimised through co-production of new knowledge that can be implemented in action. Creative thinking, innovation and problem-solving are frequently valued over and above the consolidation of so-called static knowledge stocks. Figure 2 (below) summarises some of the key elements in the shift in knowledge, its production and circulation.

KNOWLEDGE	KNOWLEDGES
Dominant legitimacy of academic knowledge and professional knowledge	Diversity of knowledges. Legitimacy of both scientific knowledge and know-how from experience
Limited number of specific legitimate knowledge holders (professionals, academics)	Diversity of actors producing «legitimate» knowledge
Disciplinary knowledge Segmented, fragmented, specialised knowledges Little attempt at transversality and globality. Silos	Policy-oriented K and evidence based policy Future-oriented What(ever) works Whatever solves problem Flexible K, light K, provisional K Usable, readable, auditable, translatable
Relatively slow circulation of knowledge, mainly within closed entities	Intensification and internationalisation of movement of knowledge (and partial opening-up of previously closed entities)

FIGURE 2 (ADAPTED FROM DELVAUX AND MANGEZ, 2008)

An example from a leading exponent of ‘practical knowledge’ may help to clarify this point. Sir Michael Barber headed the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit (PMDU) from 2000-2005 in the UK Cabinet Office during Blair’s second administration. Here he explains the PMDU’s approach to data use:



Because we had some targets or goals that were public, we started from the targets. So we worked back from a target. So if you're talking about the patterns, we're looking for things that indicate we're on track or not to meet the target. (...) That's basically all we did. (...) So we didn't go into it with a kind of open research point of view where we say what are the many questions we could ask about this data. That's a perfectly valid thing to do but it wasn't our job. So we're going in with a particular perspective... And that's broadly how we did that. Because we were very focused on delivering the outcomes (Barber, 2014, pp. 77-78).

This statement illustrates the ways in which governing problems are 'framed' (Goffman, 1974), and the close alignment of that framing with political priorities, so that knowledge production is drawn into supporting the legitimacy and authority of target-setting and performance monitoring. Knowledge and policy are produced discursively as a form of cultural political economy (Jesop, 2008) that combines semiotic and material elements in changing the nature of knowledge and its role in governing. Policy makers suggest that social cohesion and effective government are interdependent, and now depend on integrating knowledge as well as on integrating, accommodating and managing different interests. This positioning promotes an agenda for the future in which potentially disruptive energies are harnessed to promote a discourse of continuous scientific and technical advance that also ensures social harmony (Mulderrig, 2008, p. 167). In these processes, new kinds of policy instrument are needed to organise political relations through communication/information and thus legitimate that organisation. Data, invoked as the basis for action, enable the appearance of deregulation and the development of dispersed, distributed and disaggregated forms of governing, while organising political relations through 'intermediaries' that combine technical and symbolic elements and displace politics (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007, p. 6).

These new, apparently inclusive and transparent forms of knowledge production and distribution appear more accessible and actionable than traditional (elite) knowledge production processes. Government bureaucracies were conventionally based on local, simplified, static and centrally controlled knowledge available only to those who produced and worked with it, but post-bureaucratic networked governing is decentralised, future-oriented, processual, autonomous and fluid (Issakyan, Lawn, Ozga & Shaik, 2008) and generates similar knowledge forms. Its networked nature (in the sense that it is



co-produced by different networks of policy makers, experts and practitioners) promotes its easy exchange and hence its operation as one of the prime engines of marketization within neo-liberal economies (Thrift, 2005), and as the driver of 'cognitive capitalism' (Moulier Boutang, 2011).

## NEW KNOWLEDGES, NEW GOVERNING SKILLS

These new governing forms, and the knowledges that support them, create a demand for new governing skills and new kinds of governing work from particular groups of actors who are positioned at key points of intersection of knowledge production and practical problem-solving. This work demands skills in translating information into 'practical knowledge', mediating conflict and brokering interests (Clarke, 2008; Larner & Craig, 2005; Lendvai & Stubbs, 2006). There is a growing literature on the influence, interconnections and work of networks of experts (Ball, 2012; Ball & Junemann, 2012), who promote cognitive consensus that makes political action easier. These experts are: «more than the diffusers of ideas; they develop conceptual knowledge in order to promote educational reforms, drawing on their substantial experience as policy advisers to governments and IOs». Moreover: «their attributes as experts and consultants tend to obscure the ideological and political dimension of their activities of knowledge production for policy» (Shiroma, 2014, p. 2). The rapid growth of experts, advisers and consultants in education arises from the rapid expansion of knowledge, along with its increasingly contested nature: this provides opportunities for simplification of the problem of endless competing interpretation in order to provide a basis for action (Grundmann & Stehr, 2012, pp. 20-21).

Simplification may also be achieved through a focus on comparison (Grek et al., 2013; Nóvoa & Yariv-Maschal, 2003; Ozga et al., 2011): this removes the need for attention to context and enables knowledge to travel. The power of comparative knowledge is reinforced by its de-contextualised nature and thus its appearance of validity as noted above by Grundmann and Stehr. Comparison frames knowledge-governing relations through establishing three key principles (i) that regular and systematic assessments are truthful practices for the improvement of national education systems; (ii) that such improvement has to be analysed in relation to the pace of change of other countries; (iii) that international comparison of student performances develops the quality of



national education systems while capturing educational complexity and diversity (Carvalho, 2012). Comparative data, then, are more than information: they constitute what Jacobsson refers to as a 'script' for nation-states: a script that allows nations states to remain 'strong national actors' but attracted to, and voluntarily complying with, 'soft' rules (Jacobsson, 2006, p. 208). Jacobsson (2006, pp. 208-209) goes on to develop the idea that, in the current context of changing governance, three sets of interconnected forms of governing activity may be identified, that are developing sequentially. These he terms *regulative* (evidenced in formal laws and directives) *inquisitive* (a second stage reflecting the rapid and widespread growth of auditing and ranking) and *meditative* (the stage where lessons learned from regulation and audit may be considered and developed through the sharing of ideas and experiences).

The idea of governing work as meditative is useful for our research because, although meditative governing work builds on regulation and auditing, it encompasses these activities, and in identifying spaces for policy learning and teaching, and for the presentation of ideas and models it echoes, from a different perspective, arguments about co-production, translation and mediation. For our purposes, it is important that these processes of meditation, negotiation and collective, integrated working are recognised as part of a *governing repertoire* and as governing practices. The term 'meditative governing' recognises the new kinds of governing work and the new kinds of skills involved in the creation of what Sassen (2007) calls «imposed consensus» entailing «specific types of actual work, not merely decision-making» (ibid., p. 37), through which various actors are drawn together in governing projects. Put differently, meditation also draws attention to what Clarke calls the work:

of inscribing policies as a process of translation between the desires or ambitions of a political project and the institutional terrains of the apparatuses of governing (Clarke & Ozga, 2011, p. 2).

This is «political work»; i.e. work that «both discursively and interactively seeks to change or reproduce institutions by mobilising values» (Smith, 2009, p. 13). This work of translation, mediation, meditation and consensus-building, mobilises or articulates political blocs; builds alliances, negotiates and reconciles interests, and assembles projects that define the direction and purpose of governing (Clarke, 2009, p. 2).



In brief, what we suggest here is that these new governing forms, that seek to integrate knowledge production with governing work, and that are preoccupied with enabling a process of collaboration that is productive of ‘imposed consensus’, require different kinds of skills from their key workers, including inspectorates in the field of education, and that the work that inspectorates do may be more fully understood from this perspective. We attempt to justify this assertion in the next section by offering some instances of that work and its framing in England, as a strong exemplar of the neo-liberal governing project, with some brief contrasting references to Scotland.

#### REGULATED REGULATORS: INSPECTION IN ENGLAND

Inspectorates may be understood as epistemic communities (Haas, 1992), with strong claims to expertise: they are positioned as mediators and translators of information, because of their particular and unique positioning in the work of governing. As Clarke (2011) has pointed out there are three distinctive aspects of inspection as a mode of governing: (i) 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 it; (ii) it is a form of qualitative evaluation, involving the exercise of judgement rather than only 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 and (iii) 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. Inspectors come to these tasks with varying degrees of historically-framed experience and expertise. They have always combined embodied and encoded knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991), although the balance between the two shifts over time and in different contexts. Inspectors bring their expert judgement and ‘objective’ data into relationship with one another, within more or less prescribed parameters; they are responsible for making knowledge about system performance available for translation into use by policy makers at all levels, and by practitioners; and they are also to a greater or lesser degree engaged in building improvement and knowledge about improvement within and across systems. At the same time inspectors are responsible for ensuring

that (sometimes shifting) accountability requirements are met: to greater or lesser degrees they claim independence from central governments, and offer public judgements about the performances of education systems that have political implications (Clarke, 2009). This summary of their characteristics highlights the fact that inspectorates embody complex and layered identities: the ways in which they have related to governing work and to knowledge have changed, and continue to change, over time.

A major source of change in the governing work of inspectors — as indicated in our earlier discussion — is the growth of data. In England, the commitment to data use in governing education has been particularly strong (Ozga, 2009) and the growth of data and its centrality in engaging ‘the public’ in governing remains a strong commitment in the UK coalition government’s statements about public sector reform in England. Education is the site of intensive data production, freely available to parents and others — much more transparency and unmediated information was promised when the coalition took office in 2010, and the knowledge-governing relationship is sharply illustrated in this excerpt from its first major education policy text, that also prefigured significant changes in the work of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted):

We will dismantle the apparatus of central control and bureaucratic compliance. We will instead make direct accountability more meaningful, making much more information about schools available in standardised formats to enable parents and others to assess and compare their performance. (...) In future: parents, governors and the public will have access to much more information about every school and how it performs (DfE, 2010, p. 72).

In the context of education policy in England, this commitment to more and better data, from a variety of sources, is accompanied by the construction of the active citizen-consumer, actively engaged in the extensive interrogation of evidence in order to make the best investment choices from a range of increasingly differentiated learning opportunities as centrally-driven intervention drives the creation of new school types (Academies, Free schools). Such a construction creates obvious difficulties for the traditional role and claims to authority of the inspectorate in England (as data translators and the source of independently generated system knowledge). This traditional role has a long history, but it is a history that has been disrupted. Though Her

Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) of Education in England traces its origins to the 1830s, Ofsted is a much newer creation, established in 1992, it came into being because HMI were seen by the modernising governments in the late 1980s and 1990s as elitist, as more focused on influencing government than on improving school performance, and as vulnerable to producer capture.

Ofsted came into existence with the promise that every school (primary and secondary) in England would be inspected within four years, and would then receive repeated inspections. The much-expanded scope of inspection required a change in personnel: HMI were reduced from over 500 to around 300, and the bulk of the work of inspection was sub-contracted. The recruitment of this new inspection force, employed initially by a large number of commercial contractors and, from 2005 by just three — SERCO, TRIBAL and CfBT — required efforts to ensure standardisation and consistency across the system, in the absence of the coherence previously achieved through unwritten rules, professional expertise and social cohesion of HMI. As a result there was a massive increase in inspection documentation, including inspection frameworks and handbooks—a shift that is also a shift in the governing knowledges that are being mobilised and circulated. There is a move away from the pre-reform resources — often implicit — of officer-class social behaviour, combined with professional experience and (at least in some cases) subject or pedagogic expertise, to the following of rules constructed elsewhere, and able to be applied in (increasingly) different school types.

There were constant changes to inspection frameworks within the period 1992-2010, accompanied by changes in the accompanying handbooks and web-based documentation.

Analysis of these key texts (Baxter, 2013; Clarke, 2011) reveals quite sharp contradictions in the knowledge claims and their relationship to governing that they contain: there is little evidence of an orderly progression from inquisitive to audit and thus to meditative forms of governing-knowledge relations, to use Jacobsson's (2006) terms. Instead there is oscillation between tighter and looser forms of regulation, and an unresolved tension between data use and inspection judgement. The picture is complicated by the entry of commercial, competitive agencies into the field (for further discussion see Lawn in this issue): this means that the frameworks attempt to impose consistency and quality control alongside pressures to minimise costs and maximise profit. Price is a key determinant in winning and keeping contracts, as this quotation from an inspector involved in training at one of the three providers illustrates:

I was working for xxx [agency tendering for inspection contracts] — they didn't have a clue. It was all on price not quality, they dropped the quality for the price. [The other agencies] both had much more quality. Going back to xxx, when they were brought in they really didn't have a clue, they were dreadful, awful (...) they didn't know what they were doing, they are better, but it's taken time, around 2 years before they could even get a handle on what they had to do (Lead Inspector 14)<sup>4</sup>.

Contracts also influence the ways in which knowledge can be shared between the three commercial contractors; as one inspector reported:

It would be good to share this good practice across agencies, but they [the inspection agencies] often consider this business-sensitive information; to be used when the contracts come up for renewal (Lead inspector, 12).

Whatever the requirements of the different frameworks of inspection, the key criteria (pupil attainment levels in relation to national performance targets) continue to dominate. Furthermore, the pre-inspection process ensures that data dominate: inspectors use data to arrive at a baseline evaluation using centralised data banks that provide detailed pupil-and class level information over time, on the schools performance against national targets and in relation to comparator schools. This forms the basis of the pre-inspection commentary (PIC) that guides the work of the inspection team. The process is also very strongly influenced by the speed with which it must be undertaken. Here we want to draw attention to the work of recording the inspection judgement in the very tight timescale of writing the report (which must be with the school's governing body by the end of the week of the inspection) and the inevitable reliance on formulae and concern to 'get it right'. The monitoring system that such a complex knowledge production regime generates is also significant in shaping the knowledge base of inspection and the relations between the different actors involved (i.e. the inspection team, the contracted service providers and HMI) as this rather lengthy but very revealing quotation illustrates:

4 We use role descriptions and numbers to protect the identity of our informants: a lead inspector is someone who has experience of leading an inspection team, a informants identified as HMI or HMIE are members of HM Inspectorate in England and Scotland, other informants may be contract inspectors (i.e. employed in England by SERCO, TRIBAL or CfBT).

They [the lead inspectors] are responsible for putting it all together in one report, and at the same time they will Quality Assure [QA] the sections that come in from other inspectors. When completed they will send it to the inspection service provider [i.e. CfBT, SERCO or TRIBAL] and they will also send the report to the QA readers that QA the report, then it goes to Ofsted and an HMI signs it off (...) now if HMI 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 that will say, that unless you improve this will happen (...) 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 (Lead Inspector 12).

The introduction of a new inspection framework by the UK coalition government in January 2012 and subsequent updates mark a very significant change in Ofsted's definitions of success and failure (Ofsted, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d). In the new framework four key judgements now determine how well the school is performing: achievement of pupils, quality of teaching, behaviour and safety of pupils and overall effectiveness. There is a much tighter specification of the relationship between the grades for each category and the overarching judgement. Inconsistencies are not permitted: in the pre-2012 inspection reports could exhibit inconsistencies, where schools were graded 'good' but with judgements of teaching graded only 'satisfactory'. Under the new framework teaching must be graded as good if an overall judgement of 'good' is to be achieved. The new framework was promoted as «the product of an evolved inspection system» (agency inspector 12) in which there are around 2700 inspectors contracted and trained by the three agencies and quality controlled by 400 full time HMI employed directly within Ofsted. The framework gives much higher priority to the observation of teaching and to its evaluation over time: that is, inspectors are now required to make a judgement of the extent to which pupil learning has been effective over a specific time period rather than in a single observed lesson. In addition, the grades to be awarded by inspection have changed from the four categories of Special Measures, Satisfactory, Good and Outstanding to Special Measures, Requires Improvement, Good and Outstanding. The removal of 'satisfactory' as a grade reflects political frustration with the lack of impact of inspection on the per-

formance of many schools<sup>5</sup>. A lead inspector expressed some of the frustrations and anxieties that these changes have provoked among the inspectorate:

If a school remains judged as satisfactory over a period of time then how can we be an agency of improvement? We have to change something (...) I can appreciate that. What I don't appreciate is that now we can't compare different schedules, these are different systems with different levels of performance: floor standards have changed, so if you are going to change the goalposts, you can't compare four or five years ago (Lead Inspector 09).

The 2010 Framework is notable for its heavy deployment of the term 'professional', but it is combined, as we have seen, with a simplified set of judgements in a way that creates considerable dissonance. For example inspectors are now required to:

Use their professional knowledge and engage in a professional dialogue with the headteacher or senior member of staff (Ofsted, 2012c, p. 11).

At the same time, their capacity to translate or mediate judgement as a result of such engagement is much reduced through the simplification of the framework. Indeed the new Framework and accompanying Inspection Schedule (Ofsted, 2012b) bring considerable challenges to the role of the inspector, challenges that became apparent in our research as the training process for the new framework unfolded. Inspectors are being asked to use 'professional judgement' while greatly increasing the number of failing schools (an inevitable consequence of the abolition of the 'satisfactory' grade): they are also asked to 'take account of context' but contextual value-added data that take account of the number of pupils in receipt of free school meals are no longer included in the resources informing the pre-inspection commentary, they must assess teaching over time but without reference to specific criteria. There is considerable disquiet among the inspectorate, and the operationalisation of the new procedures is far from smooth, and may further reveal tensions within the inspectorate itself, especially in relation to the basis of their claims to

<sup>5</sup> Data released by Ofsted in April 2012 revealed that in January 2012 out of 348 schools inspected under the new framework only 19% improved, 50% remained the same and over a quarter [28%] achieved a worse grade than on their previous inspection. This compares with 34% improving, 47% staying the same and 19% declining in performance at inspection under the previous regime in the period 2010/2011 (Wooley, 2012).

authority. Our interviewees are concerned about managing the delivery of an increased number of negative judgements, or, alternatively, the possible increase in unmerited 'good' grades in order to avoid those judgements and their consequences for head teachers, with whom they are supposed to be working more closely in the inspection process. The reduction in the number of judgements does undoubtedly put increased pressure on the inspectorate, as a senior Ofsted strategic manager noted,

(...) this change in the framework is a massive test for us as an inspectorate. It is very high stakes: if the proportion of failing/satisfactory schools doesn't start to fall, the credibility of inspection as an agent of improvement falls.

To summarise: knowledge-based claims to authority made by the inspectorate in England have changed since the creation of Ofsted in 1992. The pre-Ofsted HMI mobilized particular social and cultural resources to support their claims to authority. To some extent these claims depended on professional status as expert and successful practitioners, as educationalists, and as members of a highly bureaucratic and hierarchical elite that embodied a particular performance of authority. Authority, for pre-Ofsted HMI, was embodied in self-presentation, enacted in its relations with others, and encoded in its invisible, inexplicit assumptions about good practice. As a former senior inspector put it:

(...) it was a certain kind of style I would characterise as militaristic and hierarchical. It was driven by the sorts of people who came into the inspectorate, certainly in the post-war period I thought it was both very powerful as a means of inducting people and giving them a very good professional grounding in the business of inspection. (...) And I think there was something about the code that you almost had to just discern. It wasn't ever really taught (HMI 01).

In terms of governing work, these activities were regulatory but also quite inexplicit: knowledge and authority were embodied in the HMI, and strong social and professional coding enabled the inspectorate to govern through a combination of hierarchy and connoisseurship. Networked governance needs more explicit governing processes: the various inspection frameworks since 1992 attempted to specify in quantifiable and demonstrable terms the basis of Ofsted's profes-



sional judgment: this specification is complicated by the organization of the inspection workforce, by the relationship between judgment and attainment data, by shifting political priorities, and by the diminishing returns of a highly regulated system that is itself highly regulated, and that reveals its insecurities in the constant revision and expansion that characterize Ofsted's knowledge production from 1992-to the present. We return to the implications for the governing knowledge relationship in the discussion section (below). For the moment we turn to some brief examples of the work of inspection in Scotland.

### MEDITATIVE GOVERNANCE? INSPECTION IN SCOTLAND

Like HMI in England, Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) in Scotland have a history as a very powerful presence in Scottish education, as movers and shapers of the system since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The small scale of the Scottish policy community, and the fact that this community is a meritocratic rather than (as in England) a social elite, means that they were and are products of the public (i.e. state) school system that they inspect, and that they identify strongly with it as it has served them well (Humes, 1986; McPherson & Raab, 1988, 135). Their closeness to the profession they inspect — they are all former teachers, selected on the basis of their success in the classroom — is reflected in this quotation from a senior inspector:

I mean the Scottish system benefits from being a relatively small system. There is probably no secondary school in Scotland that I don't know someone teaching in or they don't know me. That's just the reality of it. The networks are very tight, they're very close (HMIE 02).

In the current context of political devolution in Scotland, the positioning of the inspectorate is strongly inflected by the governing 'narrative' of the Scottish national party (SNP) government, first elected in 2007 as a minority and then as a majority government in 2011 (Arnott & Ozga, 2010). This narrative is built around the idea of collective learning that provides a resource for strengthened national identity, growing national capacity and hence (the SNP government hopes) political independence (for further discussion of the influence of the political context on inspection in England and Scotland, see Ozga, Baxter,

Clarke, Grek & Lawn, 2012). The inspectorate thus has a role to play as ‘translators’ of this narrative into practice through their use of judgment, evidence, and the building of trust in governing processes through the knowledge production process of self-evaluation, which is propagated as a key resource for better public sector management and accountability, while they model and ‘teach’ self-evaluation within and beyond the national policy space. School self-evaluation (SSE) as set out in the key text ‘How Good is our School’ (HGIOS) is the key knowledge based process through which the inspectorate positions itself as guide and enabler of quality assurance processes that are built and maintained by the school, using HMIE guidance. Inspection provides ‘the mirror of a national perspective against which a school can reflect its own performance’ (HMIE02).

In 2011 a new body — Education Scotland — was created, combining HMIE with Learning and Teaching Scotland (the former curriculum development agency) and thus heavily underlining the alignment of inspection with improvement and development. Unlike Ofsted, which demonstrates considerable ambivalence if not downright opposition to the combination of regulation and development, the inspectorate in Scotland has united its development and regulatory roles. The new model of inspection and the whole philosophy of Education Scotland, we were told, are intended to provide, within one body:

Both that facility to provide a reflection on the national perspective, but at the same time corral the resource that is required to provide support to the school (HMIE 02).

This form of inspection places a premium on support and developmental practices, reinforced by psychological training of inspectors that seeks to develop appropriate skills:

We’re training our people quite actively in the social skills of inspection (...) we’ve got some occupational psychologists working with us to develop this framework — working on relationships with people — we must be able to win the support and constructive interest that will enable initiative (HMIE12).

In fact:

(...) how you inspect is almost more important than being right, in terms of making the judgments. I remember one time, 20 years ago, the absolute —



getting the judgment right was what mattered, nothing else — whereas now it's the social skills of being able to manage inspection to the point where you leave the school actually able to improve because they accept and are with you on the agenda — that's the real skill of inspection (HMI E01).

These social skills are also in play in the supportive role required of the inspectorate in discussion with schools as a core element of the inspection process:

What we've tried to do in the last 5 years, and particularly with the new inspection model, is create much more time during an inspection for professional discussion and professional dialogue to allow us to respond to issues that teachers might want to bring to the table but also to be able to sit down after a discussion or after an observation of a piece of learning and teaching and to say. From our perspective, that went well because of this, and then you say, but it didn't appear to go so well because of this and this. And that tends to be where the professional dialogue takes place (HMI E05).

These quotations illustrate a considerable shift in the basis on which knowledge-based claims to authority are made by the inspectorate in Scotland. Where authority was previously seen to follow from professional expertise and from the status associated with the HMI role, this is shifting towards softer, social skills. The inspector is required to enable the development of school culture and build consensus among the teaching profession in support of the overarching project. This shift has required quite considerable change in the performance of authority. The changing embodiment of authority is accompanied by change in the encoding of the knowledge production process of inspection, so that inspectors test the school's view of itself using processes including classroom observation and then move into a developmental rather than a judgemental mode if they are confident in the quality of the school's own judgment of its performance. The inspection is enacted as a process of collective learning (see Grek in this issue) that binds pupils, parents, teachers and inspectors together in a shared process, with a shared purpose that builds a collective identity as a community of learners (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This development is congruent with the Scottish government's self-promotion as a 'learning government' working in concert with its partners and thus creating more confident individuals that have the capacity for political independence.



## DISCUSSION

The material presented above presents inspectorates in a constant state of change, in both England and Scotland (and further details of inspection developments in both systems are contained in the papers by Baxter and Clarke and by Grek in this issue). In England there is a contradictory and inconsistent trajectory, preoccupied with combining data use and inspection judgement to drive improvement through competition and fear of failure. Regulative and inquisitive (or perhaps inquisitorial) processes are combined to arrive at inspection judgements, and the new inspection framework, by 'requiring improvement' installs the identification of failure, and fear of its consequences, as its core governing principle. This offers little scope to the inspectorate in England to engage in the political work of enrolment of support and mobilisation of values that may be necessary for successful governing in the networked forms that we discussed at the beginning of this paper. At the same time, the new knowledge forms that we also identified — those that involve translation, mediation and the development of 'imposed consensus' (Sassen, 2007) are also excluded, so that inspection in England is constituted primarily as an enforcement agency rather than a 'partner' in the governing of education through expertise, support and example.

In Scotland the performance of inspection, through self-evaluation and collaborative development, looks much more like Jacobsson's meditative governing: and is also more likely to enrol the different actors involved in governing work in that process of continuous self-scrutiny and self-improvement. Schools, pupils and teachers-along with inspectors themselves have, it seems, been increasingly invited to imagine themselves as auditable or inspectable performative selves (Power, 1994, 1999), and this reflection of themselves, in the national 'mirror' of self-evaluation, integrates their performance with that of the nation in a unifying project. The authority of the Scottish inspectorate is now (at least in theory) embodied in their social skills, and enacted in their capacity to support development.

In governing terms, we note a contrast between the disciplinary regime of Ofsted, and the self-disciplining regime promoted by Education Scotland. The new processes of integration of knowledge production and governing work in Scotland may or may not generate trust and genuine collaboration rather than 'imposed consensus': in governing terms there is a high risk of performativity, especially given the attempt to bring the inspectorate into the overarch-

ing national governing project. In England, Ofsted's attempts to incorporate a professional discourse into a strongly disciplinary and regulatory regime are weakened by absence of trust, while its increased alignment with political agendas aimed at increasing school choice also undercuts the mobilisation of references to professionalism. Both inspection regimes are implicated in governing problems: what our research demonstrates is that the governing-knowledge relationship changes according to the definition of the problems it is asked to address. These vary, but they are always governing problems.

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**TRAVELLING INSPECTORS AND THE MAKING OF EUROPE:  
EDUCATION POLICY LEARNING AND THE CASE  
OF THE SCOTTISH SCHOOL INSPECTORATE**

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**ABSTRACT**

The paper examines the case of education policy learning in Europe and argues that, contrary to dominant assumptions, education is a fruitful area for the analysis of Europeanising processes. More specifically, an examination of the case of the Scottish school inspectorate's 'European' exchanges is particularly useful in relation to the study of international policy communities, their formation and particular workings, as it signals a new level of 'political work' (Smith, 2009): that of exporting, internationalising and then importing afresh one's local/national knowledge, once it has successfully gone through the international 'test', and is therefore still relevant and future-proof (to the nation). This is exemplified well through the role of these actors who, rather than being Brussels-based Europeans, invariably assume European identity depending on its exchange value — as the paper shows, due to the current political situation in Scotland and the Scottish National Party (SNP) government's aspiration for independence, that exchange value for Scottish actors is high.

**KEY WORDS**

Europeanization; Policy Learning; Political Work.



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# Travelling Inspectors and the Making of Europe: Education Policy Learning and the Case of the Scottish School Inspectorate

*Sotiria Grek*

## INTRODUCTION

The paper examines the case of education policy learning in Europe through an analysis of the role and impact of the Scottish school inspectorate in policy work in Europe during the last decade. It argues for the need to examine innovative fields of political action for the building of Europe, such as that of the emerging (or, for some, already developed and growing) European education policy space (Lawn & Grek, 2012).

The article builds on the questioning of two dominant assumptions that have so far dictated the understanding of how Europe is constructed and mobilised; the first one, methodological nationalism, is rife in the social sciences (Guiraudon, 2003; Guiraudon & Favell, 2009) and particularly in the field of education (Ozga, 2008). Either through a focus on the monitoring of quality of education performance (usually performed by government analysts or national research organisations), or through an examination of pedagogy and classroom practice (by the academia), education as a policy field has largely been seen as a national ‘matter’, with the infrequent influences originating from abroad — the latter have either been seen to some as a system ‘shock’ (as the PISA results were for Germany, for example, back in 2006) or as occasional policy tourism (as Finnish tourist agencies would possibly suggest). Despite

those exchanges however, the collective myths of national education systems as distinct and protected from global trends still hold strong — and although there is a diversity of those national narratives, education research across Europe has (in most cases) been united in turning a blind eye to processes of internationalisation and Europeanization. As a result, education research lost much of its creative, inquisitive potential to locate and sociologically analyse a number of its actors who act as brokers between their national loci and ‘Europe’. It thus missed the opportunity to examine policy learning in the field of education as a contested and therefore productive space to understand Europeanization.

Second, the paper takes issue with the focus, dominant since the mid-1990s, of European integration studies on explaining Europe through a top-down agenda, where ‘Brussels’ and its formal institutions and structures are the foremost and sometimes sole players in the field (Favell & Guiraudon, 2011). Hence, other fields of governing activity, such as education, have been persistently considered irrelevant, as the operation of subsidiarity would suggest that the national formally disallows any European policy links: recent research has however suggested that, in fact, the opposite is the case at least since the mid-1990s (Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm & Simola, 2011). This sidelining of education as a field of action for the fabrication of Europe — given that education and culture were the initial building blocks of the project ‘Europe’ (see Grek, 2008; Pépin, 2006; Shore, 2000) — arguably also reflects deeper and long-standing disciplinary hierarchies, which suggest that some scholarly work derives status and exclusive authority in the field of study through the exclusion of lesser ‘others’ — in this case, education (again, with exceptions — see Martens, 2007).

The paper argues that, contrary to these dominant assumptions, education is a fruitful area for the analysis of Europeanising processes, not only because of its role in nation building in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. (Nóvoa, 2002), but also and crucially through its more recent transformation from its former institutionalised and ordered sequences into a much more fluid and transnational phenomenon, that of learning (Lawn & Grek, 2012). Learning across Europe is vital for the building of the knowledge and more recently the innovation society — it is (or so we are told) a prerequisite for economic growth and the cohesion of Europe. I argue here that learning has also become one of the most powerful tools for the governing of Europe, through the increased emphasis on what is more commonly referred to in the literature as *policy*

*learning* (Bennett, 1997; Haas & Haas, 1995; May, 1992; Raffe & Spours, 2007; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Either through meetings (such as those I discuss below) (Freeman, 2008) or through the more direct and unforgiving comparison of country statistics (Grek, 2009), learning from and with others is one of the leading modus operandi for the 'soft' governance and governing at a distance of the European peoples (Clarke & Ozga, 2011; Lawn, 2003). The paper discusses this particular aspect of the benefits of (policy) learning and examines its rise within the field of education governance through a focus on the fairly recent upsurge of the exchanges amongst European school inspectorates: more precisely, it looks at the role of the Scottish inspectorate in this policy arena.

The travelling inspector is indeed a new phenomenon — although education in Europe has always 'travelled' (Lawn, 2003), inspectors were firmly rooted and derived influence from their local and authoritative standing as education 'connoisseurs'. Indeed, in recent years, inspectors increasingly appear as one source of expertise among many:

Inspectorates are today only one among many institutions and organisations that produce evaluative material on schools, teaching and learning. The place, role and status of inspectorates can no longer be taken for granted. The quality of their products and services will increasingly be compared with other sources and could be challenged by other evaluators.... Failing this challenge will endanger the future of inspectorates, as they will be failing to deliver the information and analyses that our societies need (SICI, 2004, p. 18).

In order to examine why European inspectors are leaving their local 'knowns' and are now voluntarily and actively looking into new 'un-knowns', the paper focuses on the role of the Scottish school inspectorate, formerly known as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe), now reverting to their pre-2000 title of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) and currently part of a larger integrated organisation, 'Education Scotland', whose remit and function I will discuss later. More specifically, the paper argues that an examination of the Scottish case is particularly useful in relation to the study of international policy communities, their formation and particular workings, as it signals a new level of 'political work' (Smith, 2009): that of exporting, internationalising and then importing afresh one's local/national knowledge, once it has successfully gone through the international 'test', and is therefore still

relevant and future-proof (to the nation). This is exemplified well through the role of these actors who, rather than being Brussels-based Europeans, invariably assume European identity depending on its exchange value — as I will show below, due to the current political situation in Scotland and the Scottish National Party (SNP) government’s aspiration for independence, that exchange value for Scottish actors is high.

The paper uses discourse analysis of speeches and texts produced by the Scottish inspectorate over the last few years, in addition to interview material with key actors that have been part of this new ‘trend’ — all the data are derived from the ESRC funded ‘Governing by Inspection’ project, a comparative research study which examines the field and developments of school inspections in three countries, Scotland, England and Sweden<sup>1</sup>.

## SCOTLAND: CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND AND STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

We start our journey in Scotland and the recent changes in its school inspection regime, changes that, according to their advocates, have come at a ‘time of opportunity’ when a number of developments have arguably reached a culminating point; first, a strong nationalist government offering a stable political landscape; the slow implementation of the long-debated Curriculum for Excellence; the publication of the Donaldson and the McCormac agendas regarding the professionalization of teachers; and the growing recognition and travelling value of the Scottish ideas on school self-evaluation abroad. This time of change offered Scottish education, according to a senior officer, the chance to create a new agency, Education Scotland, an agency that would foster the creation of a *learning* education system; its remit is no less than support and fostering of the formation of professional peer learning communities by the inspectorate through their adopting the role of «the knowledge brokers, and knowledge managers, and knowledge transfer agents» (interview 21.10.11). Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) is one of the key agencies joining up to create this new organisation, therefore an examination of Education Scotland is central to the explanation of how the Scottish inspec-

<sup>1</sup> Governing by Inspection: School Inspection and Education Governance in Scotland, England and Sweden. ESRC (RES-062-23-2241) bilateral project with the Swedish Research Council (2010-2013).

torate understands and describes itself and its work not only inside Scotland but also beyond. Indeed, it is through this increasing international interest in the Scottish inspection system that its developers seem to derive a fair degree of confidence in proclaiming ‘the next generation of school improvement’ as being generated in Scotland.

We begin with a discourse analysis of the ‘story’ of the Scottish school quality improvement movement, as told by some of its key policy actors, intended for and indeed repeated to both national and international audiences: this, interestingly, is a story of ‘roads not taken’ (cf Robert Frost’s famous poem) — namely, of those policy choices prevalent ‘south of the border’, which arguably were not followed in Scotland (or at least not followed to the same extent). Instead, according to the story-teller, as we see, Scotland made a long term investment in building a different path, that of a self-evaluation, a path which is now ready to be followed. This is a story of ‘us’ and ‘them’, clearly decorated with national myths and symbols cropping up in presentations not only abroad but also domestically: the story of ‘the Caledonian way’, embellished with Scottish flags and thistles and pointing to a future that ‘is not what it was’. It largely represents the argument for the creation of Education Scotland, the narrative of which is essentially a narrative of the new ‘why’ and ‘how’ of school inspections in the country. In order to present it, I use material derived from two keynote speeches in Scotland and abroad; one given by the acting head of Education Scotland at the Scottish Learning Festival in Glasgow in September 2011 [hereafter HES 2011] and a relatively older — but very similar — one, given by an ex-HMIE senior chief inspector speaking to a French audience of inspectors in Paris in December 2008 [HMIE 2008]. I continue with a focus on the particular aspects of the Scottish inspectors’ international activity through material derived from interviews with key actors who took part in it, and move on to present the findings from a brief ethnographic study of a week-long training event of inspectors from Eastern Europe in Scotland in February 2012. Finally I conclude with a discussion of the main elements and key guiding principles of the work of Scottish inspectors as international actors as they appear in these accounts and attempt an interpretation of this work — both for what it possibly means for those receiving it, but also and crucially for its teachers, the Scottish HMI.

## SCOTTISH INSPECTIONS: THE 'NEXT GENERATION OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT'

Education Scotland has been described as the result of the need to integrate previously separate functions to drive forward the new Scottish approach to inspections. The origins of the change were:

much more about the philosophy of improving education rather than the cuts (...) frankly they were reducing the budgets anyway, so we're not reducing the funding anymore than we would have done if we'd carried on as two organisations (HMIE 2).

The argument about the integration of services saving finances is quickly dismissed; this is not about reducing budgets, it is rather a philosophy and the old/new approach to Scottish education. In order to explain where the system finds itself at and where it is moving towards, a history of school improvement is given by the speaker, based on Scottish and global experiences. According to his account [HES 2011], [dominant in the explanations and descriptions of the new Scottish inspection system], school improvement ideas and practices went through three different waves of change; the fourth could potentially be a version of that proposed and now implemented by Education Scotland as 'the next generation of school improvement'. What is interesting in the construction of the story is the numerous subtle nuances but also some finger-pointing towards the English side of the border; this is a story of what 'others' did, but Scotland did not.

Very briefly, following this account, the story of school improvement begins with *the first way*, starting post-war and lasting until the 1970s, which was characterised mainly by 'innovation and inconsistency': the rise of the post-war welfare system, the comprehensive schooling movement, and the relative open expansion of education were some of its main characteristics. This phase, according to the narrative, was seen by many as resulting in an almost unregulated profession, which led to extremes and wide variations in performance. Thus, it was followed by *the second way*, which saw a more general push to get a better grip on quality and consistency: these were the Thatcher years up to the 1990s, with a very heavy emphasis on goals and performance levels, a lot of 'top-down' prescriptive curriculum and practitioner guidance, and all these again mainly emanating 'south of the border'. Interestingly,



the phrase is repeated and used consistently as an alternative expression to 'England', whereas when similar accounts are given abroad the references are explicit, with quite direct and bold opening lines such as «this is Scotland. Everything you know about England, forget!» [HMIE 2008].

To return to the second way, education in the Thatcherite era was mainly associated with the high-frequency, high-stakes inspection and public reporting of results, or as the narrator describes, «the 'league tables' syndrome»: a notion of standardisation of quality combined with a market model which was thought to be raising quality across the system. The realisation that this might have been non-productive and disempowering in many ways led to *the third way*, a familiar term associated with the Blair years of 'performance and partnerships'; this phase aimed at freeing up elements in the process while still keeping a very tight view of measuring performance and retaining much the market style competition. More autonomy and responsibility was given to local providers but the strong high stakes public accountability for results remained strong (though weakened in Scotland by the absence of national testing and league tables). Although it is not explicit, once again, the speech focuses on education policy developments in England rather than Scotland over the last 30 years.

#### 'BUT WE...': SELF-EVALUATION AND THE SCOTTISH TRAVELLING INSPECTORS

But we, as a lot would agree, never went (to) extreme(s) down the second way or the third way: our history reflects this historical journey but less extreme and more measured (HES 2011, my emphasis).

The change of tone here is dramatic — this was a story of hard regulation and top-down agendas dominant in policies in England. Although the speaker acknowledges the Thatcherite developments of the era of the Conservative Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Forsyth, the 5-14 curriculum, or the fact that parental choice was 'mildly', as he put it, encouraged, he also emphasises the Scottish focus on education as a common good, with less market competition, less erosion of trust and no devaluing of the teaching profession. According to him, Scotland ('but we...') not only did not go down the English way ('south of the border'), but actually became 'pioneers' of changes that pointed towards the start of a new era; here, the example of Scotland being at the forefront of

curriculum design and assessment is given. In addition, the Scottish inspectors, according to this account, became pioneers of the self-evaluation movement, which resulted in the Scottish education system and its values becoming well-known internationally. This almost becomes a triumphant moment in the speech, which comes in stark contrast to the story of hard regulation and the constant, direct or less direct, finger-pointing to England. In a typically Scottish mode however, the exuberance is quickly moderated and contained: the performance of Scotland against international standards, namely in the Programme for the International Student Achievement (PISA) and more generally in the OECD data, is not very good news:

This raises question: where do we go next? We are good but not outstanding (...) Inspections suggest few critically underperforming schools but substantial numbers are ‘coasting’ (...) This is a generally good looking system but it has a lot more potential (HES 2011).

Interestingly now, for the first time, the spectrum of comparisons and references broadens widely; there are references to countries such as Slovenia and Lithuania with which Scotland compares directly in terms of equity, or others, such as Norway, ‘a good comparator country’ to aspire to. The English example is quickly left behind.

This is where self-evaluation becomes key for answering the question ‘where next?’: ‘we’ve invested a lot in self-evaluation and we should be capitalising on this now. The new inspection system is meant to be intelligence-led, proportionate and operate in a ‘performance-coaching’ way. Apparently, «there is role for transparent performance data, but you need to use data that is very intelligently benchmarked and reported». What is interesting in this account is that this is not presented as a solution to all systems and schools — this is the ‘good to great’ agenda, applicable to Scotland which by international standards is performing well, whereas it would and could not apply to failing systems elsewhere: this is an interesting point, as it appears to have emerged relatively recently as a result of the Scottish teaching of self-evaluation abroad.

However, this is only a first stage in the change process. ‘Good to great’ can and should lead to the ‘great to outstanding’ agenda which is the vision for Scottish inspection and which, in fact, although presented and discussed widely at the national and local level, is a less common theme in presentations abroad. This is seen as a very progressive programme of reform based on peer-led learn-

ing and the creation of professional learning communities with the aim of decentralising learning and promoting innovation. The role of the inspectorate in this system is to ‘gather intelligence, advise and intervene’ to support a «learning system through which the professionals at the front line create the forward planning and the forward movement». The motto of the new Scottish inspection system is ‘to live the talk’ of being self-evaluative, hence to constantly be looking at international benchmarking and the best systems elsewhere. According to this new agenda, the role of the inspectorate is to build from the bottom, invest in capacity for front line professionals and steer from the top in a light way:

This is no micro-management, quite the opposite of that (...) Education Scotland has the role of choreographing and managing careful balance of pressure and support from the sides (HES 2011).

This is an innovative agenda rarely discussed in international meetings and exchanges — although, for example, hints are given in regard to new developments, such as the ‘validated self-evaluation’ pilot scheme, it is quite obvious that the Scottish inspectorate has become more careful about the messages it sends: self-evaluation is a long-term investment which requires substantial persuasive and other work on the ground. This muting of the most current changes while abroad is interesting however: it suggests a possible slow maturation of these international exchange processes, through which the Scottish teachers/inspectors become more and more aware of the need to adapt themselves to whoever they are working with — teaching in these occasions is not simply transmitting. It involves a lot of understanding and getting to know others. The next section discusses some of these processes, which were novel at first, but are now almost routine travelling realities for the HMI.

## SCOTTISH INSPECTORS’ VIEWS ON GOING INTERNATIONAL: ‘LIVING THE TALK’?

The Scottish inspectorate is looked upon as one of the leading if not THE leading inspectorate in Europe (HMIEr).

In this paper I will not go into detail in regard to the specific influence of the Scottish inspectorate through its involvement with the Standing International

Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) and the spread of its self-evaluation practices abroad (see for example Croxford, Grek & Shaik, 2009; Lawn & Grek, 2012). Rather, I prefer to focus on the views of the Scottish inspectors about these kinds of developments, developments that appear to be increasingly requiring a great deal of their time and attention. For example,

Here in Scotland HMIE has an overwhelming range of requests to engage in bilateral work, get visitors to go out and do training. The Scottish inspectorate has actually for example done a three year project to train the Czech inspectorate wanting to move from the way it had perceived and had operated when it had a Communist government and now wanting to move to a different kind of inspection. We've done quite a lot of work with Portugal and other countries training inspectors. The Dutch tend to do work of that kind. Ofsted come and go a bit (HMIE1).

The next section focuses more on what such training events usually entail — however, the fact that the inspectorate now compiles and counts a considerable number of both outward and inward visits for the purpose of exchanging and often simply training other European inspectors is interesting in itself. For example when asked about European exchanges, education actors have lists of travel itineraries to show:

I've pulled together a couple of lists — the first one is folk who have come to visit us from overseas. One is over the last couple of years and also giving you the last couple of years before that... That's the second list. The second list is where we have made inputs to training events — now those can be either at a SICI workshop or a general assembly or in some cases for example in Romania where SICI are effectively contracting us along with other inspectorates from Europe to do support training in different countries. Romania has been the most recent... But the money for Serbia is coming in from the World Bank (...) One of the most interesting ones (on the list) was a Dutch inspector over for about a month as a kind of internship—they were very keen to see how we operated within Scotland (HMIE2).

In fact, training events are now organised and follow specific formats. They are not one-off events — their frequency requires that specific inspectors are in charge of these international activities, which very often are also led by



ex-senior inspectors who have now moved on to occupy key positions at SICI, such as in its 'Academy'. The SICI academy has the specific remit to organise the teaching and learning of inspectorates across Europe: «At least now we are more clued up and actually charge for these events — for a very long time we were doing all this work for free!» (HMIE5). Teaching the Scottish inspection system not just in Europe but also beyond, is not at all an add-on to the usual work of the former HMIE, and not even an area of international activity that simply covers a growing need to appear international; it has become routinised, everyday labour:

There's a more general presentation — the 'bog standard' presentation if you like — that we tend to give in the place of self-evaluation in particular: the Scottish approach to school improvement (...) and then there's another one here which is more specifically delivered by one of the local authorities (...) And then this document here which we produced about 2 or 3 years ago about improving the curriculum through self evaluation. There's been quite a lot of interest in that, so that document has been spoken to in some of these events as well, about how you use self-evaluation in order to bring about curriculum improvement (HMIE2).

Another aspect of this international activity which has also to some extent become routine, as we saw above, is describing the Scottish HMIE in contradistinction to the 'English':

And one of the first things I always say to visitors or visiting inspectorates coming to Scotland is «You'll have heard about Ofsted, we are very different to Ofsted» and I've said that to colleagues in Ofsted as well—and they acknowledge that (HMIE2).

In fact, it appears that, at least during the last decade, the more Ofsted became introverted and less active and interested in the SICI work or other exchanges, the more the Scottish inspectorate was gaining ground. And while the Scottish self-evaluation manual 'HGIOS' [How Good is our School] «has been translated into all sorts of languages including Finnish», English policy actors became more and more solitary and isolated at home:

Well... essentially Ofsted had nothing to learn from anybody else and operated very much within its own shell... would tolerate missionary work if you

like but (...) not at all interested in what was happening outside the boundaries of England... [For OFSTED] self-evaluation was not part of the solution but part of the problem (HMIE1).

Finally, an interesting theme that continually emerges in discussions about this work of the Scottish inspectors abroad, is not only what they offer to their foreign colleagues but also the learning that they do. This was a continuous element of the training event that is described below; how others do inspections and what is the experience of other systems is a dominant theme in such events. Rather than simply adopting the didactic style of the teacher (although this does occur at times), there is a sense that international experience offers invaluable policy lessons for home. Some inspectors or ex-inspectors even learn the language of the countries they visit most, like Finland for example. The organiser of the training event described below was able during the meeting to understand the conversations in the language of the visitors and help the interpreter partly with difficult terms (more on this later) — and when she is in Spain or Germany, she presents Scottish inspection in those countries' native languages:

I think they are (Swedes), in some ways, closer to our way of thinking than Ofsted would be, say. The Skandics actually, we're quite interested in. Norway has spent some time with us. They had an OECD review in Norway last December they have a directorate of education and training in Norway which is an organisation, an agency of government very like ours, actually — there's a sense in which we feel we're almost evolving towards similar territory from different starting points (HMIE3).

Ontario is probably our biggest influence. We had Ben Levin over to our conference to talk to us, and the Skandics we've mentioned, and New Zealand a little bit... Holland's another — and we talk to Holland quite a lot and we've done joint work with them (HMIE3).

The next section is an ethnographic account of a four day training event in Edinburgh, offered to a group of 15 Eastern European inspectors. The visit was part of a larger project, co-funded by the Ministry of Education in the respective country and the European Social Fund. The beneficiary of the project is a small county Inspectorate, and the project partners included the central

national Inspectorate, a private association and SICI. The project began in 2010 and it runs for 34 months. Its 'target group' is 80 inspectors in this Eastern European country, in addition to 1000 headteachers. The training course is only part of this larger project and is

organized together with foreign expert lecturers, appointed by our partner Standing International Conference of Central and General Inspectorates of Education — SICI, and it includes 4 parts:

- § Module 1: Inspection, leadership and management;
- § Module 2: Leadership and management: planning for improvement training;
- § Module 3: Leadership and management: Means of self-evaluation/ Evaluation of self-evaluation;
- § Module 4: The school within its community/ Promoting training for improvement through inspections.

Being a participant observer during this training event was an illuminating experience, as it cast light on many aspects of inspection work, its core content and practices, on the personalities and ways of communicating of the inspectors' themselves, and finally on the reactions, challenges and cultural encounters that the Eastern European group experienced during their time in Scotland. The following text includes snapshots of the event, alongside small talk during lunch and coffee breaks — since none of the foreign inspectors spoke English apart from their interpreter, there was an opportunity to have brief discussions with the organisers during those times.

Day 1. The meeting starts around 9:30 in a central area in Edinburgh. The meeting room consists of two round tables around which we sit. The room is very full with all 18 of us.

«Welcome to Scotland!» is the first salute in the room by one of the project organisers — and an attempt to say a couple words in the visitors' language. She goes through the programme for the week suggesting that the timeframe is tight. However, progress is slow as an interpreter is there who needs to translate all that is said; apparently only one member of the group has some English. It is obvious from the beginning that, despite the heavy workload, all that was said would be expressed in single sentences at most, as the interpreter required; thus, in the less than 'normal' circumstances of the necessary translation, continuous narrative quickly turned into a series of assertions about Scottish education, its

system and its inspection, which made it even more intriguing for those unfamiliar with it. This is perhaps because causality is inherent in a narrative; it is a story told. On the contrary, single, broken statements need to be taken as givens, until the speaker is allowed to bring them together to a logical conclusion — but in this situation they were often unable to.

The Scottish inspector continues by handing out post-it notes; inspectors are meant to write questions and comments on them and then stick them on the wall; there are quite a few confused looks around, as this appears to be a quite unknown practice. It does not seem to be standard practice among professionals in the country in question, and certainly not among inspectors. The meeting however goes on.

The first speaker is a senior HMIE. She begins by saying «*First thing and important to say, we are not England*». Noisy laughter follows the comment — apparently a good ice-breaker. The speaker continues: «*This is a separate education system, and this is very important to us and it should be to you too. Education is a devolved power. The Scottish Parliament decides on it, and then it is devolved further to these 32 local councils. It is really important to understand the role of these councils — they are the providers of education. They employ the teachers and have their own policies for education*» (HMIE5). She goes on to explain the basic structures of the Scottish education system but there is already some noise and whispering in the room — something is wrong. A hand is raised, there is a question: «*So isn't Scotland subordinate to the Queen and the Prime Minister?*» The question is followed by at least a 15 minute discussion on the issue of devolution. The visiting inspectors don't seem to grasp the political situation in Scotland — but the time is tight — we need to move on. Back to the presentation:

*The primary school takes students from the ages of 5-12 and secondary schools 12-18 year olds. The maximum number of students in the class is 33.*

«— 33?» One of them asks. Now there is a lot of noise in the room. «— So could there be a class with only 1 student?», someone else continues. The inspectors start speaking to one another — this seems to be really interesting to them. The interpreter can't keep up so she stops translating. We (English speakers) have no idea what they are talking about but it is obvious that they are surprised with the high student number per class. At the same time mobile phones continue to ring — they have never really stopped from the beginning of the meeting. The speaker is just at slide 2 of a 25 slide powerpoint presentation. She needs to leave at 11 and it is obvious she is getting impatient.



The first session continues with lots of questions from the audience — interestingly very few of them on self-evaluation itself. Most interest is shown in regard to understanding the system: this, it is obvious from the reactions, is a peculiar place — one thing they all agree, things in Scotland are ‘different, very very different’. The speaker manages to rush through her presentation answering all sorts of questions regarding the Scottish system. Time for a break.

The ex-HMIE/SICI inspector (from now on ‘Mary’) approaches me with her cup of coffee and biscuit; she mentions that these are all subject inspectors, not management inspectors, so they are here to extend their skills. Another group from the same country is in Sweden at the moment taking a similar training visit. Apparently that meeting is not going very well — the weather is worse there (she laughs and the passing interpreter laughs with her). She was in Mexico last week; it was part of a big OECD project with 24 participant countries and 12 study visits — «it is fascinating. Self-evaluation is everywhere». Our discussion is interrupted as the interpreter approaches Mary again — she has a question: «How do I translate improvement? Is it about career progression?» Mary tries to give a quick answer but the interpreter looks more confused than before. She nods and goes away — it is time to go back in.

It is Mary’s turn to speak. Interestingly she understands some of the visitors’ language. As they start talking to one another, she nods. She speaks to the interpreter explaining the difference between their national inspectorate and the former HMIE. She speaks really slowly and answers all questions in detail. Her style is very didactic, almost patronising, but seems to be going down very well. More and more questions come to her — «so what do you mean by improvement? What do you mean by ‘support and challenge?’» Mary replies but the visiting inspectors become more forceful with their questions: «No, I mean in practical terms, give us examples» (The interpreter winks at me and smiles). Mary remains calm and composed — she continues slowly and now talks about ‘ownership’. The interpreter now asks «and what do you mean by ‘ownership?’» Mary gives an unlikely answer: «It should come from within you, not somebody from outside, you own it. Think of an alcoholic or a drug addict, the first step for them is to recognise themselves that they want to improve. That’s the principle». The interpreter looks at me and smiles again.

Mary continues: «Do you remember the example of the ugly duckling thinking it is a swan? Self-evaluation is not easy. I’ve just been to Mexico. I was part of an OECD group looking at

*the evaluation of the system in Mexico. What they did was to take materials from Scotland and translated them into Spanish and suggested that all schools do that. What happened? Nothing really. Any system has to be supported not just by printed material but face to face discussion and good examples. (She brings Slovakia in as another example) You have to have an extended system of checking how good self-evaluation is. And that is one of the most important points in Scottish inspection now —the evaluation of the quality of self-evaluation. You tried to create one yourselves, remember? It is very difficult.»*

Although these field notes could be extended considerably, what is attempted here is to give a flavour of the nature of the meeting — some of its difficult but also some of its more comical moments. In essence, this meeting, which was to train subject inspectors (i.e. Inspectors of History, Maths etc) as management inspectors (i.e. interested and knowledgeable in leadership training), turned into a meeting of exploration and of entering a new professional and policy world. The East European Inspectors were faced with a system very different from theirs, which apparently — despite startling contradictions (high classroom student numbers, high truancy numbers, relatively good PISA results etc) — worked better than theirs (since they were the learners and not the teachers). From the point of view of the teacher/inspectors, the Eastern European visitors seemed very different from them, too; the Scottish Inspectorates use of common language and common terms to describe the system at all levels (from the HMIE to the local authorities' quality managers to the head-teachers in the schools they visited) was so striking, that it almost gave the impression of a script, rather than a story; a script well-rehearsed and repeated time and again during the 4-day visit. This was quite evident in the visiting inspectors' attempts to get 'behind' the 'keyword' terminology the Scottish inspectors were using (terms for example, like 'improvement', 'excellence', 'ownership', 'support and challenge'). When they realised that they would not, some of the visitors became tired and eventually they all resolved into capitalising on their journey as tourists — they asked for and finally managed to reduce the meeting workload and organise free time for sightseeing in Edinburgh.

## DISCUSSION

This is a preliminary discussion and interpretation of the policy teaching and learning activities of the Scottish inspectorate: it builds on work which began



as part of the Fabricating Quality (ESRC funded, RES-000-23-1385) project, where we identified this activity as unique in Europe in terms of its volume and frequency over the last decade (Ozga et al., 2011). ‘Governing by Inspection’ has allowed for further exploration of the field, which is continuously growing especially since SICI, the main European agency moving this agenda forward, has established a new Academy for the training and international exchange work of inspectorates. In the meantime, the former HMIE has not only increased this travelling activity but also expanded it beyond Europe with networks and collaborations in places such as Mexico or even Afghanistan (HMIE4).

However, what does this all mean for the study of policy learning in Europe and indeed for the building of Europe itself? Through our work on the Europeanising and converging effects of the quality assurance and evaluation processes in the field of education, we have been constantly confronted by actors who deny that these effects exist, yet their actions and practices emphatically and repeatedly confirm the opposite. Nonetheless, the numbers of travelling inspectors around Europe are growing, as well as their acknowledgement of the benefits and mutual learning of ‘best’ practice that this travelling produces. What, then, is different about the Scottish inspectorate? What is distinctive about inspectorates in Europe in general, since they have become so mobile and receptive to lessons from abroad? Why do they advertise and pursue these exchanges when others stubbornly do not? We argue that the case of the ‘travelling inspectors’ confirms our view of education as a valuable policy area for the understanding of Europeanization: it illuminates the significance of learning not only as a resource for economic and social cohesion, but crucially as a governing mechanism for the travelling and exchange of policy at the level of the international. The ‘answer’ lies in precisely what the head of Education Scotland said — ‘we need to live the talk’. Talking about self-evaluation and the creation of peer learning communities at the level of school needs to reflect similar work at the very top — and this is precisely what this inspectorate has been pursuing internationally over the last decade.

The Scottish study could then be described as *prototypical*: based on the experience of doing work with this case and in this field over some years now, I might speculate that studying this early example may help us understand a phenomenon of growing significance not only in the field of education governance, but in governing terms more generally. I would also argue that the contrast with an introverted Ofsted does not weaken this argument — on the

contrary. As I discussed elsewhere (Grek, 2012), (most) European inspectors, under the threat of data and the emergence of numerous new accountability mechanisms and agencies, came together and formed a new field of collaboration and exchange using SICI as a platform. Applying Bourdieusian terms, SICI could then be seen as a field of actors who constantly negotiate and push their own agendas forward: the field changes as it develops, reflecting the political situation at home. According to Bourdieu, the logic of positionality is what gives the notion of the ‘field’ meaning (1993). In other words, the positions occupied by the different agents in the field, their advances and withdrawals, relate to their efforts to achieve distinction within this field as an expression of their professional, educational, or other interest. In terms of the Scottish inspectors, the distance of ‘Europe’ from their everyday professional reality at home (a reality constantly squeezed as they were recently integrated with other agencies and functions) requires a willingness to take a risk, to go international. Meanwhile, the structure of the field is neither static, nor does it change in any systematic way. On the contrary, it is endlessly reformulated according to the agents’ struggles for recognition and improvement of their situation. Agents use the force of their capital — economic, social, cultural, or in the case under examination, knowledge capital — to raise their game and advance their front. Nevertheless, it is the *relational* nature of these advances that gives the field its explanatory significance; for example, Ofsted used to be more far more involved in exchange work — they used to collaborate with the Dutch, another leading inspectorate in Europe. When they began withdrawing, another actor advanced its position: Scotland. Reflecting and working with the political situation at home (a strong nationalist government), they have begun to consistently construct themselves and their choices in contrast to the failed — as they see them — policies in England, while working more with ‘Europe’ and beyond, spaces of increased significance as loci of exchange for the independence-aspiring nation.

However what explains their success and the relative lack of recognition of other inspectorates equally involved in such activities (such as the Dutch or the Swedes)? Their answer is the use of a common language: «what is important is that all people in the partnership speak the same language and understand one another» (HMIE6). It appears that they do the same abroad, as they have developed a specific framework for delivering these training events; they are organised and consistent. In addition, Scotland is a small system, often seen abroad as the UK underdog and therefore less threatening than Ofsted. Being small reaps additional benefits: as people are more easily con-

nected at home, they maintain a more coherent and stable profile abroad, which is a vital ingredient in not only establishing but crucially maintaining network relations. Moreover, they learn from the processes themselves and appear humble: they learn the languages and customs of their ‘pupils’ and they also allow space for more ‘touristic’ touches to the visits in Scotland as well — they are professional but humane. Finally, and perhaps more significantly, they have now gained an unprecedented momentum in these international travels which does not seem likely to wane in the immediate future.

To conclude, education policy learning in Europe, as the case above clearly illustrates, points towards two significant and interdependent directions which were discussed at the introduction of this paper. First, the paper highlighted the fallacies of methodological nationalism in research, which is either blind to international policy work, or at the very best, looks for ‘clean’, direct cases of policy transfer and borrowing, when, in fact, the reality and ‘fields’ of these exchanges is far messier and under constant flux. The analysis above is evidence of a field of policy work that is in constant activity, especially at a time when data and quality indicators for education systems in Europe signify substantial convergence of policies for the knowledge and innovation society. The case of Scotland in particular shows how ‘Europe’, rather than existing as a separate and democratically deficient political entity, is in fact continuously fabricated and capitalised on in the political scene at home — in other words, and using the usually problematic language of ‘levels’, rather than diminishing in its role and power, it is in fact the ‘national’ which makes Europe happen. It is in the examination of the national policy spaces that one finds the most useful and enlightening examples of Europeanization in action.

Second, and for the reasons above, the Scottish case signals a need to divert the analysis of Europeanization away from the well-trodden pathways in the corridors of the Brussels European quarter of glass towers to more local and apparently peripheral spaces. A sociological examination of the interaction of international actors who come together in such policy and physical spaces could move the European studies agenda from the more top-down, relatively obvious and by now rather stale examination of ‘formal’ European processes, to other arenas which now take advantage of their knowledge and learning potential — or, at least, it is only now that we acknowledge them as such. Paraphrasing Monnet, if we were to study Europe all over again, why not start from education?

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**SEEING LIKE AN INSPECTOR:  
HIGH MODERNISM AND MĒTIS IN SWEDISH SCHOOL INSPECTION**

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**ABSTRACT**

In this article, John C. Scott (1998)'s ideas are used in order to discuss how the Swedish state sees education, as it relies upon its technical and juridical rationality. Drawing on cross-case study data from inspection processes, it is suggested that inspectors' work involves a dual optic. On the one hand, regular supervision is explicitly conformed to a regulatory evidence-based model derived from ambitions to develop universal, objective, and neutral judgements. On the other hand, the concrete work of inspectors does entail modification, adaptation, and mediation of rules, templates, schemes, and standard procedures. Hence, the evidence-based design denotes inspectors' practical wisdom or *mētis*.

**KEY WORDS**

School inspection; Governance; Judgement; Knowledge forms; Equivalence.



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# Seeing Like an Inspector: High Modernism and Mētis in Swedish School Inspection

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## SEEING EDUCATION

John C. Scott (1998) argued that the governing of modern states relies upon certain forms of tools and knowledge. His book *Seeing Like a State* (Scott, 1998) detailed how strong state-initiated social engineering has involved a rational and technical administrative ordering of society based on universalistic, logical, formalistic, impersonal, and quantitative explanation and verification. On the one hand, this form of high modernism is related to the development and maintenance of democratic welfare and «[o]ur ideas about citizenship, public-health programs, social security, transportation, communication, universal public education, and equality before the law» (Scott, 1998, pp. 339-340). On the other hand, Scott (1998, p. 4) argued, these «well-intended schemes to improve the human condition» have simultaneously tended to dismiss important elements of local and practical knowledge that, by necessity, are parts of complex human activities. In his adoption of Scott's ideas to the governing of education, Martin Lawn (2011, p. 65) has argued that «[t]he gradual rise of the rule and framing of education over time by the modern state has enabled it to be tamed, to be reduced, to be rendered transparent, to be turned into aggregated units, and to be tested» [translated from French]. In other words are context-bound, complex, creative,

informal, and moral processes of teaching and learning reconstructed and simplified in order to be governed.

In this article, Scott's ideas are used in order to discuss school inspection as a mode of governing. School inspection has come to play a critical role in the governing process of Sweden and in the Europeanization of education. Drawing on cross-case study data from inspection processes, it provides insights on *how* the Swedish state sees education (i.e., how the state re-imagines and reshapes schooling today), as it relies upon its technical and juridical rationality (Cf. Lawn, 2011, p. 68). The paper draws attention to an on-going struggle within the domain of school inspection: the struggle between two different knowledge forms — high modernism and the practical form of knowledge that Scott (1998) labelled *mētis*.

The article starts with a section, which theoretically places the study into current discussions on state governing. This section also offers a short introduction of the Swedish model of school inspection. Second, the two knowledge forms are presented in the form of two mental models. These rather sweeping frame works are used to contemplate school inspection as a practical inquiry in terms of holistic views on knowledge, method, and culture. Third is a section wherein the methodology and data are briefly presented, then I offer some empirical examples of school inspection events as doing governing. Here, the focus is on inspectors' seeing, as well as their work and ideas. Empirically, I draw on cross-case studies, including observations and interviews with inspectors, but also with school actors who have experiences of being the locus of the state's vision. Finally, I offer a conclusive section, including a summary and discussion.

## GOVERNING EDUCATION BY INSPECTION

This article is placed within an international policy context characterized by waves of deregulation and decentralisation, which are accompanied or succeeded by re-regulation and/or increased centralisation. In the Swedish context, Larsson, Letell and Thörn's (2012, pp. 262-282) analysis of contemporary forms of governing offers a starting point that is congruent with Scott's ideas on high modernism. They introduce the concept of 'advanced liberal engineering' in order to analyse the mix between, on the one hand, liberal ideals, including principles of freedom of choice and self-regulation through market



mechanisms, and, on the other hand, conservative ideals, emphasizing law and order secured by regulatory apparatuses pursuing standardization, monitoring, auditing, and evaluation. The authors (Larsson, Letell & Thörn, 2012, p. 264) argue that this concept acknowledges «continuities and discontinuities in relation to the era of social engineering» and describes a «'logical' ideological attempt to make a certain version of liberal government legitimate».

National school inspection is one example of a regulatory apparatus that serves to address public distrust, steering problems and negative or unintended issues of marketization within education. Today, school inspection is seen as an important policy tool that is utilised in order to enhance efficiency and provide quality in the competitive, dynamic, and knowledge-based economy. However, it is also associated with the increase of what has been defined as audit culture, audit society, performance management, the evaluative state, or the competitive-evaluative nexus (see Clarke, 2005; Neave, 1998; Pollitt et al., 1999; Power, 1999; Strathern, 2000).

Rönnerberg (2012) has examined how the reintroduction of national school inspection in 2003 equalled «the return of the state.» At the turn of the millennium, state trust in governing bodies' (e.g., municipalities and free school companies) own evaluation and governing was replaced by a thorough model of external national inspection, including a severe increase in resources and inspection activities. Rönnerberg (2012, p. 670) argues that «Swedish schools are now exposed to the most thorough inspection and checking in modern times», and the number of inspectors employed has increased dramatically since the 1960s and 1970s, when Sweden had one of the most centralised education systems in the world (Daun, 2004, p. 326).

A separate national agency, The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (SI), was founded in 2008 with a government expectation of a «powerful, distinct and regular supervision» (The Swedish schools inspectorate, 2008, p. 4). «Policymakers», wrote Rönnerberg (2012, p. 70) «appear confident in the utility of inspections as a means of steering, and the Inspectorate is repeatedly presented as a problem solver for diverse perceived problems».

As Rönnerberg has noted elsewhere, inspection is a complex and many-sided mode of governing. It is

simultaneously directed to, for instance, legal issues and/or sanctions, economic incentives and/or means of resource distribution, i.e. 'hard' instruments, but also, at the same time, contain more or less 'soft' elements such

as the promotion of self-evaluation, transfer of knowledge and other means allowing and encouraging actor's to coordinate amongst themselves with less central government involvement (2010, p. 5).

The Swedish case, thus, revolves around the somewhat paradoxical concurrence of what somewhat inadequately could be dichotomized as an 'older' style and bureaucratic mode of regulation and more modern forms of governance. The question that arises here is: how could these governing tensions fit theoretically with Scott's (1998, p. 4) analysis of 'muscle-bound' social engineering? Notably, Tilly (1999) has argued that Scott's work does not adequately theorise interactions between top-down and bottom-up power. Tilly's critique is related to more recent discussions on how to conceptualize contemporary developments in state governing, wherein scholars have questioned the so-called 'governance narrative' (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003; Goodwin & Grix, 2011; Grix & Phillpots, 2011; Marsh, 2008). In short, these discussions represent attempts to overcome the theoretical dualisms between understanding the state as: a) centric and hierarchical (the traditional form of big and bureaucratic government, by means of rules and external control); and as b) hollowed out, working through decentred network governance and soft power (via co-operation, consensus, self-organisation, self-evaluation, etc.). An important aspect of these attempts is to challenge the establishment of single narratives. This paper contributes to this discussion by acknowledging the diverse and conflicting beliefs and practices of inspectors as political agents.

John C. Scott argued that state-initiated engineering originated in a combination of four basic circumstances: administrative ordering of nature and society, high modernist ideology, an authoritarian state, and prostrate civil society. These circumstances are all relevant to the Swedish case, and in this article, I will focus on the first two elements and particularly on the force field between the two earlier mentioned knowledge forms that are present in the state's vision. Initially, though, I will say a few words about the latter two circumstances in order to situate inspection in a historical and socio-political context of governing.

## THE AUTHORITARIAN STATE AND THE PROSTRATE SOCIETY

Following Ozga, Segerholm and Simola (2011, p. 93), I argue that it is important to acknowledge the ‘authoritarian potential of liberalism’ in the field of education. As noted by Wilkinson (2013), Europe is currently haunted by the ‘spectre of authoritarian liberalism’, a practice that works to conceal the underlying conflict between democracy and capitalism. Ultimately, authoritarian liberalism refers to the perceived «need to contain public interference with private market freedoms and immunities such as the right to accumulate wealth, to contract and dismiss freely, to dispose of one’s property and to exploit, wherever possible, the privatization of public assets» (Wilkinson, 2013, p. 543). This practice is historically rooted in Hayek’s neo-liberal ideas on state coercion and planning. What is the role of school inspection against this background? For one thing, Sweden, the country with the world’s most de-regulated education system — including a model with tax-funded, profit-making school companies equivalent only to the system launched by General Pinochet in Chile — is in need of a strong state control that works to persuade citizens that equivalence is compatible with de-regulation (Cannon et al., 2013; see also Rönnerberg, 2011). As noted by Carlbaum (2013), the Swedish Schools inspectorate is not only a market police that deals with the school market’s negative side-effects, it is actually possible to perceive the agency as «a planner for competition» (Hayek, as cited in Wilkinson, 2013, p. 544).

Scott (1998, p. 5)’s idea on the origin of state-initiated engineering is also related to the issue of emergency, particularly how urgent conditions «foster the seizure of emergency powers». According to Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003, p. 427) the «ongoing collection, production and publication of surveys leads to an ‘instant democracy’, a regime of urgency that provokes a permanent need for self-justification». My assumption here is that the international competition, ranking, and the PISA assessments places Sweden and other struggling countries in positions where the state becomes willing to put drastic designs into being (Cf. Meyer & Benavot, 2013). The legitimacy of such designs is related to Scott’s final circumstance: the prostrate civil society. Swedish school actors has been target of some 20 years of criticism over failing practices, declining results, poor efficiency, and general pedagogical fuzziness. Growing inequalities and local differences, in combination with a steadily stronger consumer culture with expectations for greater choice and

demands for good quality schooling, has led to an alleged educational crisis (see Clarke, 2004, pp. 126-146, for a discussion on the 'crisis of the public realm' and the 'performance-evaluation nexus'). This situation has weakened school actors and made them, as well as the populace, more receptive to authoritarian schemes. The reintroduction of a tougher and results-oriented school inspection with a power toolbox, including the possibility to use penalties, to shut down schools, to impose conditional fines or measures at the organizer's expense, and to revoke licenses for independent schools, is most arguably one such example. At the same time, and as argued above, the authoritarian measures are not the only features of SI. These measures co-exist with other forms of governing within the current inspection regime.

## TWO MODELS OF INSPECTION

In Sweden and elsewhere, inspectors' work is characterized by tensions between increased regulation through technical means, such as performance data and the rules followed by inspectors in their school assessments, as well as their expert knowledge; professional judgement; and use of support, development, and persuasion in encouraging self-regulation in the teaching profession. These tensions respond to two basic models of knowledge use and production that can be identified in the literature and which are inherent in the fundamental characteristics of Scott (1998)'s oppositional knowledge forms — namely, high modernism and *mētis*. The following presentation serves as an orientation and is, by necessity, simplistic and ideal typical. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that although Scott clearly favours *mētis* over high modernism, he realizes that the former, by no means, should be regarded as 'the product of some mythical, egalitarian state of nature' (Scott, 1998, p. 7). In order to avoid a normative standpoint, I would like to put forward the assumption that these knowledge forms might serve different purposes and work to produce valid results within their own domains and according to their own logic.

In relation to school inspection, these two models can be described in terms of a regulatory evidence-based model and a model based on 'educational connoisseurship' and 'educational criticism' (Eisner, 1975, 1979, 1985). The former derives from ambitions to develop scientific methods and universal, objective, and neutral judgements that provide all educational practitioners, parents, and other stakeholders with explicit and clear knowledge and information (Biesta,



2007; Slavin, 2008). Here, standardisation and uniformity is important, and the personal values and ideals of inspectors are filtered away. Clarity, certainty, and order are the ideal norms of practice to cope with the unstructured and complex reality of schooling (Schwandt, 2005). This is a positivistic and behaviouristic approach where observable and measurable empirical data aim to determine whether or not the goals or criteria of the curriculum or assessment protocol are achieved. In this «world of measurement» (Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003, p. 853), school inspection is believed to establish, evaluate, and control secure links between objectives and output within a school organisation that is made transparent or, using the words of Power (2007, p. 34), «turned inside out». It is, thus, a model that seeks to reduce the complexity and the interpretative character of judgement making, which emphasizes results, rather than procedures or contextual factors (Bridges, 2008). Performance data are used to compare, evaluate, and monitor progress. Evidence is also used in order to generate cumulative knowledge, to make schools more efficient and effective, and to resolve competing approaches. Data is seen as both evidence and the absolute basis for judgements, and reliability and stability are secured by the quality of the instruments and techniques themselves. This means that relatively unskilled and inexperienced inspectors could carry out inspections using checklists, templates, and schemes or by following standard procedures. In line with this, the Swedish Schools inspectorate has recruited inspectors with non-educational backgrounds such as professionals trained in law.

Versions of this model are currently dominant as a part of the public sector management agenda of governments, and international organizations like OECD and the World Bank (Grek, 2009). National school inspectorates are related to these performance measurement systems, and school inspection is, thus, part of an evidence-based governance regime that is expected to stimulate and steer the development of the education system. Evidence is used by actors at different levels (politicians, administrators, principals, parents, etc.) in order to make rational choices and improve both the education system and their own performance within it. This model serves the administrative purposes of accountability within a de-regulated school market, and it produces statistics and results based on comparison. There is, thus, a close relationship to the ideology of New Public Management that affects public services, with an emphasis on outcomes assessment, performance measurement, and continuous improvement, favouring best practice and the standardization and manualisation of assessments (Schwandt, 2005).



The other model, which Eisner (1975, 1979, 1985) discussed in terms of ‘educational connoisseurship’ and ‘educational criticism’, bears a direct kinship to Scott (1998)’s idea of *métis*. Central here is the idea that embodied and encoded expert knowledge, manifested in a form of professional wisdom or artistry, forms the most adequate basis for the judgement of schooling. The starting point here is a fundamental critique of the previous model. Education and teaching are not seen as objective and nomothetic processes that are possible to control, measure, and transform by sets of laws and standard recipes. Teaching is regarded as an ideographic activity framed by individual and contextual factors. The usage of explicit guidelines and criteria might be considered, but the judgements are derived primarily from professional experience that allows the inspector to bracket phenomena so that they become defined and visible. The knowledge required must, therefore, be embodied and have «the characteristic of plasticity; flexibility in attending to the most important features of each situation» (Schwandt, 2005, p. 324).

In short, this model involves three inter-related steps; description, interpretation, and evaluation/appraisal, all of which together serve to help others to see, understand, and appraise the quality of educational practice and its consequences. Description requires persistent, on-site observations, which render possible the rich portrayals of the complex qualities of schooling. In order to do so, the language ought not to be merely technical and objective, but poetic and filled with experience, emotion, metaphor, and analogy. Interpretation involves efforts to understand the meaning of what is observed, whereas the evaluative aspect implicates value judgements about educational significance:

Educational critics ultimately appraise what they encounter with a set of educational criteria; they judge the educational value of what they see. To make educational value judgements requires not only the ability to see educational subtleties occurring in the classroom and to be able to interpret their meaning or explain the function they serve, it is also to have a background sufficiently rich in educational theory, educational philosophy and educational history to be able to understand the values implied by the on-going activities and the alternatives that might have been otherwise employed (Eisner, 1985, p. 98).

The ability to consider alternatives requires a sense of the practical realities of schooling that goes beyond what Eisner (1985, p. 112) called «the educa-





tionally naïve eye». In order not to condemn schools that «do not live up to our highest hopes», argued Eisner (1985, p. 112), it is important to recognize what is, and what is not, possible in the course of daily educational life. Ultimately, education criticism comes down to improvement (i.e., that description, interpretation, and evaluation speaks to education actors and that something is made out of it).

Ultimately, this model can be traced back to Dewey's theory of inquiry, which rejects the so-called spectator theory of knowledge (*knowledge as objective visual reception and representation of an external reality*) in support of *practical judgements* — a quest for better understanding of pragmatic situations and problems (Dewey, 1929). According to Dewey, inquiry is always contextual. The usage of *a priori* elements and fixed rules in inspection would, as such, have to be refined and modified, according to the particular situation and problem of each school (Cf. Dewey, 1938).

This brief summary indicates a range of differences or even incommensurabilities between the two models. Different inspection regimes might frame the work of inspectors differently in relation to the models. The British inspectorate, Ofsted, is explicitly linked to the evidence-based model with a heavy reliance on results. Interestingly, this model was partly introduced as a retort to criticism and mistrust concerning the independence and validity of inspectors' work (Clarke & Lawn, 2011; Clarke & Ozga, 2011). A contrasting example can be found in Germany, where the Baden-Württembergische model excludes out-put data/results and approaches the issue of school quality only through qualitative methods (Kotthoff & Böttcher, 2010). Overall, it appears as if the Swedish inspectorate has moved from expert judgement to evidence, but the characteristics of the balance between the two models remains relatively unknown. In practice, however, school inspectors often combine versions of the two models by bringing their objective data and expert judgement into relationship with one another. The empirical question is: how is this enacted in concrete inspection practice as the state sees education? Additionally, how in turn, does this mirror the way that the state 'sees' education through the eyes of inspectors?

## NOTES ON DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Before going onto discussing the above questions, I will briefly describe the data and methodology. In order to explore the questions, I draw on cross-case studies

on regular supervisions carried out during 2011. Regular supervisions are conducted by state employed inspectors on a five year cycle in all municipal and independent schools, from pre-school to adult education. The case studies were planned and carried out by a research team, including myself. The municipalities and schools were chosen by diverse case selection (Gerring, 2007), focusing on demographic and economic structure (urban and rural areas) and previous inspection experience. The total number of schools studied was 11 (including three free schools). All names have been changed in order to preserve the confidentiality of the informants.

The case studies generated data on different aspects of the inspection process. Internal material of inspection includes interview manuals, judgement guidelines, memos, production schemes, and other working documents specifying how to conduct inspection. The case studies also included the official material accessible on the agency's website, such as the final inspection decisions, instructions for the schools, and the judgement points. Observations of inspection visits served to provide insights on the concrete and on-site usage and production of inspection knowledge and were recorded in written observation protocols. In a similar fashion, observations of the internal quality assurance meetings at SI where inspectors, team inspectors, and team lawyers deliberated on and finalized the official judgements were carried out. Observations also included informal discussions among the inspectors and inspectors' conversations during meetings, as well as before, during, and after the school visits. Interviews were conducted with inspectors (n 16) concerning their occupational and educational background, their views on what competencies and experiences are needed for adequate inspection, and the aims of and basis for their specific judgements. Finally, the case data provides comprehensive interviews with school actors, including teachers (n 22), head teachers (n 15), and responsible officials within municipalities and school companies (n 12), regarding different aspects of school inspection.

For this particular paper, I draw mostly on interviews with inspectors and officials representing organisers (municipalities or school companies) using the remaining data set as an implicit backdrop for validation and discussion. The chief executive officers (CEOs) of two large school companies became key informants due to their distanced overview, their rich experience, and their outspokenness in relation to the research themes. Inspired by Stake (2006)'s ideas on cross-case analysis, I worked with the cases and research questions in order to generate results and conclusions. The data set was familiar, as it had

been previously analysed and discussed in the project group. The analysis of evidence from the cases studies is selective, and in order to make a better view of the ‘mosaic’ possible, it postulates more homogeneity and logic in the inspection practice than daily experiences render visible (Stake, 2006, p. 40). Following Stake (2006), my working process is best described in terms of abduction (i.e., a continuous oscillation between theoretical concepts and data). I read the cases with the literature and the research questions at my fingertips. During the reading, I accumulated four themes while taking notes and underlining. In a phase of reduction, I then merged the data from the cases in a cross-case analysis and selected typical quotes that provided illuminating illustrations.

The first theme draws attention to the fundamental aspects of the inspectorate’s vision and inspectors’ seeing. The second theme is related to the potential conflict between the quest for formal rule compliance and the effectiveness of schooling — i.e., is schooling ultimately about doing things the right way or about doing the right things? The third theme that emerged is about equivalence and the inspectorate’s mission to secure children’s rights to equal access to education and the right to education of an equal quality. The final theme revolves around the basic conflict in an inspector’s vision between evidence-based and practical reason.

## SEEING LIKE AN INSPECTOR

When the responsibility of school inspection was transferred from the National Agency for Education (NAE) to the Swedish schools inspectorate in the autumn of 2008, the state’s educational gaze changed. Lindgren et al. (2012)’s policy and document analyses show that key concepts before that time were more supportive of schools and municipalities and recognized local conditions. Later, a language with the intention of detecting shortcomings and supporting an ideology of juridification became apparent (Lindgren et al., 2012).

The focus on deficiencies is one important feature of contemporary regular inspection. Whereas the earlier NAE inspection’s reports offered positive *and* negative criticism, the SI reports focus mostly only on deficiencies — i.e., on aspects of schooling that depart from or fail to meet standards in legislation, curriculum, or school ordinances. This is an example of how the systems of ideas inherent in school inspection ‘make’ certain things in educational life visible and invisible.



Inspectors acknowledge that the current model of regular supervision is somewhat rigid and unable to capture complex and important aspects of educational processes. One inspector argues that:

[t]here is a risk with this model, that it is easy to count deficiencies [bullet points]. We all know that there might be one school that has three points that is not so good, while a school with seven points might be working just as good. If they [the school] has a really good work concerning the democratic aims, but has a plan against offensive behaviour that is not that good... well, then it is more important how this is [actually] played out in the school (...) It is difficult to capture this notion of quality in regular supervision, it is much easier to see what is right or wrong. There is a will to simplify, but this [schooling] is a complex activity, you cannot just translate it into statistics and whatever, it is much more complex than that (Inspector 2, Näver School).

Inspectors frequently refer to inspection using the analogy of vehicle inspection: a standardised procedure of box-ticking. School actors have also identified the formalistic approach of SI: regular supervision. The idea of a regular check directed to national requirements is not regarded as problematic, per se, but there are voices raised concerning the overall meaningfulness of such a design. As noted by one of the informants, school inspection is 'black and white per definition' because SI 'does not relate to the practical reality of schooling, but to the statutes' (CEO, Kornett School). The punctilious vision of inspectors, it is argued, tends to draw attention to extraneous problems:

They're coming in to look at paragraphs, and to see if paragraphs are being followed. They're not coming in to look at (...) they're not really scrutinising and examining the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They're not looking enough at the interaction between teacher-student. And they're not looking enough at what the principal does as a leader in the school to make it a success. I'm sure SI could visit a school that is run by an incompetent leader, but is extremely good with the school-law and make sure all forms and paper-works are in order and all his paragraphs are tipped, and they would leave and that particular principal would get a fantastic report. But the school would still be a disaster, so it's too geared towards meeting the little rules that just aren't that relevant (CEO, Eternell School).

In this respect, seeing like an inspector resembles Scott's notion of high modernism. Such a model of inspection serves certain political and administrative purposes, such as transparency, accountability, and control, but it tends to dismiss the practical problems of the disorderly world of schooling. In addition, SI also has other aims than the strictly regulative. For example, regular supervision is supposed to bring about *increased* goal attainment, quality, and equivalence. One way to analyse SI's vision is on the basis of its own aims in terms of performance. The inspectorate is geared to performance in congruence with the evidence-based model, which sees professional action in terms of intervention and effect. At the same time, SI is concerned with formal rule compliance in relation to national requirements. The question is whether the idea about performance is compatible with a formalistic and juridified vision.

#### DOING THINGS THE RIGHT WAY OR DOING THE RIGHT THINGS?

The case study data suggests that school actors sometimes frame the question of effects rather differently than SI. For example, when faced with a practical problem in school, teachers tend to reflect upon the situation using a repertoire of pedagogical knowledge and experience, rather than looking in the statutes. They might seek to solve local and pedagogical problems outside of the domain of formal rules or regulation. As shown above, school inspectors tend to see schooling more strictly from the horizon of what is formally correct. To put it in another way, SI tends to be concerned with efficiency (i.e., *doing things right*), whereas school actors are often more concerned with effectiveness (i.e., *doing the right things*). According to the informants, SI's primary focus is on how things are done, without considering *why* they are being done.

Their judgements tend to prioritize the details that they ask for (...) How does your plan look like? Is there a prescribed amount of teaching hours? Is there a school library? Are there routines for filed complaints? Is there information regarding the routines for filed complaints? These kinds of binary questions are very frequent (CEO, Kornett School).

When the inspector comes in, they're really there just to regulate the paragraphs in the school-law. And it seems to me to be very bureaucratic and



pointless in the sense, because although they seem to be much more focused on outcomes that schools produce now. A lot of our recent inspections have started with 'Oh, fantastic school, great results, very well-behaved students and excellent school', and then a series of injunctions where we haven't met a paragraph in the school-law. But obviously it's not really affecting our outcome. So my interpretation of the inspection here is that it's not very effective, it doesn't really improve schools. I think what it does is that it focus very much on aligning schools to the school-law. I don't think it's really designed to make effective schools (CEO Eternell School).

According to school actors, this mode of inspection influences education in unforeseen ways. There is a contradiction between, on the one hand, the strivings for equivalence and efficiency in the current education policies and, on the other hand, the effectiveness present within the realm of concrete educational settings.

I: How is that?

R: Yes, well, equivalence and the formalistic turn is ultimately aiming at unravelling that certain things are done. It is not aiming at developing how they are done or how they would be done best (...) The basic problem with Swedish education policy is the focus on how things are done and not on what shall be done. Nobody says, 'I don't care how you do, but you have a damn good school because you have a large quota of students reaching the goals' (...) Because you see, the big problem is that Swedish education is questioned and very criticised (...) Everyone wants to do the right thing, and that's why nobody is interested in discussing effects and results. 'Just tell me what to do and I will do it' (CEO Kornett School).

SI's version of regulatory evidence-based inspection, it is argued, is not geared toward effectiveness in schools and classrooms, but, rather, to efficiency within the particular frame work of the formalistic and juridified regular supervision. In the following, I address the circumstances that make possible this mode of knowledge production: What are the social, historical, and institutional historical conditions under which this particular form of inspection model can be authorised and legitimised?

## INSPECTING EQUIVALENCE — EQUIVALENT INSPECTION

The claim for particular forms of equivalence is probably one important condition associated with regular supervision as a truth regime. One of SI's main tasks is to secure the question of educational equivalence — i.e., the individual child's right to equivalent schooling of good quality. In Sweden, the state's promise of equivalence is a utopian policy goal rooted in post-war social democratic narratives of education. During this period, education was seen as the most important vehicle for public welfare, economic development, and social justice. The fulfilment of this policy goal has become increasingly difficult because equivalence has appeared to be poorly compatible with de-regulation and marketization (see, for example, National Agency for Education, 2012). Following Scott (1998), SI's high modernism is fundamentally associated with the maintenance of democratic welfare (i.e., progressive prospects of securing individual rights and social justice).

However, equivalence is not only expected from the educational system as such, but from school inspectors' judgements. School inspectors are pressured to deliver reliable, independent, and objective judgements in order to make the reports explicit and clear, as well as to increase their potential to actually govern schools and provide accurate information to stakeholders (e.g., politicians, tax payers, and educational consumers). Formalisation of the inspection processes, internal programs (including surveys and self-assessments of inspectors' competencies), judgement points, templates, manuals, and internal quality assurance meetings are intended to secure equivalent judgements in the final decisions.

This quest for legally secure decisions and equivalent judgement leads to a preoccupation with simplification and formalities. Inspectors are inclined to use hard evidence, such as documents and statistics, rather than data contaminated with human interference, such as observations. As noted by Clarke (2010, p. 8; see also Cutler & Waine, 1998), this knowledge form tends to be associated with «generic management» — the belief that all organisations share common characteristics, and thus can be directed using a set of universal principles, knowledge and skills». It, thus, fosters a rationing inspection culture, a state vision that treats every school and governing body as precisely comparable and that deliberately and explicitly overlooks contextual aspects, including different local needs. Consequently, the SI decisions are void of contextual conditions. School actors, on the other hand, are sceptical to SI



judging all schools, whose preconditions are all radically different socially, economically, and culturally, by a standardized inspection model, including simple results measures.

In a way, the formalistic approach meet the need of defining the meaning of equivalence (...) But it is not very helpful to us as providers that SI are inspecting on the basis of their interpretation of the statutes. One would also like to have a more nuanced picture. I mean, it is not of very much help to get an inspection of a school in an exposed area that makes the observation that not all the students are reaching the goals. It is a bit nonsensical really (...) Can't they [SI] use SIRIS [the National Agency for Education's online information system on results and quality] and just relate their comment to that? It makes one wonder: who is the inspection for anyway? (CEO, Kornett School).

In sum, the case study data show a complex mixture and interplay between two different ways of understanding and judging pedagogical phenomena: the formal and juridical evidence-based model officially advocated by SI and the model based on practical pedagogical reason displayed in the realm of experienced inspectors and school actors. In the following, I highlight some examples of how these forms of reason are enacted by the inspectors.

#### REGULATORY/EVIDENCE-BASED VS. PRACTICAL REASON

In the data, there are many examples of how the more formal legal focus steers inspectors' seeing. In light of the inspection model, informal and local solutions guided by pedagogical intuition, experience, and values become problematic. One of many examples of this conflict between SI's formalistic and juridical perspective and schools' urge to solve pedagogical problems is derived from a feedback meeting after a school visit. The head teacher (HT) is asked about why they have placed a six-year-old student in special school (in Sweden, children can only enter this school form as they are about to start compulsory school at the age of seven):

*Head Teacher:* We think that special school is a proper environment for this child.



*Inspector 1, Moss School:* There is no special school for pre-school children. It is not correct to have a child in special school that is not registered.

*Head Teacher:* From a pedagogical point of view, it would have been wrong to place this child in a regular pre-school class — she would not have been given the pedagogical support she needs.

*Inspector 1, Moss School:* Formally, it is not correct (Feedback meeting, Moss School).

Sometimes, school actors might be ignorant of formal regulations. In other cases, they deliberately choose not to act on the basis of what is formally correct. During observations in one school, the inspectors noticed two different activities that were organised in order to meet the needs of students and that appeared to be some kind of remedial classes. In the interviews, they returned to this issue in order to determine the formal status of these activities. The thing was, if these activities were remedial classes, then the head teacher had to make the decision about it. The inspectors consulted the school ordinance in order to be sure about this, but they remained uncertain during the visit as to how to actually make the judgement. One of the responsible inspectors for this particular supervision reflected on this particular example and identified the conflict between the two forms of reason: «These are creative solutions to local problems outside the statutes (...) The question is whether they really know what they are doing (...) but, hey are trying to look after the kids, of course» (Inspector 2, Rönn School).

Sometimes, when SI staff members are out of public view, they reflect upon these issues. During one internal quality assurance meeting, there was a discussion about whether the head teacher of the small and rural Tall School was able to show that he had made the prescribed follow-ups of his school's results. At the meeting, the lawyer concluded that the inspectors needed to take a closer look at this, and he added: 'Small schools do not see any need for detailed documentation — for good reason. It is us that are so bureaucratic' (Quality assurance meeting, Lawyer, Tall school).

School actors' drive to find creative and informal solutions is often pushed by economic problems. During the SI interviews with teachers, they often returned to the issue of economic downsizing and its problematic consequences for the students. One striking feature of the SI judgement points is the silence regarding the schools' economic conditions. The SI decision-makers are very quiet about this issue; in fact, according to SI, it is the principle

organizer (municipalities and school companies) that is the guarantor for the economic situation.

Inspectors also describe creative and informal solutions associated with their own work. One of the inspectors explained how she approaches the dilemma of drawing lines between deficiencies and non-deficiencies in the process of making judgements and writing decisions:

[I] use to think like this: is this going to help this school? Do I think that they need to continue to work on this? Is it important that they do so? If so, I usually write about it. If not, if I see that they are already working on this issue, that they are on their way by themselves and I am confident that they will continue to work on it (...) Well, then I might not write about it (...) The important thing is to get the process going, if the process is already started, well then you can hesitate back and forth [concerning judgements] (Interview, Inspector 1, Moss School).

The inspectors' judgement-making looms largely as complex dilemmas, rather than as problems that admit to solutions applicable to some manual or checklist. This practical challenge is 'simultaneously cognitive and emotive' (Schwandt, 2005, p. 322): the inspector conceptualises the situation and reacts on it as she 'feels' the schools need. The above quote draws attention to the fact that inspection — for many of the inspectors — is not primarily concerned with finding evidence, but about *using knowledge* in order to develop the practices of schooling. This approach to inspection is not the only feature that bears resemblance to Eisner's notion of 'educational criticism'. Inspectors acknowledge the importance of good and close relations. They describe examples, such as the introduction of initial meetings before the regular supervision, in order to handle the nervousness of school actors. These meetings and conversations were not in the agency's process model, but they were introduced because the inspectors believed that they are a prerequisite for a fruitful dialogue and inspection.

Despite the detailed steering in terms of inspection manuals, the inspection process contains examples of inspectors going beyond formal instructions. In the accumulation of knowledge, experienced inspectors are asking supplementary questions that they find interesting and important, but that is not used directly as basis for judgement. One example in which an inspector goes beyond the manual is when Inspector 2 at the Rönn School asks the head

teacher, who is leaving his position, the following question: «Now, when you are quitting, you are leaving your computer and your office, but what else is it that you want to leave behind to your successor?» (Observation, Rönn School). These kinds of exceptions all touch on pedagogical aspects that seldom reach the final report, even though they are regarded as important by inspectors and school actors.

The inspectors' descriptions of judgement-making are often close to the idea of connoisseurship and outside of the manuals and official ideals of SI:

Usually, we can sense an atmosphere and we can 'read' how they talk to one another about the students. Such things say pretty much about how they perceive their own work....We have a trust in ourselves that we can judge when we see good and bad quality (Interview, Inspector 2, Rönn School).

Such 'tacit' and embodied bases for judgement are not congruent with positivist demands for hard evidence. Nevertheless, they are present in Swedish inspection activities and are regarded as inevitable by inspectors.

## THE DUAL OPTIC — NOTES TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

Drawing on case study data from inspection processes and official documents, this article sought to provide insights on how the Swedish state sees schooling today, as it relies upon its technical rationality. Based on the data, I argue that Swedish school inspection could be described as a manifestation of what Scott (1998, p. 4) labels high modernism, or a 'state initiated social engineering'. Regular supervision is oriented towards goal attainment and deficiencies, as well as towards juridical aspects and results. The standardized regular supervision serves the legitimate purpose of detecting and pointing out deficiencies in a mission for equivalence and in the pursuit of poor quality. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate seeks to overcome problems of inspectors' judgement-making in terms of biased, nonfactual, and blurred descriptions. In the concrete work of inspectors, the demands on equivalent judgements, as well as the claim for objectivity and universality steer their foci to formal and juridical aspects about which it is possible to make judgements. Inspectors, thus, execute judgements foremost regarding the simpler or quantifiable aspects of



education manifested in evidentiary trails of documentation, and they tend to overlook the complex processes that produce certain results.

The focus on particular forms of equivalence tends to systematically dismiss local practices and knowledge that are indispensable to routine social life and solve pedagogical problems. The assemblages of tacit and oral knowledge that constitute pedagogical professionalism — both school actors' and inspectors' — is at conflict with the desirability of uniformity in the production of equivalence and rule compliance. To some extent, the well-intended protection of children's individual rights to equivalent education and educational wellbeing, which currently involves substantial state capacity, appears to be a threat to local practical knowledge.

At the same time, there are examples of inspectors bending the formal inspection guidelines in order to create space for and address aspects of the local pedagogical realities of schooling that they hold as important. Seeing like a Swedish school inspector, thus, involves a dual optic, an interplay between different forms of reason. In a sense, inspection processes resemble the knowledge use and production of most positivistic science, in the sense that the final text (the proof) has to follow a certain format and canon in order to be legitimate, whereas the actual and messy practice of inspection (science) always requires genius or *mētis* (Scott, 1998). Despite the attempts to blue print inspection activities, inspectors appear to find ways to navigate beyond the formal framework and discuss with school actors issues other than the ones directly advocated by SI policy. The school visits — and, particularly, the interviews — offer a space for professional deliberation and learning in the connoisseurship tradition à la Eisner (1985). To some extent, meetings between inspectors, as well as between inspectors and school actors, appear to function as relays where formal guidelines are mediated, renegotiated, and made meaningful. Drawing on the data, it is foremost experienced inspectors with educational backgrounds that make use of their discretion. To the extent that regular supervision is a powerful policy tool, this is partly due to inspectors' manipulation and adjustment of rigid models in relation to the realities of schooling. In a sense, decoupling of formal directives appears to be an important aspect of the *mētis* of school inspectors.

The notion of a dual optic, as suggested by the data, implies that the single continuum featuring an evidence-based model and a model based on educational connoisseurship, or *mētis*, fails to capture the complexity of school inspection as a mode of governing education. Further bottom-up empirical

studies is needed to provide claims about the linkage between practical work routines and contemporary performance and control regimes.

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**OUTSOURCING THE GOVERNING OF EDUCATION:  
THE CONTEMPORARY INSPECTION OF SCHOOLING IN ENGLAND**

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**ABSTRACT**

The schools inspection service in England has been privatised and private companies manage it, through contracts. These companies hire flexible and part time inspectors who may be led by a small number of permanent HM inspectors. This shift in the highly regulated inspection service has introduced new methods of operation, market based behaviours and commercial confidentiality into the education sector and contrasts with the older, elite, judgement-based advisory work of their predecessors. Knowledge is produced and used by new actors for new purposes. The outsourcing of school inspection is a significant step in governing education, and indicates a future development in its governing knowledge.

**KEY WORDS**

Privatisation; Contracts; Outsourcing.



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# Outsourcing the Governing of Education: The Contemporary Inspection of Schooling in England

*Martin Lawn*

## INTRODUCTION

England had school inspectors prior to the formation of a national system of education but the organization, scope and practice of inspection has changed continuously over time, and especially in the last thirty years. Inspection has altered in line with changes in the governing of education, and the latest stage, the privatisation of a state agency itself, is the focus of the paper. The new inspection companies and their market problems are explored here, and one of the interesting aspects of this change in inspection is the shift in both the producers and the production of system knowledge as inspection changed. The knowledge base of inspection has shifted from being personal, elite and experiential judgement, used in the state steering of education, to a publically available, unrestricted, coded and regulated data-based reporting, used for market choices and comparative performance information. Importantly, this knowledge is the property of the company contracting the inspection as well as of the government. Knowledge gained from inspection does not develop reflective, inspectorial judgement but instead contributes to company market advantage and the sale of services.

Contemporary state governing solutions include alliances or partnerships with private companies although states differ in their involvement with the

private sector in the delivery of public policy. England appears to be turning its public sector — from health, transport, social services and education — into a field for private enterprise, through a policy of outsourcing (Ball, 2012; Ball & Junemann, 2012). In 2012, the Financial Times said:

The collective growth of the sector — dominated by FTSE 100 giants G4S, Capita and Serco — means Britain is in the grip of the biggest wave of outsourcing since the 1980s (Williams, 2012, p. 4).

There are great variations in the arena of Public-Private Partnerships, and this paper has emerged from a study of the school inspection service in England and the use of private contractors to manage the regulation and inspection of schools<sup>1</sup>. This business sector has grown rapidly across the world in different areas and circumstances. Unlike the older national systems of education, with their organized actors and hierarchies, this area is an entangled world of networks, venture capitalists, cross-border companies, and market pressure groups, all involved in the commodification of education, and its trade.

Businesses of various kinds, with limited or wide interests in education and other fields, are present in surprising ways in education arenas, and this is especially the case in England. Encouraged by the state, and even pampered by it, they have a new role as the state organizes itself to govern at a distance.

There are five different areas of private sector involvement in English state schools, these are: providing ancillary services [supply teachers, Technology, CPD], — a £600 million a year business — delivering important national education programmes [Careers Centres, Teachers' Pensions]; heavy involvement in infrastructure modernization [new school buildings]; providing specialist and supplementary education [private tuition, prison education, pupil referral units, work-based learning] and managing some local education authorities and schools where existing providers are judged to be failing (Muir, 2012, pp. 4-5). They may be actual providers of schools, of everything related to or needed by schools, or caretakers of historic state functions. In the last ten years, these education businesses have grown as they have begun to operate in new areas of education or in equivalent areas in public contracting. They have grown as a direct consequence of government policy and local financial cri-

<sup>1</sup> Governing by Inspection: Education Governance and School Inspection In England, Scotland and Sweden ESRC Bilateral RES 062 23 2241A.

ses. These contractors are organized in profit making organizations, mutual companies and foundations, but their contracts are achieved in competition and are similar to each other. They may operate across segments of the public sector, sometimes closely allied to education, at other times varying widely. They are or they contain education businesses and find profit from contracts and additional school services. For some time, Ofsted, the government agency inspecting education services in England, has used contracts to manage its school and social inspections. This process of outsourcing its work has produced education businesses that manage inspection contracts as one of their areas of interest. Their purpose is clear. What is not so clear is why the state is now using them to deliver key education services. They are a recent phenomenon and have become omnipresent in a short time, although at the same time, they are not well known publically. They have advantages in cost and accountability but as Cuban has said, outsourcing:

will flourish because when you do not know what to do, you experiment, experiment, and then experiment some more (Washington Post, 2013).

Experimentation should not be treated as forced on government by financial crisis, or driven by ideological hostility to the welfare state but, at least in the English case, as a deliberate governing strategy in education. Inspection is just one part of a policy of creative destruction!

The paper now briefly introduces the history of the education inspectorate in England, and its redesign as the agency, Ofsted; it then discusses the rise of inspection contracts and the companies which hold them, and considers their problematic status and how they work. Finally, outsourcing is related to the concept of a shadow state.

## SCHOOL INSPECTION AS A BUSINESS

In an education system which was heavily stratified into a restricted elite secondary education and a mass elementary education, the official purpose of education was limited, and the tools of governance ranged from central grants, examinations, handbooks and inspections. Oversight of the system, particularly its efficiency, depended upon the judgments of the school inspectors, Her Majesty's Inspectors, the HMI. With the exception of financial data [about the central

grants to the local authorities], the system was without data. The reports and judgments of the inspectors were the main source of information about the working of the system of education. At the same time, the inspectors did not view themselves as state servants: the idea of independence was an important sustaining myth for the inspectorate — «our cherished independence of judgment» (Allen, 1960, p. 235). They were an elite with a strong esprit de corps

HM Inspectorate relied on a strong collegiate tradition and shared experience (as well as internal guidelines) to achieve reliability and common practice (Maclure, 1998, pp. 21-2).

So, the Inspectorate 'offered advice' to schools and government, it was not regulatory; it offered a form of mediating power between institutions, expressed within conversations and reports, at a time when the system was increasingly seen as 'a central system, nationally administered' or 'a partnership between central and local government and the teaching profession'. The HMI had elite power, and in England, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1980s, this meant their judgement counted and not evaluation or empirical data. From the 1980s as public judgment and output based criteria were being established, HMI produced their own research and sampling techniques for national Primary Surveys and published analytic studies, based on an accumulation of inspection reports. Yet the more public or visible they were, the more their judgements were challenged. New questions about standards and accountability raised questions about their independence and their value: their knowledge base gradually changed over time — it had to be produced so that it could be read publicly; its validity was challenged; it began to be codified.

School inspection was radically redesigned in the early 1990s, following a new Schools Act which introduced intensive school testing and rankings. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) began to inspect schools in yearly cycles, and soon within only two days notice of inspection. Within a few years, it began to inspect local education authorities [the democratically elected area authorities], teacher education institutions, 16-18 years, independent [private schools] and early years education [nurseries and childcare]. This process of the extension of responsibility into new areas of provision and an intensive and punitive inspection regime continued. At the moment, there are two types of school inspector: Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), approximately 400, the senior inspectors of the system; and Additional

Inspectors (AI) employed by external companies [Regional Inspection Service Providers (RISP)], employed on contract, approximately 2000 in number. An HMI accompanies contracted AI inspectors on 6-7% of inspections, including 75% of those of secondary schools. Reports produced by the outsourced inspectors must be checked and signed off by HMI before publication. Outsourced inspectors must be monitored by HMI before working independently. The AI inspectors may work for several RISP contractors, or just one; they are self-employed and are chosen by the contractor when they are needed.

In the first years of Ofsted, there were a large number of recognised inspection companies or agents but the number fell rapidly as the inspection contracts became focused on regional divisions and streamlined scale of operation. So, the number of external inspection contractors fell from 39 in 2004, to 24 in 2005, and by 2008/9 to 5. Today, there are three main contractors: CfBT Education Trust, covering the North of England, SERCO Education and Children's Services, covering the English Midlands and Tribal Group, covering the South of England. There is an additional contractor, Prospects, with responsibility for one Early Years inspection contract. I look now at the four main inspection contractors and at their wider business interests.

Serco, which holds the inspection contract for the English Midlands, operates across many different fields and several countries: it has become a powerful general service company. Among its operations are public and private transport and traffic control, aviation, military and nuclear weapons contracts, detention centres and prisons, and schools. It operates passenger trains and sea ferries, immigration detention centres; prisons; airports and air traffic control services; and hospitals. Apart from a large inspection contract, Serco has contracts to manage and operate some local education authority services to schools, a point I will return to later. Serco was selected by Ofsted to run its Inspection services to schools, further education colleges, and work-based learning organizations in the Midlands in 2009 for a six year period. This contract is valued at £55 million. Although it had no direct experience of inspecting schools, Serco was confident that its experience in managing three local government education services and managing national contracts in other policy areas [like prisons and hospitals], enabled it to be successful in winning the Midlands contract. This experience is generic, drawn from a wide experience in performance based systems, and managing teams, logistics and innovative software systems. The emphasis on systems is a crucial element in the work of service sector companies, like Serco, as technology is

used to harness efficiency and automation. Of course, the entire business is focused on profit.

Their general capacity to manage systems across wide fields means that it has to present itself as an education business when it deals with schools. It cloaks itself in a peculiar and yet typical language of business, education and performance:

We are delighted to be appointed by Ofsted and are excited about introducing our ideas and capabilities to support the improvement of inspection services. Our first priority will be to build up a strong and professional base of Inspectors, Managers and supporting staff. We are really looking forward to working with Ofsted, with existing and potential new Inspectors, and with all the educational establishments that provide learning services to children, young people and adults in this central region of the UK. This appointment underlines our position as one of the leading private sector providers of educational services in the UK. We are committed to ensuring these services will ultimately result in higher attainment for the children and young people in our region (Serco selected by Ofsted to run Inspections 25 March 2009 Press Release).

Serco's version of business in public education is covered by reference to its values: it works with 'customers in a collaborative, flexible and imaginative way' and it understands public sector 'principles and passions' and shares its professional's 'standards of conduct'. This new discourse of improvement, of capability and of a value brand is common to the RISP contractors, as it is to other private actors in education for example, chains of school academies. It is intended to have a persuasive power for educators and parents, as it is not necessary to use this discourse in obtaining an inspection contract, which will be based on value for money and efficiency criteria.

Another large mixed profile service company, Tribal, inspects nearly a third of state schools, employs 1200 inspectors and delivers about 25,000 inspections a year, including in Further Education colleges, work-based learning providers, maintained schools, independent schools, child minders, child-care settings, and Initial Teacher Education providers. It describes itself as the leading provider of student management systems to UK universities, school, college and nursery inspections, and information systems on Children's Services to local authorities. Tribal trains its inspectors through face-to-face and



online support. Tribal is an education business, and inspection contracts are only one part, a crucial part, of its growing business. It is through its experience of school inspections that it has been able to develop and sell a Schools Improvement programme, using its support technologies, which it promotes as transformational: it brings together ‘results, processes and culture’ for performance improvement, and it ‘professionalises’ school to school networking on improvement (Tribal 4 November 2010 / Press Release).

The Tribal online shop sells diagnostic and learning software, including school self evaluation tools. All this will be useful in the next stage of its business development, working with or developing chains of Academy schools: in the space of two years, Academies have grown across England from about 200 to 2300 in number. Apart from English school inspection contracts and new business in school improvement and Academy chains, Tribal works overseas, mainly in the Middle East, on schools inspections in Abu Dhabi and have a contract worth up to £6m to conduct school inspections there. Inspections are used therefore to build the capabilities of the company in the English and international markets.

In 2010, Tribal obtained another inspection contract in Early Years education, which meant that it then employed 245 ex-Ofsted inspectors as part of the contract. Tribal stated that their new employees were enthusiastic and positive about their training in Tribal. Again, like Serco, Tribal invokes a new language of education: its inspectors will make a ‘strong and positive difference to the lives of families and young children’ in their area. They will also be efficient, maximise productivity, streamline complaints and review processes. The complex operational processes in inspection will be managed through their proprietary software-led system of inspection workflows. It is these technology driven systems that give companies like Tribal their business advantage in education, as the complexity of regulation, compliance and inspection involves questions of logistics, investigation, assessments, reports, and document management. In 2011, Tribal stated that this involved the completion of 1,548,928 tasks in Early Years inspection alone, and yet Tribal increased the efficiency of its Early Years inspection contract by 352% in 2010, and by 185% in 2011. It is working under contract, with a fixed price, and with permanent regulations, and its workflow software that produces its profit margin. Again, like Serco, it is the knowledge gained from contract management which can be sold on to other markets — in the Academy business or Abu Dhabi, for example.

The old public sector was mainly organized locally, and on a small scale, with little exchange or partnerships between authorities. These companies have an advantage over the democratic local authorities; they focus on profit and they invest in technology. Sturgess, from Serco, describes the early advantage that they had

Governments turned to the private sector for IT services largely because there was no in-house capability in this field and, given the pace of change, there was little point in developing it. What has changed in recent years is the expansion of the associated support services which private sector firms are capable of managing on behalf of clients. The term most commonly used is 'business process outsourcing', and the range of services variously includes asset management, financial management (including payroll, pensions and accounts), human resources administration, procurement and supply chain management and help desks and customer information (Sturgess, 2007, p. 22).

These firms grew out of specialist back office companies, with generic interests in technology driven business logistics; and their operating knowledge across different sectors developed from efficiencies of scale.

CfBT [originally the Centre for British Teachers, since 2006 the CfBT education trust] is the third main education inspection contractor in schools (state and independent), the learning and skills sector, initial training education and childcare. It employs about 700 inspectors, on contracts ranging from 20 days to 120 days per year. It makes great claims for its supportive environment for inspectors, including pastoral support, and for their professional development; it provides some evidence that there is high satisfaction with its school inspections. Like the other two companies, its inspection contract is across state and independent schools, FE colleges, work-based learning, and children's centres, but unlike them, CfBT is a charity and not profit making. Synergies between inspection, evaluation and consultancy provide an expertise-based business model, and it has a research programme, Evidence for Education (EfE) which identifies, develops and disseminates evidence-based good practice. It has contracts to provide major school improvement and consultancy support to Lincolnshire and Lambeth local authorities. It has its own chain of associated Academies and Free Schools.

The fourth education business, Prospects, has an inspection contract for Early Years education. It grew out of a network of local authority youth career

offices in London in 1996. In 2012, it employed a staff of 1500 [directly or flexibly], works in 60 sites and has an annual turnover of £80 million. Most of this expansion is due to public sector contracts from government departments or agencies. Its business includes youth services, employment services, training and skills services, and into economic and community regeneration. Following its education contracts, the rapid expansion of Academy schools since 2010 has enabled it to create its own chain of academy schools, directly providing schooling and not just services. It has also acquired companies that allowed its services to grow; particularly a data software provider, which will probably take over all internal services across Prospects wide field, and at the same time, allow growth into new areas and provide an additional commercial service.

In 2010, Prospects obtained the contract from Ofsted for the inspection of Early Years education providers [for example, child minders, preschools, day nurseries and children's centres] in the Midlands and North of England. In this area, there are 55,000 providers and Prospects employed over 200 inspectors. This is a large and valuable contract and it is clear that a new company, like Prospects, had to convince its employer, Ofsted, and Early Years professionals in its area that it knew what it was doing. Its documentation makes constant reference to its 'professional inspectors', who are 'trained' and 'dedicated'; they have a 'thorough knowledge and understanding' of their work, the 'highest professional standards' and collect 'robust evidence'. They explain that although this situation is new, a private inspection company, that they work directly to Ofsted, following their instructions, quality assuring their work and reporting back to Ofsted. Their reports will then appear on the Ofsted website within 20 days. Its business discourse covers similar ground to the other contractors. It offers probity and stability, through its procedures, track record and image, and yet, for its investors, it makes it clear it is a commercial company, albeit in the public sector, and intends to develop the Early Years area into further profit making services. Prospects already provide consultancies, training, inspection preparation and web design, for example, and it is constantly looking for voluntary, public or private sector organizations who can expand the range of its education business, including policy and lobbying companies, and with any companies 'looking to enter the Early Years market'.

Although each company has a different history, they all operate an opportunist business model and have moved into inspection contracting because it



offered expansion opportunities. The knowledge gained from these contracts is used for profit, for synergy, or for additional service sales. They are now specialists in income generation and producing profit in the field of public sector education.

## CONTRACTS, MARKETS AND INSPECTION

Even though these companies are taxpayer dependent and work on lengthy contracts, they work in a business model with instabilities. In this section, some of their problems will be analysed. As a consequence of the financial collapse of 2009/10, CfBT lost 13% of its income and 100 staff members, closing its businesses in the US and Singapore. A rapid shift in government policy meant that it lost a profitable contract in youth services at only three months notice and most of its staff, and became involved in a legal battle with its local authority partners. Even public sector contracts are not free from risk. For example, when Prospects and Tribal won the Early Years contract, they employed the experienced inspectors who had been working for Ofsted for up to 25 years. However, within two years, the institution of a new regulation framework for inspection in 2012 mean that over 300 early years inspectors, working for the two companies had to sit an assessment. Large numbers of inspectors failed the assessment and criticised Ofsted [which was responsible for the design and management of the assessment process]. Prospects and Tribal 'were surprised at the number of experienced and well-qualified inspectors that failed the assessment and are now faced with shortages of inspectors in some areas of the country' (Gaunt, 2012). These inspectors were now deemed incompetent. Prospects was caught between its employer and contract manager, Ofsted, and its employees. It could not continue to employ these inspectors if, because of a change in regulation, they were now 'incompetent' [even if longstanding and experienced ex-Ofsted employees]. Yet they were now to lose significant numbers of inspectors, through a process of assessment which was viewed as poor, and managed by its employer, Ofsted.

Prospects said publicly, and had to say as a contractor, that:

Any inspector carrying out early years inspections is assessed and must demonstrate they meet the required level of competence in such inspections. While a minority of inspectors have not met the standard, Prospects has suf-

ficient capacity in our pool of competent employee and freelance inspectors to meet our obligations and ensure safety and quality are not compromised (Gaunt, 2012).

In fact, many of its inspectors were demoralized and stressed by this event: although a change in regulation was always followed by an assessment, this was the first time it involved dismissal on such a large scale. It was widely felt that this was a serious attempt to lose the professional, longstanding inspectors and employ self employed, freelance staff, to 'casualise' inspection. Indeed, it was stated that Prospects offered the 'failed' inspectors their jobs back as freelancers on lower rates of pay (Gaunt, 2012).

Risks to the company brand may even result from profitable contracts. Serco had held a ten year contract with the city of Bradford to manage and operate the local education authority, providing education support services to the City's schools, and to raise standards (Serco Press Release, 2001). It had similar contracts with the towns of Walsall and Stoke-on-Trent. It claimed that it had improved these local authority services hugely, upgraded their examination results and their Local authority grading. These contracts were worth millions of pounds and involved hundreds of schools. Walsall's education services were taken away from the local authority and compulsorily outsourced to Serco in 2002 by the Secretary of State for Education in London. Ofsted had viewed the Council and its education service as a failing service; its schools failed inspections and were in special measures. Serco took over its services and its staff, brought in new management and restructured the service. Within 2 years, Walsall [and Serco] was re-inspected and showed a 'spectacular improvement' [according to Serco]. Yet in 2013, Walsall terminated its 12 year contract with Serco, worth «£345m».

The rapid rise of Academies, by voluntary or enforced action, post 2010, had destabilized this contract. These schools were becoming independent of the local authority and would begin to buy services from outside Walsall. Serco's contract with Walsall, in which they acted like a local authority, was becoming an irrelevance when the Academies were moving into independent action, or combining into chains of schools. Serco lost a lot of income from the loss of this contract, but it was even more concerned with damage to its brand as an effective and productive education business. It didn't want its reputation to suffer. The following year its contract with Bradford was terminated as well after ten years after wide consultation between the local authority

and parents and governors. Bradford wanted to take back strategic control of its education services to achieve its regional planning objectives [School Matters, Sept 2011, p. 2]. Serco's confident statements the previous year, 2010, were about how its work in Walsall and Bradford had been very successful, and 'their' schools had improved at twice the national rate for school improvement. This was the direct result of Serco's 'introduction of new management, improved relationships with schools, motivated staff, shorter decision-making chains, more efficient processes and effective use of technology'. A 2010 Press release by their Managing Director for Education said:

I would like to congratulate the staff that work either for Serco, for the partner local authorities, or other partner agencies who are committed to creating a better future for the children they serve. We are delighted that we have been able to play our part in improving exam achievements and will continue to bring our values, skills and resources into delivering better children's services (SERCO Press Release, 2010).

This achievement, if it was one, was nullified by the loss of these important contracts in education, mainly because of a change in national or local policy, neither of which it could shape or control. These inspection contractors work in a privileged but unstable relation with government. They have enormous benefits from national contracts, financially and in knowledge and experience. They have had a fortunate entry into a new field of education business. This will last as long as the outsourcing of national and regional government continues. But their business model still depends on government funding. The tap on the government pipeline can be turned off, as well as on.

## OUTSOURCING AS GOVERNING

Outsourcing has grown significantly over the last 20 years and recently new arguments about the risks involved and the high cost have been strongly made. One event has come to symbolize the problem, and this was the security debacle at the 2012 Olympic Games in London, where a private contractor, G4S, failed critically, causing the only major malfunction in the whole complex process. With vital services, the state cannot opt out of responsibility:

If a contractor messes up, the government has to fill the resulting gap. Bringing in an alternative private supplier — the marketeers' solution — simply does not work when time margins are short, training is required and budgets are tight... Contracting parties need to maintain constant vigilance. Departments and councils need permanent, real-time intelligence about what the contractor is up to. If they don't have it, they run the risk of service failure (Walker, July 2012. The Guardian).

Outsourcing has worked in parallel with the segmentation of the education service and its transformation into measurable objects. In this process, local authority bidding for government monies, tendering processes, and contracting, depended on the production of data, and so did national government controls and performance audits. Education business companies make a virtue out of their technological sophistication; they reduce complexity in contract processes, they manage workflow efficiently and they boast about their scrutiny procedures. They argue, like Serco does, that contracting produces new clarity and visibility in public service improvement, and they are used to increasing accountability and standards of service; for example:

Performance management is integral to how we do business — if we fail to deliver on our commitments, we fail to make a profit — so you can imagine that this is a subject that exercises our minds often (Sturgess, Serco, 2004).

These businesses exist as hybrids between the market and hierarchies; they work as a heterarchy, a system of organization with multiple forms of connectivity, entangled relations and layers of interaction [Jessop 1998]. They profit through different forms of activity — sales, services, consultancy, contracts and provision — and yet, in our case, they are almost welfare dependent on government sources. They operate in a sphere in which actors move between advocacy, public service, consultancy and entrepreneurship, often with a single visible identity. Their multiple concerns — surveying new sectors, proposals, partnerships, contract scrutiny — means that focus moves constantly. They discipline themselves through a dependence on technology which makes accountability, performance and control overriding and pervasive. Their discourse is about efficiency but cloaked within a language of public service.

They are working within the grain of contemporary governing. The public have learned to act as consumers, and move between public/ municipal and

private providers. Contract culture and outsourcing is not new anymore, it has existed in England for 20 years. Market opportunities are created all the time as the state opens new areas to privatization and performance management regimes. As large public services — like education — are broken down into smaller parts — like careers service, skills centres, child guidance, staff development, training — it became easier to open them to private contracts (Whitfield, 2010, p. 99).

A dominant and early version of outsourcing was defined by the number of voluntary and non-profit organizations which were working in complex arrangements with government. The idea of the 'shadow state' has grown out of an attempt to define:

a para-state apparatus comprised of multiple voluntary sector organizations, administered outside of traditional democratic politics and charged with major collective service responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector, yet remaining within the purview of state control (Wolch, 1990, p. xvi).

In England, the situation has altered so that a variety of organizations, with different relations to profit making [charitable foundations, mutual companies and commercial companies] now operate in this sector. As Trudeau explains, this can lead to «divergent assemblages of state and civil society relations that reflect hybrid arrangements of state and civil society functions» (Trudeau, 2008, p. 673). Their hybridity leads to semi-autonomy and to a disciplining of their independence, as they are subject to regulation, audits and contract changes, as well as close micro-interventions. Influence, through different scales, «travels in multiple directions» (Trudeau, 2008, p. 684) in this contract relation.

The governing of education in England has changed fundamentally in recent decades. It is managed by punitive regulations, market stratagems, commercial actors and advanced technologies, and even sensitive core elements of the system, like inspection, are operated by private entities. The advantages of outsourcing more and more of the education service are several: tax and employment costs are lowered; local authority power is weakened; there are benefits of scale; and, government is not directly responsible for the service. The rise of public awareness of the extent of outsourcing and its failures has made the subject more politically sensitive. Private companies of different kinds have found great advantages in obtaining profitable government



contracts: they can produce additional services from the knowledge gained in their operation, and they can generate generic advantage from software driven efficiencies, which are applicable in other realms. They can be surprised by the instability of contracts however; a change of national or local policy can end contracts, and sometimes with great difficulties. Profitable areas are not stable and new sources have to be sought constantly.

The consequences of this shadow state of entangled public-private relations and actors appear to be that coordinating mechanisms and audit have to be applied with greater and greater force, and that unrecognized costs emerge. Coordination, if it still exists as a governing practice, involves a market, mixed in with public sector hierarchies still in place, and an entrepreneurial set of knowledge networks. A recent report — the Shadow State — raised a number of issues with outsourcing: and the power of private companies that apply to the study of English inspection (Williams, 2012). The English education system was a hierarchical and a central/local democratic system with variation, tradition and excellent practice. It did not have a lot of public data but what there was could be accessed. Private companies use commercial confidentiality to protect their business which makes it difficult to understand how they work, how they get and operate contracts, and on what basis they can be audited or evaluated. School inspection in England can have major consequences for the school; it can lead to loss of staff and pupils, and even school closure. The fact that this could result from the action of a private company, appearing as a public agency, is still not well known. The widespread use of outsourcing has occurred within public sector institutions and the public has little knowledge of their existence. Ofsted is regarded as a powerful state agency yet it is also a series of private oligopolies, usually profit making, operating with flexible labour, and focused on brands and expansion.

The problem of outsourcing is two fold: should the state relinquish its responsibility for its democratic functions to the private sector; and should public monies be used to support this private business sector [upon which it is also dependent]? There is another, little discussed problem with outsourcing, and that is, state and professional governing knowledge is being lost and these private companies take this knowledge and use it for their market expansion. Outsourced contracts lead to a loss of knowledge about the public sector and its practices, within government and the public. Private companies have the potential to become the shapers and brokers of public services which only



they really know. It is not uncommon in English government for advisers to be used from the private sector to shape the regulation of their industry. Outsourcing, including the outsourcing of inspection, signals fundamental shifts in the nature of governing.

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**KNOWLEDGE, AUTHORITY AND JUDGEMENT:  
THE CHANGING PRACTICES OF SCHOOL INSPECTION IN ENGLAND**

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**ABSTRACT**

School Inspection involves the construction and mobilisation of particular conceptions of knowledge, judgement and expertise. These constructions change over time and between different inspection regimes. In this paper we explore some of the shifting criteria and practices of inspection that have been visible in the recent development of school inspection in England as organised through the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). At stake in these processes are the shifting relationships between different types of knowledge (not least data and observation); the types of expertise and authority understood to be embodied in the inspector; and the forms of judgement that are exercised in inspection. In the work of Ofsted, these changing constructions and mobilisations of knowledge are also linked to the changing practices and criteria used in the evaluation of school performance: most dramatically the reclassification of the evaluation grade of 'satisfactory' to 'requires improvement'. The paper explores the political and governmental pressures that drive changes in the construction and mobilisation of knowledge in school inspection and consider what new problems may arise as a consequence of such changes.

**KEY WORDS**

Knowledge; Evidence; Expertise; Authority; Judgement;  
Evaluation criteria; Discourses; Practices.



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# Knowledge, Authority and Judgement: The Changing Practices of School Inspection in England

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper begins with a description of the ways in which knowledge and evidence are understood in the context of this paper. It continues by exploring the ways in which inspection discourses of knowledge and evidence in the English context impact upon the wider community. Drawing on data from research on inspection in England, we explore how differing forms of knowledge and evidence influence the discourse of inspection and equally the ways in which inspection discourses influence which elements of knowledge and evidence are privileged at any one time.

## KNOWLEDGE AND EVIDENCE IN INSPECTION

In this paper we draw upon Foucauldian thinking about knowledge in which knowledge is understood as the product of a series of complementary and conflicting discourses that evolve and mutate over time. In this discursive field, different forms of knowledge may compete with one another in a space of practice, helping to define and give meaning to its practices, relationships

and ordering. Foucault stresses the process of constituting a form of «collective consciousness»:

between the simultaneous and successive phenomena of a given period a community of meanings, symbolic links, an interplay of resemblance and reflection which allows the sovereignty of collective consciousness to emerge as the principle of unity and explanation (Foucault, 1969, p. 24).

From this perspective, the discourses that claim the authoritative status of truth (and become the accepted and authoritative knowledge about the field) can be examined through analyses which reveal the underlying hegemonic or dominant belief systems that come to underpin particular actions and empower the actors who perform them. Although this perspective considers the temporal and historical elements of the discourse, it draws upon the idea that discourse «must not refer to the distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs» (ibid, p. 28). To put it another way, this is an analytic orientation to discourse in practice, and to discourse as practice. This view of knowledge permits a diachronic analysis of the breaks within discourse: the points at which, due to historical, cultural and political contextual conditions, discourses of knowledge begin to shift, leading to both new forms of knowledge (and ways of knowing) in particular contexts while also illuminating the ways in which these discourses are resisted and shaped by references to the past.

These understandings also draw upon inspection in the wider context: conceptualized and acted out within a 'fluid policy space that encompasses national and transnational contexts and their interactions. Examining how they interpret, mediate and translate into action, transnational performance based knowledge' (Grek, Lawn, Ozga & Segerholm, 2013, p. 2). In this study, we treat inspectors as actors who both interpret and enact discursive interpretations of policies whilst concomitantly shaping the perceptions of those being inspected. Through this they negotiate political blocs, build alliances, negotiate and reconcile interests, and assemble projects that define the direction and purpose of governing within a specific field of practice (see Clarke, 2012). This implies thinking of inspectors as actors, located and formed by specific governmental contexts and concerns. Our approach is framed by an interest in how specific forms of knowledge and ways of knowing are articulated in practice and with how they are embodied and enacted.

As a consequence, we approach the issue of evidence — or more accurately, the varieties of evidence — as pointing to the ways in which «performance is made visible and transparent» (Ozga, 2011, p. 5) not only to those who seek to govern performance but also in the wider context of the ways in which this evidence is privileged within the work of governance. Public perceptions of the legitimacy of forms of evidence are in play in the operation of instruments of governing. Inspection, like other governing practices, involves articulations of ways of knowing, forms of knowledge, types of evidence that seek to be authoritative. Here we draw on the work of Ernest House who argues that all evaluation is a form of persuasion (1980, p. 71). In offering a performative understanding of evaluation, House distinguishes differing forms of evidence according to the contexts in which they are generated, stating that:

Evaluations themselves can be no more than acts of persuasion. Although sometimes evaluators promise Cartesian proof, the certainty of proof and conclusiveness that the public expects, the definitive evaluation is rarely (...) subject to serious scrutiny, evaluations always appear equivocal (House, 1980, p. 72).

House helpfully points to the rhetorical and persuasive character of evaluation, always striving to claim certainty, truth and objectivity. However, as he suggests, such claims are necessarily potentially vulnerable to scrutiny, challenge and sceptical distance. In the field of school inspection, such vulnerabilities are recurrent, contributing to a cyclical process of change in search of the improvements in method and judgement that might overcome such vulnerabilities and the ‘credibility gap’ they engender. In drawing on these understandings of forms of evidence as tools that are deployed to convince and persuade, we examine how understandings of knowledge and evidence shift and combine with persuasive discourses and normative assumptions around the purpose, function and articulation of inspection within England’s particular political and governmental context.



## THE STUDY: GOVERNING BY INSPECTION

This paper draws on data from the ESRC project: *Governing by Inspection*.<sup>1</sup> The project explores the ways in which national systems of school inspection operate within their own jurisdictions and how they intersect with international organisations such as the Standing International Conference on Inspection (SICI) to create sites for the interaction of «global, European, UK and local policy» providing a space for the investigation of «the influence of historically embedded assumptions and beliefs on the mediation of global policy trends» (Grek et al., 2013, p. 1).

As part of the research design, a series of local cases was undertaken in each country), while also exploring the work and development of the three national systems of school inspection. In common with a number of multi-country case studies, researchers in the field seek, ‘the ordinary happenings for each case, investigating settings and following the range of value commitments’ (Stake, 2006, p. 29). The multiple case study approach ‘begins with recognising what concept or idea binds the case studies together’ (ibid., p. 23). In this study this was achieved by analyzing national data in the form of thematic and policy documentation concerning school inspection in combination with local inspection data, drawing upon analysis of 50 inspection reports in each local setting. We also conducted interviews with national and local actors (inspectors of different kinds, local authority School Improvement Advisors and head teachers).<sup>2</sup> The interviews were analysed using a coding structure emanating from themes emerging from Nvivo analysis of data, in combination with discourse analytical methods (Fairclough, 2001, 2009). Documentary evidence was analysed using established techniques based on political discourse analysis (Chilton, 2003), combined with media analytic techniques which view official discourse as fulfilling both operational and political functions as an intermediary between media and policy (Burton & Carlen, 1979; Fitzgerald & Housley, 2009).

1 *Governing by inspection: School inspection and Education Governance in Scotland, England and Sweden* (ESRC: RES 062232241A) and the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsradet). The authors acknowledge the funding and support of the research councils concerned.

2 The English system includes Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMIs) directly employed by Ofsted and a large subcontracted workforce of inspectors who provide the bulk of the staffing for inspection teams. The work of recruiting, training and managing these inspectors is subcontracted by Ofsted to three organizations: Serco, Tribal and CfBT.



## SHIFTING CRITERIA: THE ENGLISH SYSTEM OF INSPECTION

The English inspectorate for education has been in existence since 1839 when it was introduced as an accountability measure to ensure that funds from Parliamentary grants awarded to schools were being used appropriately (Maclure, 2000). The inspectorate continued to develop in response to government requirements for ever greater accountability within the education sector until Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education) was established by the 1992 Education (Schools) Act (Parliament, 1992). The period leading up to the creation of the new agency was characterised by an increasing suspicion of the role and power of the inspectorate combined with growing levels of government mistrust of the public sector in general, reflecting Clarke's argument that:

[when] governments strive to reform public services and produce 'improvements', they encounter an increasingly sceptical public, unwilling to believe things they are told by politicians. Evaluation systems and agencies promise a way out of this paradox of government: independent and expert agencies that can assess performance and its improvement 'at arm's length' from government (Clarke, 2008, p. 123).

The new agency was granted far greater regulatory powers than its predecessor. It has employed a succession of frameworks in order to evaluate school performance (Ofsted, 1993, 2005, 2009b, 2012b, 2012c), judging it according to the grades: outstanding, good, satisfactory or inadequate. The 'satisfactory' judgement was changed to 'requires improvement' in September 2012 in order to reflect the vigorously articulated sense of dissatisfaction among politicians and some educationalists with the term 'satisfactory' (Garner, 2012). 'Satisfactory' was viewed by both the Secretary of State for Education and the new Chief Inspector as too generous a judgement of underperforming schools, contributing to a perpetuation of 'coasting' schools: those that made little effort to improve (Burns, 2011; Paton, 2012).

In deploying this framework of judgement, Ofsted and its inspection teams have constituted discourses of excellence in schooling and accompanying discourses of failure. Schools that have been identified as outstanding have become 'beacons of good practice', attracting attention from the media, the government, parents and students alike. Beset by attention, oversubscribed,

their head teachers lionised and their cultures emulated by schools throughout England, such schools have become hegemonic representations of educational excellence (for further discussion see Baxter & Clarke, 2013). At the same time, the judgement of being a ‘failing school’ has powerful effects within communities, reducing property values and leading to an exodus of those families who can afford to move house in order to send their children elsewhere:

After property, good schools must be the UK’s most popular obsession. It should come as no surprise then, that the performance results of state schools within the catchment area of your property will have a direct effect on its value (Howard, 2012).

This points to the complicated social (and economic) dynamics that have followed the invention of a distinctive quasi-market in schooling in England. One head of an ‘outstanding’ school pointed to some of the ramifications this may have within local areas:

I think that the term «requires improvement» is a notice to improve, that’s what it is. Parents [in a local school] were very, very concerned about the notice to improve, but there is nowhere for their kids to go. I got a lot of requests for people to send their kids here, but we are full, massively full, and to be honest, I don’t want the refugees. The sort of people who want to bale out are exactly the sort of people who ought to stay there to get the place back on its feet (EP22).

Following from House’s idea of evaluation as persuasion, the discourses created by the inspectorate aim to create a bridge between education policy and definitions of school success that establishes a schema, a frame or a way of understanding educational attainment in England. These discourses function as theoretical constructs and are articulated in official documents such as inspection reports and thematic documents (see for example Ofsted, 1999, 2003) in order to create what Chilton terms a «neutral reality» (2003, p. 51) which the public are enjoined to accept by the nature of its purportedly impartial and objective stance. Ofsted recurrently and rhetorically insists on its independence, for example: «We prize our independence and we report impartially» (Ofsted, 2009a, p. 2).

The discourses also possess a dynamogenic element, mobilizing both affective and metacognitive responses in order to create a temporal discourse of

progression in which both public and teaching profession take up their roles in a journey towards success (for further discussion see Baxter & Clarke, 2012). This vision of success and raised standards often fails to define what successful education is within today's society, preferring instead to focus on a distant point on the horizon in which English education will be the best in the world. As Chilton points out, political discourses often employ kinesthetic metaphors in order to create frames for:

indirectly experienced concepts such as time, plans, purposes and policies. Political concepts involving leadership and political action conceptualized by movement or journey metaphors and including systematic expressions such as coming to a cross roads, moving ahead towards a better future, not deviating from plans... (Chilton, 2003, p. 45).

The articulation of these discourses occurs directly through a variety of media: inspection reports, thematic reports (Ofsted, 1999, 2003), web based media and press releases from both the agency and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (Paton, 2012). There are also more indirect means, ranging from training sessions in which teacher delegates are prepared for inspection, handbooks such as *The Perfect Ofsted Inspection* and *The Perfect Ofsted Lesson* (Beere, 2011, 2012), to national and international conferences in which the system of inspection in England is introduced to international audiences. Our analysis of these texts, transcripts and observation notes reveals the normative elements of inspection discourses: elements that derive from the way in which inspection has come to be farmed and deployed within an English political and governmental context. One of these texts, *The Perfect Ofsted Inspection* by Jackie Beere (Beere, 2011), demonstrates the extent to which pedagogical discourses have become entangled with Ofsted requirements. The book's emphasis appears to be on presenting one's school in the best possible light, underlining the performative character of inspection. It is described as «a highly practical and comprehensive guide that will ensure that you show your school and its achievements at its best» (Beere, 2011, p. 1). The book attempts to bridge the discourse between inspection and pedagogical practice by creating a mix of advice as to what constitutes good teaching, with a practical view of how to persuade the inspector that your lessons are indeed outstanding. For example, the author describes how to make an immediate impact upon the inspector:

The primacy effect suggests that first impressions are so powerful that they can override objective judgements. The primacy effect for your students occurs in the first six seconds of your lesson. In an observation the first six seconds of an inspector's visit to your classroom will be influential. Getting brains engaged immediately pays dividends (Beere, 2011, p. 53).

It is this combination of ideas of what constitutes good teaching alongside the performative requirement to 'make an impact' on the inspector that contributes to such a perplexing culture in terms of the way in which knowledge is understood in inspection. What are inspectors expected to observe — and how are they to judge what they see and hear?

#### SHIFTING KNOWLEDGES: WHAT DO INSPECTORS KNOW?

The question of inspectorial judgement is further complicated by recent decisions to re-model the inspection workforce. Attributable partly to a number of government inquiries and partly to the inspectorate's enhanced focus on school improvement (Ofsted, 2012c, 2012f), the three sub-contracted inspection agencies are now tasked with recruiting in-service school leaders from good and outstanding schools to be part of inspection teams. These individuals, acting as self-employed inspectors, are asked to undertake a minimum of one inspection per term. Employing in-service professionals as inspectors has brought another dimension to the type of knowledge that is valued within educational inspection: teacher knowledge or head teacher knowledge (Baxter, 2013a).

Some of the head teachers who we interviewed were enthusiastic about this move, seeing it as overcoming some of the distance between inspectors and schools, and bringing relevant knowledge of running a school into the inspection process. For example, one head teacher said «I worry about the quality of inspectors... I look at people on courses and think: Would I want that person coming into my school and making a judgement?» (HT1). This headteacher was particularly troubled by the lack of contemporary experience of schools, pointing to the length of time that had elapsed since some inspectors had been in a school except as inspectors. She thought this made such inspectors more likely to make judgements that ignored the specifics of the school under inspection. Others talked about the importance of current expe-

rience of running a school as a critical resource for inspections — and for the schools being inspected. One informant suggested that such experience could reduce the ‘inconsistencies’ visible in inspection judgements that reflected a focus on process rather than attention to the context (HT3). However, asking professionals to draw upon their knowledge while performing at most one inspection per term has implications for the way in which this knowledge lends itself to the work of inspection (for further discussion see Baxter & Clarke, 2012; Baxter & Hult, Forthcoming). It also raises questions around the performative nature of inspection: what type of evidence will these teacher/head teacher inspectors tend to privilege and how this will integrate with the type of knowledge they are expected to privilege as inspectors?

Ofsted documents insist inspectors must use their professional judgement and discretion when making their judgements, drawing upon a range of evidence in order to substantiate their claims (Ofsted, 2012f). But a key part of the inspector role is the degree to which they can enter into dialogue with the school in a way that supports school development while also legitimizing inspection judgements and credibility of evidence. This ‘teacher to teacher’ discussion taps into notions of professional dialogue, enabling inspectors to deploy their own school experiences in order to justify decisions. This can be a powerful means for the bridging of school and inspection discourses, as one head told us: «One of the team was a deputy head, from a grammar school just outside Birmingham and it was really interesting in terms of the conversations about people’s own experiences» (EP6). But interviews with inspector trainers offered different insights into the significance of such professional knowledge, identifying tensions in terms of one form of professional knowledge that is gained as a teacher or head teacher and the type of professional knowledge that is valued as part of an inspection team:

It’s the baggage that’s the problem, we ask them to leave their baggage behind, don’t bring it with you, it clutters, by that we mean what works in your school won’t necessarily work in the schools you are inspecting (EP10).

This was echoed by another inspector trainer who highlighted the ways in which the normative assumptions of head teachers often impede understanding of tasks that, although sharing the same name, may be put into practice in very different ways in different settings. This ex-head and inspector trainer describes how this plays out when teaching inspectors are called upon to observe lessons in their capacity as inspectors:

It's a different skill. We mustn't forget that teachers and head teachers and the way that they evaluate and observe teaching in schools, it has to be that way: it's developmental nurturing, it has to take into account that these are people that they know well, so they can't go in with total objectivity, and also they are immersed neck deep in that person's personal life. And I don't mean their domestic life but the fact that they weren't feeling very well last week, that they have an examination group and it may well demotivate them so there is an entire matrix of dynamics going on around headship and leaders and line managers that is a lot of galaxies away from an inspector walking into a classroom and judging teaching and leadership and behaviour. So yes, some people find it very difficult to get to the point of offering advice, equally people find it very difficult simply linking provision with outcome, or cause and effect (EP11).

The conflicting character of these accounts of what constitutes knowledge and evidence in inspection is compounded by the differing ways in which statistical data contribute to inspection judgements.

## THE DATA DILEMMA

Returning to House's description of evidence in evaluation; in order to create accounts that are both legitimate and persuasive, it is important that evidence *appears* to be both robust and credible. The inspectorate in England has historically used a mix of qualitative observations combined with statistical data as a basis upon which inspectors make their judgments. But successive drives to create a more transparent system of inspection, prompted initially by John Major's Citizens' Charter in 1991 (Parliament, 1991) and subsequently by the desire to compete internationally (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005; Grek, Lawn & Ozga, 2009), has led to the development of 'one of the most extensive educational data banks in the world' (Parliament, 2011).

The evidence on pupil attainment drawn from this school data management system (RAISE online)<sup>3</sup> is used by the inspectorate alongside other evi-

<sup>3</sup> Its website says that: «RAISEonline aims to: Enable schools to analyse performance data in greater depth as part of the self-evaluation process, Provide a common set of analyses for schools, Local authorities, inspectors and School Improvement Partners, and Better support teaching and learning» (Retrieved 08.11.2013 from <https://www.raiseonline.org/About.aspx>).

dence from, for example, school observations, surveys of parents and pupils and knowledge of school culture and context. But this study has revealed tensions around the use of data compared with the use of other forms of evidence that are combined with inspector professional knowledge in order to produce a judgment. The 2012 Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2012c, 2012f) and accompanying Inspection Handbook have caused a resurgence of a debate which dates back to pre-Ofsted days when Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) were accused of using their professional judgment to contribute to 'a secret garden' of education, in which the classroom was an occluded place where teachers operated free from parental and government intervention and where the inspectorate employed its professional judgment to obfuscate what was really occurring in schools. The current Chief Inspector has discussed these 'bad old days' of inspection:

We must be bold and decisive to build on the progress we've made as a nation. I remember how bad things were in the 1970s and 80s, when whole generations of young people were failed by a self-indulgent and unaccountable school system. Consider that before Ofsted, the school reports of Her Majesty's Inspectors weren't routinely available to the public. The three lines of text they sometimes contained were, until the early 1980s, confidential to head teachers and governors (Wilshaw, 2013).

The creation of Ofsted supposedly addressed transparency by introducing the publication of judgments supported by an extensive *Inspection Handbook* which articulated in minute detail, every aspect of the phases — before, during and after — of the inspection process (Maw, 1995; Ofsted, 1993a, 1993b).

A number of Parliamentary enquiries questioned the appropriateness of such a high degree of specification-known, in some quarters as a 'tick box' approach to inspection (Ofsted, 2004; Parliament, 2004, 2011). Questions were raised about the effectiveness of reporting on twenty eight different topics. The White Paper introduced by the incoming UK Coalition government in 2010 demanded a recentering on schooling and its inspection around 'the Importance of Teaching'. This direction was reflected in a 2012 Framework in which just four judgements replaced the previous twenty eight (Ofsted, 2009a, 2009b, 2012c, 2012f). The new Framework also featured a heightened emphasis on the professional judgement of its inspectors: analysis of the documents revealed a 40% increase in use of the word 'professional' in this Framework

as compared to the 2009 version. While a shorter, more simplified Framework was initially welcomed by both inspectors and head teachers, questions emerged about its implementation in practice. One Lead Inspector articulated some of the tensions:

The tension is that the actual judgement to make is about teaching over time, actually you spend a lot of time on learning methods and if there is one aspect of the current framework that teachers really are quite struggling with, teachers and inspectors, it's that inspectors are going into lessons observing teaching and making a judgement on what they see that teaching is good, but actually the judgement that comes out is satisfactory Cos they've got to get in the notion of teaching over time, and the impact of teaching over time, so that requires them to look at data, data so we have RAISEonline, but then you have the well why bother coming in just look at RAISE, but to use the Ofsted word, RAISE is a signpost: it is to signpost where we are going, but it is the only thing that the inspector has to show performance over time. So they do have that, progress and attainment, so they have to weigh that up with the data that the school provides and what they see, and that at the moment is the single biggest tension that inspectors are facing really (EP11).

An inspector trainer reflected on the difficulties that this is posing for inspector training:

No doubt about it, so even though we've gone from a framework that has, before Christmas, twenty eight judgements to four judgements, I'm getting feedback from our inspectors: this is no easier, in one way it's more challenging, but in truth it's focusing on what matters: the behaviour, the teaching and how well leadership and management are driving all of this, and generally, I think that the inspectors are happy about this, this aspect of the structure, the focus (EP12).

The increased emphasis on the professional judgement and knowledge of the inspectors (particularly the lead inspector) is combined with a government decision to discontinue the use of Contextual Value Added (CVA) data in the formation of inspection judgements. Up until 2012 three forms of data were used in the evaluation of English schools: raw and aggregated data about attainment; value added data, and contextual value added data.



The three forms of data are substantially different from one another and the shifting emphasis placed upon them reflects very different ways in which both school and individual pupil performance may be viewed. A diachronic analysis of the use of statistical data in inspection reflects changing political influences on schools since the creation of Ofsted in 1992 (Baxter, 2013b). The Contextual Value Added measure was introduced into the secondary Achievement and Attainment tables in 2006 in order to attempt to: «give a better and fairer measure of school effectiveness than raw results alone» (Ray, 2006). Where value added data introduced in 2002 gives a picture of how far pupils travel depending upon their starting point, CVA took the data one step further taking pupil deprivation indicators into account in relation to pupil attainment. This measure was particularly popular with schools in areas of high socio-economic deprivation as it prevented direct comparisons with schools in more economically buoyant areas. Although schools were able to see their CVA measures for all key stages in the Pupil Achievement Tracker database (PAT), the inclusion of this measure in RAISEonline meant that Ofsted inspectors would automatically take this contextual element into account when forming judgements. Following a CVA pilot in 2005 the measure was mainstreamed and remained part of all inspection frameworks until January 2012, when it was removed (Ofsted, 2012a, 2012b, 2012f). Although some implications of context were reflected in the introduction in 2011 of The Pupil Premium (a payment to schools intended to support the development of ‘disadvantaged’ pupils, indexed by the receipt of free school meals) (DFE, 2012) this is not considered as part of the inspection data. Debates continue about the impact of socio-economic disadvantage between those who see socio-economic inequalities shaping both individual and school performance and those who (like the current Chief Inspector) see such discussions as excusing under-performance and contributing to a culture of ‘low expectations’ that disadvantages pupils from poor areas (see for example the Chief Inspector’s 2013 Report on Schools, Ofsted 2013).

The withdrawal of the CVA measure in 2012 was due to a number of factors, including the growing significance of international comparisons such as the OECD PISA (for further discussion see Grek, 2008; Grek et al., 2009) which take raw, not CVA, data as a basis for comparison. The 2010 Coalition government’s education policy, articulated through the 2010 White Paper and subsequent 2011 Education (Schools) Act (DFE, 2010; Parliament, 2011), placed great stress upon the need for England to succeed in international competition in education. In addition, the arrival of a new Chief Inspector in 2012 marked

the beginning of a new phase for the agency. The new HMCI, a former head teacher of a school judged by the inspectorate to be outstanding, yet functioning within an extremely deprived area (40% on the Free School Meals Indicator of social deprivation), has publicly proclaimed the view that schools in the past have used CVA as an excuse to set lower targets for students from deprived backgrounds, whilst also using indices of social deprivation as an 'excuse' for a lack of improvement. This was compounded by figures released by Ofsted which revealed that, since the inception of the new framework in January 2012, out of 348 schools inspected only 19% of schools improved, 50% stayed the same and over a quarter [28%] declined on their previous inspection performance. This compares with 34% improving, 47% staying the same and 19% declining at inspection under the previous regime in the period 2010/2011 (see Baxter & Clarke, 2012a; Ofsted, 2012d).

This change in the type of data deemed appropriate has created a dilemma for both schools and inspectors. While RAISEonline data give an indication of pupil progress they do not tell the whole story in terms of either context or changes that have been made within the school, as reflected by this statement by the head teacher in a school with 24% of students in receipt of free school meals and 11.4% of pupils on the School Action Plus programme:<sup>4</sup>

It's the rigidity of the system, given that this is a relatively deprived school. Now we have a very clear indicator that of nineteen thousand schools on a database of Pupil Premium, our score is 46% of free school meals; which is high. So we are in the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile for deprivation and obviously struggling to get high results (EP24).

The concerns expressed in this case were reflected by a number of other heads in the study, all from schools in areas of high deprivation who indicated that they felt that this lack of consideration of school context (as reflected in the inspection judgement), was a fundamental weakness in the inspection process. Although Ofsted stress the importance of carrying out in-school observations and inspections, reflections from a number of school leaders indicated that, although they valued on-site inspections, in many cases they felt that

4 A plan relating to students with special needs in England: *Students at School Action Plus* require more detailed planning in terms of educational needs and will also be required to receive input from special advisory services, see: <http://www.specialeducationalneeds.co.uk/UsefulInformation/SEN-EducationInfo/SchoolAction.html>.

judgements had already been made on the basis of the performance data and that the knowledge deployed within the inspection was strongly focused on statistical data. One head teacher suggested that sometimes inspectors arrived at the school with a draft report already prepared: «they had the words there on their laptop which they just tweaked at the end of the visit» (HT1). Given the very heavy emphasis on teacher observation and feedback within the new framework, it is perhaps surprising that school leaders believe that very little of this is taken into account when making the judgement. But the new inspection period is much shorter; teams are much smaller than in the past and inspectors may now be called to observe anything up to fifty lessons in just two days. As one head told us:

Let's be honest, you come and do a two day inspection. Do you really get a grip; a feel for what school's about in just two days? You go in and see around 50 observations, say my best staff work Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and they [the inspectors] come Thursday, Friday? It's the inconsistency. I think they should flip that coin, have their first conversations with the SIP [School Inspection partner] the LEA [Local Education Authority]: tell me about the leadership and management of the school, where do you see the grades over the next 3 years under this management? Then go and inspect it. Otherwise stay in London and look at RAISEonline (EP20).

But the education function in the Local Authorities (LAs) is in many cases declining: indeed, in one of our case studies the number of local authority staff working with schools had declined from forty to two in a two year period. This decline, partly due to reduced funding and partly due to political choices to encourage greater numbers of financially independent schools under the academies programme (Easton, 2009; Machin & Vernoit, 2011), means that in many cases the support and knowledge of both inspection and school improvement possessed by LA school advisors is now lost (Douette, 1993). An increasing number of schools now buy in services and pedagogical advice, and contract inspectors can also earn money acting as self-employed consultants paid directly by schools. As a result, their impartiality, value and knowledge within the inspection process is potentially compromised (Humphrey, 1989). The demise of the LA education function through cuts and recent damning reports by Ofsted which highlight the links between underperforming LAs and underperforming schools (Elliot, 2005; Paton, 2013), combine to create



a situation in which, now more than ever, the hegemonic quality of Ofsted discourses of success and failure, and the ways in which the agency privileges particular forms of knowledge, evidence and authority look likely to become more powerful, despite their vulnerabilities and contestations.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we set out to discuss the shifting nature of knowledge and evidence within the system of inspection of schools in England and the way in which this impacts upon discourses of inspection. As House suggests: «The question of how the public interest and the interests of all parties are to be represented in an evaluation is critical» (House, 1980, p. 175). What is particularly critical in terms of the public interest within school inspection is how it is conceived of, and by whom. Twenty years have elapsed since the creation of Ofsted in its guise of ‘the parents’ friend’, yet an important question for and about the inspectorate is whether or not the public interest is at the heart of the inspectorate or, whether Ofsted now represents other interests: those of government, but also those of the agency itself, which, unless it can retain credibility, may risk decline or extinction in an era of ‘shrinking government’.

The discussion demonstrated that the power and authority invested in the inspectorate is reliant on not only the act of inspection but also on the discourses surrounding it; on its credibility as an actor (or body of actors) and the extent to which in performing inspection it *appears* to act in the public interest. It is in these discourses, in which certain forms of knowledge and evidence are privileged, that the power of inspection lies. Changes to the inspection frameworks, underpinned by changes as to what constitutes valid knowledge and evidence at a particular time, should not be read as logical progressions towards improvement. Rather, they are better understood as successive attempts by both agency and government to retain control of an increasingly systemless system of schooling (Lawn, 2013) in which the autonomy granted to individual and federated schools present substantial challenges for how they can be governed.

The shifting emphasis placed on context-related knowledge evidence is a theme throughout this discussion, in terms of the type and nature of evidence deemed valid at any one time (for example the CVA measure), and the type of knowledge which is ignored or overlooked in order to attain a particular

objective. In the case of the teacher/head teacher inspectors, pedagogical and school knowledge is privileged not so much in terms of what it contributes to the judgement process but rather in terms of its ability to bridge discourses, and to produce credibility and legitimacy for the inspectorate.

Those forms of knowledge that are excluded from Ofsted judgements are perhaps those that reveal most about the current system. The exclusion of socio-economic impact on school performance (e.g., via CVA) risks imposing a culture of failure on schools that are struggling to improve. In its haste to use members of the teaching profession to create the credibility necessary to effect this particular form of evaluation, Ofsted fails to consider a wealth of research on the strength of that teacher professional identity and how this impacts upon judgement (Goodson, 1981; Goodson & Goodson, 1992; Maclure, 1992). The inspectorate is perhaps unwittingly making room for discourses of inspection which, rather than leading to a discursive symmetry and overall homogeneity of discourse and practice, may instead lead to fragmentation and the concomitant erosion of the credibility of the evaluative process (referred to by many of our respondents as the problem of ‘inconsistencies’). Will such gaps in theory and practice undermine the capacity of inspection to provide hegemonic representations of what good education in England looks like?

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# FRAMEWORKS OF REGULATION: EVIDENCE, KNOWLEDGE AND JUDGEMENT IN INSPECTION

JENNY OZGA & MARTIN LAWN

FRAMEWORKS OF REGULATION: EVIDENCE,  
KNOWLEDGE AND JUDGEMENT IN INSPECTION  
Introduction by Jenny Ozga and Martin Lawn

KNOWLEDGE, INSPECTION  
AND THE WORK OF GOVERNING  
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