

School leadership, school inspection and the micropolitics of compliance and resistance: examining the hyper-enactment of policy in an area of deprivation.

Abstract

This paper examines the influence of intense scrutiny from Ofsted on school leadership and policy enactment. Data was collected in a coastal area of deprivation providing the setting for a detailed case study of school leadership in a state secondary school and a state primary school - both with recent or ongoing experience of intense scrutiny from Ofsted. Seventeen interviews were undertaken with staff involved in leadership roles. The analyses of data and discussion form an understanding of how policy is enacted in relation to the dual responsibility that school leaders negotiate between the local context at Seatown and Ofsted.

This paper suggests that Ofsted forces a privileging of a compliant and consistent enactment of policy – a hyper enactment of policy, that reduces the capacity of school leaders to address the significant social context of the school. Foucault's work on self-disciplinary technologies provides insight into the micropolitical spaces which open up for some school leaders. The discussion on the micropolitics of compliance and resistance offers insight into the tensions pertinent to school leadership teams and explores issues relevant to those interested in policy and inspection activity, particularly those within areas of deprivation. (193 words)

Introduction

This paper examines the micropolitics of compliance and resistance amongst school leaders serving a coastal area of deprivation. In England, coastal areas are more typically linked to deprivation than other areas (English Indices of Deprivation, 2019). This is in part related to access to employment opportunities, poor transport infrastructure, and associated factors such as high unemployment rates, poor health, teacher/leader recruitment and retention issues, below average levels of academic attainment and low levels of participation in higher education exacerbated through intergenerationality. Both schools forming the case study had experienced policy work when under intense scrutiny from Ofsted¹. The research findings have implications for schools in other contexts under pressure to perform in challenging contexts.

¹ Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. It is a non-ministerial department responsible for relevant inspection and regulation.

While not providing an audit of current policy (Ball et al, 2012, p:7), nor an examination of policy activity relating to a specific policy text or group of related policies, this research seeks instead to examine the implicit and explicit policy activity that was expressed by school leaders in relation to their recent experiences. Policy is loosely defined in this paper as a text or set of strategies that intend to direct activity in a particular way while recognising that the processes “are limited by the possibilities of discourse” (Ball et al, 2012, p:3). Ozga argues that policy is “struggled over, not delivered, in tablets of stone”, recognising the complexities of ‘doing’ policy in such a way that “policy settings” such as schools (Ozga, 2000, p:1) are sites of struggle.

The policy actors in this research were school staff members with specific leadership responsibility, whether Head Teacher or curriculum leader. They provided insight into “the ‘wheres’ of policy and the ‘whos’ – that is who does it, and how” (Ball, 2015). Some school leaders referred to specific policy texts, for example, from government, Ofsted or from within the school itself, while others demonstrated the “process of complex iterations between policies and across policy ensembles” (Ball et al, 2012, p:8), for example, by indicating the pressures of needing to improve outcomes for the pupils through “a piecemeal process of ‘fixing’ problems” (Ball et al, 2012, p:8).

Policy enactment defines the ways that policy “becomes interpreted and translated and reconstructed and remade” (Ball et al, 2012, p:6). The process of enacting policy therefore, involves ‘actors’, i.e. teachers and leaders etc., responding to policy texts in various ways and finding methods and purposes for policy processes. I have proposed the term *hyper-enactment of policy* to describe the excessive response to enacting policy prompted or influenced by school inspection. Neoliberal, rather than contextual

or value-based priorities dominate decision-making in the hyper-enactment of policy. Specific focus is placed here on the hyper-enactment of policy and its effects.

Policy context, school leadership and the mantra of autonomy, accountability and responsibility

Ozga describes the tension between “the dominant intention or purpose of education” (2000, p:10) and “the way things work out on the ground”. Maguire, Braun and Ball describe the heterogeneity that “lends itself to divergences in the various interpretations of and attention paid to different policies” (Maguire et al, 2015, p:487). The authors, for example, identify high levels of compliance, or “policy dependency” amongst new teachers (Maguire et al, 2015, p:494) and yet, other policies, that are perhaps specifically linked to a particular member of staff, leave the school when the member of staff leaves the school. They also observe policy passing some teachers by (Maguire et al, 2015, p:494) as “a case of ‘now (some of you) see policy and now (some of you) don’t’” (Maguire et al, 2015, p:494). Many of these responses to policy lie within factors beyond a deliberate intent to resist policy.

In Perryman, Ball, Maguire and Braun’s (2011) research on the accountability culture in schools, the authors state that they entitle a section of the article ‘policy evasion’ rather than policy resistance “because none of our departments could actually resist the policies around attainment” (Perryman et al, 2011, p:190). Ball, Maguire and Braun’s texts too, acknowledge that the nature of examining resistance, in particular, is somewhat problematic within the contemporary English school setting (2012, p:149). The authors found more easily recognisable evidence of “discontents, murmurings, indifference and disengagements” (Ball et al, 2012 p:150).

Recognising the “terrain of struggle” (Ball and Olmedo, 2013: 85) and “spaces of doubt” in day to day leadership roles offers the possibility for alternative policy responses. Ball and Olmedo’s work had centred upon “a small set of email exchanges between Stephen Ball and teachers” (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p:86), which is in marked contrast to a researcher or research team interviewing a number of staff over a relatively short period of time. The “micropolitics of resistance” (Ball et al, 2012, p:150) that the authors refer to too, are linked to positionality and context. Acknowledging the work of Hoyle (1982, 1999) and Morley (2008), micropolitics can be defined as the tensions apparent within professional, and sometimes personal relations within the organisation, influenced by power. The concept of micropolitics offers the capacity to open up the spaces between compliance and resistance. The email exchanges in Ball and Olmedo’s work, while only able to provide brief moments of insight into positionality or context, nevertheless act as a cornerstone for this paper. The micropolitics of resistance remains therefore, a relatively underwritten area, largely because of the difficulties associated with unravelling such resistance.

There are other interpretations of policy work in relation to compliance and resistance, for example in the work of Thomson (2008). Thomson argues for “a more expansive theoretical repertoire” to support the investigation of critique and resistance (Thomson, 2008: 87). Usefully here, drawing from post-colonial studies, Thomson discusses ‘emulation’ and ‘simulation’. Emulation: “taking actions to meet expectations” and simulation: “actions which appear to meet expectations” (Thomson, 2008: 87-8) are both relevant to the field work undertaken here, and as Thomson points out, both suggest “an act of agency”, whether compliance or resistance (Thomson, 2008, p:88).

Thomson, citing postcolonial scholar, Szkudlarek, recognises that “acts of resistance may invite acts of repression” (Thomson, 2008, p:89) echoing here Mills (2003, p:35) on Foucault where she argues that we are “the ‘place’ where power is enacted and the place where it is resisted”. Thomson also indicates a potential issue of research positioning when she states that for Lyotard’s theory of performativity, emulation and simulation would be understood in the same way, i.e. fabrication, “whose accomplishment profoundly limits time and space for resistance” (Thomson, p:88). Compliance and resistance then, emerge from sites of power and struggle, and can be usefully considered in relation to features of neoliberalism:

“the end goals of freedom, choice, consumer sovereignty, competition and individual initiative, as well as those of compliance and obedience, must be constructions of the state acting now in its positive role through the development of the techniques of *auditing, accounting and management*” (Olssen and Peters, 2005, p:20-2).

Ofsted serves as a disciplinary tool of neoliberal governance supporting the government’s newfound vigour in tackling schools that are deemed not yet 'good'. The government's website for the Department for Education cited Nicky Morgan, the then Education Secretary as sweeping "*away bureaucratic and legal loopholes* that previously prevented schools from being improved" (Morgan, press release, 30 June 2015), through, for example, academisation.

Several of the local schools in the coastal area of deprivation that form the case study in this research were deemed to be “failing” and have experienced forced academisation. For those schools falling short of the *good* or *outstanding* judgment, Ofsted monitors improvement in the form of an initial visit following the previous inspection, alongside "further monitoring and other activity" (Ofsted, September 2014) until the subsequent inspection confirms that enough improvement is deemed to be made. Leadership teams, the staff and pupils therefore, continue to be placed under

scrutiny from Ofsted until a *good* or *outstanding* judgment is made and this places the daily practices of teaching and learning too, under a disciplinary gaze.

Ofsted have previously cited school leadership for its perceived role in the "stalling" of progress in secondary schools in England and Wales, heightening the disciplinary gaze on school leaders. In his speech introducing Ofsted's annual report for 2013-14 Wilshaw, the then Chief Inspector for Ofsted, outlined the educational landscape. That "the leadership of teaching was more than twice as likely to be the cause of problems as the quality of teaching itself" (Wilshaw, 2014) demonstrated an emerging tension between notions of autonomy deemed by the Academies Act 2010 and other educational reform, and the role of leadership required to sustain such autonomy. To exemplify this, Wilshaw identified the route to an 'outstanding' school: "...autonomy itself is not sufficient... It takes leadership. It takes a refusal to accept mediocrity" (Wilshaw, 2014). Ofsted and the Department for Education identified accountability and responsibility alongside autonomy as central to leading school improvement (e.g. Wilshaw, speech, 10 December 2014; Gibb, speech, 22 January 2015). This is largely linked to schools having to accept responsibility to tackle inequality by being held accountable for school data sets and ensuring gaps are closed in performance between specified groups, in order to enjoy the freedom associated with autonomy. This can be demonstrated in for example, Nick Gibb, the School Standards Minister's speech in 2017, "Herein lies the power of greater freedom and autonomy for schools" (Gibb, speech, 2 November 2017). Gibb continued the speech by linking the government's role in 'freeing' teachers to its role in creating a 'level playing field':

But government has played, and will continue to play, an important role. As well as levelling the playing field and liberating teachers from unnecessary constraints, the government has played a crucial role in raising standards for all. (Gibb, speech, 2 November 2017).

Yet in the most recent publication of the Education Policy Institute's Closing the Gap? Trends in Educational Attainment and Disadvantage (Andrews, 2017), gaps remain across all age ranges stating, "At current trends, we estimate that it would take **around 50 years for the disadvantage gap to close completely** by the time pupils take their GCSEs" (Andrews, 2017, p: 6, N.B. emboldened in original text). Recent government direction has continued to link social justice or social mobility to school improvement and justifies policy as an attempt to create a fairer society (e.g. Morgan, 2015; May, 2016; Gibb, 2017). This type of juxtaposition between reform and social justice, what Ball describes as the "rhetoric of reform" (2013a, p:17-18), often serves, regardless of its stated moral intentions, to reproduce social inequality through neoliberal governance (e.g. Ozga, 2000; Lipman 2011; Brown, 2015). There is therefore a tension existing between school leaders serving areas of deprivation with real contextual factors evidenced daily, and the government's notion of a level playing field liberating teachers (e.g. Gibb, speech, 2 November 2017), perpetuated by neoliberal governance, including Ofsted. While the gaps relating to disadvantage and the implications for schools could be examined in relation to Bourdieusian theories of social and cultural capital, for example, the conceptual framework here, however, focuses on school leaders as neoliberal subjects - the site of power and struggle. Foucault is drawn upon to examine compliance and resistance within neoliberal governance and the technologies in which dominant discourse is formed.

Conceptual framework

While the concept of domination remained a central preoccupation for Foucault and remains influential here, he became increasingly interested in the ways in which we,

as subjects, continue to be worked on through the techniques of self-government he termed technologies of the self. Foucault describes the process of transforming ourselves "in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1988, p:18) as the care of the self (Martin, 1988). This is not a departure from previous ideas, and indeed it returns to the concept of self, first explored in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* written in 1976 (Martin, 1988), but here the focus is away from sex, and instead concerned with "a certain number of operations on their (the individuals) own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being" (Foucault, 1988, p:19).

The technologies of the self include any particular shaping of self in response to discourse (Gillies, 2013, p:15). This might include for school leaders internally and externally rationalising difficult decisions for staffing or pupils; developing a more competitive edge to demonstrate commitment to the direction the school is taking, or simply ensuring that performance management targets are met at the next review point regardless of how *meaningful* they might appear. These examples demonstrate the potential areas of tension for school leaders that relate back to conflict of purpose, and the space within compliance and resistance. Ball states, "The neo-liberal subject is malleable rather than committed, flexible rather than principled" (2013, p:139). Neoliberalism demands that we are agile, competitive, fit etc. to adjust and respond to the changing demands that neoliberal governance demands. Olssen and Peters usefully illustrate the features of neoliberal demands in their 'Ideal-type model of internal governance of universities (2005, p:329). The neoliberal (or private) attributes for work relations, for example, are "Competitive; hierarchical; workload indexed to market; corporate loyalty; no adverse criticism of university" (Olssen cited in Kolsaker,

2008, p:514). This is compared to “Trust; virtue ethics; professional norms; freedom of expression and criticism; role of public intellectual” (Olssen cited in Kolsaker, 2008, p:514) for the Liberal or public sphere. For Foucault then, this demonstrates “the techniques, the practices, which give a concrete form to this new political rationality” (1981, p:153).

Foucault questions the types of technology that have “been put to work and used and developed in the general framework of the reason of state in order to make of the individual a significant element for the state” (Foucault, 1981, p:153). Technologies of the self is concomitant with domination and Foucault reflects in his later writing, “Perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power” (Foucault, 1981, p:19). Drawing on technologies of the self, Ball and Olmedo apply “the terrain of struggle, the terrain of resistance” (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p:85) and ask whether this makes social reality “not as inevitable as it may seem” (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p:85). The authors conclude that the “spaces of doubt” (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p:93) opened up by the teachers they studied as ways to answer “questions about the how(s) of power” (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p:86) may be “ways of exploring the possibilities and impossibilities of transgression” (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p:94). This struggle can be understood as constituting care for self, and when asked whether the care of the self could become an “exercise of power on others” (Foucault, 1984, p:8), Foucault replied that “a tyrannical power only comes from the fact that one did not care for one's self and that one has become a slave to his desires” (Foucault, 1984, p:8). As neoliberal subjects then, we are required, Foucault suggests, to exercise power over ourselves in order to “regulate power over others” (Foucault, 1984, p: 119). This suggests that the micropolitics of compliance and resistance located within the

hyper-enactment of policy has scope for providing spaces of doubt, refusals or points of transgression (e.g. Ball, 2016). This aligns with Foucault who identifies the ethical nature of caring for self in that it precedes caring for others:

Ethos implies also a relation with others to the extent that care for self renders one competent to occupy a place in the city, in the community or in interindividual relationships which are proper (Foucault, 1984, p.118).

This may, as Ball and Olmedo (2013) suggest, manifest itself by acting “irresponsibly”, in order to act responsibly, thus producing resistance. In this paper, some examples are of leaders acting *irresponsibly* i.e. against Ofsted and other technologies, in order to act responsibly i.e. to serve local context and the school community. When leaders act irresponsibly by making micropolitical acts of resistance against the pervading discourse they may be exercising practices of freedom. So not grand mobilization of groups engaged in resistance, but individual leaders doing their work. Importantly, leading for the social context of their schools, rather than for Ofsted.

The study

Two schools were selected within one seaside town to form an embedded single case study (Yin, 2014, p:50) located within a coastal area of deprivation (The English Indices of Deprivation, 2015, Department for Communities and Local Government). Each school therefore constituted a unit of analysis (Yin, 2014, p:50). That the two units of analysis (i.e. the schools) were selected from different age groups and stages was a deliberate part of the research strategy. Having both a secondary (Sandside Secondary Academy)² and primary school (Shoreside Primary Academy) was important to the research as I wanted to have an overarching understanding of the

² Town, academy chains, schools and policy actors have been anonymised to protect the identity of those involved.

specific coastal context for the town, including the impact of deprivation. While this determined that both schools would have different and shared policy concerns, it also allowed the impact of Ofsted on local context to be examined from different perspectives. Both schools had recent or ongoing experience of Ofsted and while by the start of the field work one of the schools had moved to a *good* judgment, this allowed a further contrast that was useful to the study.

The study is therefore focused less on a specific school type and the ways education policy, in all its guises, is enacted in response to Ofsted, but rather how this impacts on school leaders and the ways that they do policy, understood in relation to a coastal area of deprivation. This is then, the unifying 'context' that binds the two "embedded units of analysis" within the single case design (Yin, 2014, p:50). This provided what Stake describes as the opportunity to "appreciate the uniqueness and complexity" of the case and "its embeddedness and interaction with its contexts" (1995, p:16). The single case study design was 'bounded' (Yin, 2014, p:33) by the schools, school leaders and policy, as expressed by school leaders in relationship to Ofsted. This was operationalised in the field by not seeking to impose a response to a specific policy without school leaders raising the policy themselves in the first instance, for example. Also, I did not refer to events in the town, or to news items occurring while undertaking the research unless the policy actor did. The case was also bounded by time. By this a frame was set to constrain what can be viewed as part of the research method i.e. the "concrete", by what occurred within an estimated time period from March 2014 to December 2016. This therefore also bounded policy texts that emerge beyond this period as beyond the single case study design.

The study consisted of seventeen interviews with sixteen members of staff involved as school leaders in some way, in the two case study schools. One member of staff was interviewed twice because she was called away during the first interview. Six interviews were held at the primary school and the remainder at the secondary school. Many interviewed were part of the senior leadership team, and most had been in post at the time of the last school inspection, but not all. In the main, arrangements were made through the headteacher or an assigned member of staff who acted as gatekeeper. The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis. These were both theory and data driven themes (Robson, 2016, p: 471). Theoretical themes used included surveillance, performativity and struggle/resistance. Thematic themes that were derived from the data included context, consistency, constraints, instability, tensions and anxiety. These are drawn together in this paper as the hyper-enactment of policy, the micropolitics of compliance, sites of struggle and the micropolitics of resistance. According to Bazeley (2013), while the use of thematic codes or categories offers a starting point for the researcher, it is analysis that enables “a comprehensive, contextualised, and integrated understanding of the theoretical model of what has been found” (p:191) and this has been something of a guiding principle for the interpretative direction undertaken here.

Findings

Hyper-enactment of policy

Both schools in the case study found ways to respond to various policy texts. At Shoreside Primary Academy, for example, school leaders were unwilling to relinquish the intense marking approach from earlier iteration of policy texts emerging from school ministers, Ofsted and others with a view on how marking was expected to be

done. Phil, a middle leader at Shoreside Primary Academy, captured some of the resultant tensions of this in a discussion on making improvements in marking across the school in response to findings at the previous inspection visit:

For me personally, it's useful as a teacher to know you're doing marking and it's going to be responded to. Because for ten years now, I've marked things and no one's going to read it. You just do it because you have to, but now, you know every day, pupils are walking in and the first thing they look at is their book. And they know to respond to their marking. And it's nice to know that the marking is actually being used... rather than just ticking a box. My personal opinion is, it would be very, very useful if it was just English and Maths. Or maybe science, being a core subject. But we are doing it for every single thing in our book. And that is just painstaking, it is. Even handwriting we do. You know, WWW, which is what went well. And an EBI, which is even better if. And yet, we are marking everything, which is just a bit too much.

Phil described a compulsive drive to mark that was perpetuated through the school in response to Ofsted. This would enable the school to 'show' at the next inspection that they had responded to previous inspection feedback. There is an emphasis here on marking to demonstrate, or 'show' to both school pupil and inspector that the work has been checked. This, then produces data for Ofsted and others who require evidence of children's progress and the school's progress as further 'judgments, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change' (Ball, 2008, p. 57). While Phil recognises the potential benefits of some marking, the second part of his response demonstrated his recognition that the school marking policy is not unproblematic. In an effort to secure consistency across the school, all departments were required to enact the marking policy texts from different governmental, inspection and school sources, in a certain way and this caused some tensions. Lack of clarity in marking policies became a recurring theme. Bea, the Year 6 Head at Shoreside Primary Academy raised the tensions between school and Ofsted here:

Our marking has been an issue that has caused a lot of contention at the time because we, we've been praised for our marking and it does move the children on and everyone who has looked at it has said that it does but then Ofsted has released saying that it doesn't expect to see any marking in the books at all... but in terms of what our school wants, what we do, that's a conflict already.

In Ofsted's own resource, Ofsted Inspection Myths (August 2016), it states '... Ofsted does not expect to see any specific frequency, type or volume of marking and feedback; these are for the school to decide through its assessment policy.' A few months later, Sean Harford, the national director for education at Ofsted stated, 'I remain concerned that we continue to see some inspection reporting which gives the impression that more detailed or more elaborate marking is required, or indeed that it is effective in promoting pupils' achievement.' (Harford, 2017). Shoreside Primary Academy was therefore reluctant to relinquish its own marking policy that had been generated in response to earlier comments from Ofsted that marking was not sufficient, and yet school leaders were aware that there were potentially damaging costs to the quality of experience for both staff and pupils and were uncertain whether this was still a requirement.

At Sandside Secondary Academy, the headteacher, Suzanne, spoke with confidence about navigating the policy texts, taking a pupil and staff focused approach:

...Ofsted, to be fair, published their myths, you know: we don't expect this, and we're not looking for this, and there isn't an agreed timescale on, on how often books should be marked. But the feeling out there is, it's all about how good your books are, what the feedback is from students... And we're going to do some work, we're starting it now - we're going into next year with it on how much marking actually has an impact, to look at staff wellbeing. So, if staff are spending as long marking the books as the children spend writing the task then actually is that... having an impact? Fine if we've got to work that hard, that's not a problem but actually when the child writes 'yes I'll remember my full stops next time', has that actually had an impact on their learning or not? What is it that has an impact on their learning, and what is the nature of feedback that actually they need and are we just writing loads of it that doesn't necessarily help. We've done lots of bits on that... I think much of that is driven by this expectation that if it's not there then I will be judged negatively if someone comes and looks at books in my classroom.

The confidence with which Sandside's headteacher is prepared to promote certain responses to policy enactment concurs to some extent with one of the middle leaders in the same school, Alistair, who articulated the dilemma relating to marking further:

It's taken me some years to realise that... what actually good marking looks like because I trained in an era where good marking was, you mark pretty much every bit of work, and now we don't have to mark every bit of work but it's taken me some years to get out of that. ... So that is something that I think, if you've trained with it, it's very hard to lose that view... But then it does put you in a difficult position certainly as head of department when your head teacher's telling you one thing but then the press (*referring to the recent articles about marking related to the Ofsted Inspection Myths*) are saying something different. So how do I hold a member of staff accountable if the school is saying they want this level of marking and then the schools minister is saying that actually you don't need to mark that much, and a staff member who wants to kick up a fuss about it could.

The enacted chronology of recent policy iteration caused tension in relation to work load. Bea referred to the "more exciting lessons" for the children, or "something with the wow factor" that might have been possible if the intensive focus on realising the policy texts on marking was not taking up so much time. This was echoed by other leaders at the school. This has obvious implications for the educational experience of the pupils at Shoreside Primary Academy's pupils from an area of coastal deprivation who might benefit highly from memorable learning experiences. The pressure to enact policy straddling both past and more recent iterations of what might be deemed 'good' by Ofsted at Shoreside Primary Academy aligns with features of neoliberalism. A lack of clarity from Ofsted and government policy texts: a type of policy opacity, might be viewed as an example of a tactic of destabilisation (e.g. Ball, 2008, Shore and Wright, 1999), or the "fuzzy norms" (Courtney, 2016) that are typical of neoliberalism. This ensures that the neoliberal subject is agile, and flexible, rather than predictable and secure, and importantly, easier to govern. At Shoreside Primary Academy, this resulted in the enactment of policy taking on a more serious, energetic manner – hyper-enactment. Past and present policy iteration become concomitant with each

other at Shoreside Primary Academy, ensuring that any shift in policy direction could be accommodated. In this respect, while the disciplinary gaze is maintained by Ofsted, school leaders at Shoreside Primary Academy are required to turn their gaze outwards too, towards the possibility of new 'rules' for the performance they must maintain. The hyper-enactment of policy requires the subject to maintain a vigilant eye on Ofsted and other disciplinary technologies, to ensure they are alert to new policy iteration. There is tension between the external focus i.e. Ofsted, and the internal focus i.e. social context, for many of the school leaders interviewed. Hyper-enactment of policy leads, in turn then, to a decontextualised policy response. Adopting practices to address disciplinary technologies is sometimes at the expense of the local community, which is here, importantly, a coastal area of deprivation. In the following section this tension is observed.

People don't take risks: the micropolitics of compliance

In marked contrast to the other leaders, Paul, a Curriculum Director at Sandside Secondary Academy, appeared to maintain more positive views of Ofsted and the ways in which it shapes daily responses to policy work.

The school is... almost on point and doing more than what Ofsted would expect. So yes it's stressful in the fact that someone's going to come in a bit like a health inspector to a restaurant and inspect but really it isn't, because it's what you do every day.... we get informed of the different things that are going on within government and the different things... and they run loads of training as well which is quite nice.

Paul had experienced promotion following an outstanding lesson and so had felt some reward as a direct result of an inspection. His sense of "it's what you do every day" aligns with Clapham's (2015) concept of post-fabrication. Clapham argues that this results in a state of post-fabrication and found in the two schools in his study that "inspection readiness was omnipresent to such an extent that it was not a fabricated version of events" (Clapham, 2015, p:1). Paul, unlike other colleagues at Sandside,

aligns with Clapham's statement that "the macro scale policy technology of performativity had infiltrated the micro scale at the school" (Clapham, 2015, p:621).

The effect of daily responses to policy work being informed by inspection is perceived differently by one of the middle leaders of Sandside Secondary Academy, Steve, who explained how he experienced Ofsted following their judgment of good:

... in the local area other places have had no notice inspections. You know, we always get warned that this could happen... which isn't necessarily a bad thing that you're in a high state of alert but at the same time it does create additional stress and pressure for you to make sure you are... we don't have the freedom to explore and try new things because actually if you were to try new things and somebody was to come in and observe that, once again that's a snapshot. You try new things because you want to see what you can learn from that. I think people are worried about new things because they think someone will come in and make a snap judgment on what you see and I know it is difficult to make a judgment on general diet because unless Ofsted are going to come in literally every week and over a period of time I know it's going to be difficult.... But people don't take risks. They play very safe...

That people 'don't take risks' and 'play safe' has implications for the teachers and pupils in the classrooms. This is to suggest that while post-fabrication is observed in daily practices, the maintenance of this within "the high state of alert" results in playing safe. Inspection inhibits innovation.

Leave us alone: sites of struggle

At Shoreside Primary Academy were many examples of school leaders going beyond being merely "recipients of power" (Mills, 2003, p:35). Struggle with the exercise of power through the technology of inspection was observed as leaders saw something cracked. Kath was the Maths Subject Co-ordinator and had been at the school for over ten years:

There are a few bits where I think ... what was the point? How does that benefit us, the kids? What's the point on that? And sometimes it is just to have the data on that piece of paper that we show to Ofsted... It's hoop jumping. That's all it is. It's hoop jumping. And at the point, especially if you've jumped the hoop four times in different ways and you tend to think, right, well, I've jumped enough hoops now (laughing). Can

I go back and see my kids? Do you know what I mean? And sometimes it is, just, just for Ofsted. Or the political party we're in at the time.

Leaders at Sandside Secondary Academy articulated struggle too. Sylvia, the Vice Principal for Student Wellbeing illustrates her critique of Ofsted judgements and in particular, the impact of the outcomes on others:

Their (*staff*) jobs are on the line - yes. You know, there was a vice principal who was slated during one of the Ofsted inspections and I know she definitely felt like her job was on the line and she also felt that she couldn't go for a job anywhere else while she had an Ofsted report that slated the area that she was responsible for. And that could be okay if you trusted the inspection system itself. That's my problem with all this. I don't necessarily have a problem with accountability or jumping through the hoops if you then trusted the outcome at the end of it.

Violet, the Head of Year 4 and relatively new to the profession, demonstrates an element of struggle relating to the matter of context. She offered an emotional outpouring:

You know, we employ learning mentors for kids who've... they've had violence at home or whatever's happened - they're not in a place to come in and do English and Maths. But there's no recognition of the fact that this child wouldn't even stay in class and now they're staying every single day... you're always going to struggle... particularly in certain areas, quite a lot in *Seatown* in general... there's no recognition of that... that we've got that child to a place where they come into school and be in lessons and they can socialise with other kids - they're not violent any more....don't get me wrong you know English and Maths are really important but not to me at the expense of other subjects where some kids who find English and Maths really hard actually do really well and at the expense of those children that we...we do so much for but will never score on any league table...but there's no box for that... you've got to push the English and Maths...push, push the English and Maths.

Violet's comments align with others at Shoreside Primary Academy who started to open up spaces of doubt (Ball and Olmedo, 2013, p:93). Neoliberal technologies such as performativity and surveillance impact on decision-making affecting daily practice within the school. Violet recognises that when the curriculum focus is located heavily on English and Maths, this is at the expense of other curriculum subjects impacting on some of the children who might benefit from them. Recently, similar distortions to

the curriculum have been articulated by Ofsted itself and the new inspection literature seeks to address this.

Suzanne, the headteacher at Sandside Secondary Academy illustrates the ways in which revisions to policy, here around data usage and reporting, are problematic for schools and have implications for the school's context:

So, we've just seen this constant change of what is allowed to count and not count and in what combination and they then drive your curriculum decisions... but sometimes they haven't stayed the same long enough for you to be able to do that or you're busy working towards the next measure while you're still trying to finish off the old measure. So, one of the comments last summer was how many schools fell into a bit of a downturn in their five A* to C because they were so focused on Progress 8 because that was the new thing coming in and they just kind of took their eye off the ball a little bit...based on what I've seen of them (*Sandside* pupils) so far it would raise big questions as to whether they can achieve that qualification.

Other examples were seen by Teresa, who was Principle at Sandside Secondary Academy at the start of the field work before Suzanne took over the role. Here, very much concerned with Ofsted and its concomitants e.g. academy chain, local authority and Department for Education visits:

We had the DFE in doing a tour, regular, then we had the local authority who wanted to come in, we had Town & Country Academy Chain who wanted to come in and then you had the threat of Ofsted over your head all the time so it was like *someone leave us alone* because you know this is all just weighing the pig. You're not helping us.

Surveillance as technology clearly impacted on daily practices but resistance to such technology began to open up. Context was a principle concern to many of the leaders.

Here Alistair questions ideas of behaviour management in relation to Ofsted judgement:

What I can judge as dealing with good behaviour is not what someone else might do and for somebody to come in like an Ofsted inspector for two days and judge a school on the way they deal with behaviour, I think, is very, very, almost immoral.

These leaders align with Ball and Olmedo's observations that resisting neoliberalism involves "confronting oneself at the centre of our discomforts" (2013, p:93). The semi-structured interviews forming the case study offered a space for leaders to articulate discomforts. One leader, in particular, stood out in her capacity to go beyond the articulation of discomfort, into a more defined place of resistance. While many of the staff at both schools had articulated tensions, anxieties and struggle, Suzanne, the headteacher appeared to move to a place of transgression.

The micropolitics of resistance

Suzanne, the headteacher at Sandside Secondary Academy, for example, indicated a very assured approach to ensuring that changes in policy regarding which grade is recorded worked for the pupils within her school. The first example below illustrates a criticism of policy, which analytically, might appear to be more pertinent to the previous theme of struggle. It is cited here, however, to provide the background to more resistant practices.

...the government policy went... 'well you can only sit it (*GCSE Maths*) once'... so, so, there is an issue that says you only get one try at it which you don't get when you pass your driving test or anything of that nature... I said I don't wanna play on our disadvantaged card but actually the reality is that by the end of Year 11, our children might well have changed school two or three times, they may well not be living with the same parent they were living with at the beginning of the year, something may well have come up in the family...

Here, Suzanne demonstrated how she moved from a criticism to resistance of policy:

And in fact, this year we have entered some students early for their maths and we will take the hit on our results... so it's your first grade that counts so last year we didn't enter any children early and there was absolutely no doubt that the biggest losers were our lowest ability students on entry.... So, this year, forget the performance measures - we're entering them at Christmas. They kind of got Gs and Fs. Now we're working on getting them Es and Ds and we'll take the hit and I'll produce two sets of data that says actually this is what happened when we let them have that opportunity. Last year we didn't do it, too many of them left with Us, 'cause we try to push them to a high standard on their first exam and they couldn't actually cope with all of that pressure on the day.

This serves as an example of acting irresponsibly in order to act responsibly (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). It is clear that once the school was judged good by Ofsted, rather than Requires Improvement, a space whereby a certain freedom was afforded, opened. As Suzanne suggested, “I think because we haven’t got that pressure of the inspectors could be in any day it gives us a little bit of space to ... try things out and move things around”. This sense of freedom allowed Suzanne to be able to experiment. This freedom is identified as being wholly pupil focused and related to the school context as can be seen in the following example, again from Suzanne:

I think yeah, you can experiment, so, so, English have reviewed the whole way they deliver in English ... So, if I look at our data in Years 7, 8 and 9, it’s been shocking ... because actually they’ve started from scratch. They’ve stripped the whole lot out and said right we’re gonna start this again and we’ll catch up but if Ofsted had arrived in January to do a full inspection we’d have had real issues with our data but I’ve been able to say ‘It’s okay, do it. We’re really aware of what’s happening, we know where it is. I want to see it improving, I want to hear what that story is. I want to know it’s having an impact ... And I think you just have that little bit of breathing space. All the stuff on employability couldn’t have touched if we were in the middle of an Ofsted cycle.

The impact of policy changes on the lives on school leaders in the case study is relevant to consider in relation to “the approved and authorized exercise of power” (Gillies, 2013: 12). Suzanne, while situated within the dominant discourse, was visibly more confident about the way that power could be exercised, even though it is important to be mindful here that there may be many constraining elements that she may be unaware of, for example, the language that defines what a good leader might be, the way that data is read etc. However, while assuming a dual responsibility to the social context and school data, it is significant that Suzanne is prepared to ‘take a hit’ in relation to the data, where that is in the interest of Seatown.

Concluding remarks

Distinction is shown between those school leaders who comply, with little critique of neoliberal education policy and concomitant technologies, and those who strive towards freedom through micropolitical acts of resistance. While many of the school leaders at both sites demonstrated compliance with Ofsted, there were several at both schools whose interviews illuminated that they were not fully compliant. These utterances came from an emotionally turbulent place. One policy actor at Sandside Secondary Academy, Suzanne, found space to undertake forms of resistance. These responses to the hyper-enactment of policy were to protect pupils and staff from policy that was viewed as potentially unhelpful to staff or even harmful for the pupils, given the contextual factors impacting the school. This is an attempt to resist hyper-enactment of policy.

The space where responses to policy may be evasive (Perryman et al, 2011) was identified by Suzanne's decision to not follow the policy text that allowed only the first entry at GCSE to count (Gov.uk, news story, 30 September 2013) evading the new regulations to benefit her pupils. This was not in an attempt for the school to get an advantage as Suzanne was aware that it might be costly. Instead, she was prepared to "take the hit" on the school's results because "there was absolutely no doubt that the biggest losers were our low ability students on entry". The conflict of purpose for school leaders in their decision making was identified in this example.

It is understood that there is further work to be undertaken in the areas of micropolitics of resistance, and within the policy landscape there is little opportunity for school leaders to be *doing their own thing*. This said, the ramifications of putting neoliberal school inspection priorities first, are not insignificant. For schools in areas of

deprivation, and specifically here, a coastal area of deprivation, to comply fully is at times, to turn away from contextual and value based priorities. The data demonstrated the tensions arising for school leaders when they are required to do this. That some are willing to seek out forms of freedom, albeit in micro spaces, offers hope. (Word count: 7541)

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