Good School/Bad School: paradox and fabrication

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ABSTRACT This paper, drawn from an ESRC-funded research project, deploys data from one secondary school to raise some general issues about the development of disciplinary technologies of surveillance and uses of performativity in education. It is argued that the use of Total Quality Management, School Development Planning and Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education) Inspections, individually and collectively produce an intensification of teachers’ work, submit teachers more directly to the ‘gaze’ of policy, and encourage schools and teachers to ‘fabricate’ themselves for the purposes of evaluation and comparison. The paper is premised on the argument that schools cannot be represented adequately within research (or evaluation) by simple stories or single essentialising tags; ‘good/bad’, ‘successful/failing’—they are inherently paradoxical institutions.

Introduction

While this paper can be read, I hope, as a free-standing and ended, if not finished, piece of analysis, it is one of a series of related and incomplete ‘attempts’ at conceptualising ‘reformed’ [1] schools. The relatedness and incompleteness is part of the point of the exercise. What I am trying to do here is move beyond the neat and totalising, essentialist, one-off forms of analysis that are normally applied to schools as organisations, both in characterisations in research and in public evaluations; i.e. failing/successful, effective/in-effective, etc.

The basis of and motivation for this concern for an analysis ‘otherwise’ are very practical. They stem from the problems involved in trying to establish some analytic ‘truths’ about a set of schools which are subjects of an ESRC-funded research study (Grant no. 235544)—see below. The schools, through the data which stand for them, refuse to submit to comprehensive, closed or totalising forms of analysis. As recalcitrant realities the schools demand more. Put simply, schools, school management, school cultures are not ‘of a piece’. Schools are complex, contradictory, sometimes incoherent organisations, like many others. They are assembled over time to form a bricolage of memories, commitments, routines, bright ideas and policy effects. They are changed, influenced and interfered with regularly, and increasingly. They drift, decay and...
regenerate. Furthermore, as ‘values’ organisations they interweave affective, ideological and instrumental engagement—although a good deal of this is conveniently ignored or set aside in much of the contemporary work on school organisations. Furthermore, despite important commonalities, organisations and managements are not sector indifferent. There are particular inherent tensions in the work practices, values and ‘attitudes’ of teachers between technocratic and substantive/humanistic orientations (see below and Yeatman, 1993).

Finally, schools, like other organisations, are produced and articulated by disparate discourses (knowledges and practices) that sometimes grate and collide, or at least sit uneasily together. These disparate discourses provide resources of order and effect, and vocabularies of motives for organisational practices and fables and are particularly visible in critical events and moments as well as in various odd and ‘unpromising places’. What we access and understand as ‘the school’ is thus an effect of the interweaving of certain historic and more immediate (and sometimes future, possible) discourses. These discourses are typically entangled and confused and they are obscured by micropolitical struggles, tactical plunderings, disguises and ploys.

This paper is drawn from a research study of ‘the changing values and cultures of secondary schools’ conducted collaboratively with Sharon Gewirtz and Diane Reay. The research involves detailed ethnographic case studies of four very different secondary schools, of which Martineau was one. The case studies were conducted mainly between January 1995 and December 1996—although some work is ongoing. Data were collected by interviewing a cross-section of staff (and some governors) in each school (approximately 110 to date) and from observations of school committees and events (approximately 120 to date) and shadowing staff with a view to analysing management practices, decision-making roles and social relationships. Particular attention was paid to the organisational language employed in the schools and we also focused upon ‘critical decision-making events’—defined as decision-making activities around issues which involved value conflicts and dilemmas. The analysis of data employs Straussian coding techniques (Strauss, 1987), which focus on the identification of key categories and concepts through a process of close open coding of transcripts and observational data. These categories were subject to continuous interrogation and refinement as new pieces of data (indicators) were collected, by constant comparison—by making comparisons of indicator to indicator the analyst is forced into confronting similarities, differences, and degrees of consistency of meaning among indicators’ (Strauss, 1987, p. 25). The analysis was ongoing and was used to guide further data collection and questioning, and ‘theoretical sampling’ was used to addressed major, emergent issues.

This paper was read and commented on, in detail, by one of Martineau’s middle managers, Ms Rice. Her general response was: ‘I think you have captured the flavour of the school remarkably well; I recognise the Martineau you describe and the attitudes of those who work in it’. Some of her other comments are included in the text below.

As will become apparent I will be attempting to problematise the concept of a ‘good school’, that is to step outside of the rather rigid parameters of the ‘official’ and common-sense discourses which currently reduce the idea of a ‘good school’ to a set of simple performativities and representations [2]. This will involve an exercise of reversal. That is the linking of various quality assurance procedures, advocated by Ofsted and others, to achieve ‘good’ schools, to such ‘bad’ effects as the intensification of teachers’ work (often on administrative tasks unrelated to the teaching/learning process), a reduction in teacher collegiality, and the production of fabricated indicators and manufactured representations of ‘the school’. An alternative version of the ‘good’ school
is implicit in this reversal. But I am not intending here to assert one conception of a ‘good’ school over and against the other, rather to demonstrate the antagonism between the two. Given the limits of space and the primary purposes of this paper the alternative will remain implicit.

Alongside my argument that TQM, School Development Planning and Inspections work as sophisticated disciplinary technologies I am also suggesting that procedures and techniques which are intended to make schools more visible and accountable paradoxically encourage opacity and the manipulation of representations—or at least produce a significant slippage between certain key signifiers and the signified. That is to say, documents produced in these technologies of surveillance become increasingly reified, self-referential and dislocated from the practices they are ‘meant’ to stand for or account for.

Martineau

Martineau is a ‘good school’: just about everybody thinks so. It is the only state girls’ school in Northwark. It is oversubscribed and its intake has grown markedly since it became Grant Maintained (that is ‘opted-out’ of Local Authority control) in 1991/92 (to 283 in 1994 and increasing again in 1995—the school over-recruits, to allow for ‘bleeding’). When the school introduced a partially selective entry policy in 1995, 344 students sat examinations for the 90 places available. Martineau won a capital grant award of £500,000 as part of the government’s technology initiative, followed by another of £800,000 for science facilities and major plant maintenance. It was also successful in its bid to be part of Toyota’s Science and Technology Fund. The total budget in 1994 was a little over £5 m. Its performance in public examinations has improved steadily, especially since 1990, and it regularly captures second position in the local league table. It achieved 49% A–C passes at GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) in 1993/94, 47% in 1994/95 (making it top of the local state league table). On occasion the Headteacher, Mrs Carnegie, describes it to parents as a ‘feminist school’. It is also an ethnically mixed school:

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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>31.4</td>
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<td>1991/92</td>
<td>32.8</td>
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The school is committed to self-improvement and has employed an educational consultant to introduce the principles and methods of TQM throughout the school.

The Headteacher is clear in her support for the principle of Comprehensive education but describes herself as a pragmatist when it comes to school policy and decision-making. The move to GM status was initiated to escape from the anti-comprehensive policies of the LEA: ‘this difficult decision was taken for reasons of philosophy, but also as an answer to resolve the problem of capital monies’. The Headteacher went on to say that ‘The first year of GM was an exhilarating one. It revealed the LEA as an emperor without clothes ...’. The Headteacher provides strong and visionary leadership but also pursues a policy of maximum delegation to her senior staff. She is also absolutely clear about her managerial prerogatives and gives particular emphasis to the establishment and use of clear systems throughout the school: ‘we must be one of the most systems-based schools in the country’ (TQM development session). In SMT (Senior Management Team—that is Head, Finance Officer, two deputy heads and four senior teachers) meetings she is vigorous and sometimes combative but always willing to foster and listen
to debate. Interestingly the SMT discussions, even of the grimmest issues, are punctuated with laughter and snippets of the Headteacher’s dry humour. She frequently shares her educational ‘beliefs’ with staff [this I believe is a sophisticated ‘steering’ technique] and constantly praises them. She provides ‘a mission as well as a sense of feeling great’ (Peters & Waterman, 1982, p. 323). But she can also be quite critical of individuals and groups of staff in public: ‘she shoots from the hip’ as one teacher put it, and is generally regarded as having ‘favourites’. None the less, in interviews with staff favourable comments far outweighed the negative. She is very involved in local and national educational circles and offers her staff a clear view of the directions of education policy. The senior deputy was very clear about the Headteacher’s strengths and particularly her ability to inspire loyalty and make her staff feel valued:

I think she has the capacity for a start to inspire the most tremendous loyalty. You have seen the way she and I will snap at each other in senior team meetings, well I say snap, that sounds as though it’s destructive, it’s not. I view the tension between her and me on certain issues as a creative one. Even if it goes beyond the creative and does become difficult at times, we both know that we come from the same … you know we come through the same door, even if we cross the room in slightly different ways, and what we actually care most about is children’s education and there’s nothing that will move us from that … she cares very much about the staff, and cares not in a sort of cuddly, lovey dovey sort of way, but through making sure that staff are well treated, that their conditions of service are as good as they can possibly be, that they get their INSET entitlement, it’s all those sorts of things, that people can go to her and talk, people have very open access to Kirsten really, so there’s that. There’s no doubt that her kind of involvement in sort of outside areas … I think makes people feel that the school has a status, and they enjoy that status, they enjoy that feeling of being in a school … that’s perceived as being in the forefront … they quite enjoy all these sort of national commissions, research projects, such as yours that we get in here, it’s a feel good factor … which is incredibly important. There is no doubt with Kirsten what her principles are….

The second deputy offered a similar account:

She’s incredibly well informed, and far seeing. She shares … she’s always had this notion of shared headship, that certainly the deputies, and I think increasingly actually the senior teachers as well, in a sense share the headship and although there are certain things that are very firmly on her plate and no one else’s, as it were, there is a lot of free discussion and she listens to what we say … and takes on board the kinds of things that are being said, even though as I say, she may well have to put them aside. She is generally a very consultative sort of person, she likes to work by consultation and by consensus, wherever she can. But on the other hand, she’s not afraid … when occasion demands it, of saying no, I want it done this way, and of being top down. But that is comparatively rare, and more often than not, even when she’s operating in that kind of mode, she has already talked things through with at least the deputies, if not the whole senior team, and so it’s a kind of top down in that respect. She cares hugely about the pupils and about their experience of education, she cares about the school and that it should be and should be seen to be a successful and worthwhile institution, and that rubs off all over the place, on the staff and on the pupils.
And the Head of Year Tutors also talked about a potent combination of missionary leadership and collective endeavour:

I think she is an inspired leader. To be perfectly honest I would not have come to the school without Kirsten ... I think she has enormous stature. I think she is responsive to her staff, but in no way intimidated by them. I do know some heads who are intimidated by their staff. I think on the whole she manages extremely well, I mean she occasionally shoots from the hip and then thinks about it, but she's always big enough to say look, that was a mistake, let's do it another way ... I enjoy her management style. I think there’s quite a lot of fun about it ... in that we’re ... I mean the things which are being discussed are very serious, and they are taken seriously, they are thought about ... I think she’s educationally very literate, but she doesn’t make it dour.

Running through all of the accounts of the Head’s style and interactions is a dualism; a strong but open, valuing but critical leadership style. The Librarian:

there’s a very strong Headteacher, personality wise, a very ... I wouldn’t say ... not dominant, but leading ... she’s a good ... she’s a very strong leader, her own ideas ... and then there’s quite a quiet team who support her I think, the senior team ... and then there are a lot of very talented teachers who are ... fairly career oriented I think, you now, will stay here for so long and then move on ... kind of thing, quite a young staff as well. I think it’s quite dynamic ... and they’re prepared to make it work, and certainly prepared to go for the output, to get good results, and to show that they’re getting good results.

In many respects leadership at Martineau embodies the ‘pop management’ prescriptions of Peters and Waterman:

The top performers create a broad, uplifting, shared culture, a coherent framework within which charged-up people search for appropriate adaptations. Their ability to extract extraordinary contributions from very large numbers of people turns on the ability to create a highly valued sense of purpose. Such purpose invariably emanates from love of product providing top-quality services, and honouring innovation and contribution from all. (1982, p. 51)

All of this is meant to give a flavour of things; I will return to the Headteacher’s leadership style and methods later.

Clearly no institution is all good, whatever the standpoint of evaluation: institutions like schools are diverse and complex. No school is of a piece in terms of either efficacy or ideology. Education is value-laden and prone to dispute and conflict, although little of that is apparent on the surface of things at Martineau. Furthermore, schools, like other institutions, may be inherently contradictory. They may be productive and oppressive, liberating and inefficient, purposeful and unfair. I intend to explore here some aspects of such contradictions.

Let us return to Martineau’s emphasis on systems. I want to highlight three related tools and methods of system and speculate about their ‘deeper’ organisational impact and effects. They are TQM, SDPing (School Development Planning) and preparing for Ofsted Inspection. The three are heavily interrelated. They all play their part in fostering and developing Martineau’s corporate culture. TQM receives the most detailed discussion.
TQM

Here, echoing Willmott (1993) I want to explore the ‘dark side’ of the project of corporate culture ‘by drawing attention to the subjugating and totalitarian implications of its excellence/quality prescriptions’ (p. 515). Also I want to suggest ways in which the ‘practical autonomy’ of LMS, GMS and TQM may be seen as achieving the purposes of state policy through a combination of ‘micro-disciplinary practices’ and ‘steering at a distance’. The first concern is with the moral significance of management tools like TQM and Corporate Culture and their attempt at the ‘governance of the employee’s soul’ (p. 517) and their colonisation of the ‘softer features of organisation’ (p. 518). The task and duty of management is ‘no longer restricted to authorising and enforcing rules and procedures’: it becomes rather that ‘of determining how employees should think and feel about what they produce’ (p. 522) and ‘every conceivable opportunity is taken for imprinting the core values of the organisation upon its (carefully selected) employees’ (p. 523). When put together, a regime of quality and market discipline provide a ‘cross-disciplinary ideology for organising professional work’ (Kitchener & Whipp, 1995, p. 207).

The TQM development and training programme has been going on for 2 years. All staff, teaching and non, have been involved and considerable staff development time has been devoted to it. As far as Martineau is concerned three key aspects of the approach have made an impact:

(1) The emphasis on everybody working together, the fostering of common aims, shared mission, etc.—what in more sinister tones might be called something like incorporation:

I’ve always thought that the way that you work with people was absolutely crucial because unless you have people working with you then what you try to do is probably impossible, in running a school ... people are central to the whole thing, whether it’s the staff or the children or the parents or whatever, because unless you can get to a position where you can all work together and have a kind of common sense of purpose, then you’re not gonna get very far, education is so complex. (2nd Deputy)

One of the things that took us into TQM originally was that the senior team were concerned about what appeared to be a huge gap between senior and middle managers, and ... not that we were at each other’s throats in any sense like that, it wasn’t that sort of gap, but it was the sort of gap that ... middle managers had really very little understanding of what it was that senior managers had to deal with and the kind of decisions we had to make and how difficult some of these decisions actually were. And we also felt rather I think, that all sorts of things were coming to senior team which had no real need to. So that was part of the reason why we started to look at our systems and then started to look at TQM ... and I think ... certainly all the senior team feel, and I’ve heard it also from a number of middle managers ... that that gap has narrowed markedly, so that there is now a much better understanding on their part of the way that we have to operate.... (2nd Deputy)

I think there are elements of it which have become ingrained, I think there are ... parts of the process which have been very valuable, like ...
particularly one that I found very interesting, working on my expectations of senior team ..., and theirs of mine ... and mine of my team and theirs of me, and I thought that threw up a lot of very interesting stuff, which I think we've been able to address. So I think the process has been valuable. I think some of the things are reflected in the way in which the school runs. I think on a day to day level for main grade teachers ... I think they'd say, what, TQM? They would say 'right first time', but it would be slightly ironic, I have to say. (Year Tutor)

The final comment in the last extract is important and I shall return to it.

A further aspect of the presentation of TQM by the consultant was a critique of traditional, hierarchical management structures and processes and in their stead an argument for a team structure. Whether as a result of TQM or other influences and concerns an emphasis on a differentiated team structure based on Groups—groups of departments under a Head of Group (Hog)—has become a major defining characteristic of the culture, structure and relationships of staff at Martineau:

This is TQM, but it doesn't work, well it does, but it doesn't work ... it works very well in the Groups, but then it's done as though we're almost competing companies, rather than all contributing to the corporate image really, this is where this corporate image thing doesn't ... in some ways ... I mean ... I think the corporate thing would work better if it there were more kind of ... you see, there's nothing that's whole school. It's very nice the senior team but they don't actually have much to do with anything. (Hog 1)

This differentiated team structure is seen by virtually all interviewees as being used to develop a sense of competition between the Groups in order to encourage and stimulate harder work and higher 'standards' of work by staff. This competition was viewed with different degrees of cynicism and amusement by all the non-SMT staff interviewed in a language which spoke either of empires, factions, divide and rule, fragmentation and suspicion or hard work and effort or increasing hard work and workloads:

I think the line manager system they've got seems to work fairly well ... but I also think it's a little bit ... divisive in that ... the recent impression of Group, against Group ... I get the impression it's a sort of divide and rule sort of scenario almost. I mean it's not ... that rigid but that's the impression you get, everybody's bidding against each other ... for certain outcomes ... and I think the nature of the school itself ... I don't think that's maybe the most effective way of doing things. (Main Grade Teacher 1)

I've noticed it this year more than last year ... after this year you come back and you go through the results, and there is a very big thing about ... how has this department done or this Group against that Group, you know, it's how are the maths results compared to the science results, and the science results compared to the history results. I mean it may be like that in all schools, but here it seems like, if you've got bad results compared to somebody else ... you are going to be frowned upon by other members of staff at the school, you can expect them to be in the staff room saying ... oh look geography have done really badly ... and it's not ... you don't get the impression that ... oh look at it, the school has done really well ... we are above the national average, the school has been very successful. It is that science are doing really well, maths aren't ... they're not coming up to scratch, you know ... or whatever. I don't
think it's enough sort of togetherness, if you like, not everyone pulling for the school, for success ... for Martineau as a whole ... it is people pulling for science success or for humanities success. (Main Grade Teacher 1)

I think one of the things here though, is that you can get very bogged down and easily ... marginalised from the system as a whole because of this Group allegiance thing. That is so strong here, you know, this thing that people don't go to the staff room, you socialise on an individual level, you sort of suss out who you can talk to as it were. I've got the vibes so far that there's a lot of vying here and there and points scoring ... to get things or be seen in a certain way ... almost a little bit of divide and rule. (Main Grade Teacher 2)

... the Group team is kind of all empowering and all kind of encompassing and it doesn't really recognise what's going on in other parts of the school much, or other teachers in other areas are treated with a bit of suspicion. They're not really one of us, and the teams are deliberately held up against each other sometimes, like this is good practice, and in the Arts they do this, why aren't you doing it, or in English they've done X, Y, Z, isn't this marvellous. (Hog 1)

She likes to get people competing against each other in different areas of the school, and it works, I don't know how effectively it works all the time though, certainly within the school I'd say that applied very strongly, and in the first few years it was idiotic really, the sort of things people had to get up to ...

(Deputy Year Tutor)

... although the senior team is a team, middle managers are not allowed to be a team, and we can't call ourselves a team, we've got the senior team, got middle managers ... CP teams. Group teams ... I think that's quite interesting. It seems to me that the language is actually bearing out the reality, and we are more likely to kind of be set against one another than functioning as a small team. (Hog 2)

... it comes from the top, the tone is set at the beginning of the year when those with good results are praised and those who aren't are either ignored or mentioned in an unfavourable light, and at any meeting where Mrs Carnegie is in the chair, there will usually be an allusion to something very good that one Group has done, that the rest of us ought to be doing, but aren't. (Hog 2)

Competition and fragmentation were driven by a combination of praise and blame and more tangible rewards (resourcing, capitation, facilities, etc.) to Groups and individuals. TQM is packaging and systematising basic control techniques such as the ones teachers use in the classroom. Some of the interviewees also made the point that the emphasis on competition worked through to an individual level:

The thing I've found is that there's a need to kind of prove yourself, in order to be respected. You have to do something ... where you're obviously making a unique contribution ... I had a minor triumph a few weeks ago ...

(Responsible Teacher)

All of this resonates strongly with Du Gay's notion of the 'post-entrepreneurial revolution' which 'provides the possibility for every member of an organisation to express "individual initiative" and to develop fully their "potential" in the service of the
corporation' (1996, p. 62). One side-effect of competition and hard work, which was noted by several interviewees and evident to the researcher, was the ‘de-socialisation’ of staff relationships. The staff room was hardly used, especially at lunch-times, and most staff social activities had ceased. Staff relations were changed and narrowed, with an emphasis on business-like and procedural exchanges. Paradoxically, then, the emphasis on common endeavour and teamwork is realised in part by and obscures a strong sense of competition and social dislocation.

(2) The orientation to the customer:

there’s a strong sense of ... maybe again TQM has had a bearing on this, as a sort of get it right first time, as far as you can ... but also ... we are very aware of the proper presentation of things ... people aren’t satisfied with poorly presented things. You know, we feel ... it’s part of the way we value people if you like. You know, if you present on scrappy bits of paper or an ill thought INSET or whatever, it doesn’t do anyone any good, so yes there’s a tremendous sense of style ... (1st Deputy)

I think TQM has a value in that, in making us think in terms of customers ... which is how I regard my parents, and ... to a certain degree the students now. I don’t think it changes the fundamental relationship but I think one is very definitely aware that numbers need to be kept up, that we need to have high targets not only for the students but to make sure that the school goes on functioning as well as it does, and I think the introduction of selection has made this very clear. (Year tutor)

Mrs C always makes it clear that pupils and parents are our customers, and she’s always ahead of the game, anticipating what was happening (Year Tutor at TQM meeting 15.2.95)* [*but perhaps only some customers, some parents and pupils, others are not wanted or their consumer interests are not a high priority].

As Willmott (1993, p. 522) suggests, ‘employees are simultaneously required to recognise and take responsibility for the relationship between the security of their employment and their contribution to the competitiveness of the goods and services they produce’. Approaches like TQM immerse employees in the logic of the market (Gewirtz et al., 1995, for fuller discussion).

(3) The emphasis on quality and linked to that continuous evaluation and improvement:

I was kind of lukewarm about TQM, I thought it was great, it was fine, but I wasn’t madly keen ... or madly anti ... and I think ... the interesting thing ... I like to be a little sceptical about some of these things, because ... you know, these things come and go ... the pattern of equality doesn’t come and go actually, so in that sense I would espouse it fully, but I think some of the techniques are really helpful and ... that whole sort of ... notion of continuous improvement, the continuous search for excellence, the continuous stress on quality, looking at the relationships between people and how they enhance the quality of institution, looking at some of the problem solving approaches as well ... the sort of barriers and solutions ... stopping us, how we’re gonna solve it, and working through those problems. I think it has been very very useful for this school, and I think by and
large it may well be seen as a management tool, I don’t know whether we’ve captured the hearts and minds of absolutely everybody. (1st Deputy)

Again note the final comment.

I know ‘right first time’ is a wonderful sort of off the tongue phrase, isn’t it, for TQM, but that also has been part of my philosophy … to try and get things as near right as you can, but at the same time constant evaluation, this is something that I suppose has developed in me over the years, that you’ve got to keep checking things out. (2nd Deputy)

As the consultant explained, TQM involves a ‘shift from reliance on outside agencies for judgement of quality to internal monitoring of self regulation’ and ‘Ofsted will look at procedures of monitoring in place’. He then asked ‘How good are you at monitoring your performance and monitoring the performance of your team?’ Viewed critically, TQM instils and rests upon self-surveillance and mutual surveillance. Professionality is replaced by accountability, collegiality by competition (a strong theme across most transcripts), costing and surveillance. These are forms of power which are realised and reproduced through social interaction, within the everyday life of institutions. They do not so much bear down upon but take shape within the practices of the institution itself and construct individuals and their social relations through direct interaction. This is, at least in some respects, a constructive rather than coercive power. It does not simply constrain and oppress, it articulates a mode of personal existence which is inscribed within the ‘minute arts of self-scrutiny, self-evaluation, and self regulation’ (Rose, 1989, p. 222 and see Ball, 1990, on teacher appraisal). The systems were a source of ambivalence for most staff, providing them with both security and constraint, a sense of support and over-burdensome paperwork. The form of power I am referring to here realised and invested and embodied within the professional selves and sense of efficacy and personal, everyday, mundane interactions of the teachers:

When I think of the mechanics of power, I have in mind rather its capillary form of existence, at the point where power returns into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and comes to insert itself into their gestures and attitudes, their discourses, apprenticeships and daily lives. (Foucault, 1980, quoted in Gordon (1990) (Ed.) Power/Knowledge)

Technologies like TQM work, in part, on the body, they use-up and exhaust bodies, submitting them to harsh regimes of stress, pressure, performativity and surveillance. I have come to realise that virtually all the meetings I attended at Martineau, especially those of the Groups and Year Tutors, can be seen as enactments of self-monitoring; the development or checking of procedures for personal or group accountability—recording and making activities visible. Enormous amounts of time are spent ensuring that students are correctly labelled, reports are completed, records up to date, etc. As noted already, debate or controversy are rare. They are displaced or subsumed by adherence to systems and the demands of performativity. An Arts and PE Group discussion of ‘setting’ is one exception I witnessed [3].

All of this keeps the gaze in place. The professional teacher is here defined by grasp of and careful use of systems and procedures, and by the narrow and superficial rewards and identities that this delivers through a regressive self-regulation. Submission to the compelling logics of TQM and the attractions of corporate culture involves a giving up of or restriction of self or the substitution of an organisational subjectivity, what might be called, in a different language, alienation. One young English teacher managed to
convey a sense of this in interview, although significantly she commented ‘I’m actually working this through as I’m talking to you’:

So in terms of the systems that have been set up, in terms of the general management ... I suppose I am thinking more logistical and financial, yes, it puts things in place that make it easier. In terms of the personal and how it’s making you, the teacher, feel in what you are doing ... that’s perhaps where I have the problem. But you see, perhaps ultimately you kind of ... because you’re also focused on the children, cos that’s what ... well that’s what I’ve come into it for ... you have to put that to one side and it comes out at other times, and with the other pluses that come from the system, that are beneficial for the children, you then work with, you put your own personality if you like, into working with those. So again it’s a double edged sword ... yes, it makes things set up in a very practical ... you know, it gives good messages to the children, that everything is here and they can work and we expect and all of that, but then how you are personally feeling, I don’t know. I’m gabbling, aren’t I? I’m really gabbling.

how much personal do you have to sacrifice for having the rest there ... is probably what would be my ... You see, I think one of the strategies behind it, and I think Peter Waters [the TQM consultant] said it, you don’t have to like each other, as long as you can work within the systems ... well ... I’m sorry, I’m not a product, and I don’t ... you know, and that really gets me. (Main Grade Teacher 2) [4]

This may exemplify Giddens’ (1991) point that where there is an institutionalised ‘existential separation’ from ‘the moral resources necessary to live a full and satisfying existence’ (p. 91), a situation he sees as endemic in late modernity, the individual may experience personal meaninglessness (cf. Broadfoot’s (1996) discussion of the technology of educational measurement).

TQM is a method and arguably a culture; it is a ‘systematic and totalising approach to the design and strengthening of the normative framework of work’ (Willmott, 1993, p. 524). It is an ‘intellectual technology’ and thus has attractions to some teachers, but it is also ‘a “relay device” effectively linking government “mentailities” and policies, with everyday organisational realities’. It has made its impact on Martineau, in part through the development process, and some ideas have stuck and have become part of the ‘thinking as usual’ of the staff, particularly the senior and middle managers. But the role of TQM and its impact, in the terms I have outlined above, should neither be over or under-estimated. On the one hand (as we discuss in a further paper), this and other techniques of ‘reforming education and changing schools’ do play a role in the reconstitution of the teacher and teachers’ work. On the other hand, as has been noted in commercial contexts, culture-strengthening programmes quite commonly elicit suspicious and sceptical responses from workers. These may generate a kind of calculative compliance and/or a distancing of self from corporate values—‘cool alternation’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1966):

It’s very easy to be totally cynical about it ... but I think the feeling within our Group is ... we don’t quite know why Martineau is spending so much money on it, because we don’t feel that the hierarchy of this school actually ... not only doesn’t it run really on TQM principles, it doesn’t want to. So we’re kind of buying into something we don’t believe in, that goes more against the grain
of what we do than with it. So there’s a sort of puzzlement ... if you look at any of the sort of A4 hand outs you get after the TQM sessions, there’s ... examples of good practice or a good model for team management or a good model for team work, and we loved that one with all the different teams that goes down to being a pseudo team, we think middle managers are a pseudo team and Curriculum Group teams are pseudo teams, but ... I don’t think most of us find it really has any bearing on our practice. (Hog 2)

Where you have a lot of people who’ve been working in a particular way for a very long time, they’re not gonna change their viewpoint ... there are a lot of ... not cynical people, but people who are ... well there are a few cynical ones, but ... there’s no way that you can change your working practice if everyone else isn’t doing that, and what happens is that TQM becomes a joke. For instance, whenever something goes wrong, you know ... at the meeting, it’s the fault of TQM ... so in a sense it’s almost backfired. (Main Grade Teacher 1)

I think the image and developing a school ethos stuff ... because it’s a comparatively new school, I think all that was very important, and again a lot of it I thought was pretty silly, like the flagpole ... but it doesn’t actually do any harm, and ... I’m not sure that’s where the school ethos comes from actually. (Deputy Year Tutor)

All these responses are quite complex and the last is particularly interesting. The nostrums of TQM do not in any straightforward sense translate into and determine day-to-day practice, but they do have various indirect effects. However, I would suggest at least in some respects the introduction of TQM is a symbolic policy. It is intended to stand for an approach to management in the school which is businesslike and innovative. It is part of the representation of the school as dynamic and adventurous. It plays a part in maintaining the school’s national profile. I am not suggesting that it has not ‘real’ effects within the school but there may be a significant gap between the degree of adoption of TQM (among senior managers or teaching staff) and the costs and effort devoted to it. This may be one part of a more general strategy of ‘talking up’ the school in the marketplace, within which there is a mismatch between the ‘sell’ and ‘the reality’:

... she [the Head] likes to get people competing against each other in different areas of the school, and it works, I don’t know how effectively it works all the time so ... certainly within the school I’d say that applied very strongly ... and in the first few years it was idiotic really ... some of the things people felt they had to get up to ... but I think in ... I think Mrs Carnegie would prefer a much harder sell on the school than actually happens ... at the moment I think what’s really happening is that she ... she tends to say that sort of thing a lot ... a fair amount within the school and hopes that it will become reality, whether it actually is reality at present, I’m not at all sure. (Deputy Year Tutor)

TQM is symptomatic of the responses of schools to the competitive pressures produced by the current policy framework of education in England. It does ‘work’, as I hope to have demonstrated, in a number of ways to shift the organisational culture of Martineau, and in combination with other disciplinary technologies provides an apparatus of surveillance and the legitimation of certain kinds of relationships. Undoubtedly both the cultural changes and the apparatus of surveillance contribute to Martineau’s ‘success’ in
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an intensely competitive local market both in terms of performance and in giving the school a distinctive profile, locally and nationally.

SDPing

Set alongside TQM, in the academic year 1994–95, was the process of reviewing and re-writing the School Development Plan. SDPs were pioneered in a number of schools and LEAs in the 1980s and were subsequently adopted and promulgated by the Department for Education. The School Management Task Force report (HMSO, 1990) identified SDPs which incorporated a management and staff development policy as a major characteristic of successful schools. Logan et al. (1994) take a more sanguine view of SDPing, and see it as having a potential for ‘organisational learning’ and/or sophisticated power assertion. When the latter is to the fore they suggest it ‘denies the moral aspects of management’ and go on to argue that: ‘The central dilemmas raised in SDP revolve around the issue, whose interest is the school now serving—the state, system, teachers, community or pupils? How are interests being served and why? That is, the critical issues of SDP are educational and professional, not bureaucratic and procedural’ (p. 49). As I have tried to indicate at Martineau, it is the bureaucratic and procedural issues that are very much to the fore. It is important to see TQM and SDPing as part of a complex web of tactics and procedures which tie the details of organisational life to the steering requirements of the state:

also linking TQM to Ofsted because I think that’s quite important, and that we use this management tool, we’ve now taken on board, and clearly ... there is a very clear link there to ... the kind of stuff Ofsted wants ... (2nd Deputy)

All of this is represented in the creation or development of school ‘systems’ (see below). Meadmore et al. (1995) convey a similar duality, which it is important to retain analytically: ‘devolution as a management strategy and a power/knowledge technology is currently a means to bring about desired change. However, just as it is dangerous to position all practices of government as being repressive forms of state control, so is it equally cavalier to position them as transformational’ (p. 22). They also note that: ‘what is in the best interests of the state must be carefully balanced with measures to increase the happiness and life chances of individuals. It is this balance which is crucial to an interpretation of devolution’ (p. 10). This touches directly upon the central paradox with which this paper is concerned.

In the language of Mortimore & MacGilchrist (1994) the Headteacher of Martineau sees the SDP as a co-operative plan, which Mortimer and MacGilchrist define as involving ‘the teaching staff in the process. The plan is multi purpose serving both the efficiency and effectiveness of the school through school wide improvements and the professional development of teachers’ (p. 2); although the professional development aspects are fairly minimal at Martineau. The Headteacher wrote to staff about the SDP in January 1995 as follows:

The Senior Team found that some Development Plans are top down and mechanistic whereas we feel that Martineau’s development Plan is organic and comes from grass roots thinking. Our development plan rests on findings flowing from INset Days, Diagnostic Windows and feedback from Team and other meetings. (Head’s Policy Paper No. 40).

This is, I would suggest, a rather ‘romantic’ view—the SDPing appears to be strongly driven and framed by the SMT and within the team by the Headteacher, although the
plan is inflected by other inputs from the team and from other ‘influential’ or persistent staff or staff groups. However, the outcomes of the SDP process cannot simply be seen as an assertion of the management agenda. [Ms Rice commented ‘agree with your use of “romantic”. It’s inconceivable that our school could ever emerge with a SDP that didn’t absolutely reflect the head’s priorities and requirements’]. This planning process also displays some of the discursive differences at work within the SMT and the tensions, ‘in’ the teachers and ‘in’ the school, between humanistic/substantive and technical/managerial orientations. These tensions are not played out in terms of a simple binary, as Yeatman presents them below, but are represented in different parts of SMT discussions or different stances by the same people in relation to different issues:

This tension between technical and substantive aspects of professional identity is one that is imported into the public service as a result of its new classing. It is a cultural conflict between humanistic intellectuals (who have primarily a substantive orientation) and the technical intelligentsia. It is a tension which exists between different sections of public servants (for instance social workers vis-à-vis finance officers) and it exists also within the consciousness of many middle and upper level public servants. (Yeatman, 1993, p. 348; see also Spybey 1984) [5]

Again viewed critically, the School Development Plan is a key method for the imprinting of core values, for the transmission and interpretation of external priorities, and concomitantly for excluding or containing rival ‘ends’ or values. It is a means of cultural engineering. The Plan as text comes to ‘stand for’ and symbolise the school. The SDP, as at Martineau, begins and ends with a closed ‘openness’, an appearance and rhetoric of open goal-setting framed by a tight agenda of actual and possible goals—hence an SMT ‘think tank’ discussion at a Professional Development Day began from the Headteacher’s question ‘where are we going’ and was quickly linked in the discussion to the need to be ‘checking that policies are working’ (2nd Deputy). Nonetheless, at least on paper, the SDP turns out to have some contradictory features. It illustrates the way in which residual substantive discourses can reassert themselves at particular moments or within particular events.

Thus, one theme that recurs in the SMT discussions around the SDP is a nascent tension between a set of instrumental, performance or behavioural priorities which relate to the reputation, image and market position of the school and a set of priorities concerned with equal opportunity. These latter, for example, emerged in the SMT professional development day ‘think tank’ discussion (3.12.94) in relation to the school’s move away from mixed-ability grouping to setting: ‘we have become de facto a streamed school’ (2nd Deputy). ‘Shall I be frank … I was initially strongly in favour of the move to setting, now I am not so sure, we have the same groups of students in bottom sets across the subjects and they are mostly Afro-Caribbean students from Streetly, and they don’t identify with us as a school and they have become behavioural problems’ (Acting Senior Teacher). As a result of this meeting three priorities were identified in the draft SDP: curriculum, setting, and special needs.

The SDP was then discussed (to varying degrees), and responded to, in all the keys arenas of the staff, mainly Groups and Years, and individually through Diagnostic Windows; although the Head was clear in introducing the Diagnostic Windows discussion at SMT (2.2.95) that the exercise was ‘consultative not negotiation’ (Headteacher). But, commenting on the windows, the Head concluded that there was ‘amazing support for priorities’; this meeting was over-shadowed by a discussion of potential of
budget cuts [6]—see below. But it was also reported by the Head that through their ‘diagnostic windows’ Humanities [who else] noted that ‘equal opportunities’ ‘had been neglected for some years’ as a school priority and was ‘absent from the SDP’ and was not represented in a project partnership; this was supported by the senior deputy [the most frequent SMT articulator of humanistic/substantive concerns] ‘I think that very strongly’ (1st Deputy). Nonetheless, on both occasions, once raised, the equal opportunity concerns were swiftly reincorporated into the evaluation procedures of SDPing. They were translated into matters of technical discrepancy and the values dimensions of the issues involved remained buried. [‘I see it as an example of the head’s skill in managing a potentially contentious area’ (Ms Rice)]. Thus, it was decided that setting be ‘monitored’. Technical discourse and practices can nullify or deflect potentially ‘discrepant’ values and concerns in this way—but at the Staff meeting (13.2.95) both Equal Opportunities and Setting were announced as SDP priorities. A third example of the substantive-technicist tension related to financial priorities, and arose in discussion of the school’s response to the 1995 local government spending assessments and the possibility of a cut in the school’s budget: top of the Headteacher/Finance Officer’s 16 suggestions for budget-saving was ‘winding up ESOL’, in order to save the school’s 25% contribution to its funding.

The further implementation (and reworking) of the SDP is also of interest. The curriculum priority became a ‘curriculum review’ focused around a costing exercise led by the Administrative Officer (significant in itself). This relates to an interest and concern expressed by the Head in the think tank—an analysis of the cost of delivering different subjects (staffing, resources, rooms, support, etc.)—and appears to be quite different from the actual discussion, which concentrated on the need to take account of the Dearing curriculum review. The setting priority was to come under the consideration of a Project Partnership [working party] to be lead by the Head herself. As regards the Equal Opportunity policy ‘we have asked the Student Council, staff and the Governors to review our current Equal Opportunities policy’ (Memo from the Head). This may be read in two ways: either as an opening up of the issue for widespread debate, or as a diffusion tactic. Without a Project Partnership formally there is no clear focus for the review (as compared to setting and curriculum) and the locus of the review is policy (text) not practice. Without a Project Partnership format there is no mechanism or pressure systematically to collect information or take evidence.

Again it could be argued that symbolism is as important as substance here. In at least two senses. The SDP symbolises and ‘stands for’ the corporate consensus of the school. It is a version of the school constructed for viewing, for inspection (internally and externally) (Ball, 1997). As the focus of activities around an ‘agreed’ set of priorities the SDP is a touchstone of shared endeavour which displaces or subsumes differences, disagreements and value divergencies. As a process it also symbolises an openness, a participative system of management which allows for the widespread expression of views and concerns. In both cases commonality and openness are reduced to an event. They are synthesised and represented in a particular opportunity to participate. The implication may be that once passed the opportunity is lost.

**Ofsteding**

The third, and again interrelated technology at work in Martineau is that required by the arrival, at some point, of the Ofsted Inspectors. The school will come under scrutiny from the outside and has a lot to live up to. While Ofsteding is not imminent at
Martineau mention of Ofsted expectations were common. Senior staff attended meetings outside at which these expectations were spelt out and the book of inspection criteria was key reading among the SMT. The Ofsted expectations became a focus for common interest within the school and a rationale for regular monitoring and checking of ‘systems’ and procedures. This provided an interesting set of possibilities for displacement. The locus of power or blame for additional work, overbearing paperwork, meticulous surveillance was often located with Ofsted and not directly with the SMT who frequently positioned themselves as ciphers for outside pressures. But, as we have seen, the school management is also implicated in the generation of surveillance paperwork. And there is a further paradox here, embedded in what Lyotard (1979) calls ‘the law of contradiction’. That is to say, increasing precision in the specification, collection and collation of indicators of performance requires greater and greater time which must be diverted away from the activities the indicators are supposed to represent (see Elliott, 1996, for a discussion of this).

What is important here are appearances: having policies for ..., being seen to ..., making sure the figures look good. Public performances like Ofsted inspections, local league table position, and artistic events in the school, dance, drama and music, all ‘needed’ to be carefully stage-managed to give the right impression. All this is oddly reminiscent of John Gray’s comments on the Soviet system of planned production:

... the soviet manager has an incentive to comply with the quantitative production targets that he or she has been set, regardless of the quality of the products, and to fabricate statistics regarding output. (Gray, 1993, p. 68)

I observed several instances when the management of figures for public consumption was discussed. At a year heads’ meeting with the senior deputy she talked about attendance figures and the need for ‘the judicious use of authorised absences’ (1st Deputy). At a SMT meeting on staffing analyses the Head asked the senior teacher responsible: ‘How do we show the contact ratio in the best light’ (for Ofsted). And in interview the Head of one subject talked about the very direct pressure coming from the Head to get the exam results presented in a particular way:

I’m rushing around like a loony today trying to put together this exam results display she wants ... I didn’t have any data to do it with and I’ve had to collect that and then I’ve had to find a way of presenting the results in a way that looks good ... GCSEs and A level results against the national average ... that’s presented us with some problems, because obviously with four subjects the results are uneven ... I’ve found a way of doing the A-level that looks alright, I’m struggling a bit with the GCSE. (Hog 2)

One the one hand, the issue again is that of appearances—the simulacrumic organisation? An organisation for ‘the gaze’, and for avoidance of ‘the gaze’:

the propaganda of the system here, I don’t know ... I take results. Yes, that sounds good, and I see what happens in my own classroom and ... do I sometimes even get taken in by the whole machinery of ... this is how wonderful we are ... am I actually starting off on the completely wrong premise, are we not, have we got gaping holes, that me as part of the system has not been showing or has not noticed yet, or might notice if they weren’t covered up, and are they being. I do feel a bit like that sometimes. (Main Grade Teacher 2)
I’ve noticed now she’s [the Head] getting much stronger on the development plan than she was recently … she’s suddenly … well it’s probably to do with OFSTED … but she’s trying to … when I first came here it wasn’t that important, she said I don’t want it to be something … I just want it to be a document that people will look at … and they did look at priorities … but other things came along, like setting I mean things like that suddenly happened, and even though they’re not on the plan. (Hog 1)

But the organisational responses to or anticipations of Ofsted do also have first order effects on teachers’ practices and second order effects on students’ school experience [7].

In a different way from previously, substantive and technicist tensions, and compromises, are evident once again. As before, in some circumstances, in subtle and not so subtle ways, ‘the sell’ and image become more important than and/or are set over and against substantive issues. To reiterate, income maximisation, reputation enhancement and indicators of ‘quality’ do also have immediate effects upon professional practice. They reorient attention and effort and have the ‘tendency to reduce the organisational entities involved to calculable and ultimately financial inputs and outputs’ (Yeatman, 1993, p 351). Yeatman suggests that professional, technocratic managers are ‘teleological promiscuous’ (p 349); a system of means that can be turned to different ends without a primary concern for the ends in themselves:

the Headteacher takes a genuine interest in the Arts and we have a very good position in the curriculum, compared with a lot of other schools, but the quid pro quo if you like is a thriving kind of public face and most of the teachers are actually committed to that, funnily enough … I mean they enjoy doing it, they get a lot out of it … but it’s a lot of work, particularly to maintain the programme that they want … a problem with performance, the public performance in education, although it’s educationally beneficial, very, for those students involved, it is inevitably selective, and what you’re doing is concentrating on the able students … at the expense, well you haven’t got the time to spend so much on others, although of course we try and get … other people involved as much as we can…. the performance … we’ve got so much keenness to be involved, and if you’re doing what we’re doing at the moment … like we’re going into a thing … with the National Theatre, organising a youth theatre project, we might be able to get … actually to the National … the pressure’s on and we’re not gonna pick kids that can’t do it, and anyway one of the things that the Headteacher would say is, we don’t want anyone who can’t act involved really … she doesn’t like people in the orchestra who can’t play instruments, who’ve only just started, although you can get away with that to an extent, but she’s against that, so there is that … I think it’s unfortunate but performance is really aimed at … the kids who benefit are the ones who are able … (Hog 1) [8]

Conclusion [9]

In its investments in TQM and through the various other technologies of quality at work in the school Martineau is definitively positioned within the ‘quality revolution’ (Oakland, 1991), although I have tried to indicate that the new managerial discourse of quality is not the only one in play at Martineau. Nonetheless, quality does a great deal of micro-disciplinary work in the school, but this work is part of a ‘bigger picture’, a
larger transformation. The concept of quality forms ‘part of a wider Conservative government-led project of change in the public sector’ (Kirkpatrick & Martinez-Lucio, 1995, p. 8.) and is also ‘part of a larger ideological narrative and organisational strategy of the “enterprise culture”’ (pp. 10–11).

However, it would be a mistake to represent Martineau as a paradigm case of a ‘quality’ organisation. Organisational control at Martineau is made up of bits of ‘new’ management (TQM, SDP) and entrepreneurism, and bits of ‘old’ management (hierarchy, separation of policy and execution), and educational commitments especially to the education of girls. These produce a heady mix of feminism, surveillance, initiative, competition, and corporate culture. The staff are ‘encouraged’ to commit themselves to the corporate culture in exchange for a sense of virtuousness and resourcefulness but they are also subject to a considerable amount of micro-management—checking that reports were done, etc.—a mass of trivia which ‘used up’ time that might have been devoted to substantive discussion. The combination of innovations and changes stemming directly from government policies and from Martineau’s responses to those policies—as a set of loquacious tactics of power—produces a set of contradictory experiences and responses from teachers. They are invigorated and empowered by new demands and skills, exhausted by additional work, and, in some cases, alienated from their selves and their colleagues. They make sense of their work lives typically very positively within these dissonances—although overwork and stress are commonly referred to in interviews. As one Senior Teacher explained:

Mrs C never keeps still, just when you think you are comfortable we’re off again—you can’t be complacent. It’s nice to be in an institution where you are constantly reviewing your practice and the practice of others.

This is no simple or simplistic story of oppressive power at work. Rather we see here the ‘polymorphous techniques of power’ (Foucault, 1981) and its effects of ‘refusal, blockage and invalidation, but also incitement and intensification’ (p. 11). Almost all staff speak proudly and positively about their school and compare it favourably with other schools they know of. The undoubted achievements of the school provide staff with a very strong sense of effectivity. Martineau is an inherently ‘flexible’ organisation where an ‘organic’ complementarity is established between ‘the greatest possible realisation of the intrinsic abilities of individuals at work’ and the ‘optimum productivity and profitability of the corporation’ (Du Gay, 1996, p. 71). What I am struggling to envision here is a sense of the social and personal costs, and moral significance of all this. To draw attention to the rates of exchange in play within the ‘quality revolution’. But importantly, flexibility and the apparatus which makes it possible are part of a piece-meal improvisation, not a simple expressive or repressive relation between the individual and the state. Management at Martineau is a hybrid of old and new (Fordist and post-Fordist) management paradigms; reflecting perhaps the particular local contingencies of a hybrid market/bureaucratic school system.

Put epigrammatically, the point here is that it is what makes Martineau good that makes it bad. What counts as good and bad, of course, rests on what qualities of institutions are valued. That valuing is to a great extent determined by the indicators and technologies of quality which are predominant at any point in time.

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NOTES

[1] I use the term deliberately loosely here to signal both the school as object of the processes of reform, and the school as a reforming subject, in much the same way that we talk of a reformed alcoholic.

[2] The school effectiveness movement is an important source of performative technologies (and I have written about these elsewhere). See also Elliott (1996).

[3] Even here the debate turned more on the knock-on effects of other clusters’ setting procedures on the constitution of Arts teaching groups at GCSE.

[4] The mode of speech, the ‘gabbling’ are significant here, in indicating both the creation of a response, based on previously unarticulated concerns, and the difficult, personal and emotional nature of the response.

[5] We may need to think of a third kind of entrepreneurial intelligentsia, a form of professionality founded on the ethics, arts and skills of income maximisation, image manipulation and marketing.

[6] The use of these individual written forms tended to fragment and personalise responses and discussions at meetings were stultified by the working through of fixed and pre-determined agenda items. The convenience and formalism of the management technique produced particular kinds of response.

[7] These are explored elsewhere in our research writing.

[8] Again I would suggest that the form of utterance is significant here. The broken pattern of speech suggests something of the speaker’s discomfort and sense of dilemma.

[9] This paper covers a lot of ground and works, for the most part, in terms of generalities. It lays out a set of arguments and concerns which need further development and more grounding in data. It is intended to provide an agenda of possibilities for thinking about school reform and reformed schools.

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