

Performativity and Capital in Schools

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Abstract

With the advent of performance management and its related pay structures into schools, another step has been taken in the commodification of education. Productive efficiency and international competitiveness are the aims, a regulatory framework of measures is the means of establishing it. Education has long been developing into a commodity form. Historically, universal State provision has generally masked the reality of this situation. Nevertheless, with schoolchildren and teachers subject to this form, it becomes easier for their labour to be incorporated within the dehumanizing social relations of capitalism. The performative order oils the machine for business and the State, ensuring a smooth production process. In this article I explain the mechanics of performativity. The inadequacy of much contemporary critique to the task of tackling the commodifying nature of performativity is exposed.

Both schoolchildren and teachers sell their labour capacity to the State. It expects a return on its investment in schooling. I apply Marxist theory to explore the role of performance in measuring the work of children and teachers to ensure profit margins. Performance is considered as a fetish, representing to the producers the alienated form of their work in schools.

Keywords: *Marxism, Education, Commodification, Performativity, Performance Management, Schools, Testing*

Introduction

The analysis offered here is historically situated at an interesting moment in the uneasy relationship between the teacher and the State. Since 1997, the New Labour Government of the United Kingdom had enacted a mighty slew of education-related initiatives, policies and funding decisions (forty-seven in the first year of office alone (Ball, 1999b, p.195)). The broad aim of these moves has been to ‘improve Standards’. Within every corner of the educational establishment, ‘improvement’ is underway. The quality of our teachers and schools is to be raised to such an extent that, by 2002, an enormous upswing in the key skills of our children will be visible, evidenced by SATs and GCSE results. The targets and tables commanding the exact increases in skills and knowledge for each region and every school are well known to the workers in all the educational establishments of Britain. It is not necessary to identify specific figures here, for the particular percentages and comparatives are not relevant. The concern of many, including the author, is partly that these statistics exist at all - at least in the form in which they do - and, more pertinently, what they mean for the teachers and children they ‘represent’. For every one of the charts and graphs *represent* no more or less than the work of very many men, women and children. The Government’s targets and the measurable means of establishing them demand a reconceptualisation of what it actually *is* to be such a teacher or learner encrypted within these tabulatures, within this society and system.

This paper will examine the nature of the hard and fast facts and targets as measures of performance of New Britain’s education. It will outline in descriptive detail the system of performance management now operating within English and Welsh schools, placing this within the broader context of ‘performativity’.

Stephen Ball has constructed a critique of performance and performativity which draws on the work of Foucault, Lyotard and Butler. Remarks will be offered on the work of Ball, highlighting some of the shortcomings in his analyses. This section inevitably falls short of a full study, a project which demands further work at another time. The subsequent remarks propose a quite different analysis from that of Stephen Ball, drawing its methodology not from poststructuralism, but from Marx.

It is also worth noting that the author is an infant school teacher. The weighting of evidence will implicitly tend towards an experience of the Primary phase of schooling. Complicity, resistance and autobiography are inscribed within every aspect of this chapter.

Context

It is worth taking some time to outline the context within which the measurement of performance is being developed within schools.

Education in Britain has for at least the last century been conducted within capitalist economies of power and production, which have shaped its remit and directed its ‘content’. However, the fact that for most of this period, the State has footed the bill, invested the capital and reaped the profits in terms of overall economic growth has, for the most part, concealed these relations of production from those involved, educational workers, teachers and learners. This situation no longer pertains.

The education sector is under ever increasing pressure from organisations representing international capital, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), to become more competitive. Its General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) for example, demands clearly that the laws of the market be applied to the structures of education. The manner in which education is delivered is increasingly subject to market scrutiny and commercial management. Ultimately, the position of the WTO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) can only be understood as a primarily ideological stance, tightening connectives between education, employment and trade; though as Hill (2001) indicates, the apparatuses employed to enforce this position as policy are not exclusively ideological, but draw on repressive means as well. Indeed, New Labour’s Department for Education and Employment (now, Department for Education and Skills - DfES) has effectively abolished the distinction between educational and economic policy, operating a Third Way which represents the triumph of an employment and industry led social policy framework.

The UK Government is at the vanguard of delivering “a business agenda *for* schools and an agenda for business *in* schools” (Hatcher, 2001, p.48, original emphases). As

Hatcher (2001), Whitfield (2001), Regan (2001) and many others have outlined, the business agenda *for* schools demands curricular upheaval, increased vocationalism and specialisation to meet the needs of industry for particular kinds of knowledge; there is also an increasing role for entrepreneurship at all levels of education. The role for business *in* schools, whilst less the concern of this study is also relevant. The UK leads Europe in its pursuit of innovative ways to allow the private sector to break into the world of schooling, opening up commercial possibilities in the teeth of opposition from unions, parents and governors. Education Action Zones, Private Finance Initiatives and Public Private Partnerships all play their parts as ‘Trojan Horses’ for the right to contract, to put to tender, the right to make a profit. It is too simple to suggest that education is being ‘privatised’ in a purely economic sense, though the Thatcherite approach to this matter certainly continues apace under the current administration. Rather, as business strategem and private money is ever-increasingly employed to reap an advantage from the educational system in terms of profit, what we see in schools is the privatisation of the individual subject - teacher and learner, the horror that is the commodification of our very personhoods (a point taken up by Glenn Rikowski in his most recent work, such as Allman, P., McLaren, P. & Rikowski, G., 2002).

A central plank of Government’s efforts to bring market relations to the heart of education has been the attempt to link the pay of teachers with ‘performance’. This has resulted in the introduction of a threshold, through which teachers must pass in order to continue to see incremental pay-rises. As the system becomes established, the aim is that the threshold horizon will operate to incite particular kinds of self-interest and calculation. In order to cross the threshold, one’s ‘performance’ will be demonstrated year on year in the meeting of targets and the raising of standards against established criteria, supported by the production of banks of evidence. This process is termed ‘performance management’. Other, more direct methods of connecting results to pay through the performance management framework on a yearly basis are currently being contested. It is quite clear that the intention of the government is to introduce full-blooded payment by results when possible, linked directly to performance management.

Performance management, the threshold and the testing regime

Whilst the details which follow are not, of themselves, crucial to the thrust of the subsequent argument, it is essential to illustrate the mechanics of performativity. The level of generality expressed in Ball's critique can divert the reader from a concern with performativity as the *experience of a set of material practices*. It is also important to expand upon some key aspects of current policy and practice in performance management in order to pursue the relationship between the systems of incentive and coercion for teachers and the testing of children. Both teachers and learners are expected to perform to prescribed criteria and the framework in place since September 2000 establishes the patterns of regulation which bind the two together.

The performance criteria for learners have been in place slightly longer than those for teachers. Since the mid-1990's the system of Standardised Assessment Testing has been embedded within educational practice in the UK. Devised initially as a statistical rather than an educational tool, SATs were a vital step in regulating the production of 'results' in education. It is important to restate in this context that the operation of the SATs regime that now pertains across all schools in England is premised upon end-of-schooling expectations of employability skills. It has been taken that a sufficiently clear competitive advantage is conferred by the possession of GCSE, A-level and degree level certification to warrant the formulation of a pyramid of target levels ascending to the apex of employability. That is to say, if the Government suggests, as it does, that, in order for the UK 'skills economy' to effectively compete on a global basis, it must ensure that by 2020, 50% of young adults reaching the end of their formal education will be awarded a degree or qualification at an equivalent level, then there must be a correlative increase in A-levels results, GCSE results, Key Stage 3 SATs, Key Stage 2 SATs, Key Stage 1 SATs, Baseline Assessments at four years-old - and in all the intermediate tests that operate between these benchmarks. This is a perfectly logical and, essentially unavoidable consequence of taking economic indicators as the basis on which to build a testing regime. In the vast majority of cases, children can now expect to be subjected to formal benchmark testing, at least annually, every June from their first (Reception) year in schooling (aged four/five) until the age of eighteen, with the possible exception of Year 1 (aged five/six).

As all teachers are aware, far subtler forms of performance management have more recently been introduced into the classroom to augment and strengthen the testing regime. The setting of targets for all learners, for each subject, even for aspects of some subjects such as English and Maths now occurs on at least a termly basis in most schools. The tables of subject-specific targets published by the DfEE tie individual pupil performance to the level descriptors which form the basis for end-of-year testing. Learners themselves are expected to contribute towards the establishment of their own targets, thereby reinforcing behaviours and attitudes conducive to the production of predicated standards.

Teachers quickly became aware of the ‘top-down’ structures of the school testing system. Many, familiar with models of child-development that emphasise a ‘bottom-up’ approach, resisted: boycotts of SATs testing occurred. As unions caved in under increased pressure, active resistance was crushed. However, pockets of discontent have continued to exist. In many staffrooms, voices can still be heard condemning the SATs regime. In the author’s experience, such opinions still receive a sympathetic hearing, up to a point. That point is generally when active opposition is called for - when actual patterns of practice are challenged.

Given this backdrop, the Government has perceived the need to introduce a system for managing the performance of teachers so that it too reflects the ‘standards agenda’.

Just as regularly reviewed targets are now part of the standard practice of managing the performance of learners, so are teachers now expected to perform to targets set in annual review meetings. Of itself, this may appear little different to prior systems of appraisal. However the key difference is the place of the performance management system within its wider educational and economic contexts, specifically highlighted by the links between teacher performance, pupils’ test results and pay.

The Department for Education and Employment identified two major ‘benefits’ of performance management for teachers. The first, that “pupils will benefit because their teachers will have a more sharply focused picture of what... their pupils can achieve” (DfEE, 2000a, p.3). The second, that teachers will benefit because they “have the right to expect that their performance will be regularly assessed” (ibid. p.3).

In the former ‘benefit’, the kernel of the link between pupil results and teacher performance is identified. In the second an appeal to *the ‘right’ to expect assessment* is made to justify its introduction in terms of advantage to teachers. Even the casual reader’s suspicion is raised at the invocation of ‘rights’ in respect of the introduction of employment conditions of this kind. (Would it, for instance, appear reasonable to expect workers to uphold their ‘right’ to have monitored the number of toilet breaks they take during the day? A ‘right’ to expect to be policed at home to ensure that ‘voluntary’ paperwork is being completed?).

Performance management is a process, an ongoing cycle of target-setting, monitoring and reviewing. The targets set for individual teachers fall into two identified categories, pupil progress and professional development.

Targets for pupil progress will be defined in terms of SATs results where these are available, and for teachers working within those year-groups where SATs are not carried out, and other forms of testing and assessment which lock into the predicted pattern of progress expected to achieve specified SATs targets. Schools will have established these by the use of both internal and external criteria. National targets broadly shape the statistical framework within which schools will attempt to place themselves at a competitive advantage to ‘similar’ schools, as defined by numbers of children receiving free school meals or identified as having special educational needs. Professional development targets will include engaging in the types of activity likely to develop the capacity for teaching better so as to ensure the expected SATs results. These may involve additional training, being observed, being monitored to ensure progress and monitoring others.

In order to continue to receive incremental pay-rises on an upper sliding scale, teachers who have worked for seven or eight years are required to demonstrate their level of performance by ‘crossing the threshold’. This is achieved by providing a range of evidence to support their claim in five areas, Knowledge and Understanding, Teaching and Assessment, Pupil Progress, Wider Professional Effectiveness and Professional Characteristics.

It is not a shock to discover that evidence in the categories of Knowledge and Understanding, Teaching and Assessment and Wider Professional Effectiveness will,

in large part, reflect the hegemonic standards agenda, constructed around the visible measurement of efforts which contribute towards the type of pupil progress demanded in the third category.

The most intriguing category of evidence is that of Professional Characteristics. The data required of teachers in this area is of a qualitatively different order. Evidencing capability in this regard rests upon claiming personal qualities compatible with a list of sixteen drawn up after extensive analysis by Hay/McBer (2000). These include such immeasurable descriptors as 'Respect for Others', 'Conceptual Thinking', 'Initiative', 'Holding People Accountable' and 'Understanding Others'. In this, the fifth of the five categories, there is clearly a difficulty of accounting for the assessor. This situation has necessitated the construction of a relationship between '*personal characteristics*' and performativity. Ray Richardson (2000) makes the point that Hay/McBer has to operate statistical equations of the form: 'Performance' = $a + b_1, X_1 + b_2, X_2 + b_3 \dots$. The X's are the immeasurable teacher characteristics (like 'Creating Trust') and the B's are the estimated coefficients that link these standards to performance (SATs results). Ray Richardson (2000) notes that:

If the Hay/McBer work is to be trusted, the only threshold standard should be the X's - you should not also need to measure 'performance', precisely because the X's are supposed to be able to predict performance accurately... If, on the other hand the Hay/McBer work is no good (i.e. The X's do not generate 'performance') why are their variables being turned into the threshold standards? (p.22)

The issue arises as a result of efforts to make *personal* characteristics a factor in the calculation of 'performance' and its pay-reward. The algorithms purported to arise from the relation between a, b, c's and X's are a convenient device. As Richardson reaffirms: "It is surely the case that there are no equations which most dispassionate researchers agree on that both identify most of the relevant X's and explain a very large part of the performance variation among pupils" (2000, p.22). Indeed analysis of the Hay/McBer report reveals that, with the waters muddied yet further by the introduction into the equation of a third set of variables relating to 'Classroom Climate', predictions of variance in pupil performance can still only be made at 30% accuracy (Hay/ McBer, 2000, p.7). The correlations between specific teachers' attributes and pupil performance, evidenced in Standardised Test results is

problematic to say the least, but will continue to occupy the minds of policy-makers for some time to come, for this presents a key issue in the extension of the business of performance management into attitude and personality management.

So, it appears that, currently, their personal characteristics exist in the threshold application requirements only as a sop to the understandable concerns of teachers over the ‘hardness’ of the evidence data demanded. Where does this leave the individual teacher’s personal characteristics in relation to the overall operating system, the standards regime (and, ultimately, the demands of the national and international economy)? Clearly, a failed but important effort has been made to account for test results in relation *to the type of person that an individual teacher is*. At this point such efforts are relatively crude behaviorist descriptions, but an awareness of the existence of even these is vital in attempting to construct an analysis of what is really going on at a philosophical level.

Ball and Contemporary Critique

Stephen Ball offers an analysis that relates educational change to the market firmly but incidentally. His primary objective is to negotiate a kind of logic or coherence within the maelstrom of policy initiatives churning at a point of inchoate postmodernity both inside of and beyond the crumbling structures of modern bureau-professional education in the UK and other western cultures. It will be argued here that, in employing the methodology of left-leaning ‘soft’-postmodern social critique (after Foucault and Lyotard) Ball is unable to support precisely the coherence he seeks. Whilst he alludes to the logic of the market, he is unwilling to develop his critique beyond a descriptive analysis of the symptomatic relations which arise as a consequence of the work of the market. However, his descriptions are very useful in making visible the operation of some of the forces of the market within education, particularly with regard to performance.

Ball acknowledges the instrumentality of performance as a tool for *economic* ends:

In relation to the economy, education is expected to provide particular and general skills required by capital and to graduate students who are ‘fit for work’ in a whole variety of ways... Performativity plays a particular role in reorientating education,

educational institutions and students to the competitive needs of the economy. (1999a, p.189)

However, rather than operating upon this reflection to instigate an analysis of the relation between capital and the material realities of performance management in schools, Ball works within a paradigm of ‘language games’, in Lyotard’s terms, which reduce the practices and politics of performance to ‘discourses’.

He offers three descriptions of the ‘work’ of performativity:

First, it works as a disciplinary system of judgements, classifications and targets towards which schools and teachers must strive and against and through which they are evaluated... Second, as part of the transformation of education and schooling and the expansion of the power of capital, performativity provides sign systems which ‘represent’ education in a self-referential and reified form for consumption... Third, performativity also resides in the pragmatics of language... The addressee is placed within the context created by the utterance. (Ball, 1999a, p.190)

Ball falls short of placing all three of these mechanisms within a context which would *explain* their operation: the investment of capital and the expectation of returns. He will only go so far as to indicate that the former two operations are ‘linked to’ and ‘valorised’ within the market form of education. Elsewhere, Ball makes the connection between policy decisions taken by New Labour and their “rendering of education itself into the commodity form” (1999b, p.198), but the relationship between performance and commodity remains unclear. Ball is hampered by his insistence on the reification of the management of the performance indicator, whose referent becomes a ‘sign’ within a language game whose play of signification is wholly internal to the operating paradigm. On Ball’s internal market one can only buy signs and symbols. Whilst he refers to the influence of the WTO, OECD and such-like on the discourses of education, it is as if the market in performance indicators which exists within education has sprung up spontaneously, parallel with capital’s demands but without real reference to its relationship with the wider market in commodities of all kinds, including the labour of teachers and pupils.

The valorising factors which Ball proffers as proof of his market form are familiar:

... the publication of national tests and examination results and the construction of local league tables; inspection, articulated and enacted on the principles of management, quality and procedure; teacher appraisal, incentive payments and performance-related pay; and parental choice (linked to per capita, formula funding). (1999a, p.192)

But none of these exist in isolation. The observation, classification and measurement of individual activity takes place within a context of very real investment and the expectation of increased returns, necessitating an emphasis on the visibility and ‘accountability’ of the work of the educator within the national and international economy. Ball underplays the blurring of the distinction between accountability and accountancy which emerges from an economically driven model of inspection and audit.

He is correct in identifying that the notion of performance implies visibility, an audience. The verb ‘to perform’ is transitive; one must perform *to* or *for*. In reality, the terminology and materialities of performance, applied both to teachers and learners, are wholly or principally tools, making explicit a relationship towards a mode of production. Such a position is paradigmatically unavailable and, anyway, ineffable for Ball. Labour, the quality of which is measured in performance terms, is very visibly work *for* an other. The role of teachers in working principally towards the production of units of economic benefit to the capitalist State is becoming much clearer in the language of performativity. The terminology is, in its turn, reinforcing and redefining the mode of production.

Ball’s aim is to seek to “establish the existence of an ‘attitude’ and an ‘ethical framework’ within which teachers and researchers in schools... are having to work and think about what they do and who they are” (Ball, 1999c, p.2). The philosophical implications for the category of the subject alluded to in Ball’s 1999 paper (Ball, 1999c) are underdeveloped. This is, perhaps, not surprising given the descriptive nature of his critique of the phenomena associated with the drive towards performativity and the ‘new society’. Ball’s penchant for the post-structuralist *lingua franca* in fact renders his critique of the process of interpellation impotent. The question certainly remains “what it means to be educated; what it means ‘to be a teacher’” (Ball, 1999c, p.2). However, it is not the all-pervasive “texts” which are

“making us up” (ibid. p.2), but rather the material practices associated with working under conditions of ubiquitous marketisation.

Ball’s use of the term “discourse” serves to elide the insubstantiality of his analysis. The educational subject whom he posits is neo-Foucaultian in the sense that it is an effect of the exercise of power. However, Ball’s is not a general theory. He is not concerned with subjectivity *per se*, rather with the experience of performativity and its implications for the individual subject, teacher or learner. Ball identifies the technologies whereby new educational subjectivities are materialised as “inspections, audits, promotion applications, job interviews... record keeping, committee and task-force meetings, interactions... ” (ibid. p.3). In referring to these formative conditions as texts or discourses he belies the reality that a retelling or rereading alone cannot *change* the situation. The “discourses” which he defines are in reality, and *are experienced as material conditions of work*.

For Ball, individuals, subjects become samples or data, as relationships are left “flat” and “deficient”. He never rises to the challenge of naming this deficiency as the result of the process of commodification. However, his allusions to the objectification of the human as datum serve to reinforce a Marxist analysis of his critique: he states, “there is a real possibility that authentic social relations are replaced by judgmental relations wherein persons are valued for their productivity alone” (ibid.p.7). (‘Judgement’ seems a rather curious concept to include here. Within the context of his paper, ‘assessed’ or ‘assessable’ might have been a more natural choice).

This last statement of Ball’s cries out for a Marxist exposition. What Ball is explicating is a growing visibility that the relationship between educational workers as human individuals is transforming into, or already is in reality, a relationship between the *work* of those individuals, posited as an object, and thus subject to fetishisation as a commodity form (of labour).

The commodity fetish: performance in the phantasmagoria

In order to explore why performance and performativity are such central concepts in the education policymaking of the Government at this point, it is necessary firstly, to

review what is meant by performance, and secondly to establish the role of performativity.

It will be argued here that performance is a means by which teachers are brought into a new relationship with their mode of production or labour. Performance is a fetish: it 'stands for' exchange value, engendering a commodification of the relationship between the teachers/learners and the process of teaching and learning. In order to analyse the importance of performance, it is necessary, initially, to consider what the commodity fetish is.

Performance as Commodity Fetishism

As Marx indicates in his examination of the phenomenon of "the fetishism of the commodity and its secret", there is nothing, absolutely nothing *in* the set of material movements and reactions that, together, constitute the *work* of teaching (or any other form of labour), which, in and of themselves, contain exchange value. This is to say, value is not a property of labour or any other commodity in the same sense as its intensity or its duration are; or, in the case of the material product of labour, as its durability, its precision, its hardness or its strength, or whatever other physical attributes may be examined in relation to its makeup or structure. Performance is no more a quality or property of the work of the teacher than excellence or value-for-money are. One cannot say of the aggregate of physical activities engaged in by the teacher during the course of a lesson that they are of such-and-such worth or effectiveness, except in relation to the work of others. A sustained clear tone adopted and modulated in a manner sufficient to communicate a question to a large class can be attributed with effectively fulfilling the intention of the teacher. A carefully and precisely executed operation can be said to effectively model the techniques required to catch a ball in terms of stance, swiftness of movement, et cetera. Performance, though, does not seek to define a relationship of intention to action or of the teacher to the teaching, but rather, of teaching action to teaching action, labour to labour. It quantifies a relation which is far from being inherent in any description of the material relations of labourer to the labour or its products. A measure of performance, like any measure of exchange value, is an arcane descriptor, *arising from the commodity form*. It is a relational quantification. It equates one physical act with another, perhaps in

another place at another time, irrespective both of intentionalities or the biochemical differences in material processes and agents. The various kinds of human labour are equalised and objectified by the performance measure as an indicator of exchangeable value. The teaching labours themselves thus come to be placed *in a relationship to each other*. They are valorised in relation to each other as commodities within a particular kind of market, operating within the wider, totalising global marketplace of the Capitalist economy.

The commodity form, in a sense, takes on a life of its own because it has assumed an active relation with other commodity forms. In the commodity form of production, not only does the teacher's relation to the product of labour - the learner - become a relation to objects, performance indicators, but the performance indicators themselves, those of both teachers' and learners' work, enter into a relation with each other which enslaves both teacher and learner. The exposition of this fetishisation appears curiously idealist, even mystical, given Marx's avowed materialism. The relations Marx proposes appear to coalesce in a hazy theoretical phantasmagoria, akin only, perhaps to the "misty realms of religion" (1990, p.165), where, like the social relations between commodities, "the products of the human brain [gods and spirits] appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race" (ibid.). For:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. (Marx, 1990, pp. 165-6)

Producers become subject to the sum of relations between objects, the material conditions of their relationships towards the products of their labour being determined beyond the producers' sphere of material influence. Such is the case under those material conditions of production in which the use-value of an object is completely subsumed within the value-relation of products exchanged within the market, the ritual play of prices, which is Capitalism. The whole labour of society, being at its most fundamental the material movement of individuals, can only enter into a relationship with itself, become itself as a whole through the relationship of products as commodities within the market. Thus the relationship between the producer and

product of labour becomes not a social (active) relationship, but a passive relationship between material subject and active object or commodity. The many and varied types of labour are equalised in the social form of their manifestation as values between objects.

As commodity production has become the predominant mode of relation between worker and work, extending across ever wider reaches of society, touching every sphere of human existence - including the pedagogical - workers themselves, situated within the nexus of commodity production, have found their very capacity to work defined exclusively by the conceptual structures of commodity production.

The particular type of commodity in which the Capitalist State is interested with regard to education is that unique form, the labour-*capacity* of teachers and learners. The teacher offers for sale her/his mental and physical capacity to teach. The learners bring their capacity to learn, which makes possible their future accession to the labour market. With the once rigid appearance of public and private within the educational sphere now disintegrating, the teacher is faced with the prospect of having her labour-power bought in an increasingly open market. This is a vitally important point in terms of the revalorization of what teachers do. National pay and conditions agreements are chipped away at with the prospect of incentives and allowances (for instance, the new, and largely market-led Recruitment and Retention payments), laptops and cheap housing playing their part in the negotiations within the sphere of circulation. The teacher hands over her labour-power as a commodity of a particular *measurable* standard. The owners of Capital, in this case still, generally (but not always) the State, purchase that labour-power or labour-capacity for a given period (the temporary contract is becoming the rule) and at an established rate.

The question then arises: how does performance *act* as the fetishised form of teachers' labour?

The role of performance

If one were to apply the analysis above to schooling it would mean that teachers' relationships with the people with whom they work, colleagues and learners, would, as indicated, become relationships to 'things', for in handing over their labour-power

in the educational marketplace, teachers would become alienated from the products of that labour, the students. Alienation means the experience of the very real separation of the work of teachers and learners from the products or results of that labour which, as Marx makes clear, seem to exist only insofar as they are expressible in the commodity form of level descriptors or performance management success criteria, operating in relation to each other, beyond the producer's control.

This commodification is precisely what is happening at the level of curriculum and school planning and even the everyday interaction between teachers and learners. The imposition of standards of measurable attainment within all spheres of educational work mean that the relationship between teachers and the results of their labour is becoming, exactly, a relation to quantities. Many teachers of young children will readily acknowledge that sometimes, and increasingly often they will refer to children as "level 2s" or "level 4s". This is not to say that teachers have somehow mysteriously and at a stroke forgotten that the children with whom they work are also productive human individuals engaged, with them, in a common endeavour. Rather, they are very often forced to act and make judgements as if their own and the learners' humanity had been forgotten. In fact, the operational structures of performative assessment act upon the individuals to materialise their very subjecthood in distinct ways in and through just such deformative mechanisms' inscriptive practices. The doublethink which lauds the appreciation of children's humanity whilst espousing a rhetoric of productive efficiency is particularly prevalent among school management.

It is the urge to please *business* which is leading Government to treat children as points on a scatter-graph and it will be the businesses involved in running schools who continue to push the instrumentalist standards agenda. It is in the interests both of the business agenda for schools and the agenda for business in schools that the relationship between profit and measurable performative standards (SATs, performance management success criteria) are strengthened. Correctly, or incorrectly, a business sector which perceives particular types of knowledge and skills, codified in test results as the key indicators of competitive employability, will seek to intervene at all levels to skew educational priorities and educators' thinking towards the attainment of these ends.ⁱⁱ An agenda for business in schools which specifically links the achievement of SAT's targets with payment will be doubly beneficial, both in

terms of immediate and deferred capital returns. Witness, for example, Leeds where the Local Education Authority has been privatised and where one school which had 17% of Key Stage 3 pupils attaining at level 6 last year was told that their target for last year (2000/2001) was a wholly unrealistic 34%. Education Leeds (the new conglomerate now running services) has been set performance targets which are to be met if they are to receive their full payments. The material reality that the targets relate to actual children and their work in schools is largely disregarded in an instance such as this. It is SATs results which bring in the profits for Capita, the private partner in Education Leeds, and it is these which they will seek to wring from teachers and learners through the full range of performative technologies, regulations and observations which impact upon working conditions and teachers' pay.

Intervention at a curricular level means that in many primary schools the content to be taught, especially in Years 2 and 6, very rarely deviates from that which is necessary to fulfil the prescribed SATs results, the 'broad and balanced curriculum' effectively suspended. Take as an example Nord Anglia's training solutions for Hackney teachers (this private company is responsible for 'tackling under-achievement' in the borough). Their in-service training file contains courses almost entirely in literacy and numeracy, the sole science course is 'How to Prepare for Key Stage 2 SATs', the only two information-communication technology courses are ICT in the Literacy and Numeracy Hours. There are no courses in any other subject (Donnison, 2001, p.12). Teachers are being trained to teach to this curriculum, because this is what will produce the measurable results required by State and industry. Whatever the stated intentions of the Government, and no matter how primary curricular innovation is dressed up in *Building on Success* (DfEE, 2001), the impact of performance targets has been both restrictive and reductive.

The possibility of a relationship between teacher and learner as a *social* relation, existing at the level of *useful* labour has been and continues to be eroded and transformed by performative thinking, the quota and target. Anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers are aware that the very ways in which they themselves relate to their students are being constrained by the expectation of performative measurability. They find that rather than react creatively to children's needs and to their own strengths and inclinations, teachers are channelling their comments and responses to

achieve ends commensurate with measurable performance in terms of SATs and performance management target success criteria. Jeffrey and Woods' terrifying testimony, 'Testing Teachers: The Effect of School Inspections on Primary Teachers' (1998), offers ample evidence of just such attitudinal and behavioural change in relation to the policing of performativity by OFSTED. Fielding asks: "How many teachers of young children are now able to listen attentively in a non-instrumental way without feeling guilty about the absence of criteria or the insistence of a target tugging at their sleeve?" (1999, p.280). Are they becoming to their very hearts Standardised Assessment Task teachers?

Certainly, no matter how hard teachers and learners try, there is no doubt that their relation to each other and to what passes for learning between them has become instrumentalist in a way that it is only possible to account for within the epistemological phantasmagoria of the fetishised commodity of performance.

The Value and Measurement of Work

The rationale for the setting of performance targets is to make education *work harder*, become more efficient, more productive of profit. For Capital there is at this point, still relatively little profit to be made from the actual process of schooling. Services can and are being put to tender wherever possible in the rush to achieve 'Best Value', but this does not seem to touch the heart of the system. Teachers and learners are not actually returning profits from their efforts in the classroom. The investment which Capital makes in teachers and learners is, for the most part, only guaranteed a return in the longer term, as learners begin to be earners and their labour-capacity, shaped and directed by the school system, can be sold on the labour market. David Blunkett makes it clear that this is precisely the State's interest: "Investment in learning in the 21st century is the equivalent of investment in the machinery and technical innovation that was essential to the first great industrial revolution. Then it was physical capital; now it is human capital" (DfEE, 1997, p.15).

As there are few ways for capital to profit directly and immediately from the processes of school learning - the extraction of surplus labour takes place within the waged world of adulthood - it is important to explain the sense in which the work of learning takes its commodity form.

The capitalist state demands that children be schooled. Even those very few individuals who choose to educate their children otherwise than at school are regulated in this venture by the operation of the apparatuses of the State: the Local Education Authority, Social Services and so on. In earlier stages of capitalism, schooling quite clearly inhibited the growth and development of capital by denying the factories a section of the workforce, just as it does in many developing countries today. However, it is now the case that this deficit has been offset by the unwaged work which children do to improve the quality of their labour-power. Indeed it is now considered essential that children acquire at school the skills and knowledge necessary for their full accession to the job-market. It is as well understood that children will work as it is that adults will work. In both cases, the reason for such labour is taken, ultimately to be the reward of a wage.

The commodity provides the basis for the fundamental form of the class relation of capital, that where the only access to social wealth (in the form of commodities - food, clothing, etc.) is via the selling of labour-power, and where the products of labour must also take on the commodity form. It is the commodity form which forces the child into school as much as it forces the worker into productive (waged) labour. However, in an analysis of the fundamental form of relation to work imposed upon the working class by the commodity-form, it is important not to conflate this entirely with the money-wage. Rather, it is useful to take the working class to include all those who work for capital in a variety of ways in exchange for a portion of the entire social wealth they produce (as, for instance, Mariarosa Dalla Costa (1972) does). There are many unwaged whose work closely parallels the unpaid part of labour (surplus labour) from which may be extracted surplus value within. The most important sector of the unwaged are those involved in the maintenance and improvement of the conditions of production - of labour-power itself. Such unwaged work will include those essential functions such as housework, shopping, rearing and schoolwork, which all serve to reproduce labour-power for capital.

Support for such a position clearly runs the risk of deviating quite markedly from Marx's originally intended theory of value. Unfortunately, there is not the space here for a full exposition of this theory. Let it suffice to say that if one claims that there is value created for capital by the unwaged (housewives, peasants, etc), in that they have

contributed some part of the overall value that labour-power achieves as a commodity when it is sold, one extends the application of the labour theory of value to the reproduction of labour power itself. Orthodox - not to say Anti-Revisionist - Marxists such as Ella Rule (2000) have argued that an implication of this is that it thus appears that the commodity labour-power will be consistently sold at less than its value. For instance, if “it has taken, say, 12 hours of a wife’s labour to ‘produce’ the wage worker, yet the capitalist buys her ‘product’ for the equivalent of only, say 6 hours’ labour” Rule (2000, p.259) asserts. Yet:

... the value of the commodity, labour-power, is not determined as Marx has said by the socially-necessary labour embodied in the means of subsistence of the worker and his family, but by something more, i.e., the number of hours that the wife has worked. (Rule, 2000, p.259)

For Marx, the value of labour power is determined by the social labour required for its production that is by the value of the commodities required by the workers and their family for their subsistence (see *Capital*, Vol. 1, Part Six). In this strict sense, none of the work of the unwaged adds to the value of labour power, even though it does, of course, benefit the capitalist insofar as it contributes to the fitness to work of the labourer. However, a claim can be made that the schoolwork of children constitutes a special case. There could be no possibility of the developed capitalist economy reproducing itself without that investment in human capital which David Blunkett parallels so clearly with the investment in machinery made by the capitalist nearly two centuries ago. In this sense, the latent value, for the capitalist, of the labour-power of the potential worker is most certainly added to by work at school. Indeed, without such efforts, the worker possesses very little capacity to labour at all. The capital investment in education makes possible the later extraction of more surplus value for the capitalist if and only if this is accompanied by particular types of work during the period of schooling. Performative measurement assists in ensuring that this is achieved.

This is to say that the unwaged work of school children is not unpaid. It is at least partially sold to the capitalist state in return for nonwage income, ultimately employability. The work of learning is thus a type of commodity in the same sense in which labour capacity in general is. Indeed, as school learning is a precondition of labour capacity within the modern economy, it can be said to constitute a part of the

accumulated commodity of labour power. As a commodity, this work cannot be repaid by means of a wage at the end of the week or the month, but at the end of schooling, as it is subsumed within the labourer's capacity to sell him or herself to the capitalist. Such a deferral of wage-payment does not exclude the work of school children from the realm of production or of commodification. It is the measure of employability and competitive advantage, which is the quantification of the performance of the unwaged (or, more correctly, deferred-wage) work for capital, which allows for the exchange of this type of work in the sphere of circulation both within the educational marketplace and the job-market.

The closer the system of performativity reaches to a continuum in equivalent 'levelness' where a Foundation Stage Profile 9 is equivalent to a National Curriculum level 1, SATs level 6 is equivalent to a GCSE grade E and so on, the more clearly the operation of the sphere of circulation within education is connected within the broader sphere of circulation. Measuring performance in this way allows for universal classification and ranking of pupils of all ages, and of schools in any geographical locality; organisation of children into sets and streams and the planning of greater or lesser investment of teacher-time in those more or less likely to be able to cross a border between levels and gain a competitive advantage for the school and the capitalist (employer).

In order to ensure that there are tangible signals of improvement in future returns on the Capitalist State and Business's investment, the system of predictive testing has been employed. Year on year percentage rises in Standardised Assessment Test results are taken to be not just desirable, but essential if the national economy is to be furnished with sufficient skills and knowledge to be able to compete. These figures are used by Government and Industry to operate as Futures on the educational Stock Market. The observation Bill Readings makes of the contemporary university is becoming universally true of the Capitalist schooling system:

Like the stock exchange, the University is a point of capital's self-knowledge, of capital's ability not just to manage risk or diversity but to extract a surplus value from that management" (Readings, 1996, p.40).

This potential for extraction occurs at the level of speculation on individual performances. The quantification of management of variability as ‘performance management’ allows for the calibration of margins and differentials.

Teachers’ performance is the measure of the work required to achieve Standardised Assessment Test results. In purchasing the labour-power of the individual teacher, the Capitalist State expects that the performance of the functions of the teacher will be carried out at no less than the average standard of effectiveness. The labour must be performed with no less than the “average amount of exertion and the usual degree of intensity” (Marx, 1990, p.303). That is, the teacher is to work no less hard than is required to achieve their predicted SATs target. Hence the now familiar system of ‘performance management’.

The measurement of teachers’ labour against such hard criteria has a profound effect: on this, Marx is clear, the transformative power of the measurement of performance is to view labour in a quantitative rather than a qualitative way (see *Capital* Volume 1, Chapter 7, Section II). The Capitalist State errs ever on the side of quantitative surety. The signals of measurable performance are all. The complexifying overlaying of interrelated statistical tables only serves to dazzle the eye to the reality that the crudity of such data lies always within its quantitative nature. Data works as the measure of current performance and the engine of greater productive efficiency.

What we see emerging is a primitive form of a universal equivalent within the sphere of the educational marketplace, the economics of teaching and learning. The teaching of a class of 10-year-olds in Science in Carlisle is brought into a relationship with the teaching of a class of 4-year-olds in Exmouth by appeal to equivalence in performance on the part of teachers and learners.

Importantly, though, the emergence of patterns of discourse and practice based on equivalencies do not require the invention of new categories of ‘cultural capital’. Real capital is all that is required to explain the operation of the system. Performance ‘stands in’ for or represents real capital in the speculation in human futures. Even the Government’s own National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education openly admits as much: “Qualifications are a form of currency. Their value is related

to the prevailing exchange rate for employment or higher education” (NACCCE, 1999, p.20).

An independent form of value needs to crystallise in order for the commodity forms of teaching and learning to differentiate into the commodity and the form of equivalence. Such a form cannot emerge outside of or separate from the money form. As such, it is unrealistic to suppose that a truly universal form of equivalence will arise from the processes of performativity. Taken to its natural conclusion, it would not be surprising if some bourgeois economist did not attempt to calculate an approximate equivalence between end-of-schooling test results and wages. Perhaps such an exercise has already been undertaken. Clearly, such an enterprise would have little real value, as the point about performative measures is that they act more as a tool to bring about greater productive efficiency, both within education and in terms of developing skills commensurate with long term increases in returns, than they do as quantifiers of values *in and of themselves*.

The imposition of this primitive universal equivalent, this *evaluative* scale is empty. Performance, like its oft-used companions ‘best practice’ and ‘excellence’, are so thoroughly devoid of singular referential significance as to be equally applicable to all areas of school life. This very arbitrariness is precisely the advantage to Capital of a universal of this kind. Any attempt to circumscribe the arbitrary order by means of establishing and legitimising alternative methods of valorisation could only destine the resisting teacher or learner to:

... discover that the cultural arbitrary whose worth they have had to recognise in order to acquire [legitimacy] is worthless on an economic or symbolic market dominated by the cultural arbitrary of the dominant classes... (Bourdieu, 1990, p.29).

The very artificiality of the imposition of such arbitrary equivalence highlights its necessity to ensure a universal model of accountancy within the educational stock market.

‘Good practice’, ‘high performance’ - because these are instrumental in the calculation of future economic growth, they are also the cultural signifiers positioned to gain public assent. Any critique of the indicators of performance can be decried as

a shameful resistance to public accountability: for the indicators of performance uphold the interests of the reproduction of capital, culture and thus of the 'public'.

The social conditions of school-work

Observers, Government, perhaps parents may judge it a curious state of affairs, woefully out of kilter with the market-driven drift of wider society, that teachers have hitherto escaped the performance imperative. This anomalous adherence to equal pay for the same job now appears lamentably socialistic an ideal in the light of the experience of the ever-spreading business ethic. In a sense, this is a progressive development, as it makes visible to teachers their full membership of the working class in a manner which previous structures had concealed, as they abetted these education workers in identifying themselves as one step removed, as 'professionals' with rights to conditions of employment denied others. This is an interesting area for potential future study.

Teachers perceiving their work to be principally a useful, productive task, informed by both the needs and wants of children and society, are at times surprised to find the measure of its functioning progressively reformed by an alternative method of valorisation - that of Capital. Yet, their every practice becomes refocused on the information which feeds the performance indicators, their new method of valorisation. Work which cannot be measured and evidenced, which does not contribute *visibly* to performativity becomes valueless.

The performance regime imposed upon teachers is making it ever clearer that they are part of a productive process that feeds the global market. The shadow of the new 'terror' of performativity (Stephen Ball's phrase, inherited from Lyotard) (Ball 1999c, p.2) which has fallen across teachers' lives is merely that of the market which has long been present but is now ever more 'visible'.

Hitherto, the hegemonic model operated in such a way as to allow the perception of a relative autonomy for teachers within the classroom, performing a service to society. Control measures were previously much less visible and pedagogical methodologies were rarely prescribed rigidly. Such a model necessarily also tolerated marginal or interstitial projects of a progressive or 'child-centred' nature. However, the movement

with which Stephen Ball concerns himself is in fact a change in the emphasis of the capitalist educational hegemon, making explicit to those involved in the educational sector of the economy the importance of their productive efficiency to the economy as a whole. Wastage of time and energy on schoolwork that is not channelled toward delivery of curriculum content, such as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies cannot now be tolerated. Ball is right in indicating that maximum visibility is an effective way of policing this performance. Clearly, this necessitates the use of a range of disciplinary strategies which impact upon the conditions under which teachers and learners labour. Such impositions might include programmes of monitoring or inspection, work-sampling, review procedures and such like (as in, for example, Hill, 2001).

It is hardly an oversimplification to apply to the enactment of performative measures in education the same nostrums as in any other branch of capitalist production. In order to guarantee the maximum value from the exertion of the teacher, the capitalist state must ensure the following: first, that the objective factors of labour, the conditions and materials (resources - from building bricks to ICT hardware) available to the productive process facilitate maximum growth potential. Here, the state may defer to constructivist (or other) models to aid both qualitative and quantitative calculations. Second, that the wastage of the materials and resources (including time) be to as great an extent as possible eliminated as contributing towards superfluous expenditure on quantities of objectified labour that do not count in the product or enter into its value.

Increased awareness of how far the State is willing to go in wringing additional time and exertion from teachers has produced enormous resentments and pockets of occasionally successful resistance. This is, of course, entirely to be expected. In general, the labour time of both teachers and learners has been extended, almost to a point beyond which capital cannot push without threatening the physical reproduction of its potential and current labour-force. Many teachers claim working weeks of more than sixty hours, some more than seventy. Children are similarly expected to work at home for several hours per week. DfES guidelines (1998) stipulate, for instance, that nine year-olds are to receive fifty minutes of homework per night (twenty minutes directed reading plus thirty minutes other homework). Add this to travel-time to and

from school and it becomes clear that the vast majority of the child's term-time life is dominated by the performance of work *for* the capitalist state.

The capitalist state has an interest in extending and shaping the new mode of social control which is the commodity form of education. It is the capitalist State which is on the offensive. Teachers and learners are, at best in a position of defence and resistance. Where class-consciousness and unity are stronger, this resistance sometimes yields results. For instance, the efforts to achieve a maximum working week so prevalent in industry over one hundred years ago are now being played out in the rapidly marketising public sector in Scotland. Scottish teachers have successfully fought to work a 35-hour week from 2002, echoing the achievements of nineteenth century millworkers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been argued that the reorientation of teaching methods and relations within a complex framework of calculations and measurements is part of a broad strategy to marketise the education system. The role of performance and performativity is to valorise educational labour within a totality of incentives and self-interests which constitute market relations, making visible the key role of education workers in the National economy in order to maximise the return on capital's investment in schooling.

Notes

[1] Some business sectors may argue that 'innovation' and 'creativity' rather than competence and knowledge is what are needed to drive the economy. The performative agenda conveniently excludes some of these demands. Yet New Labour calculates that the packaging of 'essential' skills and competencies pre-empt such requirements. In due course, no doubt, the call will be met with the development of programmes of study in 'team-work', 'creativity' and so on. Early indications are that, in the Primary phase, these moves will be codified in the form of level descriptors for 'speaking and listening' and in 'citizenship', currently in draft form. The central point is that 'innovation' and 'creativity' actually entails more effective methods to design

‘product’, and to package and advertise it. The instrumentalist aims enshrined in the performative standards can relatively easily be stretched to include such ‘innovation’.

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