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Teaching in the 'Performative' State: Implications for Teacher Appraisal in Australia

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Appraisal has become one of the prime features of the political reconstruction and disciplining of teachers as ethical subjects . . . It extends the logics of quality control and performance indicators to the pedagogical heart of teaching. It brings the tutelary gaze to bear, making the teacher calculable, describable and comparable. It opens individuals to an evaluatory eye and to disciplinary power. (Ball cited in Smyth, 2001, p. 117)

Introduction

Teachers can change the world. But how can they be regarded as potential agents of change when they are subjected daily to bureaucratic processes designed to control and manipulate their work?

With the above in mind, this article begins with a description of the ‘performative’ state where it is argued that the advent of self-managing schools has changed the context of schooling and teachers’ work. This has led to teachers ‘developing new technologies of the self’ in order to survive in the performative state. It is also argued that arising out of the notion of the ‘performative’ state, the concept of teacher evaluation takes on a new dimension in which the use of performance models play a major role.

The ‘performative’ state and education

Marshall (1999) makes the point that:

Education is no longer to be concerned with the pursuit of ideals such as that of personal autonomy or emancipation, but with the means, techniques or skills that contribute to the efficient operation of the state in the world market and contribute to maintaining the internal cohesion and legitimation of the state. (p. 309)

The above is evident in current education policies being implemented in many countries around the world. According to Ball (1999, p. 1), these policies ‘display two main organising principles: one is the insertion of the “market form” . . . intended to subject education to . . . competition and business; the other is “performativity”—the use of targets and performance indicators to drive, evaluate and compare educational “products”’. Ball (1999, p. 1) also maintains that by using specific techniques, governments are able to carefully monitor and evaluate teachers’ work from a distance. One such evaluation technique used by some governments is performance management. Performance management signifies a shift from an old bureaucratic form of teacher evaluation to a new form of public management based on ideas borrowed from the private sector. As a result, teachers’ work has become subject to scrutiny based on the principles of the market and new management discourses. In other words, what we are witnessing is a ‘shift from “welfarism” to “new managerialism”’ (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000, p. 253). Blackmore and Thorpe (2001, pp.

11–12) describe this move as ‘a key transition from the welfare state to what has been labelled as the post-welfare or “performative” state’.

In the next discussion, the ‘performative’ state is defined. The aim of this discussion is to illustrate both the state’s managerialist and evaluative aspects. It also serves to present a background of the environment that teachers are currently working in.

Defining the ‘performative’ state

Since the mid-1980s, Australia has experienced rapid and extensive changes in education at the Commonwealth, national and state levels which have impinged to varying degrees on almost every sector and aspect of education (Kenway, 1994). These changes were characterised by a ‘rush of simultaneous, educational reconstruction in many countries around the world’ in a context of ‘consistent concerns across the globe to improve schooling outcomes and school performance’ (Beare, 1991, p. 13). Insights into the present constructions and interpretations of educational practice reveal that ‘neo-liberal discourses are predicated on the market rhetorics of efficiency, choice, and accountability’ (Hickey, 2000, p. i). In other words, these reforms ‘are overtly political, and they tend to target the management of education’ (Beare, 1991, p. 13).

According to Grundy and Bonser (1997), some of the common features that have been identified as characteristic of the above reforms include:

1. Efficiency and good management as priorities: . . . An emphasis on cost-management, cost-effectiveness, efficient allocation and the use of resources, and a deliberate reaffirmation of government priorities.
2. Simple, political control: . . . Some powers were re-centralised, and ministerial responsibility was underlined.
3. Portfolio and policy coordination: . . . The Minister’s office . . . becomes responsible for portfolio coordination . . . policy making and policy advice.
4. Lean head-office management: . . . Large central bureaucracies were dispersed and replaced by lean, head-office management.
5. Devolution of responsibility: . . . Schools to take greater responsibility to order their own affairs.
6. Excellence before equity: . . . School management must be responsive to the client’s wishes in a form of ‘free market’ for educational services.
7. National priorities: . . . Assertion by national government of its place in deciding educational policies and practices. (p. 151)

Arising from these reforms, ‘most public schools in Australia exhibit the characteristics of a self-managing school’ (MacPherson, 1998, p. 6) with school councils, school charters, school global budgets, quality assurance, school reviews, and the like. Proponents of this school reform process, for example, Caldwell and Hayward (1998), viewed these moves as a form of natural evolution from earlier forms of school-based decision making. However, opponents of these moves, for example, Smyth (1993b) and Blackmore (1999), who reject the trend of self-management in education based on market and managerial models, saw it as less an ‘evolutionary process’. For them, these moves indicated ‘a restructuring characterised

by privatisation of educational costs, marketisation of education as a commodity, and managerialisation of educational governance' (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2001, p. 10). In other words, opponents of these moves viewed this restructuring as a deliberate attempt on the part of the government to shirk its legal and financial obligations by devolving these responsibilities to the schools themselves. Smyth (1993b) makes the point:

One of the noticeable features of the move towards the self-managing school phenomenon around the world is its occurrence in contexts of unprecedented education budget cut-backs. Whenever there is a break out of self-managing schools, the notion is used as a weapon by which to achieve the alleged 'efficiencies' and 'downsizing' of education. (p. 8)

As a result of an emphasis on self-management, 'nation states have tightened control over education for reasons of productivity, but through less direct bureaucratic and prescriptive means' (Blackmore, 1998a, p. 4). In a similar vein, McGaw (1994, p. 10) suggests that some systems are implementing a covert centralisation as more powerful control mechanisms replace others that are done away with. He uses the case of an abandonment of detailed policy prescriptions concurrent with an introduction of detailed mechanisms for evaluation. Blackmore and Thorpe (2001, p. 10) state that these modes of accountability 'require new types of information, modes of data gathering, and forms of dissemination that would facilitate systems and parents making judgements about teachers, principals and schools'.

In reality, this restructuring of the academic workplace has been marked by the increased accountability demands put upon teachers. These 'covert centralised' mechanisms produce significant tensions and contradictions in the daily operations of schools. In turn, these tensions are played out in the everyday lives of individual teachers, in the form of demands made upon their time to provide feedback and accountability upwards to their institutions, through performance management. This management accountancy approach is premised upon an input-output model in which the fundamental operative principle is efficiency (Lingard & Blackmore, 1997). In other words, 'schools now find themselves increasingly bound to the task of managing or mediating the outward expression of their "performance"' (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2001, p. 11). In the context of teachers' work:

Teachers were expected to undertake impression management by marketing their schools, attending to their professional behaviour and dress, and remaining wary not to voice their discontent publicly or in parent forums as such disclosures could damage good reputations or reinforce bad ones. (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2001, p. 11)

Blackmore and Thorpe (2001, p. 11) argue that this current 'focus on self-monitoring and reflexivity in and by schools deflects attention from the emergent role of the neo-liberal market state'. The neo-liberal market state symbolises a shift from the welfare to the 'performative' state or competitive state in which schools are now forced to compete with each other and with private providers in the open market for customers both nationally and internationally (Cerny, 1990). Gordon (1993) also informs us that the changing context of education is framed by the deregulation of the market and a move to the contractualist or 'performative' state. This, she maintains, is a direct result of the corporatisation of education which has resulted in the production of new management technologies. Corporatisation, as defined by Wexler (1995) is when the

market infiltrates all aspects of the organisation. This is precisely what is happening to schools under the guise of self-management.

Yeatman (1994) also elaborates on this shift from the welfare state to the post-welfare or 'performative' state. She maintains that the paternalist authority of the household was borrowed by the state towards a contractualist state. But the paternalistic welfare state has been destabilised by the politics of voice:

For paternalism, the state substitutes performativity as the principle which legitimises both its control functions, and the way in which those functions operate to contain and influence the horizontally integrated, democratic politics of social movements and their claims on the state. The state is therefore subject to the contradictory dynamics of performativity and democratisation. Performativity has the singular virtue of supplying a meta-discourse for public policy. Thus it can subsume and transform substantive democratising claims within a managerialistic-functional rhetoric. (cited in Blackmore, 1997, p. 5)

Arising from the above argument, Blackmore and Sachs (1998) argue that the notion of performativity captures both the state's managerialist and evaluative aspects, as part of the need to be both 'efficient' (getting more for less) and 'accountable' (being seen to perform) (cited in Blackmore & Thorpe, 2001, p. 12). Ball (2001a) defines performativity as:

A technology, a culture and a mode of regulation, or a system of 'terror' in Lyotard's words, that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control, attrition and change . . . '[A]ccountability' and 'competition' are the lingua franca of this new discourse of power. (p. 210)

Lyotard (1984, p. 11) states that performativity is always present where efficiency is the bottomline for decisions and that 'the true goal of the system, the reason it programs itself like a computer, is the optimisation of the global relationship between input and output'. In this context, performativity works in two main ways. Firstly, 'as a disciplinary system of judgements, classifications and targets towards which schools and teachers must strive and against and through which they are evaluated. The . . . "standards" and "quality" of work are important issues here' (Ball, 1999, p. 6). Secondly, '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' (Ball, 1999, p. 6). Ball also states that 'there is now a translation of educational processes into performance indicators and measurable outcomes . . . the information established in the systems of accountability does "stand for" and "represent" valid, worthwhile or meaningful outputs; that what you measure, and what you get, is what you want or is worth having' (Ball, 1999, p. 7).

The next discussion illuminates the nature of teachers' work in the 'performative' state. Here, how teachers' work is 'shaped and controlled' by new management discourses is described.

Teachers' work in the 'performative' state

The activities of performativity are evident in the day-to-day activities of teachers and in the social relations between teachers. Teachers are forced to choose and judge their

actions. These actions in turn are judged by others on the basis of their contribution to organisational performance. There is a shift in focus from a concern with individual needs to a concern with aggregate performance (Ball, 2000). This is synonymous with the underlying philosophy prevalent in corporate managerialism. Schools in the context of the market have shifted their organisational emphasis and focus to performance.

Blackmore's (1997) exploration of some of the implications of this corporate managerialism and its impact upon the nature of teachers' work has significant importance in understanding the nature of the 'performative' state. She observes that:

1. Corporate managerialism can be characterised as devolving responsibility to small subunits to provide flexibility, strong central policy guidelines to coordinate and provide direction, clear processes of review and feedback from local to the centre, emphasis on output not input, and being client focused. There is now a need for performance indicators and performance management and the production of data based systems—the former being about systems, the latter about individuals.
2. Schools serve educational markets with a shift in focus onto the individual as the consumer premised upon public choice theory. Here the argument is that the individual knows best what they want and therefore the government should pass over the funds to individuals to free up their choices. However, the state does not actually free up education. Rather it sets up new forms of regulation, ones which removes responsibility for the consequences onto either the individual or individual school, who can be blamed for making wrong decisions.
3. The 'performative' state is increasingly premised upon contractual exchanges between individuals. Teachers are now concerned with teacher employment contracts, performance management contracts and school charter contracts. In this case performativity encourages a process of individuation as teachers work in a state of conscious and permanent visibility resulting in a form of self surveillance which assures the automatic functioning of power. (pp. 4–9)

With regard to performativity in the self-managing school, Blackmore (1997, p. 9) states that 'efficiency is the bottomline for judgement of self-management for schools as efficiency has been established a primary, seemingly neutral, criteria for judgement of government'. Efficiency, in this case, means measurable and comparable levels of performance; that is, the highest levels of performance which can be attained within the bounds of competition in the educational market. As a result, principals' and teachers' work is 'increasingly focused upon the externalities, upon performance, upon exteriority and not what is happening in schools. Schools now must respond to external demands and not attend to internal needs of students' (Blackmore, 1997, p. 10).

Drawing upon her research projects, Blackmore (1997) also argues that the following problems arise from a focus upon performativity:

- Firstly, the culture of performativity encourages the restriction, not dissemination, of knowledge. Only certain positive information is disclosed. Performativity encourages the display of particular types of knowledge. Lyotard (1984) suggests that 'social action is judged in terms only of its practice use or performativity . . . performativity therefore becomes the basis of legitimating knowledge. Real knowledge is knowledge which can

contribute to productivity, performance and efficiency’ (cited in Blackmore, 1997, p. 12).

- Secondly, the focus upon performativity is ultimately individualising in its effect. Contrary to popular belief, teachers do not work in teams or units. They become individually competitive in order to display traits of efficiency.
- Thirdly, the emphasis upon performativity within the market produces particularly narrow images of what constitutes good schooling and good leadership. Critical to performativity is the capacity of the individual and institution to display and market themselves as both products and producers. Performativity leads to an emphasis that is outward and not inward looking, on to image management and not substantive educational issues (pp. 12–13).

Having outlined the nature of teachers’ work in the ‘performative’ state, the discussion now turns attention to the manner in which schools are forced to function in an environment characterised by ‘privatisation, marketisation, national curriculum, strong accountability frameworks, performance management, school charters and reviews and outcomes based learning’ (Blackmore, 1998a, p. 1); in other words, the manner in which schools are compelled to function in the ‘performative’ state. Here, it is argued that schools, apart from performing their official functions in society, are now called upon to provide information about themselves in order to attract more consumers. Thus, schools have to market themselves in order to compete in the ‘performative’ state (Ball, 2001a, p. 217). In other words, the manner in which schools ‘market’ themselves and make themselves more attractable to consumers determines their success or failure in the ‘performative’ state.

Schools in the ‘performative’ state

It should also be noted that the emphasis on performativity (as opposed to performance) has other implications for schools. Schools are now required to reorganise their responses to external demands of the market and for a ‘consumer’ society. Change that is ‘mediated’ in schools is predominantly concerned with the issue of information and communication. All information and communication must favour the ‘performative’ state. Negative or damaging information is suppressed because it would result in market loss. Thus, ‘the performative state relies upon neutralising damaging information and privileging favourable information’ (Blackmore, 1997, p. 17). It must be noted that negative exposure would have serious repercussions for both the school and teachers alike.

It is for this reason that some schools in the ‘performative’ state manipulate information about their daily tasks while presenting the image that all is well through carefully managed information. Ball (2001a) provides an example of this manipulation of information by referring to the introduction of baseline testing in schools in the United Kingdom. He maintains that:

Primary schools are eager to test early—despite advice to ‘let the children settle down’ —to produce maximum ‘under-performance’, against which ‘value-added’ gains can be made and attributed to the schools. (Ball, 2001, p. 219)

Ball (2001, pp. 219–221) also cites other examples of schools ‘marketing’ themselves in the institutional promotion arena. Some of these are:

- the renting of extra computers during open evenings in order to create the impression that the school provides a hi-tech learning environment
- the renting of plants and bushes by schools, thereby indicating that these schools are providing quality education in a ‘pleasant and conducive learning environment’ (p. 220)
- the construction of textual accounts of the school ‘in the form of development plans, strategic documents, sets of objectives’ to ‘convey order and coherence, consensus and dynamism, responsiveness and careful self-evaluation or . . . a synthetic personalism, “a caring institution”’ (p. 220)
- the achievement of particular ‘performativities’ by adopting certain policies and practices. This is evident in the manner in which certain schools in the United Kingdom control their GCSE examination results, league table positions and reputation. Here, ‘GCSE attainment percentages and local league table positions do not in any simple sense represent the outcomes of “good” teaching and “effective” learning’ (p. 221).

Gewirtz and Ball (2000, p. 253) argue that schools in the ‘performative’ state ‘effectively function as small businesses . . . This market-like environment has implications not only for work practices, organisational methods and social relationships but also for the value of schooling’. Stemming from this argument, I now look at the manner in which teachers are managed in the ‘performative’ state.

The management of teachers in the ‘performative state’

Husbands (2001) argues that:

Performance management has been constructed as a largely technical tool, which relates government policy aspirations for short-term measurable improvements in outcome indicators, to mechanisms for the delivery of policy at school level. (p. 16)

This has resulted in the notion of self-management gaining prominence in teachers’ work in which teachers are increasingly forced to justify themselves and their work. Hickey (2000, p. ii) states that ‘within narrow definitions of educational effectiveness that are based increasingly on economic criteria, teachers’ work is now subsumed by a systematic regime of testing and reporting’. What we currently have is the ‘replacement of bureaucratic-professional regimes of organisation and provision with managerial-entrepreneurial regimes . . . the marketisation of education’ (p. iv). This idea is premised on the notion that by removing costs and responsibilities from the state and transferring them to the schools themselves, schools will become more efficient in response to competition.

It is within this framework that teachers are now being managed. Menter, Muschamp, Nicholls, Ozga and Pollard (1997, p. 53) inform us that marketisation has changed the ‘professional control and autonomy’ of teachers and that the ‘range of practices associated with managerialism and driven by the market’ serve to challenge the

traditional work of teachers. They also maintain that the aim of the state is to 'construct a new model of entrepreneurial professional who will identify with the efficient, responsive and accountable version of service that is currently promulgated' (Menter, Muschamp, Nicholls, Ozga & Pollard, 1997, p. 56). In order to achieve this, teachers have to be managed in a specific manner that will ensure 'entrepreneurial professionalism'.

To elaborate, Ball (1999, p. 6) maintains that by adopting market principles in education, governments benefit in two ways. Firstly, governments can determine what is actually happening 'inside' schools and secondly, they can control and manipulate these institutions from the 'outside'. Through these processes of 'managerialism and performance monitoring', governments can 'introduce new orientations and remodel existing relations of power'. What this means is that managerialism 'represents the insertion of a new mode of power' in teachers' work. In this instance, 'managerialism works from the inside-out'.

However, 'strategies of performativity' work in the opposite direction—'from the outside in'. Here, teachers have to show that they are 'operational'. In order to judge the 'operational' efficiency of teachers, 'the use of the publication of information, indicators and other institutional performances and promotional materials' are used. Teachers now become subject to a 'disciplinary system of judgements, classifications and targets' by which their work is evaluated. They also have to ensure that they meet 'standards' and 'quality'. Thus, teachers have to ensure that they contribute to 'quality improvement' and 'assurance strategies' in order that their schools maintain the 'competitive advantage' over rival schools. What this amounts to is that we now have a 'translation of educational processes into performance indicators and measurable outcomes' (Ball, 1999, pp. 6–7). Thus, the efficiency of teachers' work is determined by sets of performance indicators and evaluation systems that measure outcomes.

The management of teachers' work is also subject to 'performance information'. Ball (1999, p. 7) maintains that 'more and more information about [schools] is required, recorded and published'. The reason for this is that it provides informative information about 'market decision-making' and it also serves to act as a basis for 'official' scrutiny. Teachers now have to refocus their work in such a manner that it 'fits' within 'the "information" of performance'. In this way, 'performance information' acts as a powerful 'disciplinary tactic of accountability'.

Ball (1999, p. 7) also maintains that the daily 'activities of management' subtly determine the nature of teachers' work. Teachers become conscious of what they do because they are aware that their work is continuously being 'judged by others on the basis of their contribution to organisational performance'. Teachers thus become concerned with meeting 'aggregate performances', thereby neglecting the 'possibilities for metaphysical discourses'. Also, the opportunities for attending to 'democratic education' are marginalised.

Another factor affecting the management of teachers is the issue of 'contracts'. Contracts are a dominant feature of the 'performative' state. Teachers in self-managing schools enter into contractual agreements with their employers, whereby the nature of the curriculum, the behaviour of teachers, performance management and school charter contracts are agreed upon by the relevant stakeholders in these

institutions. These contracts primarily serve to change teachers' work practices (Blackmore, 1997).

However, it must be remembered that not all teachers comply with this new managerialism and performance monitoring, thereby bringing the rationale of performance management into question. Whilst self-managing organisations on the one hand encourage initiative, autonomy and innovation, they on the other hand evoke images of greater control and surveillance in the work of teachers. This is because the democratisation of line management in the school situation is dependent upon a notion of professional expertise, implying authority and discretionary power (Blackmore, 1997).

Developing 'new technologies of the self'

A short discussion of this important issue is necessary at this juncture as it serves to illustrate that teachers have become aware of these new changes occurring in their work and how some of them have 'adapted' their work practices to cope with these changes.

Suffice to say, in order to maintain the notions of image and design in schools, the 'performative' state also leads to the development of new technologies of the self. The state now constructs a certain type of subject—whether principal, teacher, student or parent. The emphasis on performativity and accountability significantly alters work practices and identity formation. Good parents are those who care enough to shop around and invest time, effort and money in their child. Good schools have a well-manicured and resourced environment (Blackmore, 1997).

Blackmore's (1997) research findings clearly highlight the issues touched upon above. Her findings revealed that teachers were aware of 'developing a new self'. Excerpts from her subjects (teachers) illuminate this point. One teacher stated:

I think that what is different now is how the system measures a good teacher against another good teacher. I have been on a few appointment and selection panels. There is a concern about being in different areas . . . and there are some people who can actually sell themselves quite well without any substantive 'product'. (p. 25)

The comments of Robyn, another teacher interviewed are also meaningful in this context. She states that 'teachers are dressing up, concerned about image and that sort of thing. Image is very important' (Blackmore, 1997, p. 25).

Drawing on Walkerdine (1992), Blackmore (1997) argues that:

While teaching has always been about performance, it was performance derived out of passion for teaching and care for children. Now, being passionate about the core work of teaching and learning is not enough. Now they are positioned as performers—to attract clients, to persuade, to seduce through indicating their expertise, yet an expertise which is constantly under challenge. One also has to be passionate about the school priorities by performing a range of extra-classroom activities. (p. 24)

Thus, teachers' performativity is now judged by sets of criteria predetermined by policy makers and management. In this new scenario, 'teachers are judged by a set of

external criteria of the management or by how, what they do in the class, is represented symbolically through some form of communication e.g. CVs, promotion applications and on standardised assessment' (Blackmore, 1997, p. 27).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Blackmore and Thorpe (2001, p. 14) point out that the 'efficacy of the "performative" state hinges on its capacity to generate the perception that it is being "responsible" in that it is seen at any given time to be reducing expenditure, and therefore performing well against international indicators, while improving "quality" and "choice", and therefore meeting local concerns'. However, as argued by Blackmore (1997, 1998, 1999, 2001), the state now has greater power and control over the direction of self-managing schools. This control is effectively achieved and managed through the implementation of 'carefully targeted policies, coordinated and consistent guidelines and clear financial mechanisms, and by strong accountability technologies in the form of performance management objectives, annual reports and standardised assessment, which feed information upward to the centre' (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2001, p. 13).

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