

# Markets, managerialism and teachers' work: the invisible hand of high stakes testing in England

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*High stakes testing has been long established in the English school system. In this article, we seek to demonstrate how testing has become pivotal to securing the neo-liberal restructuring of schools, that commenced during the Thatcher era, and is reaching a critical point at the current time. Central to this project has been the need to assert increased control over teachers' work and this is being achieved through a pincer movement of marketisation and managerialism. Both of these 'policy technologies' require the value of individual teachers' work to be measured and quantified, and in this article we seek to demonstrate how high stakes testing underpins these processes. The article concludes by making the case for reclaiming teaching as a professional process, within the context of education, as a public good and conducted in a public space.*

*Keywords: high-stakes testing, marketization, managerialism, teachers' work, public good.*

In many national education systems high stakes testing has become an increasingly central element of policy and development, including the USA (Amrein and Berliner, 2002), Australia (Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith, 2012) and South Africa (Howie, 2012). Whilst an almost ubiquitous political concern, the definition of high stakes testing can still vary from system to system. In an English context, West states:

The national tests taken at the age of 11 and the public examinations taken at the ages of 16 and 18 can be considered to be 'high stakes'. Such tests determine, or help to determine, the future of pupils, teachers or schools. (2010, p.25)

West's definition draws attention to the widespread impact of high stakes testing, with consequences for students, parents and communities, as well as those working in schools. However, this article specifically focuses on teachers, and the impact of

high stakes testing on teachers' work. Radical education reform in England in recent years has necessitated a significant reconfiguring of teachers' work. Within the UK, a downward pressure on public spending has driven an intensification of teachers' labour process, whilst the perceived imperative to perform highly in international league tables has narrowed the focus of teaching and learning. These issues are nested within a wider set of ideological struggles over the purposes and future of education. These are struggles that are intensifying as the neo-liberal drive towards systemic privatisation becomes more apparent. Given these developments, the imperative to re-fashion teachers' work becomes critical. As Ingersoll argues, 'This desire to increase control over what goes on in schools and what teachers do in their classrooms resurfaces on a regular basis as a central tenet of education reform' (2003, p.35). In this article, we seek to demonstrate how high stakes testing has been pivotal to asserting an increased control over teachers' work as pressures develop to drive down the costs of teachers' labour process, narrow the focus of the curriculum and, crucially, weaken teachers' collective capacity to resist such developments.

In an article published over 10 years ago, and widely cited since, Stephen Ball argued that new policy technologies were not only re-shaping teachers' experience of work, but what it meant to 'be a teacher' (Ball, 2003). Ball identified three specific policy technologies: the market, managerialism and performativity, arguing in a later contribution that, 'They interrelate and complement one another and work on individual practitioners, work groups and whole organisations to reconstitute social relations, forms of esteem and value, sense of purpose and notions of excellence and good practice' (Ball, 2008 p. 42). In the 2003 article, Ball focused his analysis on performativity as a policy technology that had a particular impact on re-casting teachers' identities. He further argued that the balance between the different technologies differed between national contexts, but their growing influence represented a global, and globalising, phenomenon. In this article, we seek to draw on Ball's use of policy technologies to analyse more recent developments in the English school system, and specifically in relation to high stakes testing, as England emerges even more strongly as a 'world leader' in driving forward the neo-liberal reform agenda. However, in this article we seek to focus on the two policy technologies that in Ball's 2003 analysis featured much less, namely marketisation and managerialism. Our argument is that in England, in the period since 2003, and particularly in the period following the election of the Coalition government in 2010, it is the pincer movement of markets and managerialism that have combined to effectively and radically re-shape teachers' experience of work. If teachers' identities are being re-framed, and we believe they are, it is the dual-drive of marketisation and managerialism that is shaping that experience. The two elements are distinct, but are interdependent. They work in a complementary way to shape teachers' work, determining what teachers do and how they do it. Furthermore, what both have in common is a dependency on high stakes testing, as both have at their heart the need to turn teaching into numbers – to make the process of teaching something that can be measured and quantified (Taubman, 2009). In this article we seek to demonstrate how these two mechanisms of control, linked

through their common dependency on high stakes testing, create a 'free market, strong state' framework within which teachers' work is determined. This 'free market, strong state' analysis draws on Andrew Gamble's analysis of Thatcherism (1988) and frames our argument that current English education reforms represent a Thatcherite 'second wave', and the continued slow-burn of a neo-liberal project commenced in earnest in the 1980s (Stevenson, 2011).

The article begins by providing a contextual background in relation to the development of a high stakes testing system in England. We then argue that such testing has been necessary to transform teachers' labour into a product that can be quantified and measured, before demonstrating how the quantification of teachers' labour is fundamental to the creation of both marketised and managerialist modes of control. The paper concludes by offering a more optimistic vision of what teaching might look like and some of the challenges that need to be confronted if the current trajectory of policy is to be interrupted.

### **HIGH STAKES TESTING IN ENGLAND – A SUMMARY**

Within the United Kingdom school sector, education is a devolved responsibility with constituent nations maintaining their own distinct education systems. It is important to assert that this is an article about England and not the wider United Kingdom. The school systems of Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland look quite different from that in England, and these differences are perhaps at their sharpest in relation to the ways in which students are tested, and the ways in which test data are used for wider purposes. This important point highlights the need to locate policy within a global, and globalising, context, but recognising that policy enactments assume very different forms in local contexts (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010).

England has arguably long had a high-stakes testing regime. This has been based on a number of measurement points at which children were sifted, some being given access to a higher level of education whilst others were shut out, or re-directed to a different, less 'prestigious' route. This was particularly evident in the 11+ exam which acted to select apparently 'higher-ability' children who gained access to an 'academic' grammar school, whilst the remainder of children (often as high as 75% of a cohort) were sent to more vocationally oriented schools, from which the vast majority entered directly into employment (Benn and Chitty, 1997). The sifting process then continued at the ages of 16 (Ordinary Level General Certificate Education) and 18 (Advanced-Level General Certificate of Education), each occasion acting as a gateway and a rationing mechanism in accessing further educational opportunities. Both of these examination systems became established in the 1950s and continued largely unchanged until the late 1980s. At this point, O levels were reformed and replaced by the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), whilst A-levels have continued as the examination for 18 year olds to the present day, albeit in revised form. That reform of both exams is currently the focus of sharp debate attests to the continuing contestation of education

purposes and aims (Guardian online, 2013a and also [www.ofqual.gov.uk](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk)).

In small pockets of the country, the 11+ has remained intact as some Conservative Party controlled localities retained a selective system of grammar schools and secondary moderns. However, for the vast majority of the country this system came under challenge in the 1960s. The introduction of open entry comprehensive schools obviated the need for a selective exam at 11, whilst the introduction of the GCSE provided a single unified form of assessment for 16 year olds. This replaced the previous split qualifications at 16 that both reflected, and perpetuated, the grammar school-secondary modern divide.

The introduction of the new single qualification at 16+ was generally considered a progressive reform (Lowe, 2007). However, its introduction coincided with the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act (see Gillard 2011), which had a very different impact on the school system. This was the single piece of legislation that redirected the English school system on a very different trajectory from the comprehensive, welfarist principles that had developed in the post-war period. Previously described by one of us as English education's 'neo-liberal moment' (Stevenson, 2011), it was the 1988 Act that provided the architecture for an increasingly marketised system of public education and which sought to establish new hierarchies in the school system (Simon, 1987). At the centre of the 1988 Act was the introduction of a raft of new testing arrangements (for students at 7, 11, 14 and 16), coupled with publication of results in the form of league tables. The tests were called Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) and were run by government. At Key Stages 4 and 5, these SATs are replaced by GCSE and A-level tests. This new testing framework represented a qualitative shift in the English high stakes system as testing was extended beyond a 'sift and sort' function, to one in which a quasi-market in schooling would become the key mechanism for ensuring school accountability.

The 1988 Act was introduced by a Conservative government committed to radical neo-liberal restructuring of public education, and was one element of a much more fundamental restructuring of the welfare state (Gough, 1983). However, the election of a Labour government some years later did little to change the fundamental direction of travel and the new government showed no desire to challenge the logic of league-tables as the basis of school accountability (Chitty, 2013). However, within Labour policy there was a recognition that quasi-markets and parental choice did not always deliver the desired outcomes (working class communities often remained stubbornly loyal to their schools despite being told they were 'failing') and as a consequence, externally imposed target-setting emerged more prominently in policy (Ozga, 2009). This manifested itself initially as a policy of 'naming and shaming' schools judged to be below 'target', but in more recent times the integration of high stakes testing and the national inspection regime has become central to linking processes of marketisation with managerialism. The national inspectorate in its modern form was established in the years following the 1988 Act and is known as the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The role of Ofsted is to hold schools accountable for the education they

provide by inspecting all schools against a common framework. At the current time, schools are categorised following inspection as either 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' (Richards, 2012). Significantly, 'requires improvement' was introduced to replace the previous category of 'satisfactory', which the current Chief Inspector deemed to be no longer good enough (Ofsted online, 2012a). In perhaps one of the clearest examples of how 'good' is re-cast in the new performative culture, it is now explicitly the case that 'satisfactory' is no longer satisfactory. Ofsted's inspection judgements rely heavily on schools' performance in standardised tests with test data emerging as the key indicator of school quality. School examination and testing data is now the central focus for this organisation, most obviously illustrated by the introduction of 'floor targets', raw measurements of the percentage of children in a school who have to pass a benchmark level of attainment for the school to be deemed to be acceptable. Such measures are crude in nature as the targets take no account of the demographics, starting points, and potential barriers to learning that some cohorts of students face. An example of this type of crude target is that in the 2012-13 academic year, all secondary schools had to ensure that 40% of their students passed 5 GCSE examinations (including Maths and English) at a grade C or above, with the target rising to 50% by 2015 regardless of the entry profile of students. Schools which do not meet these targets are not only put under more intense scrutiny by Ofsted, but are also more likely to be given a 'notice to improve', or placed in 'special measures'. Such scenarios open up the possibility of a school being forcibly 'academised', whereby the school is removed from local authority control and its governing body is replaced by an imposed 'trust'. In many cases, 'forced academisation' involves handing responsibility for the school to a private sector sponsor and so the intimate connection between high stakes testing, inspection and the goal of securing incremental privatisation across the school sector becomes transparent. These processes are now well established, and deeply embedded, in the English school system. More than 50% of secondary schools have either opted for, or been coerced into, academisation, whilst the proportion of primary schools remains much lower, but is increasing steadily.

### **TEACHERS' LABOUR: THE QUANTIFICATION OF VALUE AND THE QUEST FOR CONTROL**

In order to understand the pivotal role played by high stakes testing in asserting control over teachers' work, it is important to understand the political Right's critique of 'professionalism' and the role of producer interests. For those on the political Right, accountability is based within the market, and the accountability of the producer is through the exercising of choice by the consumer (Friedman and Friedman, 1980). The market provides the means by which particular behaviours are either rewarded or punished. The problem for the political Right has always been that an approach to welfare provision that removed welfare from the market (a key principle of the early welfare state according to Marshall, 1950), also removed welfare professionals from the disciplinary control of market forces. Without the constraints imposed by market forces, then welfare professionals were able to 'take over' the institutions in which

they worked, and run them in their own interests (Adam Smith Institute, 1984). It is this analysis that frames the political Right's concept of 'producer capture' and that underscores much of the neo-liberal attack on the welfare state in general, and public sector workers and their trade unions in particular.

For the Right, schools were always particularly vulnerable to producer capture because of difficulties associated with placing any clear value on the work of teachers (Friedman and Friedman 1980). This point was recognised by Connell, who argued:

Teaching is a labour process without an object. At best it has an object so intangible – the minds of the kids, of their capacity to learn – that it cannot be specified in any but vague and metaphorical ways. A great deal of work is done in schools, day in and day out, but this work does not produce any things. Nor does it, like other white collar work, produce visible and quantifiable effects – so many pensions paid, so many dollars turned over, so many patients cured. The 'outcomes of teaching', to use the jargon of educational research, are notoriously difficult to measure. (Connell, 1985, p.70).

The logic of Connell's argument immediately posed a challenge for those who sought to assert greater control over teachers' work. Put simply, if it was the case that teachers' work was incapable of being accurately measured, either in terms of quantity or quality, how might teachers realistically be 'managed'? How might they be directed towards particular activities, and critically, how might they be held to account for meeting whatever objectives were imposed on them? Such an analysis drew directly on Taylor's case for scientific management (Taylor, 1914) in which he argued that workers' control of their own labour process derived from their own knowledge and expertise in relation to their work. Only when that knowledge was transferred to managers could management assert serious control over their employees. Hence, Taylor's argument that all labour processes must be deconstructed and subject to 'scientific' analysis. By this he meant fragmenting each activity into a number of discrete elements and transforming each one into a measureable and quantifiable process. Such a process was considered to increase efficiency in two ways. First, by identifying 'low value' elements of the labour process, whereby elements of work deemed to require less skill could be allocated lower cost labour. Second, the quantification of the value of output would facilitate more sophisticated performance comparison between employees with Taylor arguing that performance could be enhanced by linking individual worker output much more closely to rewards (and sanctions). It follows that none of this could be achieved without not only being able to quantify the 'value' of output generally, but specifically being able to quantify the output of individual workers.

Critiques of Taylorism gave rise to a rich critical tradition in the sociology of work, initiated, arguably, by Braverman's seminal contribution 'Labor and monopoly capital' (1974). Braverman exposed the 'science' behind Taylorism, and relocated it within the context of an employment relationship in which the employer can only realise surplus when a worker's ability to work is transformed into productive labour. Braverman argued that 'control' of the labour process was the central challenge for management,

and that this was best achieved by separating the planning of work from the doing of work, thereby 'destroying the craft as a process under the control of the worker, he [the manager] reconstitutes it as a process under his own control' (Braverman, 1974, p78). Such a framework of analysis was soon applied to the work of teachers and there has been a considerable volume of scholarship that has drawn on this tradition (Ozga and Lawn 1981; Carter 1997a and b; Smyth 2001; Smyth et al. 2000). However, for some time this tradition has been in retreat (Reid, 2003 and Carter and Stevenson, 2012) and it has become fashionable to assert that traditional labour process analysis does not offer a helpful explanation of recent developments in teachers' work (Bach et al. 2006).

Within this article, we want to challenge the argument that teachers' work is now best understood as the type of 'new professionalism' identified in policy documents in which, high levels of skill and professional judgement are valued (RIG, 2005). Rather we seek to argue that since the mid-1980s, when Connell described teachers' work as 'a labour process without an object', there has been a relentless drive to quantify the output of teachers. The overwhelming purpose of this has been to underscore the processes of marketisation and managerialism that are the key means by which teachers' work is controlled and reconstituted along Taylorist lines. Our argument is that in England it is high stakes testing, now firmly buttressed by national inspection, that is central to these mechanisms of control.

### **HIGH STAKES TESTING, MARKETISATION AND TEACHERS' WORK.**

The significant role of testing within the English education system can only be fully appreciated when it is connected to a series of symbiotic measures which have embedded market forces deep within the public education system. This process began as early as 1980 (when the 1980 Education Act introduced so-called parental choice policies). However, as we have argued, this process was really set in motion following implementation of the 1988 Education Reform Act. It was the 1988 Act that not only introduced testing at 7, 11, 14 and 16 (based on the newly established National Curriculum) but linked this to publication of results in league tables, expanded the provision for parental choice (through 'open enrolment') and linked school funding very directly to student numbers (through a formula funding system known as Local Management of Schools) (Levačić, 1990). It was at this point that an educational quasi-market was created in the English school sector (Simon, 1988), and it is argued here that the period since then has seen the market become progressively more embedded. At the time of writing, these processes have developed further as local authorities' role in school planning have been largely marginalised and much more open local markets have been promoted. This process has accelerated with the introduction of Free Schools (DfE 2013) whereby new schools are established outside of local authority structures (by groups of parents for example) where it is possible to demonstrate local demand exists. Opposition from within local communities highlights that Free Schools can be highly disruptive to local patterns of school provision (Guardian, online 2012).

The logic reflects elementary market economic theory. ‘Consumers’ require market information in order to make rational choices. Published test results, ranked in league tables, facilitate ‘like-for-like’ comparison, whilst open enrolment allows parents to exercise choice. Formula-funding, driven overwhelmingly by pupil numbers, ensures that high performing schools generate large numbers of parental preferences, and with them additional resources. By contrast, schools ranked lower in the league tables are likely to attract fewer parental preferences and hence, face falling rolls, and diminishing budgets. Within this quasi- market, high stakes testing is central. Just as the economic market requires a communicative signal between producers and consumers, so too does the educational quasi-market require an equivalent. Therefore, published test scores perform a similar, *although not equivalent* function to price in the market for school education. In particular, test scores represent a valorisation of value in the school system – a numerical expression of a school’s output that acts as a signal to consumers as they are encouraged to express their preferences. In this sense, test scores form a crucial element in the new educational landscape as the invisible hand of the market replaces more visible, and democratic, forms of planning and provision.

However, it is important to recognise that this is *not* a value determined by the interaction of supply and demand in the traditional sense, and therefore it cannot be considered a traditional exchange value. Rather it might more accurately be presented as the quantification of a use value where the use value is determined by the state. Within the English school ‘market’, it is the state that determines what counts as ‘official knowledge’ (Apple, 2000) (what is taught, what knowledge is privileged and how ‘outputs’ are measured and represented in the form of test scores and league tables) and therefore, it is the state that determines use value in education. High stakes tests become the means by which use value is measured and valorised (powerfully reinforced by Ofsted’s use of categories to reinforce the official view of ‘good’). Therefore, the quasi- market in school education cannot claim to be a representation of what consumers want, but rather what the state asserts they *should* want. In the current English school system, there is great play made of ‘freedom’, ‘de-regulation’ and ‘autonomy’. Schools are apparently free to respond to what parents want. The consumer is sovereign. However, consumers can choose what they want, only as long as they choose what the state wants them to want. To paraphrase Henry Ford, parents can have whatever colour they want, as long as it is black (Ford, 1922). This was the hard lesson learned by parents of children at Downhills school (and an increasing number of other schools) who fought to retain their school in local authority control, but found the full power of the state mobilised to ensure that the school was transferred to a private contractor against their wishes (Stevenson and Gilliland, forthcoming). In the landscape of schools policy in England, the free market is never far from the strong state, and the market’s so-called ‘invisible hand’ still retains a vice-like grip on those who make a determined effort to fashion a genuine alternative to state sanctioned ‘good’.

Given the above policy environment, schools are forced to focus their efforts on maximising ‘outputs’ to retain market position. In market terms, institutional survival

depends on market success. As a consequence the 'results imperative' impacts on both the leadership and teaching processes of schools, particularly when under the forensic gaze of the school inspectorate, as occurs when a school is deemed to be failing (Perryman, 2006). The intensification of market forces is intended to place an increased pressure on teachers to improve test scores and for teachers to make this the central focus of their work. However, it is increasingly apparent that the intensification of market pressures in the system has had a range of other consequences on teacher behaviour. For example, there is now an increasing recognition that so-called 'gaming' in the system has been widespread, whereby dubious educational practices are adopted in order to optimise market performance and position. These have included the use of admissions criteria, which are used by some to skew their student populations to the advantage of their results in high stakes testing, (West et al, 2004; West et al, 2006), the focus of additional support to students on key performance threshold borderlines, and the improper use of student exclusions to manipulate aggregate results. To date, overt examples of test data manipulation are isolated, and in England there have been very few examples when compared to the institutional abuses witnessed in the United States (*LA Times*, 2012). Rather, in the English context, what is presented is a 'bending', rather than a breaking of rules relating to the conducting of high stakes assessments (Ofqual, 2012). These are sometimes presented as the 'unintended consequences' of policy as though somehow their occurrence could not have been anticipated. 'Perverse incentives' are acknowledged, but can apparently be regulated away. Nowhere is the link between markets and inequalities made explicit, and nor are the tensions between market logic and professional ethics, as the market-driven pressure to focus on students likely to 'add value' conflict with traditional welfarist commitments to value all students equally. Given the power of the market, it is by no means certain that professional ethics will triumph (Stevenson 2007).

### **HIGH STAKES TESTING, MANAGERIALISM AND TEACHERS' WORK.**

The emergence of a new managerialism in the public sector generally (Ferlie et al, 1996; Hood, 1991), and in education specifically (Gewirtz, 2001), is well documented. The processes have been in place for some considerable time and are now well established, even if debate continues about the specificities of form and content (Clarke et al 2000). This is evident in a form of management that draws heavily on private sector practice, and which is driven by an emphasis on target-setting, performance review, and the use of incentives and sanctions to reward appropriate behaviours and punish inappropriate behaviour or what is deemed poor performance. The pursuit of such objectives, and the managerialism that underpins them, are not value neutral, but are rather imbued with the values embedded within the wider system. Hence, the values of management reflect the wider values of the market, or as Ball argued, 'value' triumphs over values (Ball, 2003).

At school level teachers experience managerialism principally in the form of target-setting and performance review, all of which are increasingly underscored by testing.

This is where traditional high stakes tests must now be seen in the wider context of a system that has often generated a raft of internal testing to track student progress forensically at all points across their school career (allowing so-called value-added analysis and comparison across cohorts). Internal testing takes the form of timed activities, or more general pieces of work, that are used to generate numeric assessment data that in turn are used to track both teachers and students. Students are made aware of the importance of such tests, and become focused on ‘performing’ when required. Frequent internal testing has therefore, and intentionally, made it easier to quantify the ‘output’ of individual teachers on a regular basis, rather than rely solely on the infrequent instrument of annual public testing. This process has in turn been formally embedded in the structures of performance management and the near ubiquitous development of data management systems in schools. These ever more complex systems require teachers’ performance to be annually appraised by senior leaders within schools and targets for future performance set. In reality, the process is often experienced as one of perpetual observation and surveillance as the monitoring of pupil performance in tests is buttressed by ‘work scrutinies’ (management checking of *student* work to monitor *teacher* performance, often conducted with no notice and sometimes without teacher knowledge), lesson observations and ‘learning walks’ (management ‘walk throughs’ of curriculum areas). For some time, performance management has made explicit links to teachers’ pay, links that have become progressively more entwined over time (Carter et al 2010). More recently, this process has accelerated whereby any automatic pay progression based on length of service is being removed, thereby ensuring that all pay progression is performance-related (STRB, 2012). One head teachers’ union has interpreted this as pay awards only being made to teachers judged as Ofsted ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’, reinforcing the notion that what was once ‘satisfactory’ has been redefined as no longer acceptable. The National Association of Head Teachers’ (NAHT) recommended pay policy for use in schools is not openly available. However, the commentary of one of the large unions representing classroom teachers highlights the issues:

The NAHT model policy requires teachers to make “good progress towards objectives”, be competent in all areas of the relevant Standards and achieve a grading of “good” in classroom observations. Furthermore, it suggests that teachers’ objectives should become progressively more challenging as they move up the scale; that evidence wider than that available from the performance management / appraisal review may be considered eg “impact on pupil progress” and “impact on wider outcomes for pupils”; and that teachers who are not graded as “good” should not progress (NUT, 2013).

The screw tightens. As the pressure on schools to meet external targets has increased, and as league table pressures have intensified, then so too have high stakes test scores become a more significant element of teachers’ performance management targets and the focus for professional discussion.

What is arguably most developed and widespread is the extent to which teachers’ labour has intensified as a result of the increased pressure to deliver specified levels

of performance as judged by student achievement in external standardised tests. The external tests are the 'public face' of the assessment regime, but are built upon constant internal testing of students used to 'train' them in the culture of assessment. Our argument is that this represents the operationalisation of the fundamental elements of scientific management, whereby managerial control of the labour process is asserted firstly by finding ways to quantify the value of individual employees' output, and secondly, by linking productivity and performance to pay (Chamberlin et al, 2002). All of these essential elements of Taylorist scientific management are now deeply embedded in the English school system allowing student performance in tests (both external and internal) to not only determine merit payments, but now to determine whether basic annual increments are secured or withheld. The Chief Inspector of Schools has denied that the Ofsted framework implies a 'one best way' model of teaching (scientific management *par excellence*) (Ofsted, 2012b), although teacher debate in the blogosphere indicates many teachers in schools perceive and experience this differently. Many take the view that there is 'an Ofsted lesson': a prescribed format which must be followed if 'outstanding' is to be awarded.

It follows that one consequence of the increasing importance of student performance in tests of all types is a substantial transfer of power and authority to the school Principal. There can be little doubt that within the current English school system, the 'frontier of control' (Goodrich, 1920) has shifted decisively and that within schools, power and control has transferred upwards. What appears to be happening is that a much more coercive and aggressive approach to management is evident in many schools. However, establishing the precise extent and consequences of this is difficult. Researching the 'dark side' (Brooks, 2005) of schools as organisations has never been easy, but it is arguably becoming more difficult as 'brand-conscious' head-teachers become more wary of approaches by potentially critical researchers. At the moment, the picture we present here draws on occasional evidence that appears in the press (see *Times Educational Supplement*, 2013) or from teacher union disputes (see *Ealing Gazette*, 2013). One fascinating source of data is the emergence of *The Guardian* newspaper's '*Secret Teacher*'. The secret teacher is in fact not a single teacher, but rather the term provides a cover by which teachers are able to provide anonymised accounts of their lives in schools. That teachers need to adopt such measures to raise a voice, arguably speaks volumes of the extent to which mechanisms of control are stifling open and honest debate about what is happening in England's public education system. However, in the absence of such debate, the accounts from the *Secret Teacher* (and the fascinating comments that follow each post) provide a revealing insight into how the new performance-based culture translates into an experience of work in which bullying (Guardian, online 2013b) and castigation for failure (Guardian, online 2013c) appear to be increasingly common. In such a system, where the consequences of non-compliance are potentially high, teachers have little option but to conform to meeting the demands of a system over which they have ever diminishing influence. Managerial control of teachers' work is complete, whilst resistance is made more difficult by the panoply of managerial controls that can be imposed on those considered dissident or recalcitrant.

## **INTEGRATING MARKETS AND MANAGERIALISM: FAILURE, FRAGMENTATION AND FEAR.**

We have endeavoured to illustrate the different ways in which processes of marketisation and managerialism have increasingly shaped teachers' experience of work in the English school system. Each of these elements is distinct, but both are clearly interdependent, with each both shaping, and being shaped by, the other. Our argument is that the processes of marketisation and managerialism are threaded together by narratives of failure, fragmentation and fear, and it is these discourses that shape teachers' experience of work and provide the context within which teachers function.

Narratives of systemic failure are central to the drive to privatize public education. The 'discourse of derision' (Ball, 1990) is nothing new (see Callaghan's 'Great Debate' in 1976, available online at Gillard, 2010), and is not unique to England (see 'A Nation at Risk' (NCEE 1983) in the USA). This narrative about a crisis in public education has always been a central element of the Right's discourse because people cannot be expected to accept radical change (such as privatisation) unless they believe there is a major 'problem' that, by definition, requires a radical 'solution'. The vocabulary of failure has also been turned into quasi-moral panic about 'wasted lives' and the need for rapid solutions to save generations from educational oblivion. In England, in recent years, high stakes testing has become central to the discourse of 'failing schools'. High stakes testing is the means by which national crises in public education are established (poor performance in international league tables), individual schools are identified as 'failing' and individual teachers are identified as 'incompetent'.

Hence, a narrative of failure becomes much more powerful as a means of control when it is sufficiently nuanced to create division between those considered 'failing', and those considered 'successes'. Failure as a discourse of control must therefore create division as it feeds fragmentation and the rivalry that is generated when 'losers' co-exist with 'winners'. These are the dividing lines that set school against school and teacher against teacher. Shared interests and identities are fractured as those considered 'successful' are encouraged to set themselves apart from those who 'fail'. In such contexts, any basis for solidarity is inevitably, and intentionally, undermined.

None of the above has serious consequences unless it is underpinned by fear. Failure must have consequences. In a market, the very real threat of failure is meant to engender anxiety; hence, the description of market forces as imposing a discipline. In the new educational market place, failure has become a very real phenomena, with punitive consequences for schools deemed to be failing (the pressure of being placed in a 'category' by Ofsted, and the potential for forced academisation). At the same time, individual teachers are confronted with 'notices to improve', and formal capability procedures are much more readily invoked. This need to introduce a real sense of fear into the public sector was articulated explicitly by one Coalition government minister:

You can't have room for innovation and the pressure for excellence without having some real discipline and some fear on the part of the providers that things may go wrong if they don't live up to the aims that society as a whole is demanding of them (Public Service, 2011).

The Minister's convictions are clear – *real* discipline can only be effective in a context where there is *fear*, because failure has consequences. In such a climate, the fear of failure not only drives a compulsion to conform, but fragmentation and division generate a fear of resisting. Resistance and defiance are behaviours that, in a marketised and managerialist culture are exposing and potentially isolating. They generate a vulnerability that can be de-stabilising, and the strength and confidence that comes from solidaristic action is replaced by the fear and vulnerability that flows from isolation. The educational market place has created a much more difficult environment in which teachers can act collectively, and rather it has created a context in which fear can overcome the impulse to challenge. For the privatisers to prevail, what is required more than anything, is for those who seek to defend a democratic, public education to do nothing. Fragmentation, failure and fear are intended to encourage compliance and acquiescence.

### **AN ALTERNATIVE FUTURE - RECLAIMING TEACHING**

Biesta (2010) highlights the marked impact that the measurement culture has had on all levels of education, from international policy to the individual classroom. He argues that the data provided by high stakes testing has in some ways been useful, adding to our understanding of the educative process. However, at the same time it has led us to have a misplaced belief in the power of factual information. All decisions which are derived from data are, in part, value judgements due to our need to interpret the data we collect. Consequently, data is seen through our own values system, not through some mythical 'objective' lens. Biesta also highlights the problem of deciding what to measure. Do we measure what we value, or do we merely measure what it is easy to measure? In the current English system, we appear to measure that which the *state* values, and in turn we align activity in schools to meet those challenges. This results in a lack of diversity, and a focus on test results as a proxy for the performance of teachers:

The rise of a culture of performativity in education – a culture in which means become ends in themselves so that targets and indicators of quality become mistaken for quality itself – has been one of the main drivers of an approach to measurement in which normative validity is being replaced by technical validity (Biesta, 2010, p.13).

The constant use of high stakes testing leads to an underlying system of measurement and control (O'Neill, 2002), where teachers become ever more focused on short-term gains and ultimately to an ever greater pressure to teach to the test. We argue that as high stakes testing becomes the core of measurement, so the curriculum needs to align to this philosophy, constantly being refined to 'fine-tune' the outcomes

gained from tests. A broad curriculum and assessment regime cannot exist alongside simple measurement, as it assumes a range of legitimate perspectives on knowledge, understanding and skills. Wider definitions of the curriculum are not easily measured and compared to allow sorting of students into winners and losers. In summary, the higher the stakes, the more relentless the focus on the target. Testing in turn assumes a simpler form (with exams being exalted as the only truly rigorous assessment) and the curriculum necessarily narrows. What matters is what is measured.

Much of what we describe in this article aligns with a vision of teaching identified by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) as one based on ‘business capital’. This view of education sees the teacher as someone who works hard, but undertakes a task that only requires moderate intellectual and academic ability. Teaching processes and decisions are taken on the basis of numeric data and what has been deemed to work elsewhere, and ultimately comes down to hard work and measureable results. However, as a consequence, teachers are not seen as highly educated professionals and can be dispensed with easily, their places to be filled by others keen to be teachers, ‘*This is the human widget image of the profession*’ (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 2). It is based on a ‘bring ‘em in, burn ‘em out’ model of teaching with low costs of training, high pay for some, but low pay for the majority and limited long term liabilities (such as pension entitlements). It is a Taylorist model of a teaching driven by a system that seeks to turn a profit from schooling. It is also a model of a profession unlikely to forge a common identity and the notion of an activist profession (Sachs, 2003) from which professional confidence and solidarity might grow.

Is there an alternative? Can systems develop which do not have high stakes testing as their basis for accountability, and for ‘sorting’ children as they move through the education system? And as a by-product of a different system, can the role of the teacher be enhanced, thereby raising both educational standards and teaching quality? Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) highlight flaws in the U.S. education system, predominantly focused on an overreliance on standardised measurement and a focus on the individual, particularly in relation to issues such as performance related pay. Instead, they argue that the development of meaningful collaboration between teachers, based on developing professional dialogue and the emergence of outstanding teaching, are where high quality education will grow.

Hargreaves, (in Sahlberg, 2010), starts by arguing that many systems, such as those in the USA and England, have now stuck with policies over the past 30 years which have time and again not worked, based around pressure on teachers, increasing political interference and intervention, competition, marketisation and over-testing. After such a long period, these systems still cling to the idea that this is the one best way. Our view is that this is because educational reform has not been driven by what is in the best interests of all children, but by the interests of business and the drive to privatisation.

In contrast, some emerging and rapidly developing economies such as China and Singapore have started down a very different road, with diversified assessment, local

autonomy, and innovation and creativity (for example Singapore's 'Teach less, learn more' (Ng, 2008)). Therefore, some countries are already seeing a different future. At the heart of this difference is a varied and authentic assessment regime. In Finland, children do not have any work graded, even internally, until the age of 12, and the only high-stakes tests they face are taken at the age of 18, the results of which are used for determining university entry. However, even here, testing results are not used to hold teachers to account, they are the responsibility of the students who have taken them. In both Finland and Singapore, teachers are held in high esteem, are seen as central to the social and economic development of the nations and work in collaboration as highly skilled professionals to improve the education of the children with whom they work. Trust, professionalism and essentially dialogic systems lead to high comparative international educational outcomes. High stakes testing has either no place or is declining in these systems. There is a conscious focus on the quality and development of learning, as opposed to cramming students through high stakes testing. Accountability still exists but is attained through dialogue and support for teachers. Markets have no place, and consequently there is no need for large scale measurement to feed into systems of 'choice'. The hand whose invisibility hides a powerful pressure to control, potentially becomes transformed into a helping hand focused on support and achievement for all.

What becomes apparent is that there are diverging paths in the rapidly globalising education policy environment. Some systems become dominated by business capital models, creating ever more elaborate accountability systems fed by constant 'measurement' of teachers and students, and which make use of high stakes testing, an ever expanding and valuable industry to a burgeoning private sector. As this inevitably leads to criticism of standards and the quality of education, however narrowly defined, the professional standing of teachers is diminished. As such, marketised systems slowly spin into spirals of decline. England is in the vanguard of this tradition.

The alternative future is one which sees the professional capital of teachers as a driver for improvement and incremental change. Such change is also based on the foundation of education being seen as a social good, as opposed to an economic opportunity. In this alternative system, the focus is on learning, leading to a spectrum of assessment types which have an authentic character, and which perversely will have greater utility in the wider world beyond school. It is in this wider debate concerning the nature of assessment, and its relationship to both management of education and the marketisation of schooling, that high stakes testing exists.

Given the dominance of the business capital model within the English school system, it is difficult to envisage the circumstances in which the trajectory of current policy may be interrupted, let alone reversed. Moreover, as we have argued in this article, the combination of failure, fragmentation and fear are intended to undermine the solidarities that might offer resistance to this agenda. However, our belief is that such possibilities exist. The drive to an intense market model in schools, underpinned by relentless high stakes testing, is one that is often challenged by teachers and indeed

parents (Stevenson and Gilliland forthcoming). By its nature, such resistance is often issue-focused and isolated. However, there is the possibility that as the break-up of the public education system in England continues apace diverse loci of dissent overcome, their historic divisions and alliances of resistance begin to coalesce. At this point, new possibilities emerge.

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