

**‘Teachers repositioned and governed by dominant political rationalities ...’**

**Understanding performative pressures experienced by Heads of Physical Education (HoPE) within six Free Schools.**

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**Abstract.**

This paper looked at educational realities faced by middle managers within the growing number of Free Schools in England. Heads of Physical Education (HoPE), key policy actors within the middle tier of school management, have had to contend with performative pressures resulting from limited resources made available to run both curricular and extracurricular programmes. A Foucauldian analysis based on the concepts of governmentality and ethics was utilised to comprehend the self-regulating behaviours that follow within this context. Six high schools in the North West of England were selected for in depth interviews; grounded theory was chosen to categorise data as it was collected. Findings revealed that HoPE in Free Schools faced the dominant political rationality of inspections

leading towards pressures manifest in an increase in the use of performative language. Such behaviours were perceived by younger HoPE as ‘professionalism’ and as ‘playing the game’ by older, more experienced counterparts. Such internalisation of behaviour was seen as the norm for the former, while more experienced HoPE used limited policy spaces to skilfully negotiate desired outcomes, in this case changes to annual performance review criteria.

### **Introduction.**

There is a lack of research regarding the impact of Free Schools (Walford 2014) particularly within key education fields such as policy and management. This study will help both practitioners and theorists to understand roles undertaken by HoPE within Physical Education and School Sport (PESS), a resource dependant curriculum subject whose status is constantly changing (Evans and Davies 2014). Recent governments have used PESS as a means of achieving their own targets involving community renewal and social inclusion only to be replaced by administrations who have made severe funding cuts to the subject (Jung, Pope and Kirk 2015). Such changes may have created new pressures for HoPE, policy actors positioned at both the meso and micro level within educational practice. It is this combination of having to manage a subject that often appears to be ‘reinventing’ itself (Williams et al, 2010 2) within the relatively new educational policy context that Free Schools find themselves in, that makes for a potentially intriguing study. The aims then are to unpick performative pressures involved within the context of opening up a new school and to analyse middle management responses in order to provide understanding for current and future policy actors.

### ***Performative pressures.***

This study will draw upon Ball’s 2003 applied adaptation of Lyotard’s concept of performativity (1984). In making parallels between the education sector and changes made in

other work environments, Ball reflects upon a neoliberal paradigm enacted by successive United Kingdom governments based upon operating a marketised system utilising private sector practices such as competition and efficiency. Within this context, educational change over the past twenty five years has been significant and this has brought greater accountability for those in middle management positions. Change has resulted in competition between schools with the introduction of league tables, devolved budgetary systems and, overall, the fundamental need to run a school as a 'business.'

A connection can be made between ideologies linking performativity and a Free School discourse (Farrell et al 2016). Performativity encourages competition based upon quantitative outcomes in order to improve standards (Ball 2003). Similarly, the UK Coalition government of 2010 promoted Free Schools as a means of not only developing parental choice in disadvantaged areas but also to improve performance in neighbouring schools. Inspections are also part of the performative process leading to discourses regarding time management and pedagogical constraints (Ball 2003). Will inspections be a prominent issue for HoPE in this study? Performativity aims to maximise resources; likewise, Free Schools open with financial considerations uppermost, stemming from the responsibilities associated with devolved budgets. As a result teachers in Free Schools may find themselves with multiple roles of responsibility within a setting where institutions are often starting out with new structures, new staff and unfamiliar buildings.

Performativity is but one aspect of a neoliberal paradigm, which claims to free the individual and develop a sense of self-worth (Gilbert 2013). The devolved power given to Free Schools could be a similar extension of that liberating process although it is interesting to note that Wright (2012) refers to such government policy as 'fantasies of empowerment' while Farrell et al (2016) state that Free Schools appear as paradoxical in nature. Will the promise of greater autonomy for HoPE in this study lead towards innovative, creative leadership or will

this be stifled by performative pressures of a similar nature to those found in other types of schools?

### ***Why PE?***

To understand why PESS is the subject of focus, it is necessary to look at changes across all types of schools before addressing the Free School context. It is possible to suggest that Physical Education has experienced change at a greater rate than any other subject within the curriculum (G. Williams and D. Williams 2013). The contribution made by the subject to the development of the whole child was recognised by its inclusion in the National Curriculum as a Foundation Subject from its inception in the early 1990's. The subject went through rapid transitions in the 1980s and 1990s, alongside its inclusion as an examinable subject with the introduction of A-Level, GCSE and latterly, BTEC in Physical Education. Many saw these changes as giving increased status and justification for its inclusion in the school curriculum (Green 2008). Significant investment by New Labour governments provided the most lucrative period of the subject's history, though bringing further pressures to bear on HoPE, not only in being concerned with examination performance within their subject, but also school sport partnerships and particularly interaction with the community (ibid).

Free Schools are not obliged to follow the National Curriculum and this has particular implications for Physical Education in terms of the nature of the curriculum, the facilities available and the qualifications of those who teach it, since qualified teacher status is not required. This has been monitored by a sample of 64 Free schools responding to the 2012 School Workforce Census which showed that 11 per cent of the teaching staff were unqualified as opposed to a national average of 3.9 per cent for all state-funded schools in England. Interestingly, it would also appear that for some parents one of the attractions in choosing a Free School for their children is the promise of extra- curricular activities often positioned at

the end of a working day (Morris 2016). Indeed, some parents actively look towards a school sports programme utilising good facilities as means of achieving this (ibid).

## **Literature Review**

The 2010 Academies Act under the UK coalition government provided for the introduction of Free Schools, institutions beyond local authority control whereby interested parties could apply to set up independent state schools with funding directly from the government (Higham 2014). Accounts on how they are performing can vary. Current, limited academic research is perhaps a mixture of ideological and pragmatic analysis (Higham 2014; Walford 2014; West and Bailey 2013) unpicking discourses involving community and choice. Attempts to scrutinise Free Schools in terms of performance and effectiveness can lead to claim and counter claim generally dependent upon when the research was conducted. However, although this study will research performative pressures experienced by HoPE and how this can affect their behaviours, it is necessary to analyse wider issues in order to fully understand the contextual settings that our research subjects find themselves in.

### ***Contradictions and tensions.***

Research suggests a disconnect between government policy and the realities of provision (Higham 2014). Free Schools were designed to bring new people and ideas into education in response to the needs of local communities. Amongst the new proposers would be existing Academy trusts who would seek to utilise private sector funding and expertise as they expanded into leading Academy Chains or federations (three of the six schools featured in this study belong to MATs). This would provide a collective means for parents, teachers, charities and other organisations to apply to become a Free School. The Coalition government argued that the introduction of Free Schools would increase competition, autonomy and innovation (Cameron 2011; Gove 2011) across all types of schools. The Secretary of State for Education,

Michael Gove argued that 'Free Schools are being established and driving social mobility, particularly in areas where deprivation is high' (Gove 2011, 14). However, research by Higham (2014) highlights tensions within Free School policy. Proposers within highly disadvantaged areas appear to have aims and expertise that 'do not fit well with what the DfE appears willing to accept' (Higham 2014, 136). Furthermore, he highlights evident difficulties in completing the application process and claims that those most able to negotiate are not necessarily actively seeking to serve disadvantaged communities. Walford (2014) argues that such issues need addressing if this process is to become more equitable.

Consequently, there is a suggestion that some proposers are serving their own needs rather than those of the local community. Walford (2014) and Higham (2014) have argued that proposers are establishing some Free Schools with specific agendas linked to for example, religion and business. Proposers then, are drawing upon the structural advantages of businesses and the church amongst their sponsors who have been permitted to take on dominant roles in the governance of schools thus influencing ethos and character (Hatcher 2006). Such an agenda may be perceived as being somewhat divisive and may actually 'segregate' as opposed to 'bringing together' specific communities.

### ***Impact?***

Research by Porter and Simons (2015) has been used, mainly by government, to suggest that opening Free Schools has caused neighbouring non-Free Schools to improve their performance. These findings have been criticised by other researchers who have found no significant performance differences between other schools located in close proximity to a Free School (Burgess 2015; Allen 2015). Demonstrating overall effectiveness when compared to other types of schools is difficult (Burgess 2015) often due to the sheer variety of Free Schools

along with the fact that studies were conducted at an early stage of their existence. Furthermore, trying to understand the social composition of Free Schools is perhaps also problematic although there is a suggestion that recruitment does not necessarily reflect the disadvantaged locations that many of these schools find themselves in (Green, Allen and Jenkins, 2015). These are interesting findings that may well go some way towards satisfying a stated need to research the impact created by this radical government policy (Miller, Craven, and Tooley 2014).

Free Schools have often been portrayed as a cost-effective means of opening a new school. Indeed, the whole process of starting a new school appears to have become an accelerated financial process as the very first Free Schools opened some 15 months after the election of the Coalition government (Abbott, Rathbone and Whitehead 2013). However, it is the speed at which this has happened that auditors have found problematic and as early as 2013 the National Audit Office began to query the rising costs of opening a Free School with a call for a more efficient means of spending government money.

Although much of the research presented regarding impact would perhaps appear somewhat inconclusive it must be remembered that establishing a new school takes time and, given the predicted increase in pupil numbers over the next ten years, there is a growing need for provision, whether that be via new or existing schools. Indeed, Miller, Craven, and Tooley (2014) writing on behalf of Free School proposers, see this as an exciting opportunity to deliver innovative quality education for the future.

Many of the above sources of information were published before April 2015 and so more recent research is required. Interestingly, Ofsted reports in 2017 stating that one third of Free Schools are 'outstanding' ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)), have been used by government to suggest that the Free Schools policy has been a success. With many Free Schools now working their way towards

performance outcomes for their older students, again, there is a need to reevaluate what is happening. Although a quantifiable measuring of performance is not the intention of this qualitative study it is still necessary to recognise how discourses involving impact and resources may add to the performative pressures felt by HoPE. Primarily, it is the discourses regarding community, choice and autonomy that are a central focus for this study.

### *Discourse through Language.*

A Foucauldian analysis was selected as the most appropriate form of social theory in order to understand findings. Although Foucault has written predominantly regarding power and discipline, his works are still applicable towards schools and educational leadership in particular (Gillies 2013). Moreover, his thoughts on neoliberalism, an economic and political discourse from which Free Schools have emerged (Wright 2012), were perhaps equivocal (Zamora ed. 2016) and so have helped to provide an objectivity that this study has sought.

In a Foucauldian study such as this, the discourses created by Free School policy are of particular interest. Locating Free Schools within a policy discourse of school effectiveness is one such example where power and knowledge can be joined together through a number of 'signs', one of which is language. This is but one part of what Foucault would term the 'dispositif' i.e. the systems which support the Free School discourse whether they be institutional or administrative. This in turn links to Ball's adaptation of performativity and the systems used to enhance that concept: league tables and inspections in particular. The regulation of discourse (Niesche 2011) through language becomes important especially for policy actors who may encounter moral and philosophical challenges in their everyday working lives (Ball 2003). In this instance, we aim to focus initially on the language of performativity (Williams 2017) and why HoPE in a free school may or may not choose to use it.



Indeed, Free Schools have attracted a number of individuals and organisations from the private sector (Higham 2014) who have the ‘vision, drive and skills to set up a new school’ (DfE 2010, 58). Business-style efficiencies and entrepreneurialism adopted by new entrants to make public services more responsive to local needs (Ball 2009), could result in increased performative pressures and an upsurge in the use of the language that comes with it.

Lyotard (1984) suggests that the use of language is particularly important within a performative culture and can invoke fears of being ostracised for those who do not comply and conform. Performative language now appears frequently in official texts and includes vocabulary such as ‘measurable’, ‘high quality’, ‘effective’, ‘impact’, ‘achievement’ and ‘success’ (Williams 2017). Such terms have become increasingly prominent within education particularly in Ofsted reports and other government documents (ibid). At a meso policy level school statements that feature performative phrases such as ‘driven by a thirst for improvement’, ‘a commitment to excellence’ and ‘knows what outstanding is’ are utilised in a variety of contexts (ibid). Free Schools may well adopt such language as they perhaps feel the pressures of performativity through being at the forefront of a relatively new government policy.

The notion and use of performative language has influenced teachers’ thoughts and feelings to the point where it may affect their behaviours (Fielding 1999). In an attempt to disentangle this assumption, Frowe (2001) suggests that such an assimilation of performative language by teachers is either due to a genuine attraction or a need to be a part of the process, a desire to ‘play the game’. Grace (1994) suggests that the use of such language can have a ‘de-humanising’ effect on teachers whereby they become programmed in both the written and spoken word. Furthermore, Savage (In Gillies 2013) illustrates the self-regulation of behaviours by capturing the thoughts of Marion, an English teacher who acknowledged that she was starting to sound like the language she hated.

Research questions:

1. Is there an increased use in performative language by HoPE when trying to gain recognition/acquire resources?
2. Is there a perception of increased accountability measures within a Free School?
3. Is the age and experience of HoPE a factor when reacting towards performative pressures?
4. Do performative pressures lead to a change in the regulation of behaviours?

## **Methodology**

### ***Research design***

The desire to ascertain the thoughts and feelings of policy actors within the chosen research field necessitated a qualitative design. This in turn led to an attempt to reveal and understand truth and meaning within the specific policy context of Free Schools by using theoretically based concepts. The selection of a constructionist research perspective (Holstein and Gubrium cited in Silverman 2014) supported the notion that knowledge is context dependent and encouraged the pursuit of not only an investigation into social reality but also the analysis of how a situation had arisen (the Free School concept). These considerations are particularly applicable to a context such as this where starting a new school has issues regarding 'survival.' Thus, a qualitative design enabled the research to establish the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of related phenomena (Silverman 2014). In this instance such an approach was used to firstly understand how HoPE experience performative pressures and secondly, for what reasons.

In depth semi structured interviews were selected as an appropriate research method to allow for flexibility and ease of conversation. So, although a set of 12-14 questions were made available to both interviewer and interviewee beforehand, some deviation took place to allow the conversation to develop and progress at a natural, personable level. The interviews took place in a variety of settings (meeting room, office or empty classroom) predominantly during the school day. Each interview typically lasted 40 minutes and responses were recorded on an audio device before eventual transcription and analysis.

### *Ethical considerations.*

The research project received clearance and approval from the university's ethics committee three months before the first interview. Letters to schools, informed consent forms and a register of risks were an established part of this process. Utilising the DfE web site (Gov.uk 2016), all 27 Free schools within the North West of England approached primarily for their geographical proximity. Earlier analysis in this study has suggested that PESS faces many challenges and within the Free School context this may well be intertwined with issues regarding facilities and parental expectations. Therefore, it was necessary to approach those who were responsible for the subject's management – the subject leaders' themselves.

Letters were sent to school principals asking for permission to approach HoPE to take part in the research. Very few schools made a reply. Access to the six schools who eventually became involved tended to be a matter of networking following up on contacts from student alumni and from former work colleagues.

### *Pen Pictures*

**Martin** – Head of PE (mid 50's) at 'King's Grammar School' a co-educational Free School (last 3 years) that originally opened in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and caters for 4 – 18 year olds. Martin

has taught at the school for 28 years. For their first ever Ofsted in 2017 the school achieved 'good' in two areas and 'requires improvement' in five areas.

**Chris** – Teacher i/c PE (early 70's) at 'Brunswick Faith School' a non-academically selective, co-educational Free School (last six years) that originally opened in 1986 catering for 4 – 16 year olds. Chris has now entered his 50<sup>th</sup> year as a teacher. He has taught in a number of schools prior to working at Brunswick. In addition to PE, Chris also teaches other subjects including humanities and photography. Brunswick achieved 'good' across all areas in a 2013 Ofsted with very similar outcomes for the corresponding inspection in 2017.

**Andy** – Assistant Head, Teacher i/c PE and Maths teacher (late 20's) at 'Milltown Studio Design School' a non-selective, alternative provision school focusing upon enterprise education, namely recreation, leisure & tourism, retail, ICT & business administration for 13 to 19 year olds. The school is part of a Trust that operates three schools in total within the same town. Andy has been at the school since it opened three years ago. For the last two years, the school has been located within a refurbished 'lodging house'. The 2015 Ofsted inspection deemed the school to be 'good' across all areas.

**Lisa** – Head of PE (mid 20's) at 'Cast Town School' a co-educational Free School within existing premises (formerly a local authority school). Lisa has been teaching for three years. An Ofsted report for 2014 judged the school to be 'good' across all areas while in 2018 the school 'required improvement'.

**Katrina** – Head of PE (late 20's) at 'Greenvale' a co-educational Free School catering for 11-18 year olds started by local residents in 2012 within temporary accommodation before transferring to new premises in 2013. Katrina has been teaching for six years and a significant amount of her timetable involves teaching Humanities. Sandymoor obtained 'good' across four areas and 'outstanding' for one in its 2014 Ofsted. The 2018 Ofsted judged the school

to be 'inadequate' and Sandymoor has approached the Regional Schools Commissioner to find a suitable trust to manage the school.

**Mark** – Head of PE & Assistant Head (late 30's) at 'County Town School' a faith school for boys, which operates as part of a nationwide educational trust. At the time of the data collection, the school was located in an office block; a sixth form will open in 2019. Mark has been teaching for 16 years. In its first ever Ofsted report in 2018 the school was deemed to be 'outstanding' in all areas.

### *Analysis of data.*

It is difficult to set aside preconceived ideas regarding Free Schools. As already stated findings from some of the first academic research (Walford 2014; Higham 2014) are perhaps sceptical regarding ideology, costs and effectiveness. However, this study has tried to remain objective; as the country's population expands, there is a need to develop existing educational provision and starting a new school can be difficult (Miller, Craven, and Tooley 2014).

Hence the choice of grounded theory as a means of analysing results. Rather than start with a hypothesis the aim has been to use inductive analysis by developing theory as data was collected. So, even though the research commenced with a defined purpose of investigating performative pressures within a Free School, through data analysis new theoretical positions or understanding became possible (Gray 2018). After each interview transcript had been completed 'theoretical sampling' took place whereby annotations were deployed as part of an open coding process assigning text to various forms of categorisation before final selective coding which allowed theorisation to take place. Part of this ongoing process was then used to inform and adapt future questions (Silverman 2014). In addition, a selective approach was necessary when viewing the whole, as certain sections of the data were perhaps peripheral to the overall research questions but still useful in getting to the central objectives of the study.

*Social theory and the analysis of data.*

Foucault's 'technologies of the self' helped to provide understanding and meaning and of the many Foucauldian concepts that could be applied towards the data, two stood out: governmentality and ethics. The former concept is particularly useful as it involves the impact of government at whatever level upon the self. Foucault talks about the 'conduct of conduct', in this case, how national government policy can impact upon the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of middle managers and how this in turn can influence other colleagues that they are responsible for.

Governmentality can also help us to understand the contradictory nature of autonomy and subjection (Zamora ed, 2016; Dean, Villadsen, and Mitchell 2016). This has been highlighted already (Farrell et al, 2016) as being part of the paradoxical nature of Free Schools, the notion that central government funding can appear to lead towards autonomy for schools although the reality is that they often experience increased monitoring as to what they do and why. In fact Mark (County Town) in his dual role as both HoPE and Assistant Head did state that, 'there seems to be a lot more about what you must do as opposed to what you might want to do.' Foucault's notion that freedom is a resource for state rule is pertinent here (Barry, Osborne, and Rose eds, 1996). The suggestion that liberty merely provides governments with an opportunity to rule perhaps supports the aforementioned paradox that Free Schools find themselves in.

Gillies (2013) suggests that governmentality can also help explain how educational leaders rationalise and then internalise policy, which Foucault sees as one of the effects of neoliberal discourse (Zamora ed, 2016). Part of this whole process could lead to ethical considerations whereby leaders face a dilemma between what they would like to do and be as opposed to what someone else tells them to be (Williams 2017). It is this relationship with the self then, a

central tenet within Foucault's concept of ethics, which will help us to understand HoPE behaviours within this context.

## **Findings.**

### ***Governmentality and the Self.***

#### *Normalisation ('playing the game').*

Once terminology with examples had been explained (interestingly understood and recognised more eagerly by experienced HoPE), all of the respondents agreed that they use the language of performativity in both the written and spoken word. When asked why this might be the case it would appear that reasons for doing so are a factor of age, status and experience.

..... it's just standards, it's professionalism ... (Katrina, Greenvale)

..... yeh, I think you're pushed to use certain language ... (Lisa, Cast Town)

The two youngest HoPE in this study then, saw such 'professional' language as part of their role although Lisa was able to suggest that she felt 'pushed' to do so. The more experienced teachers were more analytical in their approach and were quite happy to agree with the notion that they were 'playing the game' by using performative language to gain recognition for departmental achievements and in the pursuit of bidding for resources.

I think experience allows you to play the game ... you have to play the game, otherwise all you're doing is simply putting a barrier up to those to whom you are accountable and to those who ultimately might be the hand that feeds you. (Martin, King's)

This is the normalising of behaviour that as Foucault would see it, leads to ‘punishment’ for those who don’t comply, in this case not being able to achieve the recognition that departments crave within a competitive environment. So, Martin along with most of the other HoPE has identified that using the correct language within the context of writing bids for extra resources or when conversing with senior leaders in performance management meetings is necessary in order to promote his department in terms of both status and provision.

Chris (Brunswick Faith), however, has a different interpretation of how to ‘play the game.’

So playing the game I don’t do that. I don’t believe that you should play the game because if you do, then that might hurt the kids. So I would play the game as far as the kids are concerned but not as far as management is concerned. (Chris, Brunswick Faith)

This is perhaps an ambiguous, slightly confused statement to interpret, almost suggesting an attitude of non-compliance with senior leaders, but which nevertheless exemplifies the moral responsibilities felt by all respondents in their quest to put pupils first. However, what has become apparent is the normalised behaviour exhibited by HoPE regarding how to get resources and recognition for their department. These are ultimately prime considerations within the establishment of a new school, which of course is very much the Free School context.

*The rationalisation of behaviour (‘the conduct of conduct’).*

Again, any recognition of how using the language of performativity had changed behaviours tended to reflect the age, status and experience of the respondents. Martin as a teacher with 28 years’ experience is particularly aware of this:



I wouldn't necessarily say that I set out to actually do it ... I'm not a business man, I'm a PE teacher ... (Martin, King's)

On reflection this is perhaps a defiant statement from Martin that after all these years his identity is primarily as a PE teacher. Martin wants to remain a PE teacher and perhaps views the use of performative language as an association with being a business man, something he doesn't want to be. Interestingly there were a couple of instances when HoPE appeared to inadvertently reveal how the language of performativity and the marketization discourse that comes with it, had become the norm. When asked about the notion of 'business language' Mark (County Town) immediately assumed that this would refer to external competition between schools to attract students rather than within schools for promoting departments. Andy (Milltown Studio Design) used the performative expression 'high quality PE' (a key phrase within New Labour School Sport policy documents) twice within a three sentence answer to a question regarding provision within his own school.

All these adaptations to the use of language are perhaps examples of how Foucault sees governmentality as the 'conduct of conduct'. Here, the performative culture propagated as part of a wider government neoliberal discourse has resulted in an assimilation of behaviours which Foucault would see is to 'structure the possible field of action of others' (in Faubion, 2002, 341). Remembering that the concept of governmentality also suggests a process that is influential at all levels in society, this use of performative language by HoPE could well filter down to other teachers within the same department.

### ***The Ethics of Leadership.***

Gillies (2013) contends that teaching is a moral activity. Teachers have a duty of care towards young people and the responsibilities that come with that are of the utmost importance invoking many contexts where important decisions have to be made regarding a person's

welfare. Leaders in particular have to be aware of not only how they understand their own behaviours but also how they might influence the actions of colleagues they have a responsibility for.

*The importance of inspections.*

The pressures created by working within a performative culture are thought to present many moral and philosophical challenges (Ball 2003). Previous research (G. Williams and D. Williams 2013) has highlighted demands placed upon HoPE regarding time management and accountability within a role that has traditionally created expectations regarding the organisation of extra-curricular sporting activities. In this study Martin (King's) uses the analogy of 'spinning too many plates' and then goes on to state that he finds it increasingly difficult to maintain existing activities within the school's PE programme, in particular an annual Ski trip which has now ended after a 20 year duration. But what are the reasons behind these pressures leading to the curtailment of enrichment activities?

Foucault refers to the need for a set of standards for the individual to be judged by as part of a self-examination; criteria for self-analysis and reflection (the 'mode of subjection'). The individual needs to know how effective they are and in the case of educational leaders, how they can positively influence other colleagues. For Martin under Free School status performance capabilities are now moving away from being judged by extra-curricular success.

.... whereas the sporting performance hitherto was more important, it's now not ... a lot of it is now far more driven by Ofsted ... we should be judged by the fact that we're getting 130 kids out on a Saturday morning ... (Martin, King's)

Martin then goes on to state how in his school Ofsted has become an arbiter of judgement with each department graded annually using inspection criteria. With a first ever Ofsted inspection imminent, time that was once used for extra-curricular activities is now being threatened by the need to attend twilight sessions led by educational consultants on how to achieve the best ratings possible. Clearly, enforced changes to Martin's work routines has led to an introspective self-regulation of behaviours. The mode of subjection, preparing for an Ofsted inspection, has resulted in the cancellation of a well-established ski trip leading to moral dilemmas regarding the curtailment of extracurricular activities, hitherto a part of this leader's philosophy and identity.

Role expectations.

Translating policy from both macro and meso levels is difficult (Perryman et al, 2017) and for HoPE, as previously mentioned, the traditional expectation of organising extra-curricular sporting activities perhaps sets Physical Education apart from other curriculum subjects. In a Free School there are also challenging pressures regarding the establishment of a new institution, resulting in a need for some teachers to either teach other subjects as well or assume other management positions (four out of the six subjects in this study have responsibilities other than being HoPE). For Martin this has led to a form of role conflict bordering upon concerns regarding identity.

When I first signed up 29 years ago I was a PE teacher, I knew what my job was.

Now I'm wearing a number of hats ... So you're keeping a lot of balls in the air at the same time. (Martin, King's).

Even some of the younger respondents were wary of how a growth in administrative tasks in their relatively short time in the post could take them away from teaching itself.

.... sometimes I worry about management taking over the love of PE and the delivery of lessons ... that's the reason why we came into teaching.... It's a tick box playing the game if you like... how much is it really benefiting the child? (Katrina, Greenvale).

Such ethical tensions perhaps illustrate how the notion of governmentality places leaders in the awkward position of having to judge themselves by their own interpretation of policy (Perryman et al, 2017). As a relatively autonomous professional, the HoPE feels compelled to make judgements regarding the self. In addition to Martin having to forgo well established extra-curricular activities, Katrina is also concerned about how administrative tasks will impact upon lesson preparation. Mark (County School) laments how senior management responsibilities result in a reduced timetable 'when I could really do with spending time with children in the classroom.' This diversity in ethical tensions reflects one of the central findings of this study, that Free Schools differ considerably in the pressures that they face and that the attitudes expressed by HoPE reflect their age, experience and status.

#### *Leadership activity.*

With the pressure of an Ofsted inspection undoubtedly a major concern for all six respondents, the procedural responses involved as part of this preparatory process were very interesting. Katrina (Greenvale) referred to 'self-evaluation forms' for her department team members and 'book scrutinies' (a far more performative descriptor for looking at children's work than a 'search' or a 'viewing'). Lisa (Cast Town) mentioned 'learning walks' as a means for all teachers to discover more about their school. By encouraging teachers to allow colleagues to enter the classroom at any time opportunities are presented for reflection and ultimately self-evaluation. Foucault's notion of self-forming activity is applicable here. HoPE

have found a set of standards, driven by Ofsted criteria (mode of subjection), which is then used by teachers to judge themselves. Ancillary self-forming activities such as the aforementioned are then part of that evaluative process.

It would be very easy to portray such responses as creating unnecessary pressure and providing a distraction from other more personally favoured ways of utilising teachers' time. However, Lisa (Cast Town) speaks very positively of her school's evaluative policies. Learning walks and an 'open door' policy (access to Senior Leadership) are seen as a strength contributing towards a context where all teachers are valued for at least one aspect of their expertise from which colleagues can learn from.

Yes, there's a strength against everybody .... we're a team, if there's one link that's loose then we all need to make that a little bit stronger. (Lisa, Cast Town).

Lisa is also very supportive of the current school development plan entitled 'Expecting Excellence Everywhere.' Such collegiality is commendable. However, Gillies (2013) does interpret Foucault's notion of self-forming activity to a more analytical level by suggesting that leaders engage in such behaviours so as '...to be seen (to themselves) to be providing leadership...' (82). Leaders often feel the need to create an impression of who and how they should be. Foucault uses the term 'ethos' to describe this manner of conduct which ultimately is a product of self-refinement and experience, almost a public manifestation of how self-forming activity has led to change. Martin's analysis of why he uses the language of performativity supports this concept.

There's always buzz words/key words that you want to get in .... gives the impression that you know what you're talking about. (Martin, King's)

It is worth discussing at this point, whether any of the aforementioned pressures and activities are really that different in a Free School. Mark (County Town), a teacher of 16 years many of which had been spent previously in a local authority setting initially stated that the pressures faced within both contexts were equitable. However, this comment was followed by recognition that monitoring visits from both the education trust that ran the school and the DfE would inevitably be followed by an Ofsted inspection. Whether ‘monitoring’ from three different agencies is more than that experienced in non-Free Schools is debateable, but Mark perhaps revealed the pressures he felt by stating; ‘you know, Free Schools have to be successful.’ Martin (King’s) was also facing new, more demanding accountability pressures although a change in status here was based on a transition from being an independent school. In this setting, the biggest change had been the need to assimilate Ofsted inspection criteria.

*‘The bigger picture.’*

In conducting research with a focus on the use of language, it soon became apparent that many of the findings perhaps reflected wider, more immediate performative pressures. The assumption made by that Mark that Free Schools have to be ‘successful’ was reiterated by Chris;

It’s all about survival. It’s all about can we keep these kids? Can we achieve? Are our results and our Ofsted reports, are they going to be good enough for us to keep going as a Free School? (Chris, Brunswick Faith)

But what are the political reasons behind these pressures? Do HoPE differ in their analysis as to why they are under such pressure? Once again, reasoning amongst respondents was also a factor of age, status and experience.

For Katrina (Greenvale) and Lisa (Cast Town) acceptance by the local community was more important than consolidating any national government policy. The former spoke of the influence of social media used by parents to make comments suggesting that as a new school they are being watched. Katrina describes her work place as a 'community driven school' (Greenvale even provide minibus transport for its pupils). For the older, more experienced HoPE analysis was based upon a recognition that national policy issues, in this case the marketisation of schools, were more of a concern. For Chris (Brunswick Faith) community has been subsumed by wider more pragmatic issues.

The local community doesn't have a school based on the local community any more, it has a school based on numbers. (Chris, Brunswick Faith)

Clearly the issue of attracting and retaining pupils is a primary concern here, as it could be for many Free Schools who have total school populations considerably less than other types of schools.

### *Acceptance; a sense of place?*

A link may also be created here between how younger HoPE feel accepted by and almost grateful for the opportunities that a Free School has given them, despite the performative pressures that they encounter.

You get more experience, more strings to your bow ... it's that family oriented feel for the place. (Andy, Milltown Studio Design).

Whatever we like to do ... we can. Because you're not a robot here. (Lisa, Cast Town)

We are improving all the time ... I think you'd get full support ....[in relation to failing to achieve performance targets]. (Katrina, Greenvale)

This sense of place and wellbeing was often attributed to the policies and support received from school senior leadership teams.

Sometimes I think it's the leadership team make the school ... she has helped to create this lovely environment to work in ... I feel that you are really looked after and cared for ... (Katrina, Greenvale)

Katrina also mentioned how she receives help from the school's Business Manager regarding the writing of bids for extra resources both internally and externally. In addition, she is full of praise for the principal who in the past has stepped in to take a practice or team for an extracurricular sporting activity. Lisa too is happy with her school's senior leadership team; she states that extra resources are shared equally between departments. Collectively these positive statements from younger HoPE point to a compliance with Free School discourses regarding opportunity and autonomy.

## **Conclusions**

*'Teachers repositioned and governed by dominant political rationalities ...'*

The selection of a qualitative, constructionist research design investigating performative pressures faced by HoPE necessitated a theoretical analysis of why this has happened and what could be the implications for the future. The above phrase used by Savage (In Gillies 2013, 88) is pertinent here in providing understanding and meaning.

The 'dominant political rationality' as to how HoPE have found themselves in the Free School setting varies according to the individual and the context. For the younger respondents it has been a means of achieving promotion, a chance to develop their careers (Katrina had mentioned that her first six years in teaching merely involved moving from one maternity cover post to another). For Andy (Milltown Studio Design) to become an Assistant Head at



the age of 29 is quite an achievement. Although respondents didn't really state as such the Free School context in being a brand new school must have been instrumental in providing these opportunities. Martin's situation at King's is different, once again illustrating how the nature and context of Free Schools can vary so much. His 'dominant political rationality' was that due to falling rolls unless the school applied for Free School status then a centuries old former independent school would cease to exist.

However, a change in school status, as suggested in the findings, hasn't really resulted in escaping the 'dominant political rationality' of inspections and the need to be effective. The fact that more experienced HoPE such as Mark, Chris and Martin have been able to identify that pressures are perhaps even greater within a Free School would suggest that teachers have been merely 'repositioned' within this performative discourse. To further understand what is happening here, particularly in terms of the self, it is necessary to analyse Foucault's understanding of the term 'rationality.'

*The notion of rationality within the Free School context.*

The marketization principles which underpin neoliberalism, and in the context of education the application of private sector practices to a public service, are viewed by Foucault as a 'rationality' (Zamora ed, 2016; Dean, Villadsen, and Mitchell 2016). State governments have allowed these practices to happen not for philosophical or ideological reasons but because they appear to be a logical enactment for the art of governance at that particular time (Dean, Villadsen, and Mitchell 2016). Target setting, league tables and all round competition within and between schools has become the norm to the extent that alternatives are perhaps unheard of. For the younger HoPE within this study this is very much the case. Therefore, the idea of empowering communities to create Free Schools to provide for an expanding population is seen as logical and appropriate, a product of rational thinking. The discourses created are a

product of a 'political rationality' which has become normalised, especially for younger HoPE who have not experienced the autonomy afforded to teachers before the marketization of schools began in earnest some 25 years ago.

As a result, performative pressures have created dilemmas for HoPE who would perhaps rather spend time away from tasks such as analysing pupil performance data and writing action plans. Traditionally, PE teachers have devoted time towards non-contractual obligations such as extra-curricular activities (G. Williams and D. Williams 2013) and this could be one area which has had to suffer as a consequence. Having identified that HoPE in Free Schools have been repositioned within a performative discourse what exactly are the moral issues that come with this?

#### *Morality and educational reform.*

Foucault uses history to confirm a belief that the rationalised practices of government are used to shape individual conduct. Self-regulation which often starts at a state level can then become the norm for the individual who in having to become accountable for his or her own actions, turns government into a moral activity whereby a set of standards is decided by someone to be the correct way of doing things (Dean 1999). For HoPE in this study the external pressures created by Ofsted become internalised into such self-forming activities as using a SEF (self-evaluation form) creating some of the aforementioned ethical dilemmas regarding the use of time and resources.

However, there is still some scope for individual liberty and opportunity. Dean (1999) expands upon the notion of self-regulation (self-government) to discuss further ethical implications regarding the question of freedom. Although, the initial reaction here might be to think of restrictive, repressive implications there is recognition of how the individual can

provide some resistance to government. This was evident at times in some of Chris's responses.

No, I'm a rebel and I believe in saying how it is ... so I didn't write a review for PE.

(Chris, County)

In addition, discourses regarding choice and liberty are applicable to the Free School context where the much vaunted concept of autonomy for the policy actors involved is perhaps questionable ('there seems to be a lot more about what you must do as opposed to what you might want to do' (Mark, County Town)).

Farrell et al.'s findings (2016) regarding the moral acceptance of educational reform by policy actors within a Free School case study have some relevance here. The younger, less experienced HoPE in our research appear as more complicit towards a Free School discourse than their more senior counterparts. For the latter combined notions of rationality and freedom can still be used, however, to benefit the self. This is exemplified by Martin (King's) who has been able to negotiate with Senior Leadership his own criteria for performance management, in this case targets based upon pupil physical performance outcomes in addition to examination scores. To achieve such an unusual, and possibly unlikely, set of criteria is perhaps a product of skilful negotiating by an experienced policy actor. In this instance the Free School context can offer opportunities for positive self-regulation.

***Concluding thoughts***.....Although the relatively small number of participants in this study is illustrative of Free Schools at best, there are a number of findings which are useful for both practitioner and theorist. The attitudes towards performative pressures by HoPE in Free Schools vary according to age, experience and status of the respondents. For the younger teachers there is an acceptance of context as a means of developing their career; the

behaviours that come with it ('conduct of conduct') are justified as part of professional expectations. In contrast the more experienced HoPE, who often assume other more senior roles, are able to understand and even use the context of the Free School setting to their own advantage by 'playing the game' to negotiate resources and achieve performance recognition.

Each one of the six Free Schools contain policy actors who are undoubtedly 'repositioned and governed by dominant political rationalities' (Savage In Gillies 2013, 88). However, it is the more experienced HoPE who are able to interpret the 'rationality' of government education reform for their own self-regulation and ultimately for their own advantage. So, the self-regulation encouraged within a neoliberal discourse can alter relationships with government at any level and indeed relationships with the self (Burchell In Barry, Osborne, and Rose eds, 1996). Within this study, the more experienced HoPE have been able to use their freedom, as a factor of experience, to negotiate outcomes that suit themselves. As Burchell (In Barry, Osborne, and Rose eds, 1996) would suggest they have accepted the rationality of Free School ideology as a 'condition of their active freedom' (30).

Although Free Schools undoubtedly offer early career opportunities in leadership for younger teachers (School Workforce Survey 2017) we would concur with Farrell et al's (2016) finding that these settings merely offer 'new policy solutions to old problems' (15).

Performative pressures stemming from both regular inspections and dual role expectations, possibly leads to greater moral introspection and self-regulating behaviours for middle managers than in other types of schools. Perhaps issues such as these are more to do with merely starting up a new school rather than the type and for this purpose, we call for further research on the more well-established Free Schools.

The theoretical basis that underpinned this research utilised Ball's (2003) interpretation of performativity intertwined with Foucault's concept of governmentality, used because the

latter recognises both the role of the state and the process of self-regulation that policies can create. The performative pressures identified by the HoPE within this study, as exemplified by a conflict of integrity, are perhaps a good example of how the Free School ideology promoted vigorously by the state has led to a process of self-regulation amongst the policy actors within it. The six participants within this study and the schools that they represented were very different. Confidence in terms of resources (facilities and pupil numbers) were key considerations. Foucault's view that neoliberalism is a contested, conflicting combination of limited freedom and government intervention might suggest an uncertain future for Free Schools. Based on the remarkable differences between the six institutions studied here and the data generated therein, only time will tell.

### **Disclosure statement**

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