

Surveillance Schooling: Euphemistic ‘book Looks’ and the Proliferation of Permanent Incompetence

Tyrone Ruth

MBZUAI, the United Arab Emirates

Abstract

This paper proposes the urgent need for further research into the influence of surveillance practices across the breadth of school life and educational systems, with particular attention to informal and pervasive forms of observation. In particular, the distinctly under-researched instance of surveillance apparent in contemporary education through the pervasive policy and practice of ‘Book Looks’. After framing the historical policy context in the UK and its permutations globally, analysis will move to expose the ‘Book Look’ as a euphemism for intensified surveillance under the guise of ‘best practice’. Amidst the widespread marketization of education under a neoliberal agenda, the book itself has become an important artefact, a touchpoint for contemporary consumers of the school experience. It can be argued that as students’ workbooks continue to make their way into the hands of fee-paying customers, they require constant control and quality assurance, as they perpetuate a faux-personalised relationship between business and consumer. It is therefore the responsibility of school systems and leaders, especially prevalent in organizations whose *raison d’être* is profit and measurability, to create a mode of surveillance on teachers’ work in student notebooks which reduce potential risks to their commodity. Consequentially, it is teachers who become recipients of persistent, organised and invasive surveillance, contributing to the creation of a ‘permanent incompetence’.

Keywords: Education, Surveillance, Teaching, Wellbeing, Managerialism, Marketization