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# REFLECTION ON SCHOOL INSPECTION

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ABSTRACT
The author was employed as an inspector of education in Nigeria from 1973 to 1978, in what was a completely new system of national inspection. His experience as an inspector has given him a long term interest in educational administration, particularly in relation to the types of school inspection that different countries have in relation to their overall educational system. This paper consists of some reflections on the different functions of school inspectors in different educational systems, with particular emphasis on the evolution of the National Inspectorates of Education in the United Kingdom and in Nigeria, and with the possibility of a National Inspectorate of Education in Australia being discussed.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to talk to an Australian audience about school inspection or school inspectors, as inspectors here are certainly an "endangered species" if not already extinct. In other words educational administrators in Australia do not really believe that inspection is a relevant concept any more. They may be right for Australia, but one theme of this paper is the relevance of inspection elsewhere in the world.

When the general functions of inspectors have been defined the second major theme is to review the inspectorates in a number of different countries to see which functions (roles) were/ are important. In Australia the roles of former inspectorates might be examined so as to point out that at least some of the functions of inspectors will now be carried out by people with other titles. That is, inspectors may be virtually extinct in Australia but some of the functions they used to have, are performed by other professionals and some of the tasks that they used to have are now not being carried out at all, which may be to the detriment of the education system as a whole.

The last theme is that of change. In a rapidly changing world, the functions of inspectors, where the inspectorates of education are still strong, must change or the systems will become fossilised and the inspectorates will disappear. A number of examples will be chose to illustrate each of the major themes stated above, and these are taken largely from countries where the author has worked, so the paper contains a considerable element of personal reflection. The themes are relevance, function and change, whilst the countries being used as exemplars are the component parts of the United Kingdom, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Australia and Western Samoa. Table 1 summarises the comments about the themes and the countries.

**INSPECTION WORLDWIDE IS ALIVE AND WELL?**

It is probably not possible to produce enough evidence to confirm or refute the rhetorical question above in a short paper. In some countries inspectorates are very influential, whilst in others they are not. Some educational systems remain prone to accepting authoritarian structures, whilst others do not. The author's view is that inspection does not have to be linked to an authoritarian power structure, but can simply be seen as one of many forms of accountability, that can be organised in a variety of ways. Also inspectorates should not be seen as only applying to education as Rhodes (1981), for example, describes inspectorates in a variety of fields.

In England and Wales, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs), whose inception dates from 1840, fitted in very nicely to a Victorian class structure. Historically HMIs inspected only in the primary schools (Ball, 1963), and the methods of inspection changed over time (Dunford, 1980). These have had important educational consequences for the relationships between teachers and inspectors. Inspectors were generally recruited from a level of society above that from which teachers were recruited, for example H.S. Tremenheere (Edmonds, 1965). Many inspectors were ordained clergy. The chances of conflict between the inspectors and the inspected was thus reduced by the width of the social gap. This was important because with "the payment by results" system, the level of the pupils' knowledge, as measured by the inspector, determined the teacher's salary. In those times the inspector's work was certainly considered relevant and important and it has remained so as the HMIs have been very flexible, changing their role with time as will be seen in a later section. Information about the HMI is easily available as their place in the educational system has been reassessed many times.

The local education authority inspector / adviser also has a lengthy history with the first appointment being by the London School Board in March 1872 (Spalding, 1900). The number of lea advisers/inspectors has varied widely over time (2736 in 1967, & probably a lot less now). Schools in the UK have been devolved for a long time, though currently this process is going much further, with some state schools becoming independent. With the power of the leas being steadily eroded the lea inspectors are perhaps in the process of becoming redundant. Bolam, Smith and Canter (1980) give a background to the work of the local education authority adviser.

In Western Samoa it would seem that the school inspection system is very much interlinked with the social system of chieftaincy (the *Matai* system) with inspectors very much supporting the Samoan way (*fa'a Samoa*) and ensuring that teachers teach the children traditional values. It should be added, in fairness, that most other imported power systems are now similarly interwoven into the fabric of Samoan Society. Whilst social stresses are not too great, the form of inspectorate that has developed appears to be in keeping with and relevant to the type of education that society supports at the moment. This is especially the case as inspectors mainly look after administrative tasks at primary schools. Highly ambitious well qualified teachers tend to seek work overseas. There is thus little likelihood of major conflict between inspectors and teachers as the inspectors have a high status and few teachers are likely to be much more academically qualified than the inspectors.

In earlier papers about Nigeria (Palmer, 1983) it has been argued that there was, up to self -government, a colonial system of school inspection similar to the English/Welsh model which was imposed by the colonial power. At or just prior to independence each of the three Regional governments attempted a major reform of its system of school inspection. For a variety of reasons each of these efforts at reform eventually lost momentum and these inspectorates reverted to bureaucratic practices similar to those of the colonial era. Taiwo (1980) provides a good general background to the Nigerian educational system and a more detailed comparison of the Nigerian and British inspectorial systems is made by Palmer (1985). In the political arena, there were a series of coups and a civil war after which there was a new attempt to reform the system of school inspection as a new Federal government set up a series of inspectorates covering all the social services, as a means of showing its own dominance over the twelve newly created states.

The Federal Inspectorate of Education was just one of these new inspectorates and its inception is fully described in a recent paper (Palmer, 1990). When founded, the Federal Inspectorate of Education was certainly relevant to the needs of the country as the federal government was already putting large sums of money into education and was indeed just about to increase them considerably. Not unnaturally, the Federal government wished to see that the money it was investing in education was really being spent on education and was not being diverted for other purposes. Inspector's reports do not give precise details of major projects, but give general information about the overall effectiveness of such projects.

In Papua New Guinea (PNG) the local inspectors were employed by the Provincial Administrations and visited primary schools and were largely involved in day to day management tasks. A history of the early development of the inspectorate in PNG has been written by Palmer (1986). The primary schools and the primary school inspectors were Papua New Guinean nationals with inspectors being drawn from the ranks of successful primary school head teachers. The National Inspectorate were largely expatriate as were about one quarter of the secondary school teachers. These inspectors had day to day management tasks and visited secondary schools in their areas to observe both teaching and administration. Many of these inspectors did excellent work, but overall the National Inspectorate had a name for pettiness and cliquishness. They also inspected the higher level of secondary schools (National High Schools) and it was during the inspection of one of these schools that the most appalling scandal broke that after various cover-ups led to the dismissal of a number of these inspectors. The detail may be best forgotten, but the point to note is that as the teachers become better qualified, more knowledgeable and more aware of their rights, so inspectors have to be much better qualified too.

## THE FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL INSPECTORS

School inspectors can perform a variety of different functions, dependent on the organisation of the educational system. The following are the most common functions (Palmer, 1979):

1. Fact finding often referred to as "eyes and ears"
2. Assessment of teachers, including the idea of 'payment by results'
3. The advisory role or the 'dispersal of sound practice'
4. The regulative/administrative role, sometimes called 'the watch-dog role'
5. The energising role or the role of the 'educational missionary'.

Function 1 (fact finding for government) is a most important role in larger countries, particularly those with a loose federal structure. It includes passing on information to central government with appropriate recommendations and also passing information from central to local government. Much of this information may be in particular reports about individual schools, but the most important feature is the possibility of generalising from this data about trends, for example, in a subject specialism or about the teaching of disadvantaged groups.

Function 2 (the assessment of teachers) was considered the *"raison-d'etre'* for inspectors, though the author would not consider it a major role for a modern inspectorate. It may however be necessary to collect individual data in order to be able to generalise about quality across a system.

Function 3 (the advisory role) is what all inspectorates (local and national) should see as their major task. This is the way in which the quality of instruction in schools can best be improved.

Function 4 (administrative) is what tends to differentiate local and national inspectorates. Local inspectorates will be heavily involved with administration, whereas national inspectorates will be less involved with administrative detail.

Function 5 (energising) is important and the perceived dedication of inspectors by teachers will help to improve the morale of the teaching service. This will involve the inspectors being involved in a wide variety of professional activities and being enthusiastic about their duties.

As an example, the way in which an inspectorate actually functions in carrying out a major part of its work, the Federal Inspectorate in Nigeria has been chosen. The Federal Inspectorate spent a great deal of time and energy formally inspecting schools and the sequence is now described. The basic mode of operation was that Full Inspections were organised centrally in advance, inspecting one institution each week from a list of institutions put forward by State Ministries of Education. Inspectors not involved in full inspection could continue routine advisory visits to schools on a schedule prepared locally to avoid clashes with national commitments. Findings and recommendations from these advisory visits would be discussed with the Chief Inspector of the State and his officials.

Full inspections of a school almost invariably started on a Sunday evening with a meeting of all inspectors. Inspectors then attended assembly on Monday morning and were introduced to staff. On Monday afternoon there was a brief discussion to see if there were any special problems. By Wednesday recommendations were prepared and discussed and agreed at a meeting of all inspectors under the chairmanship of the team leader. The whole team met with the Principal of the school on Thursday morning and presented him orally with a summary of the main recommendations. The team would return to their states whilst the Team Leader and Reporting Inspector would visit the State Chief Inspector of Schools or the Federal Director of Schools, if the visit had involved a federal institution, to brief him of the results of the visit. All inspectors would send in their reports on academic and pastoral matters to the Reporting Inspector who would edit the final report. For the first six months, the Chief Federal Inspector personally led all the formal inspections, gradually allowing other inspectors to lead teams after that.

The summary chart (Appendix1) lists the functions of the local and national inspectorates from the various countries being considered which are the United Kingdom (England and Wales), Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Australia and Western Samoa.

**CHANGE IN THE SCHOOL INSPECTORS' ROLE**

In this section a differentiation will be made between developing and developed countries. Beeby (1966, p.72) divides primary school teachers (a similar schema could presumably apply to secondary schools) into the following four categories dependant on the education and training that these teachers have received. He also describes in some detail the teaching methods (characteristics) associated with each type of teacher.

Stage I Dame School Ill educated, Untrained

Stage II Formalism Ill educated, Trained

Stage III Transition Better educated, Trained

Stage IV Modern Well educated, Well-trained

It is the author's observation that for inspectorial system to work effectively the inspector needs to be at some more advanced stage than the teacher in respect of the stages above, in social position, in age or in academic knowledge and preferably in all the above, though the inspector should not be culturally or academically too distant from the teacher or advice will simply be adjudged as impracticable by the teacher.

The paper will assume that the Beeby theory of stages is appropriate for both primary

and secondary schools and for both developed and developing countries, though it might need some new, as yet undefined stages. eg stages V and VI for developed countries! Given this as a working hypothesis each of the countries will be considered again to see the results of change on the inspectorial system. In Samoa the system's secondary teachers would be assisted in methodology and knowledge by continual long term inservicing in their subject areas which could be provided by specialist advisers/inspectors; it could not be carried by the current primary inspectorate, many of whom would lack the knowledge for the task. This work is currently being carried out by officers of the Curriculum Unit of the Ministry of Education, and with encouragement and increased resources they could effectively improve the knowledge base of the secondary teachers.

In Nigeria, the fire and idealism present in the Federal Inspectorate of Education at its inception, is evidently now missing. There are a number of reasons for this, but one would be the loss of dedicated inspectors, transferred to other areas who have been replaced by less dedicated people. Another is the lack of imagination and innovation in using the talents of the experienced inspectors. The Federal Inspectorate of Education should have used the full and thorough reports that it built up from its visits to a variety of schools around the country to address specific issues such as the quality of science instruction or the reasons for underachievement of pupils in schools. A huge amount of expertise of the many educational problems was built up, but not utilised. The Federal Inspectorate of Education has had a fair measure of success but has not achieved its potential.

The National Inspectorate in Papua New Guinea was expatriate dominated and had great difficulties in dealing with younger expatriate teachers, who were knowledgeable in their fields with first and sometimes higher degrees, whereas the inspectors often had few formal qualifications, but a good knowledge of PNG, based on very many years of experience. These are ideal grounds for conflict which certainly occurred, caused largely by the cliquishness and inflexibility of the inspectors. What was known as the 'Kerevat affair' certainly caused considerable damage to the cause of education, generally, in PNG and was eventually the subject of a report, critical of the educational hierarchy, by the 'Ombudsman'. More careful recruitment and greater involvement by PNG Nationals should have prevented these problems.

In the United Kingdom, Her Majesty's Inspectors have certainly moved with the times very skilfully. One of their strengths is certainly the openness of reports (both PNG & Nigeria were obsessively secret, often for no good reason). Each school that the HMIs inspect receives a report which is available from their central office on request and this gives the whole education system a high degree of accountability. They also publish an account of the UK system as they see it relating to Curriculum Matters Series (eg. Her Majesty's Inspectors [HMI], 1985), or on a topic basis, the Education Observed Series (eg HMI, 1984 and HMI, 1987) and in comparison with selected countries (eg. HMI, 1986). The HMI, in part or perhaps totally, are in the process of being privatised, where the inspections of schools will be carried out by inspectors acting as consultants (the

author does not have detailed information about this currently). The HMI remain a source of general and academic interest, so that books ( Lawton & Gordon, 1987) are still published with the HMI as a focus. In the UK, the HMI are not the only means of achieving this push to accountability. There are the local inspectorates, some of whom have emulated the HMI, some have who have chosen a largely advisory function and some who have stayed mainly bureaucratic. There is the Assessment of Performance Unit that makes surveys of achievement for all children in the UK at definite ages, the results of which are published on an overall and an area basis. There is a national curriculum that ensures that all children have the opportunity to study the same core of carefully defined educational curriculum materials. There are the traditional GCSE and A level examinations for students at about the ages of 16 and 18 years old respectively. There is also freedom of choice for students for schools in a given lea area and a newly introduced policy on the local management of schools. The UK has certainly moved a long way towards an idealised accountability system based on a politically right wing view point. In many ways it is entirely rational (until one looks at the 'warts' underneath), but in spite of this, teachers known to the author are deeply unhappy about the system. It does however remain a model that administrators should consider and if they do not like the system they should have reasoned arguments as to why they oppose such a system. At this seminar Payne (1992) in the introductory address quoted a UK Minister giving comparative statistics about the performance of a particular local education authority in the UK with the implication that this was a curious thing to do, but in Australia very little appears to be known publicly about how schools or state education systems compare with each other. Is the lack of comparative performance indicators in Australia really humorous? Or is it considered such dangerous knowledge that its collection should not be attempted?

**DISCUSSION ON SCHOOL INSPECTION IN AUSTRALIA**

School inspection in Australia to the best of the author's knowledge, is very much as though it has never been. Ball, Cunningham and Radford (1961) wrote a substantial monograph about a survey that they carried out in the late fifties. Also there are a myriad of academic papers and articles about school inspection in the states during the sixties and early seventies. The following are some examples - Turney (1970), Maclaine (1973) and Pollock (1979) - and these are perhaps illustrative of the genre. The author has a collection of over fifty articles from this earlier period, but has found nothing on current practice in Australian school inspection since 1980, though it may be that he has not looked hard enough. The inspector in Australia is thus presumed 'extinct'. What is the cause of this extinction? Is it a good thing? Certainly Holbrook (1973), when visiting Australia from England thought that the state inspectorates ought to be abolished, as the inspectors that he met appeared to be bureaucratic tyrants, so perhaps the state inspectorates were largely responsible for their own downfall! Are there roles in education in each state that State inspectors used to play that are now not being undertaken by anyone. If so, does this matter? The author would like to see more advisory work being carried out in the states, but does not see the necessity to resurrect state inspectorates. On the other hand, the Federal! Commonwealth Government does need to be properly informed about what is happening in each of the states in education. Education is a state responsibility, so it could be argued that central government has no

need or right to know about the condition of education in the states. However, education is the cornerstone of the "clever country rhetoric", which is said to be the basis of the future industrial success of Australia as a whole. Can education continue to be just a State matter? Or if it remains so, doesn't the Commonwealth Government need to know what is happening? Such data could be supplied by a full time professional inspectorate, one of whose functions would be to collect, collate and analyse such information.

This issue would appear very cogent, in view of the current work on a National Curriculum. Those working on the National Curriculum will be employees of particular states, often with experience only of that state. It is extremely difficult for any of these people to have Australia-wide vision in their subject area. For this, experience with a national inspectorate of education, that visited schools throughout Australia would be useful. Apart from this specific current need a good Federal Australian Inspectorate would disperse sound teaching methods and inform teachers of the latest developments in their respective fields, but more than that they would bring an idealism to their work that can help keep teachers enthusiastic.

However, whatever the theoretical advantages of creating a Federal Australian Inspectorate of Education may be (and the author believes these to be considerable) it is unlikely that any such group will be formed as there would be unlikely to be any political support for the idea as it would offend the politically conservative by appearing to reduce the powers of the states and would offend the unions on the other side of politics, as school inspectors have always been an anathema to unionists.

The possibility of recreating state inspectors is perhaps slightly more likely, though they would have a title such as adviser, advisory teacher or teacher organiser for specific subject areas, but considering the cuts being made to existing educational support positions generally, perhaps even this scenario is unlikely.

**CONCLUSION**

During the course of the conference it became apparent that being provocative and controversial was a desirable attribute. This paper has drawn to the reader's attention some matters that it is important to consider, that may be considered controversial. When considering the possibility of a Federal Australian Inspectorate of Education, it is probably appropriate to consider warnings of Caldwell (1992) expressed at this conference about the importance of a set of cultural and historically based views that effect and may even dictate policy.

Nonetheless it is the author's view that there are a lack of accountability mechanisms in Australia of which inspection (national or local) is an option. This possibility should be given further consideration.

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**APPENDIX 1**

SUMMARY TABLE

Effectively the table indicates the main points of this paper and may thus be used as a summary and focus for discussion.

Table 1 Table indicating the types of inspectorates and their functions in different countries

| Country | Systems | Relevance | Functions 1-5 | Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| UK/Eng/ Wales | National | HMIs have firm base since 1840 | Originally Prima - ry orientation: now to tertiary Functions 1,3,5 | Rapid change |
| UK/Eng/ Wales | Local | Well established | Functions 2,3,4 | l.e.a.s losing power to Nat Government |
| Western Samoa | National | Traditional | Primary orientat - ion. Function 2,4 | Seems unchang- ing. |
| Nigeria | Federal/ National | Created as a unify -ing agent. | Secondary orientation Functions 1,3,5 | Reverting to bureaucratic institution |
| Nigeria | State | Basically the inheritors of the old regional inspectorates | Primary & Secondary orientation Functions 2,3,4 | Rigid & bureaucratic |
| Papua New Guinea | Provinci -al | Well established completely localised | Primary orientat - ion. Function 2,4 | Bureaucratic |
| Papua New Guinea | National | More recent, and small: still largely expatriate inspectors | Secondary orientation bureaucratic Functions 1,2,3,4 | Somewhat fossilised. Very liable to cliques. |
| Australia | State | Almost extinct | Primary & Secondary orientation Functions 2,3,4 | Inspectorial duties carried out by other professionals or omitted |
| Australia | Federal/ National | Never existed, except for inspectors in old Common wealth Service responsible for Territories. | N/A | N/A |