Performativity, guilty knowledge, and ethnographic intervention

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This paper applies Dennis' (2009) modes of ethnographic intervention to a fieldwork experience of an observed secondary school lesson in England. Ethnographic research raises numerous ethical dilemmas, in the face of which 'intervention' is unavoidable. The observed lesson – in which a teacher was judged as 'Requiring Improvement' – left me with 'guilty knowledge'. The performative nature of observed lessons constructs highly charged events. Drawing particular attention to the power imbalances between observer and observed, ethical deliberation about the event is considered, and subsequent 'interpersonal' and 'administrative' intervention is presented. As ethnographers, it is impossible to avoid intervening in some sense. I conclude that performativity raises ethical issues which may demand particular responses from ethnographic researchers, whose empathetic intention places them well to explore – and critically engage with – the workings and effects of performativity.

Keywords: ethnographic intervention; research ethics; performativity; guilty knowledge; lesson observation

'Where's Tim? Is he alright? I half expected to see him hanging from the light when I came back'. George, a trainee teacher said while pulling up his own tie above his head to illustrate someone hanging themselves (Beach Academy, visit two, fieldnotes 19/06/13).

Tim was a newly qualified teacher (NQT) in Beach Academy's geography department, one of three schools (Town Comprehensive, Beach Academy, and City Academy) in an ethnographic study of geography teachers. This paper analyses ethical issues raised by one of Tim's observed lessons, framed through an understanding of guilty knowledge, and an argument that enacting some kind of intervention is inescapable for ethnographers. Following descriptions of the department and teacher, the ways in which I sought to act are described through Dennis' (2009) typology of modes of ethnographic intervention.

The doctoral research from which this paper draws is primarily concerned with questions about teachers' subject knowledge. My interest in this area began during my time as a geography teacher and Head of Department in a comprehensive secondary school in Oxfordshire; making, multiple times every day, decisions about what to teach to these students, in this school, at this time. During the doctoral research I spent one academic year on fieldwork, spread across the three departments; what Jeffrey and Troman (2004) refer to as 'recurrent time mode ethnography' (p.542). I offered my time to the departments, who used me to assist as a Teaching Assistant, cover teacher and administrative assistant. My experience as a qualified geography teacher and former head of department positioned me within the departments in particular ways. The extended time I spent in departments, and my sharing in tasks carried out by the teachers enabled me to listen to them – and so to 'hear' them (Forsey, 2010) – in ways which may not otherwise have been possible for a study that may have looked superficially similar (such as an observation and interview methodology).

It seems reasonable to assume the teachers would say different things to someone not sharing, as a qualified geography teacher, in their practice.

Performativity

The term performativity has been employed for different purposes and at various scales. For example, Butler (1990, 1993, 1997) has developed a notion of performativity in her arguments about the construction and performance of gender: performativity as embodied, linguistic acts performed repetitively as ritual with normalizing effects. She often uses the term in an individual sense, highly situated in her discussions about gender. In contrast, Lyotard (1984) employs performativity in his analysis of whole post-modern systems in which 'the true goal of the system, the reason it programs itself like a computer, is the optimization of the global relationship between input and output – in other words, performativity' (p.11). He describes this version of society as '"hard" and technocratic' (p.12), and characterises it by a collapsing of 'traditional' categories such as right and wrong, or truth and error into exchange-values: 'knowledge ceases to be an end in itself [because of a] mercantilization of knowledge' (p.5). His conception of performativity, with its associated vocabulary (for example; managerialism, efficiency, technologies, measurement, governance) has been taken on by educational researchers and used to frame strongly worded critiques of educational systems and the broader societies in which they are set, serve, and reproduce. The notion of performativity used in educational research has also drawn on a sense of individual performance following Butler. For example, Ball (2013) shifts scales, moving between systems, and single inspected lessons of individual teachers:

> Performativity is a culture or a system of 'terror'. It is a regime of
> accountability that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of

control, attrition and change. The performances of individual subjects or organisations serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. These performances stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement. (p.57)

Claims about the 'whole system' made by Lyotard, Ball, and others (Cf. Jeffrey & Troman, 2012) are ambitious, and may too readily dismiss Lyotard's (1984, p.4) own qualification that it 'is not as simple as I have made it appear': a degree of incredulity toward these meta-narratives seems appropriate. Nevertheless, Ball's description of performativity as a moment of inspection that represents the worth, quality or value of an individual is a powerful way in which to understand Tim's lesson observation, which makes some sense of the importance attributed to it.

Beach Academy's geography department

Beach Academy is a mixed, comprehensive 'all through' 5-19 school in the South of England. The school was undergoing major changes –physical, organisational, and curricular - during the fieldwork. The geography department is organisationally impacted (Busher & Harris, 1999); Hugh is the only full time geography teacher, and the other geography teacher (Tim) teaches 50% geography and 50% history. The formal staffing structure of the school is undergoing significant changes, moving from a hierarchy based around subjects with Subject Leaders to a structure involving two main areas; 'Communications and Language,' and 'STEAM' (Science, Technology, English, and Maths). Teachers described the restructuring of staffing as an attempt to integrate the whole school (from 5 year olds to 19 year olds) in a more *joined-up* way. The titles given to the new groupings of subjects were taken from the International Middle Years Curriculum. Produced by a private company, this curriculum is being used by the school at the 'Gateway phase' (years five to eight). This curriculum, and the teachers

views of it are discussed below, after a description of the geography department's spaces and technologies.

Geography office, classroom, and technology

Beach Academy's geography department have an office, and one dedicated classroom. The office has four desks; one for Hugh, one for Tim, one for the Head of History, and one with a computer that trainee students (and I) used. Tim regularly worked at his desk, while Hugh never worked at his, preferring to use his laptop in the classroom. Hugh's desk was used for storing resources, paperwork, and his bike (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Beach Academy's geography office

Cycling carried cultural capital in Beach Academy, and was portrayed as being *like the new golf*. Many of the senior teachers raced at weekends. Hugh was particularly good, and used this capital to protect Tim: 'I'm a man, and I cycle: my face fits…That's one of the reasons I'm going to make sure they don't shaft him' (fieldnotes, 20/6/13). These comments came after the lesson observation discussed below. Desks around the edge of the geography classroom were used to store textbooks and resources (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Geography classroom storage

Hugh photocopied pages from sample copies of textbooks, stacks of which were also stored around the room (Figure 3). Storing in the open meant that most of the department's paper based resources were visible to the teacher. Surveying the room, teachers would walk to an area and look through materials until they found what they were looking for. Taking these papers back to the computer, a lesson would then be planned on the laptop. Tim seemed to be gaining familiarity with the room, and Hugh had a well-developed mental map of the area.

The geography classroom had a laptop on the front desk. It was connected to speakers and a projector, although both the speakers and the projector often suffered from technical problems. Geography was occasionally taught in two other rooms; the barn, and a computer room. The barn is an open-plan area used for teaching, and testing out new furniture and technology for the new buildings. Hugh had responsibility for trialling new technologies, and on the first day I arrived in the school he was presented with a big touch-screen television to use.

Figure 4. Windows update

There was considerable interest in new technology in the school: class sets of iPads were readily available; teachers were given iPads; and the latest gadgets frequently appeared at Hugh's door. Hugh described a tension between Beach Academy's embrace of new technology, and a struggle to ensure 'the basics' (among which he included projectors) were functioning properly. When I arrived for the second visit the computer in the geography office was not working. It had stopped shortly after visit one, and nothing was going to be repaired until the new build was completed. During one course work lesson I noticed that all the students' monitors displayed a pulsating windows update icon (Figure 4) in the tool bar; symbolic of technology as the beating heart of the school that demands attention and craves constant updates.

The new curriculum was also associated with a range of promises and uncertainties, and featured heavily in teachers' descriptions of their work in the school: adopting this curriculum was a source of pride and concern. The school hosted a conference, attended by adopters of the programme from across the world. Few schools currently work with this curriculum, and teachers described the school's adoption in ground-breaking terms, seeing themselves as pioneering early-adopters. Impetus for

changing the curriculum was provided in part by assumptions about the existing

National Curriculum as broken and in need of replacement, a critique articulated by

contrasting knowledge against skills: 'the knowledge-drive in the current curriculum

often fails to address and develop the significant levels of skills needed for our students

to thrive in their adult lives' (IMYC, 2012). Adoption was also described in terms of

competition with other local schools:

> we're trying to push the school in an area which is, y'know, is gonna make it
> something that's different to other schools in the area, so it'll have its own kind
> of ethos that people will be able to clearly see. (Hugh, interview 1a:68)

Physically, the curriculum's presence was felt through large boxes containing

full lever arch files. One set was stored in the geography classroom (Figure 5).

Figure 5. One box of IMYC files

The

International Middle Years Curriculum is written using a 'learning language,' which

Hugh argued had effected a shift in the discourses at work in the school. There are

similarities with the 'learnification' described by Biesta (2005; 2009b); 'a shift in the

vocabulary that is being used to talk about educational processes and practices' (2009a,

p. 37). Instead of schemes of work, the department now have schemes of learning,

students are now learners, lesson objectives are now learning goals, and home-work is

now home-learning. Learning 'flight paths' are displayed in subject areas around the

school; photographs of the learners placed either above or below a horizontal line on the

wall. Above the line indicates the learner is 'at altitude' (they are making the expected

progress); below the line means 'below altitude' (the learner is not making the expected

progress). Occasionally, the old terms (for example, schemes of work, or students)

were used and teachers corrected themselves; in this scheme of work, *sorry*, scheme of

learning… Teachers' adoption of this learning language was self-critically reflected on

by Hugh. Without any prompting, after describing schemes of learning, and referring

to students as enquirers and critical questioners, Hugh laughed: 'it sounds like I'm kinda spouting the, the kind of learning language here that we've just kind of bought in' (Hugh, Interview 1a:93). He was not passive in accepting a different way of describing his work and subject, and often challenged aspects he felt unsatisfied with. The strongest expression of this was his summary of it as 'all bollocks' (Hugh, interview 1b:0). His description of the learning language as a commodity that was 'bought in' might be seen as subtly subversive.

Changes to the terms used to describe the curriculum were paralleled by changes to school structures. Two 'Directors of Learning' were being appointed, one for 'Science' subjects, and the other for Communications and Language. Geography was placed in the latter of these, which pleased Tim (who saw it as a 'humanities' subject) and frustrated Hugh (who saw it is as a 'science'). Schemes of learning and lesson plans were required from the departments, and were checked by the Head Teacher and Directors of Learning. During my first visit to the school an audit of departmental schemes of learning (to Hugh's knowledge, the first in the school's history) was being undertaken. Some aspects of the lesson plans were centrally controlled, including use of 'the language for learning…this is my objective, so this is non-negotiable – differentiated outcomes and objectives' (Hugh, interview 1b:22-28). Adopting the International Middle Years Curriculum created a considerable amount of work for teachers. For Hugh, Key Stage Three schemes of learning had to be re-written. He felt increasingly under pressure, attributing mounting pressure and workload to the school's disappointing GCSE results, and a Requires Improvement judgement from Ofsted (Office for standards in education). He contrasted this increasing accountability and bureaucracy

(which he refers to as being 'under the cosh') against the lighter requirements

placed on a nearby school judged Outstanding by Ofsted:

> There's this huge dichotomy between what we're being asked to produce
> here, as a school who's been under – not special measures, but near enough
> – and the element of scrutiny under which, y'know, we're put, compared
> to...the school which is outstanding, and to me this is about ticking boxes
> and getting us up to that next level...Because they don't come under any of
> the kind of scrutiny that we do...And if they came in and saw this [pointing
> to the Outstanding school's comparatively brief scheme of work] we'd be
> under the cosh even more. (Hugh, interview 1b:53-59)

Tim

Tim read History at university, and then completed a History PGCE. During the

fieldwork of the current research he was employed as a newly qualified teacher in

Beach Academy. Half of his timetable was spent teaching history, and the other half

teaching geography. He was the first permanent geography teacher to work with Hugh

in Beach Academy: 'the department's really like Hugh, and me sort of merging into it'

(Tim, interview 1:18). Tim studied history and geography at school, despite them not

normally being both offered. To get around this a teacher tutored him after school. He

felt that not having been in a 'normal' class made his own teaching of geography

harder.

Views on relationship between school and academic geography

Tim had not studied geography at university, and felt unsure about the relationship

between the fields. He also felt that he relied more heavily than teachers with a

geography degree on the prescriptions of content provided by schemes of work and

exam boards. His lesson planning begins with a search for resources, and the lessons he

subsequently teaches are strongly directed by the accessibility of these resources. His

resources came mainly from the exam board, the department's virtual shared area, and

other geography teachers:

> I look at the schemes of learning, and what Hugh's set up in the
> department…look at resources…like on the system and what Hugh's given me,
> or…before I left my [training year] I was with a geographer, so I said to her "can
> I have all your resources?" …so she gave me all her resources, and my
> girlfriend's taken geography resources off the schools that she's been at… (Tim,
> interview 1:29-35)

He was not regularly engaged in finding other sources of knowledge, for

example, in the way that Hugh frequently reads and curates news articles. Tim's

experiences on his history degree were applied to the way in which he considered the

use of one particular source of knowledge (Wikipedia) for school geography.

> At university it was – there were two thoughts of the lecturers – some lecturers
> would say [Wikipedia's] a starting point for your research; start on Wikipedia
> then you'd follow the references. Some would just be like "Pfff! If I ever find
> out you're using Wikipedia…" (Beach Academy department interview:75)
> Tim has few opportunities for contact with the academic discipline of

geography. The organisational structure of the school seems to make it less likely for

questions about knowledge in geography to be raised: non-subject specialists carry out

lesson observations, and his line manager is not a subject specialist. However, Tim's

experience teaching two subjects did provide him with a source of comparison, and he

often reflected on the way things might be done in the other subject. Since the time he

attended school as a student himself he felt that 'teaching's changed [and] I think that,

sometimes I think, or I want, to go back to that method of teaching – the way I was

taught – but actually it probably isn't fantastic' (Tim, interview 1:10). The difference

between 'then' and 'now' was described by Tim as a shift from a more didactic

approach (then), to a more student-led ethos (now); strong continuity of content, taught

very differently.

Tim was finding his first year of teaching hard. He described having small 'meltdowns', which he attributed to the competing demands placed upon him, some of which are explored through a discussion of one inspected lesson I observed. The lesson came towards the end of my time in the department; across one academic year I split fieldwork visits across three departments, allowing some space between visits to reflect on emerging findings, continue analysing data, and plan the next visit. I had spent four weeks with Tim and the department in Beach Academy.

Tim's observed lesson

Tim had spent much of the weekend planning for his inspected lesson, discussing it with his girlfriend who teaches geography elsewhere. One page of his three page plan is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6. One page from Tim's three page lesson plan

Tim asked me to look through his lesson plan. 'Is there too much in it?' He asked. 'Yes': I suggested he allow much longer for one task that involved students drawing on different sources of information and writing about tectonic plate boundaries. Hugh came into the office and we asked his opinion. Looking over the lesson plan he gave a wry smile; 'so, if you could just do a 500 word essay on plate boundaries as part of your starter…!' Laughing, and poking Tim in the arm, he said 'it'll be fine…actually, I can't believe you're using George's idea! Ha! I'm only joking - I've never had an original idea in my life' (fieldnotes, 19/6/13). Hugh reassured Tim that while he would also give the students longer on the task I mentioned, the plan looked good. He wished Tim good luck. An observed lesson is a high-stakes event for which people are wished good luck. I only heard teachers wishing one another 'good luck' for observed lessons, and when their students were going to sit an exam. These are particular moments on which a considerable degree of importance is placed for teachers.

You need luck, and possibly originality. The observed lesson, as a moment of performance, distils that which is valued as important.

Tim's anxiety before the lesson was palpable. When Hugh, George, and I sat down in the geography classroom before break time Tim paced around the room and then walked to the sixth form block. He was back soon and set up his lesson, distributing resources between tables, ensuring his PowerPoint slides were all in order, sharing out rulers and other stationary, and placing students' exercise books (marked, ready for the lesson) at their places. Tim's break time was normally spent in the sixth form centre (the old staff room having been knocked down in the first stage of the re-building of the school site), sitting and drinking tea. Not today.

Five minutes before the lesson began Tim's mentor arrived, found a seat at the back of the room, and sat down. He placed his iPad on the table, and would remain in that seat, from where no students' work could be seen, until leaving the room at the end of the lesson. His position in the room was powerful; in the centre of the very back row, separated from the closest students by two desks. No students spoke to him during the lesson, nor did he speak to Tim during the lesson. He watched, listened, and wrote. Just as Tim was engaged in a performance, so too was the observer performing a role, projecting objectivity, and authority. A performance with the effect described by a teacher in Priestley et al.'s (2012, p. 105) study in these terms: 'the silence weigh[s] heavily from the 'judge in the corner''.

As the students began to work Tim described the lesson to them. He explained that they would be building on previous learning about plate tectonics, earthquakes, and volcanoes. He briefly outlined the tasks, and finished by emphasising the purpose of the lesson: 'we're going to learn what we need to do in an exam' (lesson observation

19/6/13). One of the main tasks Tim planned was a practice exam question. The students would answer the question, and then comment on one another's work. After the lesson the feedback to Tim was not concerned with his originality, or lack thereof. Where the knowledge or activities came from were not discussed. The lesson was judged as 'Requires Improvement', an Ofsted grade three. For Tim, this number was the most important aspect of the judgement. A grade three meant he was in danger of not passing his newly qualified teacher year. He was devastated. He had been told prior to the lesson that his mentor was concerned about the 'pace' of his lessons, and that he was looking for 'pace' in this lesson. The observation of Tim's lesson might be described in Priestley et al.'s (2013) terms as an example of interventionist regulatory mechanisms: within-school auditing of performance identifying under-performing teachers leading to quick intervention by the senior leadership team. The school holds a spreadsheet recording the lesson observations carried out on teachers. This spreadsheet makes visible (only to senior leaders; it is not made publicly available) the grades of teachers' lessons. Simple sorting functions make rankings of teachers quick and easy to do. Performative moments of display are used to record evidence which form part of an audit, and it seems reasonable to assume the possibility of judgements constructing self-fulfilling narratives of 'success' or 'failure'.

The judgement of Tim's lesson was primarily justified by criticism of one task. The task involved students working on an A3 sheet with four rows; Plate Boundary, Diagram, Explanation, Example. The sheets had four blank columns on which students named, drew, explained and exemplified four types of plate boundaries; Conservative, Constructive, Destructive, and Collision. Tim told the students to use a range of sources; the teacher's knowledge, (through additional examples and verbal explanations), the examination specification textbook, successfully completed versions

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of the starter activity, and their memories of the previous lesson. The students had to draw on all these sources of information to carry out the task, which Tim had assigned 10 minutes for in his lesson plan (this was the task Hugh and I suggested Tim allow longer for).

Tim was told he ought to have allowed only two minutes for this task, by providing learners with pre-completed cards to stick down. Tim was shaken after the feedback, and said that he *just needed to get it right next time*: one result of the observation was to generate a further observed performance. Firth (2011) argues that in the conversations he has observed in schools, he has been concerned by a lack of attention to questions about knowledge. The particular way in which this lesson observation was conducted illustrates this concern. A considerable amount of time was spent by Tim planning the lesson, but this time was not spent on his knowledge of plate tectonics. Time was spent planning the tasks that students would be doing, and the 'pace' of these tasks. The inspection criteria used by the observer (his mentor) was generic, and about pedagogy; subject knowledge was something assumed.

Despite their differences, both Tim and his mentor agree that the judgement should be made about the pedagogy: in Young's (2008) terms, the focus is on *how* the content is taught, rather than *what* is taught. It is particularly important to refer to this inspected lesson as a performative *moment* because of Tim's relationship with the subject matter. An understanding of Tim beyond this one lesson must include awareness of his background, and his training primarily as an historian. As he has not studied geography at university, exploring the ways in which he is developing understandings of the subject are particularly important. Interestingly, during the first fieldwork visit Tim identified plate tectonics to me as the area of geography he found

most difficult. However, the judgements made on Tim's lesson are restricted to the

performance as observed – the moment – and do not consider (or seek to improve) the

broader context from which he is working.

Ethical deliberation

During the course of fieldwork innumerable decisions were made about when, how, and

in what ways to be involved in situations. Tim's observed lesson and my responses to it

are now discussed in terms of Dennis' (2009) modes of intervention.

Tim was worried the lesson didn't 'hang together'; a vague, elusive sense of the

coherency and consistency of a successful performance. The pressure of observed

lessons is considerable, and the stakes were particularly high for Tim. Although he had

received an 'Outstanding' judgement on one lesson, and a 'Good' on another, he

described facing problems during his newly qualified teacher year, and was at risk of

not passing. His mentor previously expressed concern that Tim's lessons do not have

enough 'pace', seen in the school as one of three essential factors necessary for students

to make progress (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 7. PDF poster in Beach Academy

After the lesson, Hugh (informally, head of department in Beach Academy)

asked me how it had gone. I told him it went really well; it was a great lesson.

However, after receiving feedback Tim looked upset. His lesson was judged as

'Requires Improvement'. The written feedback stated that the activity that Hugh and I

said should be allowed to take 30 minutes (and which Tim had given 10 minutes to)

ought to have only been given two minutes, as it had ruined the pace. After telling us

this, Tim left the office again, and George (a trainee teacher) came in. He had seen Tim

walk into the office looking upset, and asked 'Where's Tim? Is he alright? I half expected to see him hanging from the light when I came back', while pulling up his own tie above his head to illustrate someone hanging themselves (Beach Academy, visit two, fieldnotes 19/06/13).

Four things seemed to present a dilemma:

(1) Tim was upset by the judgement on his lesson.

(2) The judgement was authoritative and final. It would be recorded on Tim's file and would prevent him from passing his newly qualified teacher year.

(3) I believed the judgement on the lesson was wrong.

(4) My role in the school was as a researcher, and I had explicitly stated that I was not going to be judging subject knowledge (as good, or otherwise). I was not in the school as a critic of other observers.

I felt that knowing these four points presented me with 'guilty knowledge'. McNamee (2001) argues that conflicts in the 'thicket of human relations threaten to compromise [the educational researcher's] integrity' (p.423), and he suggests such conflicts are commonplace in educational ethnography. He defines 'guilty knowledge' as 'the feeling of guilt that arises when one both comes to know of certain harms or wrongdoings and is torn between courses of action to remove the sense of guilt that attaches to the knowledge' (p.424).

Modes of ethnographic intervention
Dennis (2009) presents four modes of intervention: interpersonal, administrative, enactment and modelling:

(1) Interpersonal; speaking with participants to challenge beliefs, or ways of speaking and acting, that are deemed to be morally questionable. Dennis separates 'inclusive' from 'unilateral or exclusive' interpersonal interventions; the former being openly discussed with participants, the latter being in some degree hidden (which, she argues, means that the latter presents more ethical risks).

(2) Administrative; in Dennis' example, she uses her position in the university to intervene through the use of administrative powers. This meant speaking with the assistant principal about a teacher ('Mr Strong') who is being racist, and ensuring that 'English Language Learners' (ELL) were withdrawn from his classes. She was disappointed that nothing further happened, and argues that 'intervening through an administrative mode was ethically risky' (p.139).

(3) Enactment; the researchers putting into practice participants' own ideas and beliefs, in particular when they are in conflict with accepted ideas and beliefs of the organisation / social group. In Dennis' study intervening through enactment involved speaking students' own languages to them in hallways and corridors, and conducting some study sessions in home languages.

(4) Modelling; these also involved enacting changes, but this time the changes were envisioned by the researchers, rather than the participants (Dennis uses the phrase 'had not yet envisioned' [p.140]). In Dennis' example she argues that teachers were complacent towards bullying, and adopted a stance of non-action. Her ethnographer (William) intervened in a situation in front of a teacher, challenging a bully and supporting the bullied, thus modelling the intervention they wished to promote.

Deliberation on the complexity of this dilemma calls upon certain principles, 'but can by no means be simply the application of those principles. Different principles can be evoked. But there is judgement required in deciding upon the overriding principle and in deciding what element in one's practice relates to what principle' (Pring 2004, p.284). The intervention described includes a (possibly contradictory) combination of utilitarian justifications of my actions (the end of 'righting' Greg's judgement on Tim's lesson), consequentialist principles informing decisions (considering the possible implications of informing the head teacher of my view), and deontological rules (for example, wanting to give truthful representations of persons and events).

I responded to Tim's observed lesson by intervening interpersonally and administratively. I immediately intervened interpersonally, by speaking with Tim and telling him that I believed the judgement was wrong. After the initial interpersonal intervention I then had a conversation with Hugh. This conversation was the beginning of the administrative intervention. Hugh seemed to also feel strongly about the judgement on Tim's lesson, and when I offered to do something he asked if, having been in the lesson, I would write down my thoughts. I wrote Hugh an email which he then passed to the Head teacher, who I also spoke to. This represented an escalating of the intervention; my actions moved beyond my empathy towards Tim, to a more direct attempt to disrupt the judgement. In both modes of intervention my basic hope is to reduce the certainty with which the judgement is held, and to raise critical questions about the prescription of *a* way of teaching. In doing this I want to highlight the contestable nature of education, rather than to suggest that the observer's belief about the task was wrong, and Hugh and I were right. Instead, I want to suggest that the discussion around the lesson (and this task in particular) is productive when there is space for disagreement. The performative nature of the observation with its associated

measures, performance related pay implications, and displayed rankings, all seem to compress this space for disagreement.

I mentioned the 'guilty' nature of the knowledge I held following the observed lesson. In part this guilt came from my role as a researcher, and not as a critic of the judgements of another observer. Ethical questions might be asked of the implications of my intervention for the other observer whose judgement I questioned. Part of my concern for Tim arose from the power imbalance and the authoritative nature of the judgment. However, what should I make of the possible implications of the intervention on this observer? What might be the implications for him when the headteacher is presented with a critique of his work? What right of reply does he have? Should my first intervention have been to the observer? Why did I not discuss it with them? These dilemmas represent an initial consideration of different principles that might be evoked (Pring, 2004).

Moral deliberation is important in ethnographic research, partly because it is impossible not to interact (or in a broadly defined sense, 'intervene') with persons and situations. Not saying anything to Tim would actually have been to 'say' something. In stronger terms, 'doing nothing is the most violent thing to do' (Žižek, 2008, p. 183). In speaking with Tim, and through the administrative intervention, I hoped to present an alternative reading of the observed lesson. Performative schooling systems demand objectivity and reliability of judgements, whether of learners or teachers. The epistemological certainty attributed to these judgements, which is reinforced through their decontextualized numerical reduction and representation (Tim's lesson was 'a three'), seems to be an important point on which ethnographers might raise questions. These questions

might be about specific issues, but more generally are epistemological: situated, tentative ethnographic knowledge challenging the objectivity of performative judgements.

Conclusions

Although dilemmas remain, the discussion has presented some of the ways in which I have approached ethical dilemmas in this ethnographic research. The particular dilemma presented here offers an example of issues that may be increasingly faced in performative schooling systems. The time I had spent in the department with these teachers, and the relationships I had begun to develop with them enabled me to empathise more deeply with their position. This empathy developed through ethnography – or in Mills and Morton's (2013) terms, *demanded* by ethnography – meant that I felt the impact of Tim's observed lesson more keenly than I might otherwise have done (for example, if the methodology had not involved spending prolonged periods of time in the department). Ball employs strong, evocative terms (including 'terror') to describe the effects of performative systems on teachers. Ethnographers are uniquely placed among educational researchers to develop understandings of these systems, and the experiences of working within them. As a consequence, ethnographers are also uniquely placed to offer particular kinds of intervention, and 'to speak a kind of truth to power' (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. 118). In all of these interventions there is an underlying desire to use ethnography of and about schooling *for* education.

There have been recent discursive moves advocating a particular conception of evidence-based education, which 'capture the imagination of many' (Biesta, 2010, p.410). The interventions I have briefly described offer something of a contribution,

from research, for education. However, this contribution does not propose a solution or show what works: it is critical, and possibly disruptive. Such intervention seeks to disturb the assumed epistemological objectivity with which observers make judgements. I do not want to argue that my observation is better; only different, and justified. Education, and questions about teaching are contestable, and if this point is accepted it blunts some of the tools of performativity and hopefully opens a little more space for professional dialogue.

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