

## **Self-Deception, the University and the Information Society**

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The Information Society is strongly correlated with the expansion of systems of control. This is particularly relevant to educational institutions, traditions of which include democracy, autonomy and freedom of ideas. Furthermore as Habermas predicted these systems are increasingly becoming the only way by which we assess the value of education. Such systems appeal to many people in education as they are both relatively simple to use and extremely inexpensive to operate. Both these features are due to such systems requiring significant input and collaborative efforts of the very individuals whose work is being evaluated. For example a typical scenario in the UK now is for school teachers to spend many hours filling forms that will ultimately determine whether: they are good or bad at their employment; their place of work is successful; they are above or below the 'norm' and if they should be paid more or less. In the University sector a commonplace occurrence is for a university whose student numbers have failed to meet evaluative Government-set targets to be penalised both financially and in the public domain. Yet the reason for this is the University is attempting to preserve, as instructed publicly by their pay masters, its own 'standards' in terms of this cohort with previous ones. From the University perspective more students mean less quality without a far greater overhaul of education than the Government are prepared to pay for. From the Government perspective the universities need to be controlled so that the public can see visibly the improvements made in statistical form. In order to achieve this the Government must tell the public that we have more students who achieve more with less unit cost.

Despite much criticism of such structures, where apparent anomalies are ignored they grow from strength to strength in that the co-operation they require on behalf of those in education is almost universal. Many simply feel resigned to the fact that systems of surveillance and control are part of their working lives in education, whilst others who try to resist often fall foul of the law. Perhaps it is no surprise that rates of both staff turnover and of those leaving the profession are higher than anywhere in the European Union.

This paper examines how such structures of control that exist in the name of a limited evaluative framework continue to hold our attention. There is something of 'The Emperor's clothes' here with education dressing up ragged garments as the finest of cuts. In particular I examine how Self-deception is vital to its continued existence and renewed strength. Self-deception occurs at all levels of the UK education system from the teacher who has to spend high percentages of their time from filling in the name of the good of their pupils when many know it takes time from their efforts in the classroom. It exists in inspectors of education, former teachers who now advocate evaluation as the golden rule of success when they themselves no longer live within it. Self-deception exists in Government who ignore the loud criticism of structures such as a National Curriculum which has been badly thought out and applies only to public education where results in private (well-funded) education far outstrips it. In Ministers who send their own children to private or selective schools whilst telling the public of the success of the public ones.

Self-deception is an interesting and challenging philosophical concept and one that is being increasingly researched in organisations as a means of gaining clearer understanding of systems of control that are in place. In this paper I will examine, perhaps for the first time, how this is happening in education. Understanding of self-deception is vital to any highlighting of how structures of control and limited evaluative schemas have taken hold in education and are empowered by an Information Society. Self-deception is equally vital to beginning to formulate what other forms of assessment might appeal to those in education. For any new projected nascent model of evaluation to be realisable it must be aware of the very processes in place that will defend the status quo.