

Resistance, the Transformation of School Teachers' Work and Performance Management Reforms: A Labour Process Perspective

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The study of resistance is a central aspect of labour process theorisation. Much recent literature has focused on the impact of collective action on work, yet insights into the realities of individual forms of resistance remain understudied within an LPT perspective (Thompson 2016; Bryson et al. 2019). This article draws on the concept of opposition to develop a frame for understanding the complexities of meaning-based resistance (see Bélanger and Thuderoz 2010). A major contribution to theorising opposition is in the recognition of resistance being based on meanings and values of workers that are derived outside of the workplace context (Baines 2016). This is a fundamental development for studying resistance in public sector contexts where there is often an underlying public sector ethos of making a difference to society in an individual's day-to-day work. This study examines the impact of performance management and performance-related pay on teachers' experiences of work through the lens of resistance, within an LPT perspective.

A qualitative ethnography of one secondary, inner-city academy school was conducted over a four-month period. This comprised a six-week shadowing phase, document collection and 26 semi-structured interviews (each averaging between 45 and 90 minutes), with Teachers, Senior Managers, HR and Trade Union Representatives. Template analysis and abduction was used to derive themes from the data set (King 2012; King and Brooks 2017; O'Mahoney and Vincent 2014).

Findings reveal that a major way teachers asserted their opposition to the competitive ethos cultivated through the performance management reforms, was to turn down positions for promotion. During performance reviews, or where presented with a potential promotion, these teachers expressed that they were able to give their best with their current workload and that taking on further responsibilities would reduce the quality of their work. Their opposition was based upon a collective set of values that put their pride of work at the forefront. In contrast, there were a number of teachers who aligned themselves with the competitive ethos, placing a higher value upon their personal performance than upon the shared pride of work ethos. Where teachers succumbed to the cultural shift, there emerged a set of oppositional identities between those who held on to their collective sense of work commitment and those who sought progression up the pay scales.

The majority of studies that have considered the issue of teachers' resistance to various changes in their work have generally been framed through the lens of unions (for examples see Carter et al. 2010; Ironside and Seifert 1995). Whilst these approaches play a significant role in recognising the part that unions play in representing teachers and even, at times, shaping education reform, the limitation of this approach has been a lack of attention to other, more individual avenues through which teachers choose to exert their opposition. This argument is echoed in broader labour process debates (Ackroyd and Thompson 1999; Thompson 2016). The central contribution of this study is to extend labour process theorisation of resistance within the public sector context through a focus on individual forms of resistance.