AN INSPECTOR PALLS: THE PROBLEMATIC IMPACT OF OFSTED ON LEARNING AND AFFECT IN
TEACHER EDUCATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY.

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This paper considers the second dataset, from one of few research projects into the human impact of OFSTED on teacher education. Teachers and lecturers might find OFSTED’s claim to raise standards and to report without fear or favour darkly amusing but as university education departments shrink and the school system fragments, it seems important to pursue serious investigation into the impact and effectiveness of what is an expensive and time-consuming process.

This research therefore, sought to ascertain how teacher educators of three phases, primary, secondary and post-compulsory, understand the general impact of inspection and on their own learning and teaching and their feelings and professional identity. This combination is significant given the close relationships drawn between positive emotion, relationships and learning in both the educational and psychological theory and increasingly in neuroscience, all of which are considered here. This theory contrasts sharply with the OFSTED ‘improvement’ process which is not renowned for its positive emotions or relationships. In this regard, a Foucauldian lens is also used to understand the effect of OFSTED processes on thinking, feeling and behaviour.

Semi-structured interviews of up to an hour drew both on this framework and the previous inspection literature, and were conducted before and after an OFSTED inspection. Grounded theory methodology was chosen for a rigorous analysis and to reveal the participants’ complex thinking and feeling about inspection. Of the twenty-three staff members interviewed, fifteen were academic tutors, six were senior or middle managers and two were associated administrative staff.