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# Teaching *1984* in the surveillance culture of schools

Key words: Big Brother, assessment discourses, surveillance culture, post-panopticism, George Orwell.

## Abstract

### Purpose

This paper focuses upon the affordances of and issues surrounding the teaching of George Orwell's novel *1984* (1949) as a set text for GCSE English and English Literature in an examination-obsessed and heavily surveilled school system. It considers this by focusing on the classroom practice of a beginning teacher tackling the teaching of this novel for the first time and the newly-appointed university tutor who is required to assess her teaching against a prescribed set of national Teachers' Standards.

### Design/methodology/approach

A case study design is employed, drawing on data from classroom observation, records of conversations and textual study. These data are analysed with reference to Perryman et al's (2018) re-evaluation of Foucault's panopticon (1995), a concept which explains how institutions set up surveillance systems in which people's behaviour is shaped by their feelings of being watched.

### Findings

In the context of her practicum school the beginning teacher adopts a particular approach to language study as a vehicle for teaching the novel *1984*. This paper argues that such an approach, which finely focuses on the micro-detail of language, prevents teachers and students from seeing the big picture in Orwell's novel and is therefore contrary to the spirit of his writing. It also restricts teachers from

approaching the novel in ways which draw on students' lived experiences as participants in the highly surveilled education system.

### Practical Implications

The push for performativity in the current era of schooling ensures that, for English teachers, fear of failing to comply with imposed and implied norms contributes to a prevailing sense of unease about their subject. Thus persistent pressures of exam preparation and inspection-readiness drive a wedge between their subject knowledge/expertise and the classroom practices prevalent in English teaching.

### Social Implications

English teachers and teacher educators are subject to a plethora of 'guidelines' which filter through at every level of education and operate in a similar way to the totalitarian figure-head of Big Brother, Orwell's fictional dictator who dominates *1984*. This paper argues that away from Big Brother's all-seeing eye there are still, however, opportunities for those professional practices that do not fit within such parameters to be discussed, explored and shared.

### Originality

This article offers a unique perspective on the teaching of George Orwell at the levels of school student, beginning teacher and teacher educator. The Big Brother of this article is not the Stalinist dictator of Orwell's dystopia, instead manifesting in many different education-related personas. This Big Brother demands compliance with his fuzzy norms (Courtney, 2016; Perryman et al., 2018), rules which are deliberately vague and shifting and if contravened have far-reaching consequences for all concerned in the teaching and learning of English.

## Introduction

This article is a result of the authors being invited by The Orwell Society to present a paper for an audience of non-teachers at the annual conference in June 2017. The presentation was on approaches to teaching the works of George Orwell in the secondary school, and within this brief it seemed to be inappropriate to ignore the

confluence of factors, all linked to the emergence of a powerful school and university surveillance culture within the last three decades of education in England, that have shaped the contemporary teaching of Orwell. League tables of school performance, the data-fication of assessment, inspection regimes, and the commodification of education (Unwin, A. and Yandell, J. , 2016) have all served to mould the ways in which the curriculum is structured and within that how literature is 'delivered' as part of English. Although the research is located in the context of education in England, a discussion of curriculum structure and the issues it raises for the teaching of literature has resonance for teachers in those countries, such as Australia, that in moving towards a similar National Curriculum model, are experiencing the same sorts of challenges.

It would be false in any discussion of *1984* to draw direct parallels between the totalitarian setting of the novel and the context of English schools but certain resonances can be detected in the education system as currently constructed. Since the Conservative Prime Minister (PM) Margaret Thatcher imposed a National Curriculum in 1989, curriculum and assessment policies have been dictated by the political imperatives of successive governments. These range from the New Labour PM Tony Blair's National Strategy for education (1997-2011) which attempted to impose pedagogy particularly with regard to the subject English, to the significant interventions of the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove (2013a; 2013b), in the Conservative-led Coalition Government, around the literature that should be taught in English classrooms, to the continued championing of a knowledge-based literature curriculum by Schools Minister Nick Gibb (2015) in the current Conservative Government. Whilst education may not be subject to the attentions of Orwell's 'Thought Police', a physical force and an internal regulator in *1984*, controlling memories and perceptions of reality, the implementation in schools of the above policy impositions are 'policed' by Ofsted. This is the inspection body which on its website claims to be independent of government but which comes within the auspices of the Department for Education and is always headed by a political appointee.

This paper therefore seeks to address the following research questions:

- How is Orwell taught within one English lesson which is representative of the surveillance cultures that pervade contemporary classrooms in England?
- Can Orwell's fiction offer insights into this situation?
- How might his concepts be able to provide an analytical lens through which to view classroom practice?

## Methodology and theoretical approach

To answer these questions, a case study design has been deployed focusing on the single instance of the lesson taught by the beginning teacher. This lesson was chosen because the University Based Tutor (UBT) was observing in English lessons across many schools, and finding common features that were reflective at subject level of a pervasive surveillance culture. This particular lesson was representative of that wider context precisely because the beginning teacher was teaching *1984*, a novel which has which has resonances in both its content and language with policies and processes that pertain to the accountability of schools, particularly in the core curriculum subject of English.

The methodological approach aims to produce a rich, complex and nuanced picture of a particular situation in a similar way to that achieved by Orwell in both his non-fiction and fiction writing. Just as Orwell shows how characters are shaped by sociological and historical contexts, the aim of this article is to explore a range of factors that contribute to the case study of a teacher-educator observing a beginning teacher who is teaching *1984* for the first time during a one hour-long lesson in the autumn term to an examination class of fifteen-year-olds. The UBT at the time was tasked with both supporting the beginning teacher in her practice and evaluating the lesson, but then went on to use the data, with all permissions granted, as the research material explored in this article.

In this account, there are a range of texts, both formal and informal, that are considered. These are:

- The novel, a formal text in that Orwell is studied as one of the leading English writers of the 20th century according to a (hardly uncontentious) canon of 'great' literature.

- The PowerPoint presentation from the beginning teacher's lesson that mediates the novel for the students and which has several audiences: the learners; the class teacher and mentor in the English Department of the practicum school; the UBT.

- The pre-produced lesson observation pro forma on which the UBT records an account of the beginning teacher's progress and which references another formal document, the national Teachers' Standards.

- The informal conversation between the UBT and the beginning teacher as part of the tutorial following the observed lesson, and of which the tutor made retrospective notes for research purposes.

- The UBT's on-going discussions with his more experienced initial teacher education colleague as part of professional development in his new role, which in essence form the discussion in this article.

It is from the interactions between these texts that a picture emerges of literature study as enacted in the contemporary English classroom. The complexity of this case has been addressed by employing direct observation, records of conversations, and a study of the texts described above. Because it is not the purpose of case study to make generalisations beyond the specific case, the emphasis is on particularity and 'getting a rich picture and gaining analytical insights from it' (Thomas, 2016, p. 23) whilst acknowledging that a case may be relatable in situations of similarity (Bassey, 1981). Denscombe's (2014) view that every case has unique features but may still act as one of a type, 'a single example of a broader class of things' (p. 84) has been taken as a model.

As the boundaries between a case and its context of occurrence are not distinct, there is also a degree of relatability in terms of the larger political landscape in which schools operate. Thus, as Sahlberg (2012; 2015) demonstrates, standardisation, a focus on core subjects (in this case English, and 'literacy' as part of English), test-based accountability, and managerialism have become the orthodoxy of what he refers to as the global education reform movement (GERM). This has widely permeated educational policy and is recognisable to educationalists globally. Indeed, policy-makers exerting direct influence over schools' literacy practices via 'a common set of tools for engineering change' (Moss, 2012, p. 105) is a phenomenon found 'in

many different jurisdictions' (p. 104), and underpins large-scale comparisons of system performance such as the OECD's PISA programme[1].

The Orwellian lens that is applied to the data is shaped by the authors' analysis of contemporary educational culture, which does not exist as part of the apparatus of a totalitarian state but is affected by the context described above. Thus this paper argues that Orwell's ideas might be appropriated to offer fresh insight into the English school system.

Of significance are the concepts of the panopticon developed by Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1995) and recently repurposed by Perryman et al. (2018) to illuminate the contemporary English school setting. This recent research (Perryman et al., 2018) has shown how the accountability cultures in schools affect much of what happens in the classroom. It is this idea which forms an important part of the article's framework, showing how the professional behaviours of the beginning teacher and the teacher-educator are circumscribed by the surveillance culture they inhabit.

It is apposite therefore to make a connection between the authors' theoretical approach and some of Orwell's most potent ideas, as much of his work explores the complexities and nuances of living in surveillance cultures. As a result, an Orwellian concept such as Thought Police is co-opted into the theoretical framework because a similar phenomenon to Thought Police plays an important role in schools. All teachers in English state schools are monitored very carefully; their thought processes being strongly influenced by the language they are allowed to use about learning within formal school contexts (Perryman et al., 2018). This language appears relatively innocuous but has much in common with Orwell's concept of 'doublethink', defined in Chapter 3 of *1984* as:

> To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them… (1949, p. 30).

This paper uses the concept to critique the ways in which language is used as a resource to mobilise power (Paechter, 2004).

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[1] The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment.

An example of this can be seen in the 'autonomous model' of literacy identified by Brian Street. He argues that stakeholders (parents, students, teachers) have been led to believe that any student, regardless of background, geography or class, can become 'functionally literate' by following a set of procedures which are independent of 'cultural context and meaning,' but which leads to 'inequality for those who "lack" it and advantages for those who gain it. In fact this perspective is itself deeply ideological' (Street, 2011, p. 581). This narrow definition of 'literacy as a fixed set of skills' (Burnett and Merchant, 2016, p. 260), as opposed to 'literacy-as-situated-practice' (p. 260), refuses to countenance that 'the plurality of instantiated literac*ies*' (p. 260) associated with students' home lives and cultures has a profound effect upon the development of their literacy skills. Additionally, if their literacy skills are perceived to be weak in terms of the autonomous model, it is the teaching that is found wanting. Such a message implicitly contains a warning to all teachers and teacher-educators that, if they do not subscribe to a prescribed autonomous model of literacy common in 'Curriculum and assessment procedures in many jurisdictions' (Burnett and Merchant, 2016, p. 260), they will be accused of being poor teachers. The term autonomous as Street uses it is ironic: the learners are not encouraged to be autonomous and neither are the teachers (that is, to think professionally for themselves).This idea that knowledge can be atomised (Lyotard, 1984) and presented as a toolkit for teachers and students to employ is critiqued in this article.

## Literature Review

The language of Ofsted is in itself a toolkit. Central to Ofsted's language of school improvement are three terms which are embedded in the Ofsted Inspection Framework (2018) and thereafter subsumed into the jargon of schooling. Offered in this article as examples of double-think are: 'learning walk' (p. 50), 'performance management' (p. 15) and 'special measures' (p. 33). The Department for Education offers schools a model appraisal procedure (2012) which suggests that unlimited learning walks, or 'drop ins' (p. 7) as they are known, should be used alongside formal teacher observation when judging teachers' capability, and this forms a central part of a teacher's performance management (Department for Education, 2012, p. 7). Performance management is pivotal to decisions about performance-

related pay (Department for Education, 2018). Legislation (2016) requires that schools judged as failing are subject to a range of special measures to address their inadequacies.

Learning walks or drop-ins are code for school leaders making on-the-spot, unannounced observations of teachers' lessons. As it is difficult from such snapshots to claim accurate judgements about the learning taking place, and as leaders are frequently observing teachers who teach different subjects from their own, this usually involves checks on students' behaviour and teachers' marking. Thus, the whole exercise frequently has little to do with learning in the deep sense. It is often punitive as procedures such as 'capability' (Department for Education, 2012, p. 10) can be invoked if teachers are deemed not to be meeting the expected requirements. Similarly, performance management is, at heart, about ensuring conformity with school working practices and regulations in order for the teacher to secure promotion, or in some instances simply to remain employed. It is significant in that it provides the external lens through which teachers may judge their own teaching. Salient to performance management is the term special measures, a designation which actually means that a school or sometimes a subject department is failing to meet required standards and is therefore very 'unspecial'.

As Perryman et al. (2018) note, strategies such as learning walks are often instituted in English schools by headteachers: 'using Ofsted as a way to pursue unpopular policies, positioning it very much as the external enemy' (2017, p. 152).[2] However, it is the terminology in the Ofsted framework that puts school leaders in this position by making it clear that inspectors are 'assessing how well leaders are securing continual improvements in teaching' (Ofsted, 2018, p. 49) through surveillance procedures which are not prescribed by Ofsted but are nevertheless required. The double-think here is embedded in the use of the terms 'continual improvements in teaching' and 'pupils' progress' (p. 49), rather than children's learning. In just the same way that Big Brother requires continual improvements in workers' outputs, so does Ofsted. This inevitably leads to the manipulation of data in the contexts of both novel and schools and the subjugation of people's working lives to a continual improvement treadmill.

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[2] At the time of writing the new draft Ofsted framework (2019) has changes of emphasis but it is clear that the surveillance agenda will continue.

There is another way in which the terminology connected with school improvement and student progress contains the qualities of Orwell's double-think. Whilst the Ofsted terminology discussed above purports to be positive in approach, implying that learning will take place, performance will be improved and that staff might feel special, the meanings are internalised so that the teacher starts to monitor him/herself in the way that Foucault (1995), following Bentham[3], proposes in the concept of the Panopticon. This resonates with the society under the watchful eye of Orwell's Big Brother. As Courtney (2016) describes, panopticism is characterised by key factors, such as all performers in the Panopticon having to be visible to everyone, thus ensuring self-regulation (p. 627), and the imposition of clear norms to which all must demonstrate compliance.

More recently it has been argued that education is moving into a 'post-panoptic' era. Both Courtney (2016) and Perryman et al. (2018) argue that the label of post-panopticism better fits the current marketized atmosphere of schools where norms and criteria are kept deliberately 'fuzzy' (Courtney, 2016, p. 627) so as to unearth subjects' inevitable 'failure to comply' (p. 627). For Courtney (2016) this regime 'is dependent on external "experts" to produce success criteria' (p. 627) with a focus upon rooting out the enemy within. However, here the enemy within is not faced with imprisonment, as is the case in *1984*, but loss of livelihood as the Conservative-led coalition government (2010- 2015) introduced measures to make it considerably easier for schools to sack teachers (Paton, 2012).

There is, however, a more overt element to this surveillance culture. All state schools in England are judged on the results their students attain in their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations at age 16. Results for English Language/Literature GCSE are double-weighted so that the English scores feature prominently in the league tables of school results drawn up by the Department for Education (DfE). If results in English GCSEs fall below certain benchmarks, the school will face another inspection, possible take-over by another school provider or even closure. It is this broader but persistent threat (Perryman et al., 2018) which lies at the heart of examination-dominated English lessons. As Perryman et al.'s

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[3] Bentham was the philosopher and social reformer, 1748 to 1832, whose ideas for legal and social reform included the design for a prison building that he called the panopticon. This later influenced the thinking of and was critiqued by Foucault.

research (2018) shows, many teachers feel they need to perform to certain expectations by focusing upon exams, particularly when being observed. They believe this is what is required by their senior management team and Ofsted, which act as a sort of fuzzy Big Brother. Troman (1997) notes that 'inspectors are the absent presence in the school' (p. 349), and Page (2017) suggests that many teachers feel they need to be Ofsted-ready at any moment during the working day due to no-notice inspections. Thus, they are kept in 'a perpetual state of inspection anxiety that aims for good-or-outstanding practice throughout every day, every week and every year' (Perryman et al., 2018, p. 8).

Ofsted's criteria for good or outstanding practice is a classic fuzzy norm of the current system which leads to teachers instituting strategies which are often at odds with the subject matter they are teaching. Orwell excoriates test-driven teaching in his essay *Such Such Were the Joys* (1952). He writes of his own education as a pupil at the preparatory school St. Cyprian's:

> Over a period of two or three years the scholarship boys were crammed with learning as cynically as a goose is crammed for Christmas. And with what learning! This business of making a gifted boy's career depend on a competitive examination, taken when he is only twelve or thirteen is an evil thing at best… At St Cyprian's the whole process was frankly a preparation for a sort of confidence trick. Your job was to learn exactly those things that would give an examiner the impression that you knew more than you did know, and as far as possible to avoid burdening your brain with anything else. Subjects which lacked examination-value, such as geography, were almost completely neglected… (p. 2).

The 'trick' that is being perpetrated in English state schools now is not quite so cynical, but there are similarities with Orwell's experiences. Yet Orwell is not averse to setting down rules himself and in some respects offers his own autonomous literacy strategy in his advice to writers. As Clausson (2011) notes, the implicit prescription in Orwell's famous simile 'Good prose is like a windowpane', from the essay *Why I Write* first published in 1946, has been adopted by teachers in the USA as the 'UPS [Universal Power Supply] model of how to write the efficient, business-like prose that students' current professors and future employers will demand of them' (Clausson, 2011, p. 304). As Orwell reveals, perhaps most notably in *Politics and the English Language* (1958), he is prescriptive about what good writing is. This

implies a pedagogical approach sharing some similarities with the autonomous literacy model, although he might well have found the current regime of autonomous literacy barbaric, to adapt his own description, because it encourages what he identifies as bad writing: unnecessarily prolix, full of jargon, etc. Orwell's rules may differ from the injunctions that many English teachers in England impart to their students in order to 'uplevel' their prose but they appear to be similarly prescriptive. He writes:

1. *Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.*

2. *Never use a long word where a short one will do.*

3. *If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.*

4. *Never use the passive where you can use the active.*

5. *Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.*

But his final rule must not be forgotten:

*Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous* (1958, p. 88)*.*

This is the most important because it wittily returns the autonomy to the writer to make his/her own judgment about what 'sounds' right, a precept that this paper argues should be applied to English teaching by providing teachers, teacher-educators and students with more freedom to think and act for themselves in relation to their study of Orwell's literature.

## The case study

It is February, 2016, 11am. A class of fourteen-year-old boys enter a classroom noisily after break. The beginning teacher, S. quickly manages to calm them down with firm but friendly words. The teacher-educator, who is observing the lesson, takes notes using a checklist which requires him to judge S. according to the Teachers' Standards set by the government (The Department for Education, 2011). He is S's UBT, visiting the school to see how she is progressing with her teaching.

The class settle down and S. proceeds to present a series of PowerPoint slides to the class (some of which are discussed in the Findings section below). Each of these requires the students to do various tasks connected with George Orwell's *1984*; her tone is brisk, energetic and calm. The lesson builds up to students reading the opening of *1984* and answering the question:

 'How does the writer use language to describe Winston?'

This is a typical exam task which could be asked of many texts; it requires students to analyse the effects of the language. Students are judged in the exam by the extent to which they meet the criteria of certain 'Assessment Objectives' also laid down by the government (Department for Education, 2013). The UBT quietly asks a number of students what they think they need to do. One student says: 'I don't know, and I don't care.'

The UBT notes, for all S.'s relentless enthusiasm, the atmosphere is low-energy, with few students showing that much interest. However, S. works the class well, encouraging students to write a little. This is difficult because they appear unmotivated by the task.

## Discussion and Findings

### Rubrics limit the teacher's ability to teach Orwell

The beginning teacher was passionate and committed to teaching Orwell's novel and this was communicated in her upbeat manner, as well as in the positive comments she made to students about the text, but her approach was affected by the need to 'shoehorn' *1984* into both the rubric of the new GCSE examination and the Ofsted descriptors for an outstanding lesson. Overtly demonstrating knowledge of examination levels, by ensuring they were recorded on the PowerPoint and in students' exercise books, gave her the confidence that she was appropriately guiding her students at the same time as meeting school and university requirements.

In the observed lesson this was apparent when an 'Assessment Objective' lifted from the English GCSE was reproduced as the 'Learning Objective' (LO) (Figure1).
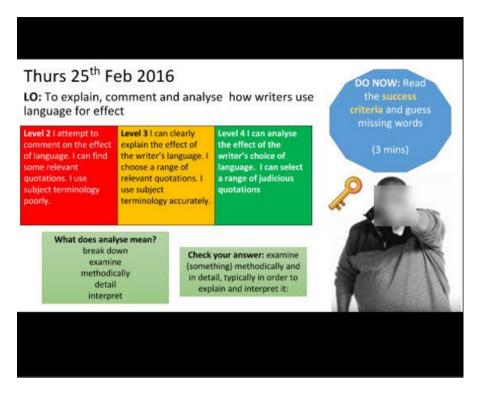
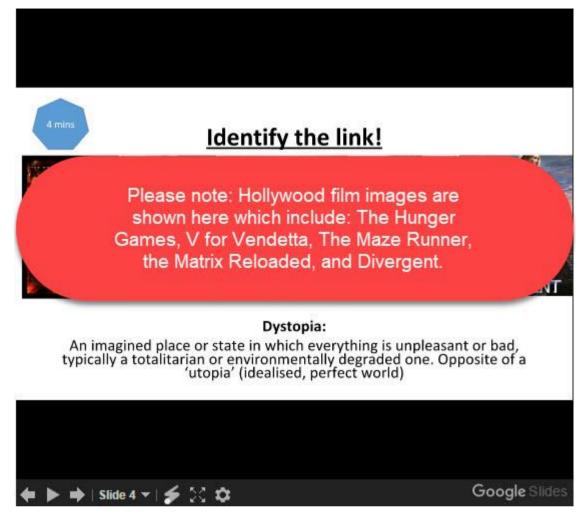**Figure 1: Learning Objective Powerpoint Slide**



The different assessment levels provided on the slide are taken from the mark scheme of the GCSE English Language paper, for which examiners are required to award a level ranging from 1 at the bottom to 4 at the top as well as a mark within that level. The beginning teacher did not provide Level 1 as an option for students because it is the bottom level and she wanted students to aspire to the top level. There was also a gesture towards differentiation, which means tailoring the work to address the diverse needs of students, because it appeared as if students could choose the level they felt able to achieve and then aim to fulfil the criteria within that level by the end of the lesson. To unpick the levels further, S invited students to 'fill in the blanks' for their chosen level descriptor where certain words/key phrases were omitted. This is known as 'cloze' procedure (Wright, 2005, p. 55), a pre-produced tool which is supposed to scaffold learning. However, in his lesson observation, the UBT noted of the beginning teacher:

> Ms S. has a series of cloze exercises for the various levels in English, e.g. "I can use subject terminology _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ (accurately)" etc. I am still not convinced that the students fully understand the levels after doing this exercise; they fill in the sheet quite mechanically. When I speak to A. he cannot explain the subject terminology.

Based on this single lesson observation it is not straightforward to discern why students lacked comprehension of the levels, but an exploration of significant research in this area shows that too narrow a focus upon exam grades or levels can be counter-productive, leading to depressed results because the emphasis is not on learning but attaining the right grade (Watkins, 2010).

Missing from this lesson were the sorts of investigative practices and values that Orwell champions – direct observation, constructive dialogue, and creative interpretation. The UBT promoted this type of dialogic pedagogy in the training sessions the beginning teacher attended, and would have hoped to see learners given an opportunity to offer their authentic responses to the text. Instead, they were for too much of the time encumbered with trying to engage with assessment terminology rather than enjoying reading the novel.

The lesson was not entirely instrumental, however. The following PowerPoint slide offered the potential for a more open-ended discussion around students' own cultural reference points (Figure 2):

**Figure 2: Dystopian Texts Powerpoint Slide**



In Figure 2, S. highlighted two popular works of young adult fiction, *The Hunger Games* trilogy, by Suzanne Collins, and the *Divergent* trilogy, by Veronica Roth, which have been made into commercially successful films. Whilst certainly not identical to *1984* in the dystopian visions they present, they offer several shared reference points. A brief teacher-led discussion ensued about whether students were familiar with these stories and the beginning teacher's purpose was clear in that she was building on links between the novel they were about to read and texts they were likely to have enjoyed already. There was the potential for this to be built into a much larger activity, but all too quickly she moved the students on to completing exam-focused language analysis.

## Surveillance cultures in schools profoundly affect content and pedagogy

Why, then, did her focus keep returning to teaching to the test? The concept of post-panopticism offers an explanation: focusing upon exam-style questions has become a fuzzy norm (Courtney, 2016) of many lessons because failure to comply might result in some form of punishment, for example, being judged inadequate on an initial teacher education programme. Teachers are so concerned about complying with these vague rules, they consequently implement even more stringent guidelines which constrain and police their own and their students' practices.
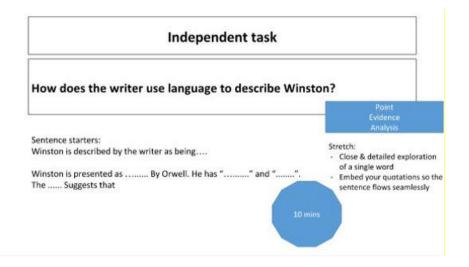
**Figure 3: Independent task**



Figure 3 shows one of the main tasks that students had to complete in the lesson. The question 'How does the writer use language to describe Winston?' (Figure 3) is typical of an English Language GCSE question which aims to engage the higher order thinking skills of students in the GCSE exam. For example, page 6 of the most recent specimen exam paper (AQA, 2018) has a very similar question and task. The slide in Figure 3 then offered two sentence starters which, as the UBT's observation notes show, some students copied down but others did not. As this was an independent task, students were not given the opportunity to talk about how the sentence starters might help them, but were instead advised to use them if they were experiencing difficulties, with off-task students being either attended to or admonished.

The beginning teacher did not draw upon the approaches promoted by the UBT in his sessions where collaborative reading, discussion activities and role-play were advocated as ways of deeply engaging students with literature. To demonstrate how

the exam rather than the novel is at the centre of lesson, Figure 3 also gives yet another toolkit for writing, 'Point, Evidence, Analysis' or PEA as it is frequently known in schools. This is a common acronym that appears in English lessons as a way of supporting exam-style writing about literature, with students advised to make a point, back it up with evidence, usually a quotation from the text, and then analyse it. In all these ways the gentle simulacrum of exam conditions prevailed from the very outset of the students' engagement with the novel, and a sense of Ofsted-readiness in both the resources and conduct of the lesson permeated the classroom.

## The political implications of Orwell are marginalised

The PowerPoint slide in Figure 4 provided two models for answering the question 'How does the writer use language to describe Winston?' Via this type of exam-oriented modelling students were guided to write about the presentation of Winston as a 'sympathetic character'. Model 2, which is clearly the one favoured given the level of detail, polices their feelings, pointing them to the so-called correct answer which is that the reader should 'feel sorry for him'.

## Figure 4: Model answers



Tip: embedding quotes

Example 1:
*Winston is described as having a red face. "naturally sanguine". This could mean that he was ill. Sanguine means 'blood-red colour', so it has negative connotations. He also is described as having blonde hair, "very fair". This means that his hair was very light, and contrasts his face, naturally sanguine.*

Example 2: *Winston is introduced to the reader as being 'naturally sanguine', with 'very fair' hair. Sanguine, meaning red-faced, could suggest that he had a blushing complexion. Furthermore, the adverb 'very' emphasises his light hair. Both these adjectives gives him a delicate or even child-like quality.*
*On the other hand, the paleness of his hair, and the redness of his face could suggest illness and fatigue. Both of these interpretations present Winston as vulnerable, and I would argue that he is presented as a sympathetic character; the reader feels sorry for him as he has to live in poor conditions.*

Students were not invited to interrogate the models nor to offer different readings and so the beginning teacher's model quickly supplanted any other interpretations, inviting imitation rather than genuine engagement with the text. As Xerri's (2013) research into poetry study in English lessons demonstrates, the prevalence of assessment discourses drives pedagogical approach by positioning the teacher as

the one sophisticated reader in the class who acts as the gatekeeper of meaning. Furthermore, there is considerable pressure upon teachers to ensure that their students appear 'literate' in this type of analytical writing, which implies that autonomous literacy (Street, 2011) policies are working even when a piece of literature is the focus of the study.

## The opacity of teacher-education

In his formal assessment of the beginning teacher's lesson under Teacher Standard 3, 'Demonstrates good subject knowledge and curriculum knowledge', the UBT stated: 'The linguistic approach [to literature teaching] is quite new' to the beginning teacher 'but she is familiarising herself with the relevant terminology'. Here was a coded reference to the tutor's concerns about the mismatch between the practices espoused in the school and those championed in his university sessions. The latter refers in essence to his own practices which over many years have been forged from 'the shared experiences of teachers as and with learners, critically interpreted through instruments for reflection' (Daly, 2004, p. 196) and based on his engagement with the research evidence showing that grammar is best taught in context (Myhill et al., 2012). He praised the beginning teacher for teaching grammar terminology (as illustrated in Figures 5 and 6), because this is now expected in most English lessons, even though he did not believe that this way of approaching the reading of the text, particularly in its early stages, was entirely effective.

However, in the face-to-face tutorial following the lesson, away from the Big Brotherly focus on his formal record, his concerns were raised and the carefully constructed formal messages of the UBT's written account could be discussed in a constructive way. Ball (2003) suggests that a performativity culture encourages just this type of opacity in the way that lessons are evaluated.
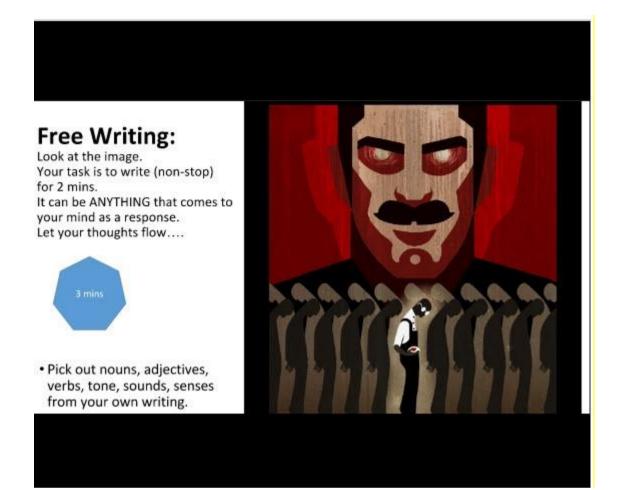
**Figure 5: Free Writing**

**Figure 6: Grammatical terms**

## Conclusions

### How is Orwell taught in the present day within English lessons?

In this case study Orwell's *1984* is reduced to a set of learning resources that do not inspire students in his work. This is largely because the central focus is preparing students for an exam rather than promoting enjoyment of the novel. There is a moment in the lesson when the beginning teacher tries to connect the reading of the novel with the interests of her students, but this is all too brief, as the impetus toward performativity proves stronger. As a result, the novel is simply an autonomous literacy resource (Street, 2011), and where character analysis is invited, pre-prepared models are used to police students' responses to characterisation.

The authors argue that the beginning teacher and the UBT are not entirely to blame for this situation, but rather pedagogy suffers because they are constantly trying to negotiate a complex web of accountability and assessment procedures which act as fuzzy norms. As a result, the meaning and richness of Orwell's writing is lost in this surveillance culture rather than shedding light on it. The ways in which students and teachers are spied upon in English schools could offer the English teacher an opportunity to explore with students their lived educational experiences in relation to the world of the text. This case study demonstrates how prevailing assessment discourses take pedagogy in a somewhat different direction.

However, the Chief Inspector of Schools, Amanda Spielman, announced in 2018 that there will be changes to the way Ofsted inspects, focusing on 'not just what the results are looking like' but also whether schools are offering a 'good education' (2018). At this point, it is unclear whether this will lead to schools becoming less Orwellian places or simply that the new Inspection Framework will introduce a different set of fuzzy norms which remain powerful in the surveillance of teachers.

### Can Orwell's fiction offer insights?

Orwell's depiction of a society entirely shaped by surveillance provides a telling analogy for what is happening in English schools, where compliance is achieved through teachers' self-policing and by the external mechanisms explored above. Thus the concepts of Thought Police and double-think are highly applicable to the situation described. The behaviour of both the beginning teacher and the UBT can be explained because they believe their practices are being closely monitored

through official documents such as teaching resources, students' books and observation sheets. It is only when they sense Big Brother is not watching them that productive advice is offered and accepted. The danger is that the advice may not be acted upon because it is silenced by the prevalent discourses of accountability. All actors in the scenario are the victims of what Lyotard calls 'terror', by which he means 'the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him' (Lyotard, 1984, p. 63). This terror is not akin to the torture of Winston Smith, rather it is the terror of being at odds with the dominant language game in teaching which is shaped by the terminology of Ofsted. As a result, the UBT engages in a form of double-think when he writes positively about the way in which the beginning teacher imparts grammar terminology because he is aware of the Thought Police who might read the document. The off-the-record discussion returns autonomy to the UBT and he is able to tell the beginning teacher what he thinks but the depth of this discussion is not acknowledged in the official document, which remains opaque. Thus the documentation is carefully managed to be part of the fabrication (Ball, 2003, p. 225).

While teachers are not working in a totalitarian state, they are nevertheless employed in environments which are 'high-stakes'. Failure to comply with fuzzy norms can lead to constant pressure which manifests itself in de-professionalising discourses. This situation produces a mismatch between what and how the English teacher would like to teach and his/her actual practices. Yet Orwell's concepts could provide a helpful, incisive and motivating framework for English subject specialists in their teaching of *1984*. As this article shows, Orwell remains an author who inspires English teachers, as was seen in snatches of the beginning teacher's lesson. His ideas about surveillance and control in *1984* are useful precisely because they offer telling labels to identify and chime with the experiences of both teachers and students in contemporary English classrooms.

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