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SCHOOL CULTURE AT RISK OF POLITICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL EXPROPRIATION

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to problematize the concept of school culture both as a concept and as a subject of investigation. It deals with the historical roots of this concept and the fact that it is shrinking—a consequence of the managerial imperatives of effectiveness and accountability in education. School culture, in relation to the quality of schools and the quality of education, has become the subject of audits, arrived at through a developed network of standardisation in education, testing and evaluation. The methodology of evaluation currently lending particular substance to school culture, however, generates different methodological perspectives on investigating school culture and thus research is becoming an instrument of political power. In the research it is then necessary to either abandon the concept of school culture or to free it from spinning round the cycle of evaluation/self-evaluation—a change in school culture—improving the "quality of the school"—a new evaluation/self-evaluation. One way to do this is to employ ethnographic approaches in research into schools and to understand school culture as a system of texts.

Key words: school culture; school quality; managerial accountability; research and evaluation; textuality of school culture; singular and plural interpretations of school culture

An umbrella concept—a cover-up manoeuvre

> The culture of a school, the culture of a company, the culture of living, the culture of eating, the culture of waging conflict, the culture of strawberries? Is it meaningful to rely on such as a hackneyed concept as culture?... Don't we expect dishonourable intentions from those that combine with culture apparently at will? Perhaps so. And that is why we might ask, 'What is the intention behind it? What motivates us to link something with culture?' (Markowitz 1998, 101).

A discursive obsession with "culture" has engulfed schools. In schools today the concept of "culture" is experiencing a similar conjuncture (Gogolin 1998) as did the concept of "process" twenty or thirty years ago (Huber 2009). Just as in those days concepts such as debate, communication, consultancy, development or mediation could not exist without being linked to the concept of process—even though these terms already contain within them the notion of process (Huber 2009, 14-15)—neither can today's school avoid its evaluation culture, teaching culture, learning culture, organisational culture, teacher culture, pupil

culture etc. As Huber (2009, 14) points out, for example, hardly anyone in schools today uses the terminology of teaching methods popular in the 1960s; rather, they are covered by concepts such as learning culture or teaching culture. Terhart (1994, 693) ironically notes that "in principle everything is culture in some way—if in doubt, there is subculture, anti-culture and extreme culture". Schöning (2002, 818) therefore states that culture and school culture constitute "two 'terminological smoke bombs'".

School culture is attractive as a superficial concept; however, not being anchored conceptually—an eternal topic for debate in cultural anthropology—it is able to bring together conceptually heterogeneous frames and ideologies, and in the case of culture in schools, often in a contradictory way. As Eisenhart (2001, 16) has stated in her recent research on schools, "culture may mean one thing to bilingual educators, another thing to educational anthropologists, and something else to ethnic scholars or cognitive psychologists". Culture is not only understood in different ways per se, but also across disciplines. The careful academic reader attempting to establish some kind of order will inevitably remain confused. In current pedagogical discourse, however, it is possible to observe one tendency—frequent proclamations are made invoking school culture and concerning its formation and management, without there being any attempt to explore and describe school culture.

School culture in managerial strategies for social change

These days school culture is mostly discussed in school management handbooks. It is necessary to build, lead and manage school culture and to know when to intervene in it. It is seen as an object of change, to be played around with, and it ties in directly with so-called management changes, designed to improve effectivity and the quality of service (Wagner 2006, Kruse, Seashore Louis 2009). A "strong culture will lead [to] better productivity, adaptability and flexibility" in schools (Tsang 2009, 87). What is crucial though, in terms of the essence of school culture, is permanent change. Any approach to school culture that does not conform to this dynamic is seen as being a thing of the past. Thus, Tsang (2009), for example, criticises the sociologically based "typological-functionalist approach" to school culture, which refers to stable functional elements in school culture within society and at the same time criticises the process approach, based on symbolic interactionism and conflictual concepts, since this approach is adopted solely within school culture, without discussion of the wider social consequences. For Tsang the ideal approach appears to be the improvement-effectiveness approach, whose roots extend back to the 1990s and the *School Effectiveness Research* movement. A change in culture should lead to increased effectiveness and an improvement in the school. If we consider more closely what it is that schools should improve, then generally we find that it is about performance, for example measurements on knowledge and testing. Thus, pupil performance can easily be measured, perhaps using a couple of selected indicators to quantitatively measure school culture and subsequently propose changes. Tsang (2009) suggests, for example, the SCEQ questionnaire (*School Culture Elements Questionnaire*).

This draws on an analogy with the corporate sector—school culture is like the culture of a company (Markowitz 1998). In investigating school culture, tools are being used that were originally developed for other organisations, and so

they are not developing and testing concepts and approaches designed for the specific type of organisation that a school is, but are taking them from a different kind of organisation with completely different features and are adapting them for schools (Schöning 2002, 817).

Based on the current understanding of school culture as outlined above, this approach can be seen as normative. School culture is subjected to change and intervention that is dependent on the imperative of school quality and effectiveness, without there being any awareness of what makes the culture of a school *a school culture*.

> However, no concept of school culture is being created. 'School culture' is seen as being a theoretical and practical requirement for developing the school without the concept of school culture having any substance (*ibid.*).

Here school culture is an instrumental prerequisite for permanent social change. This, according to Terhart, was the motive behind the disappearance of the concept of "society" from pedagogical discourse in favour of the concept of "culture" in the last 20 years. Terhart believes that implicit models of thinking have changed, rejecting "the positioning of 'us' (us, the observers of society) against 'society' (the others, whom we observe)" (Terhart 1994, 694). The concept of "society" contains within it this positioning of one against the other, while the concept of "culture" does not. This includes the notion "that 'we' are part of a social whole and thus we also create it" (Terhart 1994, 694). This opens up the potential for social change and dynamization of social action. Wenzel et al (1998, 15) have also followed this development and add that by substituting the concept of society, in the anonymous juggernaut sense of blocking social change, with the concept of culture, "which implies integration, shared responsibility, shaping from 'below'", the concept of culture can be linked

> to a politically created ideology of society, on the one hand, and to the idea of new social movements, on the other, through the notion that it can be formed 'from below', and altogether certainly contributes to its current attractiveness, but also to a certain diffusiveness (Wenzel et al. 1998, 15).

The concept of culture is legitimising social liberalism, actionism and social fragmentation.
The ethnographer Eisenhart (2001, 17) states that these kinds of "problems with culture" began appearing at the end of the 1970s with the ascendance of "post-Fordist" economics and the emphasis on productivity, specialisation, standardisation, managerism and accountability. A learning organisation is one that is capable of changing "from below" and that is capable of permanent change. The aims of post-Fordist economics are therefore being linked together with postmodernist conceptualisations (Eisenhart 2001).This shift away from the substance frame of culture and towards it being understood instrumentally as a means of social change has even further diffused the concept of culture in schools.

School culture—quality culture

Notwithstanding many of the complexities, school culture can be taken as a possible analytical unit of educational reality. Its diffusiveness (and therefore its considerable complexity) derives from the fact that since the concept of "culture" was introduced into the context of education in the 1930s, it has gradually been linked to all levels: the level of the

school system (the culture of schooling), the level of the particular school (as the culture of a specific organisation), and the level of the classroom (Finnan, Levin 2000), and in the same way, developing within this, we have curricular studies and studies analysing the distinctive cultures of pupils, teachers and of schools as such (Hargreaves 1995, Ebbut 2006). Diffusion can also be discussed in relation to its companion concept—the quality of the school (or the quality of the education)—which we have described elsewhere (Kaščák, Pupala 2009). The conceptual correspondence between the "culture" and the "quality" of a school is more of a certainty than an oddity; what is more striking is if the culture of an organisation is directly linked to the quality of the management—such as when TQM methodologies, for instance, brought it not only into company culture but also into the school environment (Detert, Schroeder and Mauriel 2000). Specifically linking school culture with the quality of a school and education through this methodology is, however, testament to current shifts in how these terms are understood and where school culture is being modified through an obsession with quality and is becoming part of a wider "culture of accountability" as a new model for the shape of school culture (see Developing and Assessing 2010).

Schools and their activities are always linked to specific kinds of expectations. Schools bear a certain level of responsibility for fulfilling these expectations and are accountable for what they do and how they do it. Therefore, there is always demand in schools for accountability, which has a role to play in moulding viewpoints on what is considered to be a quality school, what is quality education, on what form the school culture should take, and which particular kind of culture it fosters (thus we may also encounter the term quality school culture). It is on this principle after all that the indicators on school quality are established, and which even define the "culture of quality" today (Developing and Assessing 2010), and which enable us to deduce what is required for a "positive school culture". The question then is what role does this idea of accountability play in forming the culture of a school, or rather, what kind of accountability are schools being subordinated to and how does this influence conceptions of the quality of the school and its culture? We should just remind ourselves that it is possible to distinguish between a number of forms of accountability: Ball, Vincent and Randor (1997), for instance, talk of market accountability and political accountability, while Besley and Peters (2006) differentiate between bureaucratic, professional, consumer and democratic accountability, which exist in mutual coexistence and where one has the potential to outweigh others. In the period that followed the spread of neoliberalism throughout social administration, all areas including education began to be dominated by consumer and managerial forms of accountability. This accountability is found across the globe—from Europe, the USA to Asia—embedded in the production of policies and practices whose aim is the continued monitoring, evaluating and managing of quality in relation to school accountability at all levels in terms of the public and politicians. This kind of accountability constitutes the mainstay of current educational reforms and has become a social trend rooted in education and has given birth to its own particular culture, which ascribes enormously high values to transparency, measuring and evaluations (Suspitsyna 2010). Part of this culture is an emphasis on audit procedures, relying on standardised models of outcomes linked to high-stakes testing and the consumer model of education, which through endeavours to manage quality (school, education) represents part of the global trend of "new managerialism" and from this stems the new ideology on the administration of education.

As Simons (2002) reminds us it was basically "new managerialism" which placed the topic of the quality of schools and education at the centre of pedagogical discourse and which turned concerns about quality into a permanent obsession, and any step on the path towards the optimisation of education is contemplated via this. Just like elsewhere, the concept of quality management has become deeply embedded within the school environment as well, which as part of neoliberal rationality on the administration of people and organisations represents a shift towards a consumer, offer-demand logic and towards an entrepreneurial model of existence. A school which is constantly concerned with quality is above all an "enterprising" school based on the notion that it produces or provides something. What is being produced and provided is human capital (see Gillies 2011). As a product, this has to be standardised for the public and has to be observable, measurable and achievable—and with the help of technologies of governmentality (Kopecký 2011), such as audits and self-evaluations, the school as an entrepreneurial organisation can demonstrate the relationship between inputs, processes and outputs (Rose 1999). Demonstrable data is aimed at people with the same entrepreneurial mentality and who are seeking information on the "quality of the school" so that on the basis of this logic they can make sense of what is being offered to satisfy their needs. For these very reasons, as Simons (2002) has stated, schools are under continual pressure over the issue of quality, which for them represents "a permanent economic tribunal". Although the school may present itself as an entrepreneurial organisation, it does not directly imply that it is becoming part of business. Rather it "refers to a form of self-government and a specific rationality to think about itself, others and the world: the relation with the environment, processes, procedures and resources within the school, products of schooling, mission and evaluation etc" (Simons 2002, 628). And it is in this sense that a space is opening up for "managing the quality" of the school.

The micro-world of schools, pupils and teachers under the dictates of the audit

One of the key tools in managerial accountability has become the testing of pupils based on a series of educational standards. Within the technologies of the standardisation of education and standardised testing of pupils, a new kind of relationship between the state and education is becoming evident, where schools, as part of the public sector, are starting to apply entrepreneurial logic and where the state is running the public sector as an entrepreneurial environment aided by the controls of achieving standards via across-the-board testing. Increased levels of school autonomy and responsibility (as a prerequisite for successful entrepreneurial self-management) along with the diminished role of the state in running the internal affairs of the school are becoming a specific tool, drawing the public sector into entrepreneurial behaviour; at the same time, however, the role of the state paradoxically is being strengthened through the setting of standards and controls in education through across-the-board testing. The use of standardised testing to measure quality is gradually becoming part of the legislation on education, as is the case for example in the USA with the adoption of the *No Child Left Behind* policy as Suspitzyna (2010) has demonstrated or as in the *Education White Paper* of 2005 in England as described by Ball et al. (2011). Both cases clearly indicate that continual testing of pupil performance is becoming the focal point of the legislation that is being implemented. The establishment of educational

standards and standardised testing as part of the introduction of managerial accountability and the expansion of the neoliberal diktat on performativity is affecting the education sector at all levels of the administration and is changing the school environment, whether at the level of the whole school system or at the level of individual schools and classrooms. It is affecting the professional identity of the teachers and is changing the nature of their influence on pupils, which is having a related impact on the culture of the educational system and the culture of schools as such.

Research by Ball et al. (2011) has pointed to the fact that within the field in which it operates, the phenomenon of standards, as an expression of the "audit culture", has the ability to arrange and rearrange, shape and reshape anything and to attribute position and identity to anyone. Their study (undertaken in the context of England) on the principles of deliverology and the mechanism of the delivery chain shows how the audit culture, where standards play a central role, has permeated down from the macro-level of administration down to the micro-world of schools and classrooms. Ball et al. (2011) demonstrate how a new metanarrative is emerging on schooling to achieve standards and how the phenomenon of standards and controls have become the main filter through which all objects and subjects found in the educational and school environments are perceived. "That is, teachers, pupils and schools and pedagogies, procedures, performance, data and initiatives all of these objects and subjects are to be 'focused' on raising standards (Ball et al. 2011, 5). A "complex matrix of emotions, anxieties and role changes and relationships which produce particular meanings for practice and values, and success and self-worth—for teachers and students" is being created alongside this (Ball et al. 2011, 7).

"Performance culture" is thus becoming a dominant component in school culture as part of the widespread "audit culture" contained within the public sector. At the same time, relatively simple technologies for managing performance are finding their way into schools, such as league tables, national averages, comparative indicators and progress indicators, or via specific institutional pressures (in England, for instance, through the activities of Ofsted [the Office for Standards in Education]).

In terms of the pupils, the impact of these deliverology technologies is manifest in a new type of subjectivisation: external policy changes have led to a change in emphasis on certain types of pupil performance and schools are focusing on different types of pupils. This is illustrated by the so-called A-C economy, which means that attention is focused primarily on pupils whose performance is judged to have the potential to positively impact on the overall evaluation of the school in the national statistics. Schools are deliberately creating packages of various support programmes for precisely these pupils (most often those who are borderline C/D at GCSE level (General Certificate of Secondary Education). Interest in the good of the pupils does therefore not lie in the foreground but is on the retreat in favour of strategies that follow the overall performance of the school in the competition over ranking. Pupils who are the subject of personal intervention programmes are under greater pressure than others and they are variously instilled with responsibility for their own success and the success of the school. They receive individual monitoring of their performance, predictions on their anticipated results and these are all documented. The research conducted by Ball et al. repeatedly confirmed that although "the delivery chain" policy of standards affects everybody, concentrating on a particular kind of pupil means "the *systematic neglect of*

others... with the effect of producing a structured distribution of identities and opportunities and exclusions based on ethnicity, social class and gender" (Ball et al. 2011, 8). The end result is that the pressures associated with standards and testing bring a contradiction into schools over the interests of the pupils and the schools themselves, where interest in the overall assessment of the school in a competitive environment of managerial accountability is pushed to the top.

The presence of this new type of accountability in schools has undoubtedly had an impact on the everyday work of the teacher. The professional authority of the teacher has been reconstituted as a consequence of the introduction of new structures of responsibility. Introducing managerial accountability into the school environment is creating a new model of work for the teachers, which is based on making sure the school successfully competes over quality in the "market in education". Even though current education policy is associated with increasing the autonomy of schools (including the transfer of fiscal responsibility from state to school), the accountability required of schools is directly linked to a strengthening of the indirect regulatory mechanisms of standards and testing. While it is true that these regulatory tools, used to ascertain accountability, are meant to ensure consistency in the performances of pupils and teachers, in fact they are currently leading to the diminished professional responsibility of teachers, so this kind of accountability is a straitjacket. Wong (2006) also demonstrates the consequences of increasing the autonomy of schools while strengthening the "audit culture" through standards relating to the professional profile of the teacher in her research that is a response to the reforms of the education system in China. Her research shows that the attendant "marketization in education" and implementation of new managerialism in schools is shaping the work of teachers such that it can be seen as the deskilling of their work. This stems primarily from the reduced impact teachers have on the aims and content of education, which is dictated by the performance demands of centralised standards and across-the-board testing. Only a small number of teachers see their new working conditions as a challenge to reskill their profession, since the emphasis on accountability causes "the separation of conception and execution" in teaching (Wong 2006, 33). Teachers feel uncomfortable with this situation and as research by Gunzenhauser (2006) has shown, they are often confronted with the dilemma that under the pressures of testing, they are preparing children to perform successfully despite the fact that they themselves do not believe in the performance indicators contained within the tests.

Despite their reduced professional remit, Chinese teachers seeking to maintain their own professionality are being given hope by the policy of "quality education" (*suzhiyiaoyu*), since one of the things it does is motivate them to nurture pupil self-learning (Wong 2006). As Simons (2002) has pointed out, however, this type of nurturing does nothing to alter the reality that the teacher is becoming a component of commercially oriented schools based on managerial perceptions of quality. The new age imperative "teach the pupils how to learn" is after all a goal that corresponds to the logic of entrepreneurial education and the shaping of the so-called entrepreneurial subject:

> The objectification of the classroom as an environment for the promotion of self-directed learning expresses very well what entrepreneurship in teaching is about, i.e. judging what one is doing as a teacher by the quality tribunal (Simons 2002, 629).

The management of the quality of a school is being transformed into the management of the quality of the classroom or what is known as a *Total Quality Classroom,* where the "enterprising" teacher is becoming a "facilitating" teacher in terms of the activities that are to satisfy the learning needs of the pupils. In this network of relations, pupils are becoming "enterprising consumers" expressing their needs and articulating the quality of teaching which will satisfy their needs. The managerial concept of the quality of schools is thus basically creating subjects where the nature of the relationship is pushing school culture into the broader framework of entrepreneurial culture.

The focus on performance is also reflected within the individual parts of the school, the microenvironments and the individual school classrooms. An academic school culture, where the key values are success and excellent educational prospects, encourages pupils to make an effort and to look towards their academic opportunities. This means that in terms of success and fulfilling the expectations placed on them they feel under greater pressure. The values of a school are reflected in the values and regulations of the individual school classrooms. The pressure no longer comes from outside (from the school as an unidentified subject), but from within the classroom, from the individual members. The atmosphere between them is one of mutual competition, which again raises endeavours to succeed, to be better, to be the best. The pupils care about points, percentages and marks. These kinds of comparison come not only from the pupils as the members of a particular class, but the teachers also continually compare the different classes and point out the greater successes or better behaviour amongst them (Lemešová 2008).

Despite these influences, the macro-environment of the school, maintains a certain autonomy at the level of the micro-environment. Research we conducted into school culture (Lukšík et al. 2012) shows that teachers and pupils see the school as a social environment. The pupils in particular (in this case those in Year 8) ascribed importance to this characteristic. For them, school is a place for striking up friendships and forming relationships with other pupils. Interpersonal relations are also important for teachers, particularly in terms of mutual support. Similarly, research conducted by others confirms that pupils experience school primarily as a place where they can meet with their peers, i.e. with people who have the same kind of attitudes as they do (Haselbeck 1999). Schools often, however, deny them this contact. Pupils are divided up into different classes and they are limited to contact with the members of a particular class for the greater part of the day (for their own safety). Although school is seen as a community of people, we increasingly come across the viewpoint that school is a bureaucratic organisation focused on production, whose long-term interests are in upholding regulations and minimising difficulties. They are successful both in focusing on production and on the immaturity of their clients (Brint et al. 2001, 169). Seen from this perspective, school is an organisation that sticks to the established rules and that makes use of what is often an inflexible, formalistic way of operating, in its pursuit of achieving a certain level of performance or creating something. The established rules and social control create pressure, which may not lead the child to participate in social life. At the same time, schools are continually trying to convince us, albeit often unsuccessfully, that these rules and this control and the often unpleasant and boring tasks are the schools legitimate means of authority and not just a capricious use of power (Gregory & Ripski 2008).

Research conceptions of school culture

School culture cannot be considered in instrumental terms only; although this interpretation is typical of contemporary neoliberal approaches to school culture. Paradoxically, however, the neoliberal grip on school culture is not able to pursue its own agenda, to intervene and induce cultural change. This inability clearly stems from its lack of knowledge on how school cultures operate and how to apply cultural models to schools. Henstrand (2006), for instance, states that in investigating the influence of educational reforms on the culture of the school, it was found that "technological" and "policy" approaches were ineffective. These "neither explained the way people experience change nor the interaction of an organization's internal culture with the change process" (Henstrand 2006, 2). Thus many reforms are destined to fail. On this basis, Henstrand suggests that the "cultural perspective" is optimal. In the 1980s in the UK and USA appeals were already being made about the pressing need for descriptive culturological research into schools (Sarason 1982). The rediscovery of school ethnography was self-evident. The basic premise behind cultural intervention in schools is after all that "teacher beliefs about reforms have more impact than facts. The beliefs of members of the Culture and subgroups are ultimately more important than the facts about what actually happens" (Henstrand 2006, 7). Schöning (2002, 818) states that the meanings that members of the organisation ascribe to school events are not directly available; rather, they are hidden and experienced "on a daily basis and of course in a multitude of different forms of expression". Ethnography is a way of capturing the multiplicity of meaning. We should at the same time note that "organisations are generally not simply concerned with achieving their formal aims. Rather they also have an existential dimension and an internal function" (Schöning 2002, 825). This is the psychological relief felt as a result of group identity. Therefore, we can say that "the cultures of organisations are primarily concerned with certainty; they are conservative by nature" (Schöning 2002, 825). Thus it is essential to observe daily routine and everyday interaction.

Henstrand (2006) suggests that there are two conceptual departure points for a satisfactory understanding of school culture. The first is cognitive anthropology based on the assumption that culture is contained within the thoughts of its members and the task of the researcher is to understand the organisational principles that create the basis for behaviour. These principles are the subjects of learning. The second departure point is interpretive anthropology with its semiotic insight into culture.

Qualitative investigation into school culture, however, goes against neoliberal rationality, which operates on the normative logic of the direct influence of school events and of ensuring a measurable improved quality of the school and the accountability of the school as viewed from a quality perspective. The failure of educational reforms initiated on the basis of this logic is found in the lack of understanding about how school cultures operate. Researchers investigating the school environment are therefore faced with the question of what to do with this empty concept that is used purposefully, but which may seriously impact on the environment under investigation. The concept of school culture, which has probably become part of reality as well, may be the subject of investigation, but not of the research conceptualisation, particularly if we know that the environment we are investigating has many dimensions and sides to it.

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If we accept that school is part of its own distinctive culture and the subject of its own culture, then we have to count on there being two possible readings—the culture of the school in the singular and plural senses of the word. Herzog (1999) states that the singular interpretation rests on an "absolutely anthropological" reading, suggesting that the school is the bearer of great human culture and that elements of it copy the culture of society, thus resulting in cultural reproduction. It is a vertical notion of culture, taken from anthropology, where the school is the bearer of things that are specifically human (e.g. literacy) rather than animal. The curriculum then is the pathway into culture, an educational instrument of enculturation. In pedagogy this reading dominated the pedagogical anthropology of the 1980s.

The plural interpretation of school culture stems from an "ethnologically relative" reading, which sees culture as a heterogeneous phenomenon, where one culture stands abreast another and both are equal. This is a horizontal notion of culture. Culture, therefore, exists only in its own varieties and in pedagogy this notion is developed mostly within intercultural pedagogy (Herzog 1999, 230). School is thus a pressure cooker where various cultures come into conflict on the basis of social and ethnic diversity, even including, for example, those that are typically found in schools (pupils, teachers) and a variety of cultural micro-policies are introduced into a network of organisational conflicts, manipulations, strategical partnerships and so forth. The ethnologically relative reading therefore does not presume a high degree of cultural integration.

If we take school culture per se, then what is singularly encultured within it is undoubtedly written culture. We should note that in this case enculturation does not simply mean acquiring the "cultural techniques" of writing, but above all acquiring writing as a "cultural form". Therefore, this can also be seen to be culturally universal. A plural reading emerges in situations where we observe, for instance, the cultures of particular educational areas, which are markedly distinct. Within these areas we find "different epistemic cultures" being acquired (Herzog 1999, 235); these may also be of a monocultural nature (see the physics of Aristotle, Galileo, and Einstein, etc).

The concept of school culture can be used, of course, with different content or it can be rejected and another concept can be used. Let us just stick to this idea that the researcher employs the concept of school culture. The starting point might be one of the sources of origin of the concept and the change in the way in which organisations are understood. Introducing the concept of school culture follows on from the complete move away from the view of the organisation as a "machine" and the shift towards the concept of an organisation as a social entity comprising social processes, social norms and structures. Both in very general terms and in investigating the effectivity of organisational structures, the use of this definition makes it possible for us to explore numerous dimensions and areas within the culture of a school. School culture can be seen as a series of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories, which create the "persona" of the school. The culture of a school is formed from the unwritten expectations created over time by the teachers, administrators, parents and pupils who work together solving problems and dealing with challenges and failures (Peterson 2002). This definition does not mean that we will not come across the permeation of the discourse on managerism discussed earlier or indeed other discourses in the various research areas, but it is highly probable that, particularly

where qualitative research is concerned, we may encounter other processes and elements of school culture. Our investigation, for instance, showed that the culture of a school in our environment may be created by three distinctive elements: 1. a modernist socialist text as a backdrop overlapping with postmodern ecological themes and embellishments, 2. modernist socialism collectivism which has been transformed into a monitored electronic individualism and 3. from socialism to Christianity and on to the stopping of time/the circus of school/the virtual school (Lukšík 2011).

If we were to reject the concept of school culture on the grounds of these ideas contained within it, we could choose another concept. Our analysis (Lukšík and Zápotočná 2010) found that school culture can be conceptualised as a system of texts, i.e. as a kind of textuality. According to social constructionists, the social world is created from texts.[1] The text is not seen simply as a written document, but as words, symbols and images creating an interwoven network of meanings. The text is also a kind of metaphor, the fabric of social life and the social world (Curt 1994). Texts relate primarily to the established forms of social life and the social world (for instance, culture, science and art). Textuality refers to the environment of the text, the system of texts and the fact that they are interwoven. Schools are also an established means of life. In addition to their physical side, schools are constituted of words, symbols, which reflect the thoughts and feelings of the actors who name them, create them; that is, behave according to them. This conception of school culture is closer to the definition of school culture as the symbolic order of a school, which emerges out of the tension between reality, symbolism and imagination (Helsper et al. 2001), but also as a historically transmitted web of meanings (Geertz 2000). One of the textualities of school that we identified in our research points to the influence of the managerial discourse, which results in numerous conflicts when it collides with the traditional functions of schools. The textuality of the school, which we entitled *Control and performance for the benefit of society* is embedded within the clash between textualities operating on a wider scale: the clash between unitary education and socialisation, on the one hand, and differentiation, individualisation, fragmentation and the transformation of the school, on the other. There is also a clash in schools being played out between modernism (performance, obtaining natural resources) and postmodernism (ecology, virtually-run schools) and also a clash between regulations and discipline, on the one hand, and the need for the freedom of a democratic life in school, on the other (Lukšík 2011). It has been shown that the concept of textuality described above can also be used as a methodological tool for investigating narrative plurality in a particular socio-cultural environment (Curt 1994). In this kind of investigation we are not concerned simply with ascertaining what kind of texts exist in schools, but primarily about how they *live*, what kind of power do they have, what kind of role do they fulfil in the running of the school, what new texts are being invoked and in what field of motivation and local knowledge are they found?

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[1] Behind conceptions of the "World as text" lies an entire philosophical turn towards language—from Derrida's deconstructionist philosophy to Foucault, from Potter and Wetherell's feminist critique on language to the discursive analysis of Fairclough and the Vienna School etc.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated how it is as if two relatively distinct perspectives on the quality of schools live side by side. The first of these dominates in the current public education policy discourse and presents the school as being an institution with a specific kind of culture, which is accountable, competitive and directed at performance and economic effectivity. These are the only features currently present in the concept of school quality. The second perspective deals with the internal dynamics of the school; it has no political backing and does not follow economic criteria—quality is dependent on the nature of the relations and the environment, while legitimacy is attributed to the environment per se.

The difference between these two perspectives explicitly involves a distinction between the nature of the research and the situating of the researcher in school reality. In situations where the quality of the school is derived from external criteria (political, economic and other), the research is part of a so-called innovation chain, at the end of which is the increased effectivity and production of the organisation and the quality is a parameter achieved through a certain kind of effectivity. By contrast, the image of a school that is created through the prism of a plurality of the textuality of the culture is autonomous and non-normative, while the quality of the school can be influenced on the basis of understanding. The internal nature of this approach, however, does not provide sufficient footholds for the representatives of the external environment, thus what the researcher has to say is not met with interest, nor is it supported by or developed in public discourse.

Why is the image of school quality created at first glance so important today? What kind of research does it encourage? The consequence of a normative, performance and change oriented approach is an obsession with evaluations, i.e. the creation and use of tools for evaluating and assessing school quality accountability. That is why the current discourse on school culture is evaluation discourse. The umbrella-like external evaluation has produced a number of qualitative tools and also mechanisms, which appear to be internal controls—mechanisms of self-evaluation. Schools are therefore evaluated by armfuls of externally supplied and administered questionnaires on improving the culture of the school and at the same time they are forced to implement self-monitoring and self-evaluation methods (TMQ, SWOT analysis), which appear to use qualitative data based on the internal view the organisation has of its own running. All these tools are supposed to improve the quality of the school in terms of criteria determined by external evaluations. The evaluation criteria are becoming the criteria for quality. Identifying whether the criteria have been fulfilled is the task of assessments and the subject of research into the school at the same time. There is a cross-over between research into school quality and school evaluations, which casts serious doubt on the use of research as an independent tool for gaining knowledge about the quality of a school. This kind of research, which is essentially evaluation, cannot be considered in its qualitative and quantitative forms to be research with truly scientific goals. Scientific research (particularly in the social and human sciences) is strictly non-normative and not driven by the political motives that are always present when defining evaluation criteria. If research into the quality or culture of a school requires and creates certain methodological approaches, tools and even attitudes within the scope of its evaluation criteria, then it should be seen as an instrument for asserting political power over the school, over science

and research, and even over the regulation of the school. In accepting this "research" logic, researchers are becoming part of the spiralling vicious circle of evaluation/self-evaluation—a change in school culture—improving the "quality of the school"—a new evaluation/self-evaluation.

Economic and competitive imperatives should not be present at the beginning of any research investigation into a school, since the point of scientific investigation is to gain knowledge, and only when this is comprehensive can it lead to meaningful normativity. In this case, however, normativity is produced internally and is not acquired. If evaluation methodology replaces research methodology, then it itself is in hock to power. The entirely logical consequence is that the political prism is able to completely ignore comprehensive areas of scientific research into schools, such as ethnographic research, for example. As this article has shown, this kind of perspective is able to describe and explain phenomena such as school culture, school quality and the relations between them in a more comprehensive manner that goes far beyond the pragmatic frame of their utilitarian accountability.[2]

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