Mediating school inspection
– Key dimensions and keywords in official Swedish discourse 2003-2010

Joakim Lindgren*, Agneta Hult*, Christina Segerholm** and Linda Rönnberg*

*Umeå University, Sweden
** Mid Sweden University, Sweden
Aim and scope

- To advance our understanding of the transforming Swedish inspection regime.
- To study the official discourse of state agencies responsible for the supervision of preschool activities, the welfare of schoolchildren, schools management and adult education in Sweden.
- To trace ideas in text production and to understand how systems of ideas change.
- Specifically, to identify and discuss tensions within a number of ideological dimensions concerning what constitute good education and good education governance.
Inspection in transformation – organizational context

• Two agencies:

1\textsuperscript{st} period 2003-2007: Skolverket (The National Agency of Education, NAE)

2\textsuperscript{nd} period 2008-2010: Skolinspektionen (The Swedish Schools Inspectorate, SI)
Notes on data selection and methods

- a particular genre of texts, i.e. out-turned texts in the form of official annual accounts and plans, texts and brochures directed to municipalities, schools, the public and the government
- texts that could tell us something about the directions, views, ideas on education and governing that underpinned the inspection activities as presented to outsiders
- two major primary audiences; a) the government and b) the general public including local policy makers and practitioners
- Analytic instrument; ‘ideological dimensions’ (Bergström & Boréus (2005) derived from research questions in the project.
- Identify, sort and analyze terms, concepts and expressions that were both frequently used and carriers of central meaning or values in relation to the dimensions.
- The analytical instrument facilitates comparisons over time
- Four authors; job sharing and joint discussions (‘inter-subjectivity’)

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Ideological dimensions

• Equivalence vs. elite
• Development vs. control
• Soft vs. hard techniques
• Expertise vs. evidence
Equivalence vs. elite

- ‘Equivalence’ has been charged with different meanings.
- From a view of ‘equivalence’ as concerned with increased segregation and poor results for disadvantaged pupils, to a view emphasizing raised standards in subject knowledge.
- The ‘right’ for gifted children to get the support they need in order to reach their full potential – ‘a restricted elitism’.
- An ongoing ideological conflict between social justice/‘public good’ and individual rights/‘private good’ (Englund 1993)
Development vs. control

• 1st period: NAE introduces control within a tradition based on development. Review (or control) as a vehicle for improvement: ‘We’re inspecting for improvement’ (Skolverket 2005a, p. 7).

• ‘Compliance with government requirements and descriptions of quality is a prerequisite for guaranteeing the rights of each child, youth or adult student to equal care and education. But it is equally important for education to be seen as stimulating and meeting the needs of parents, children, young people and adults’ (Skolverket 2005a, p. 8).


• ‘The teachers’ didactic competence is also a success factor of importance. This means that we will enter the classrooms to observe and make judgements of how teaching is performed’. (Skolinspektionen 2009, p. 5)
Soft vs. hard techniques

- Instruments for data collection includes questionnaire responses, structured interviews, informal conversations, document analyses (e.g. of self-evaluations), statistics and observations of activities and work.
- The focus of inspection has implications on methods. Inspection areas:

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<td>• Results: Norms and values, Knowledge</td>
<td>• Attainment/goal fulfilment and results</td>
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<td>• Activities: Work on norms and values, teaching, steering, management and quality work</td>
<td>• Educational leadership and development</td>
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<td>• Conditions: Access to information and education, Resources</td>
<td>• Learning environment</td>
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<td>• Individual pupils’ rights</td>
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Expertise vs. evidence

• Both periods: mix between expertise and evidence. Comparisons based on statistical data are used on different levels, including the international, national and local level.

• The work of inspectors is described as evidence based (objective, impartial, fixed manuals) in both periods, but...

• In the 1st period, the professional judgment is present and it adjusted to local conditions. The inspector is a person with experience: ‘experience of steering and leadership, experience from school juridical investigations and from pedagogical work in different school forms’ (Skolverket 2003c, p. 28)

• The 2nd period features a more ‘invisible’ inspector. The technique is guarantor of an inspection described as ‘systematic’, ‘impartial and independent’ and ‘based on analysis of risk and essentials’. This stance is underlined by terms like ‘indicators’, ‘handbook of assessment processes’, ‘assessment/supervision model’, ‘examination technique’ (Skolinspektionen 2009; 2010a, b, c)
Concluding remarks

• Tentative conclusion: Tensions and changes linked to:
  
  ▪ a) an increased stress on success/good results in the knowledge economy
  
  ▪ b) a transition from a pedagogical to a more juridical discourse, showing signs of ‘juridification’ and finally, to
  
  ▪ c) the construction of the auditable or inspect-able school (and municipality).