Values in Evaluation: the *what* and *how* values in Swedish school inspection

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Abstract

This paper analyses values permeating the Swedish school inspections. School inspection is becoming increasingly influential in education policy and practice globally. As all evaluative activities school inspection conveys particular values albeit sometimes disguised in a more supervisory or legal rhetoric. This analysis highlights the what (substantial) and how (procedural) values embedded in the Inspectorate as expressed in interviews with high-ranking officers. Results point to tensions and ambiguities in values. Values concerning what to promote stress each child’s right to be awarded a passing grade in a safe environment. Values about how inspections are to be undertaken underline assessments based on equal requirements on schools, but also on a needs-oriented procedure. Reports are to sustain: Credibility, clarity, accessibility, comprehensiveness and impartiality. These values are not easily reconciled with the reporting style (deviation reports) where mainly flaws and irregularities are noticed, i.e. a style based on values like shaming and blaming.

Introduction

In a global, and perhaps particularly European context, school inspection is increasingly becoming a type of evaluative activity, or even evaluation system favored by national policymakers when it comes to evaluating and assessing (the “quality” of) teachers, schools and education systems. The Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) has for example presently 29 member inspectorates, mainly European, but also Australian (SICI not dated). Some of these member nations have quite recently decided to install school inspection like Albania and Norway. Others have a long tradition like England and Scotland (Croxford et al. 2009, Ozga 2011).

As argued by many evaluator theorists (e.g. House & Howe 1999, Schwandt 2002) evaluation cannot be separated from values. In all evaluative activities values are present, conveyed and have more or less impact on what is evaluated, assessed or (quality) audited. Several international studies (e.g. Ball 1998, Gray & Gardner 1999, Perryman 2009, Thrupp 1998) show that school inspection indeed has an impact on education practice by focusing on particular criteria, by publishing reports and by following up on schools to check if they comply with the decisions and improve in line with recommendations. Not only do teachers and head masters change their behavior, like producing required information of strengths and weaknesses in different predefined areas (sometimes called self-evaluation) (Perryman 2009), but different types of evaluative activities used as management techniques also impact on how people think and feel about education as Ball (1998) argues. This is similar to Dahler-Larsen’s notion of constitutive effects of evaluation (Dahler-Larsen 2011, forthcoming). In Dahler-Larsen’s view more is at stake when considering evaluation effects than modification of behavior. That is, evaluative activities, and perhaps specifically if they are carried out systematically, regularly and comprehensively like school inspections, may impact on our perception and understanding of ourselves and the surrounding world in particular

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1 The author acknowledges support from The Swedish Research Council (VR) for financing the projects Governing by Inspection. School Inspection and Education Governance in Sweden, England and Scotland (no 2009-5770, Segerholm, Lindgren, Rönnberg) and Swedish national school inspections: Introducing centralised instruments for governing in a decentralised context (no 2007-3579, Rönnberg).
ways that are expressed in the values permeating these activities. Language and activities (like evaluation) shape our thinking of who and what we are, of the surrounding world and what our society is. We also participate in shaping our thinking, our perceptions by using the very same language and taking part in activities, but also by different interpretations and by creating or borrowing new thoughts/ideas. In school inspection values about what constitute a good/bad school, good/bad teaching and teachers, important/unimportant knowledge, how to learn, good/bad societies, etc. are present in both what is inspected and in how the inspections are carried out. This means that values present in school inspection are potentially influential in shaping education. Since school inspection is presently such a widespread practice, and policymakers rely on it to enhance education quality, it is important to critically scrutinize the values embedded in these inspection policies and activities. Hence, the aim of this paper is to contribute to such a critical examination by analyzing the what (substantial) and how (procedural) values permeating the Swedish school inspection as expressed in interviews with high-ranking officers. However how the inspection policies and values illuminated by the analysis are interpreted and acted on, and to what extent these values permeate and affect educational practice is outside the scope of this paper.

In the following the paper is organized in four sections. First some notes on methodology and methods are presented. A short description of the Swedish inspection agency/ies is then provided in order to situate the analysis of the interviews. Thereafter the values emerging from the analysis are offered and quotations from the interviews given to demonstrate how the what and how values are expressed in the interviews. The paper ends with a brief discussion of the findings relating them to Dahler-Larsen’s notion of constitutive effects of evaluation.

Notes on methodology

A starting point for the analysis is, as claimed above, that values are part of evaluation. Values cannot be taken out or being dealt with separately in evaluations/evaluative activities. Values also reside in language and in the language used in an evaluation (in this paper school inspection). The indicators, criteria and questions chosen and used in the inspection process, the decisions and requirements of actions to take in inspection are all conveyed through language.

A large portion of the Swedish Schools Inspectorate’s (SSI) activities are directed to so called regular supervision (a description of the Inspectorate is provided below), meaning controlling that schools and municipalities abide by the national intentions laid down in the Education Act and Ordinance, the National curriculum, General guidelines, and other national policy documents. But laws and regulations are based on certain values and have to be interpreted into areas, indicators, criteria, etc. for what to supervise/inspect and how to do it. And in interpretation and translation into what and how to supervise/inspect, values also enter.

So interpretation is central in inspection and it is also central in this analysis. Interviews are language and need interpretation. The analysis and paper could be described as resting on a critical hermeneutical methodology, without subscribing to any particular ‘version’ (e.g. Ricoeur’s, Gadamer’s, Ödman’s or any other). The analysis may also be
described as a search for content and meaning or as a mix in between a qualitative analysis of content and ideas, in this case understood as underpinning values (Bergström & Böréus 2005, Böréus & Bergström 2005) The questions What is inspected? and How are the inspections carried out? directed the search. A mix of noting frequently occurring terms and concepts and of noting concepts carrying central standpoints and meanings in the interviews was applied. Looking for patterns of values linked to more general value systems in the answers given to these questions, but also looking for ambiguities and contradictions characterized the analysis and interpretation process.

Seven high-ranking officers at the Swedish Schools Inspectorate were interviewed in autumn 2010 and spring 2011. The interviews were in between one and one and a half hours long, and were tape recorded and transcribed. The selected respondents formed the major part of what can be described as the leading group of the SSI. In that capacity they are expected to be representatives of the official inspection policy and practice as it is expressed in written and spoken language. Here it is their spoken statements that are analyzed. Informed consent and confidentiality were exercised, and the results of the study are solely used for research purposes. No claims are made that the values in inspection highlighted in this analysis are the ones that dominate written inspection reports or the inspectors’ activities when visiting schools and municipalities.

**Swedish school inspection**

Swedish school inspection was installed in 1861 as a means to control that local authorities took on the responsibility to provide elementary education for all children in (“folkskola” in Swedish) (Nilsson 2011). In 1960s national inspections were organized through the National Board of Education in the form of county inspectors who acted in a frame of strong and fairly detailed central steering resulting from the extensive education reforms at that time. The inspectors collected statistics, distributed state grants and visited schools, often unexpectedly, and listened to demands from the schoolteachers and headmasters.

In 1990 the National Board for Education was closed down and a new national agency was decided, the National Agency for Education (NAE) (Segerholm 2009, not dated, Lindgren et al. 2011). Responsibility for comprehensive schooling was decentralized to municipalities as well as state grants and in the national curriculum of 1994 particular responsibilities for headmasters and teachers were listed. School inspection was abandoned, and the demands on local authorities to supervise schooling were increased. Critique from the political opposition of the Social Democrats in office, and dissatisfaction with local efforts fuelled demands to reintroduce national school inspection. This was done in 2003 and the NAE was commissioned by the government to inspect all schools in six years cycles. The inspection model rested on a rationale

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2 The history of Swedish school inspection is based on Nilsson 2011.
3 The description of inspection from 1990 to present is based on Segerholm 2009, not dated and Lindgren et al. 2011.
4 A municipality is a geographical, political and administrative unit with a local parliament and political boards and administrations for different political areas like education, elderly care, social care, leisure activities, infrastructure, etc.
where the preconditions, work processes and results/attainment were related in an overall description, assessment and decision.

When the conservative-liberal-center parties’ coalition in opposition won the election in 2006, the new minister of education crusaded to reform the entire Swedish education system, his opinion being that the national results were too low in national and international tests jeopardizing Sweden’s competitive position on the global market. A new inspectorate was decided along with far reaching reforms concerning all educational levels.

The new national agency, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate now performs regular supervision, quality assessments, directed supervision, approve licenses for independent schools and handle complaints. Municipalities and individual schools are assessed. Four areas are examined in regular supervision: Attainment and results; pedagogical leadership and development; environment for learning; and individual students’ Rights. Quality assessments are thematic and a decision of what thematic areas to assess the coming year is made by the Director General. The decisions are preceded by an analysis of available statistics and other information (a so called risk- and importance analysis, ‘risk- och väsentlighetsanalys’ in Swedish). Generally an inspection process includes analysis of documents sent in from municipalities and schools according to a list from the SSI. Questionnaires are distributed to all students, parents and teachers and responses are analyzed before site visits. In schools with a favorable inspection history and sound documents no visit is made. Visits include interviews with headmasters, a group of teachers and a group of students. Responsible local politicians and administrators are also interviewed. Oral feedback is given before a public report and decision is written.

**Values in Swedish school inspection**

This section starts with a presentation of the respondents’ general views of the inspection activities, and subsequently moves over to the analysis of the more specific what and how values based on the statements from the interviewees. Quotations from the interviews are translated from Swedish to English and polished to make them easier to read. Where sentences have been taken out to shorten the quotation and stress the essence this is marked by /---/.

As a general response to the question of what is the main purpose with the present national inspection agency and inspection activities (regular supervision, quality assessments, directed supervision, etc.) expressions like “a better school” or “good education for all children in a safe environment” were used pointing to different ways of articulating the overarching aim for the SSI and inspections. By that most of the respondents relied in one way or another on the official slogan of the SSI in how they conveyed this. The variation in statements concerns if good education is the right for “all children” or for “each individual child” and if this right was expressed as “good education” or as the right “to be awarded a passing grade”. These differences may

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5 There are some problems with translation from Swedish to English here. The expression “the right to be awarded a pass grade” is meant to demand of the schools and teachers to act so that each and every child
seem of little consequence but actually reflect rather different positions in relation to the notion of citizenship, as mainly an individual (private) rights or as a public good (Englund 1993).

Some respondents also elaborated their answers and pointed out that there is no simple causal link in between what they do and a better school. The SSI is only one of several measures or initiatives in a complicated mix of policies, actors and actions striving to improve the school. At the same time it was recognized that the SSI in fact, is commissioned by the government to control that rules and regulations laid down in the Education Act and Ordinance and other national policy documents are followed. One of the respondents expressed this as follows:

*One the one hand it (the school inspection, author’s clarification) is to be one piece of the large jigsaw puzzle in which many different policy actors have different types of responsibilities, and where we are one, as mentioned, helping to contribute to the development of the Swedish school. /-
--/ But we also have a commission to control, and in that way act as the extension of the government and see to that in fact…it turns out the way it has been decided.* (Officer 6, p. 5)

Another of the interviewed persons said:

*That is, how do you act in order to pursue what has been decided in a democratic order, in the best way, so that school development is promoted. That is the trick, somehow.* (Officer 1, p. 6)

It is quite clear that these high-ranking officers live with the tension posed by both striving to be a source for development and improvement, and being aware that the SSI acts as control agent for the government. The more detailed values embedded in what these officers put forward as the direction or substance in SSI’s evaluations/inspection, and how inspections are to be carried out will now be dealt with.

What values

There is a striking resemblance in values surfacing in the interviews concerning the importance of assessing whether or not those responsible for education in municipalities (local politicians and civil servants) and schools (primarily head-masters but also teachers) are following the rules and regulations. Rules and regulations here denote national policy documents decided by either the parliament or the government (the Education Act and Ordinance, the national curriculum, course syllabi for school subjects) or national guidelines produced by the National Agency for Education (e.g. concerning quality assurance, grading, students’ individual development plans). Officer 1 expressed it as “…and when we talk about a ‘better school’ we mean more aligned to the national curriculum, objectives and course syllabi for school subjects.” (p. 6) It seems to be a value in itself to align all work to these legal and juridical requirements independent of what they are based on. But as a couple of respondents pointed out, the reach an attainment level equal to the fulfillment of the requirements for a passing grade. It is my understanding that in the United States the No Child Left Behind Act held similar intentions.

6 The concept "the school" is mainly referring to the comprehensive school in this paper. Comprehensive education in Sweden is nine years and children usually start the year they become seven years.
rule of law is important and one person said that one aspect of this is to uphold the principle of equivalence\(^7\) in education:

_The students shall get a good education in a safe environment. /---/ But it is also about securing the right, to be a guardian of the rule of law for students. (Officer 2 p. 4) /---/ What I find very central is the requirement of equivalence. That is, not the same but the right to education of equal value and good quality. And then there is this part that has to do with student assessment and grading, since we have to, some way or another, to handle this situation where grading is performed by so many different actors who have different preconditions /---/ and it is supposed to be based on the principle of equivalence /---/ and we have to believe that this can be done in a way that is based on the rule of law. (Officer 2 p. 5)_

Several respondents underscored the importance of a child-centered perspective in the inspections, which is also apparent in the slogan of SSI stating children’s or students’ rights to good education. Good education apparently is not only about abiding by national regulations. Good education is in addition about increasing the level of attainment or as Officer 4 put it “…students knowledge development, that is what we have to work with above all…” (p. 4) Good education was interpreted by almost all of the interviewed to mean education based on criteria drawn from successful schools research. In the words of Officer 4:

_We cannot make any other interpretation than what is said in the laws and regulations. We can add and we do in our quality assessments and we also relate the rules to current research /---/ effective schools research /---/ school improvement research /---/ leadership research /---/ research on student assessment and grading (Officer 4 p. 8)_

And Officer 3 pointed to more or less the same things:

_Areas that I find important to evaluate and some of the ones we assess /---/ are the leadership of the head-masters /---/ the educational leadership /---/ and high expectations on the students /---/ and a safe peaceful environment (Officer 3 p. 13)_

A change in attitude is also necessary and according to Officer 5

_“…it is also about supporting a change of attitude, where all have to embrace an attitude based on the idea that the schools have to try to work in a direction so that all students reach the level of a passing grade…” (Officer 5 p. 9)_

However, resources or other local conditions are not of interest in the inspections and are not examined or taken into account in the decisions as Officer 1 clearly states: “So far, we have not considered the resources at hand in the municipalities. Quite simply, education shall be carried out.” (p. 13)

\(^7\) The principle of equivalence has been the hallmark of Swedish public education for decades. From the beginning it concerned equal allocation of resources and a common national curriculum. In today’s Swedish landscape of education where independent schools run by shareholding companies run on tax revenues compete with public schools run by the municipalities, it has more to do with local and individual freedom than with equality (Englund 2005).
The rule of law seems to be an overarching value present in these high-ranking officers’ views of inspection. Not one of them commented on the fact that the number of rules and regulations have expanded during the last decade and become more and more detailed now giving instructions of for example how to write so called individual student development plans. This is something that traditionally has been part of teachers’ professional tasks, and not regulated by formal rules and detailed guidelines. However it is now one of the mostly criticized areas by SSI (Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2011 p. 14) and the stress on headmasters to be active leaders can perhaps be understood as way to persuade teachers do their work as stipulated in the national policy documents. Values in the interviews of how education best is carried out rest on a belief that strong leaders and high expectations on students is the path to success. In this view responsibility (and accountability) for educational results are made an individual responsibility decoupled from political decisions and priorities albeit expressed in a language stressing the Rights of children. The ambition in SSI to “look at teaching” (see quote below) may also be interpreted in the same direction; teaching (and teachers and headmasters as responsible individuals) is to be reviewed more closely.

For some of the respondents inspection itself is of value as a lever to change education practice:

- We inspect those areas that we know are important in order to achieve good knowledge results, and that is the reason we say that we have to look at teaching (Officer 7 p. 5) /---/ There is no reason in the world to spend a couple of millions on examining an area we know works very well. Rather we examine critical areas where there is a need for development and improvement (Officer 7 p. 6)

This means that inspection as described in the interviews is also perceived as a means to implement national policy by successively emphasizing different areas in the inspection processes. This is particularly interesting at present since there is now a new Education Act and Ordinance to be applied. The new law also makes SSI better equipped to force schools and municipalities to abide by the extended rules and regulations since fines and the closing of schools can now be the result of inspections (SFS 2010:800).

How values

There is particularly one value about how inspections are carried out voiced in the interviews; the importance of assessments based on equal requirements. In the Swedish language, this is expressed in the same terms as the above-mentioned principle of equivalence. The logic is based on the idea that in order to be just and legitimate, and adhere to the rule of law, the assessments have to be carried out in the same way in all schools and municipalities and anchored in equal requirements. The following quotations illustrate this. The second one is quite long but also gives details about how equivalent assessments are to be achieved.

- And we have lawyers who ‘quality assure’ (‘kvalitetssäkrar’ in Swedish) all our decisions, both concerning schools and more overarching decisions. This is an important part of our activities and it is a big challenge to make sure that the inspection processes are carried out ‘equivalently’
likvärdigt' in Swedish) throughout the agency. And in that respect there is a lot to do still. Not even in the different regional offices this is functioning...as it is meant to. (Officer 3 p. 4) We measure all according to the same measurements. And in one place some of the results may be very good and in other places they are less good. This is a dilemma since the school is supposed to be equal. /---/ But we measure their results in the same way. (Officer 3 p. 7)

As you know we have very clear descriptions of our inspection processes in order to make them equivalent, in order for all to do it in the same way, and to make it possible to carry them out with some speed. /---/ Equivalence means that we have to assess the same criteria or issue on equal terms independent on whether it is in the north or the south of Sweden. /---/ And where is the level when we can say that this is not acceptable. And this level in the assessments has to be the same everywhere. And it is this type of equivalence ...I think is a big challenge and I respect the difficulties. Because on the one hand we are individuals who assess and not one case is to a hundred per cent similar to another. On the other hand it is a matter of the rule of law, to make equivalent assessments, and this is a challenge for us. In that respect the descriptions of the inspection processes are of substantial help. /---/ ...and we do not only listen to what the headmaster has to say about action plans. We actually collect action plans and look at them, and in doing that we enhance the conditions for equivalence. All sections work with their internal equivalence in their assessments. /---/ What we also do now in our assessments of school subjects (quality assessments, author’s clarification) is to record lessons, that is, before the actual inspection process, and use the recording and apply the criteria and indicators we plan to use and check how we assess. (Officer 7 p. 8-9)

Officer 5 further elaborates the importance of equivalent inspection processes:

For us, we have everything schematically put down, concerning the quality assessment process, the regular supervision process, and so on, in processes, where we have every single little part defined. And we also have... around every such little part there are a number of guidelines and we have to follow them and it is only... they are sometimes recommendations where we can find ideas of how things can be carried out. /---/ The (description of, author’s clarification) process itself has to be followed by everyone. (Officer 5 p. 12)

The importance of this principle of equivalence and how it is to be upheld in the inspection processes, independent of what type of inspection it is, is contradicted by the simultaneous application of a different principle; that of a needs-oriented process.

I’d like to say that what has been aimed at, when it comes to the new model, is to make it as functional and rational as possible. And that means it should be sharper as well as more frequent and efficient. And to clarify I might also say that it strives to be more flexible and needs-oriented than before. It does not have to appear in the same way everywhere, but a new thing as I understand it, and quite apparent is that we work on the basis of “risk and importance” (see next quote for an explanation; in Swedish ‘risk- och väsentlighetsanalys’) (Officer 4 p. 9-10)

In Officer 1’s quote this principle of needs-orientation and more efficient use of SSI’s resources is described.
We do a basic supervision when the schools show good results, and at a fairly quick ...well, it is a thorough analysis of documents we do, but if it looks good in the documents and the results are good, we do a quick visit at the school and check if it really is the case. And if the picture can be confirmed, the inspection is finalized. But based on the documents a decision can be made to carry out a broader supervision from the beginning. And we also do deepened/thorough/extensive (“förjupad” in Swedish) supervision if there are some particular areas showing up in the documents that we think need to be examined more closely (Officer 1 p. 9)

Somewhat surprising, not a single respondent commented on the apparent conflicting logics between inspection on equal terms and needs-oriented inspection. At a general level there is a conflict between these logics and the values they promote. Even though the descriptions of how the inspection processes are to be performed are extremely detailed, tracing every single little step, the analysis of the collected documents from individual schools lead to disparities concerning what criteria are emphasized for different schools. Also on a more detailed level the principles are conflicting. If the same criteria are assessed in all schools, different inspectors interpret what they hear read and observe in dissimilar ways, as recognized above by Officer 7. Values embedded in the two principles are ‘the rule of law’ and justice interpreted as assessment on equal terms and based on equal requirements, and needs-orientation interpreted as inspections related to the perceived status of education quality in individual schools. Two more values are visible in the quotations above: The first is efficiency, as an economic notion of inspections. The second is a particular understanding of knowledge as an objective description of reality that is produced by systematically assembling observable knowledge in an identical way (evidence of proof). This knowledge is used to substantiate claims made in the assessments and decisions, and is of value because it is closely related to the rule of law. The inspectors have to reconcile the tensions these conflicting logics and values in how the inspections are carried out in their daily practice, partly supported by the lawyers at SSI who help translate their assessment into written reports and decisions that need to be “correct” and hold up in a court of law.

All respondents displayed a widespread uneasiness concerning the reporting style at the time of the interviews. Although some of them said the new Education Act gives the SSI more space for maneuver to guide and counsel, and bring forward positive assessments, they still seem to be disturbed by the critique of the deviation reports from those who are inspected as demonstrated in the following quotations.

I think this is sometimes experienced as a problem, both within the agency and outside, this reporting, the fact that we report on deviations. ...well the effects are a bit peculiar with these deviation reports, because there may be things we do not write about, and one reason can be that we did not notice, and the other reason is that it does not exist so to speak. (Officer 2 p. 10)

And we have had some problems since in our reporting we emphasize deviations, that is what is negative. And those who we examine... find this is not helpful. They think that there is a very good discussion when the inspectors give their oral feed-back, it is balanced and nuanced and bring

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8 It is difficult to find a good English term here.
forward both positive and negative findings, but in our written report we are negative. (Officer 6 p. 10)

In reporting the assessments and decisions officers have “…to follow the principles of comprehensiveness and impartiality in the Public Administration Act.” (‘förvaltningslagen’ in Swedish)9 (Officer 2 p. 6). The SSI has developed a policy for communication and as Officer 6 explained:

We talk about the three T:s clarity, accessibility and credibility (‘tydlighet, tillgänglighet och trovärdighet’ in Swedish, hence three T:s). Our opinion is that we shall express ourselves in a clear manner, in writing and orally, so that all people can understand what we say/---/credibility is about making it visible on what grounds decisions are made so that they are not questioned. (Officer 6 p. 9)

Clearly these ambitions in reporting are not easily reconciled with the reporting style where deviations, in the sense of irregularities or what is not up to standards, constitute the essence. The dissatisfaction shown in the interviews around this issue also relates to the relief most of the respondents expressed when talking about the opportunities given by the new Education Act. From July 1 2011 the work of the SSI and thereby the inspection processes may include portions of advice and counseling. According to the respondents this is to be achieved by following the schools during a longer period and in a more positive and supporting manner. Officer 3 noted the difference between the different inspection models as follows:

Presently (autumn 2010, author’s clarification) we focus on deviations in our reporting but next year we will try to get more into advice and counseling /---/ We now have a new model, we are following the schools for six months, and since we follow the schools more closely the expectations are that change will occur faster. And I believe that earlier we worked using this as a threat but now we have to make it something positive (Officer 3 p. 9-10)

It has to be understood that the change mainly concerns the prolonged period the schools are followed by the SSI and the activities following the report and decision rather than a dramatic change in reporting style. Officer 6 said:

We hope, by more following-up activities, to be more present and by that take some more steps in the right direction (Officer 6 p. 6) We will not leave a school or municipality alone before we are sure they have understood and that they will start development work. That is, we will be more meticulous in our follow-ups. (Officer 6 p. 9)

The how values illuminated by the analysis point to inherent tensions in the way the SSI has organized the inspection processes. Two conflicting logics are in operation at the same time according to the respondents – one stressing equivalence as matter of justice (treating all in the same way) where objective knowledge is essential, and the other based on differentiation of resources related to need and efficiency (more to those who are doing worse as an overall strategy to use resources efficient). Furthermore experience apparent problems in how the SSI is to handle the style of reporting and at

9 I have not found a proper translation here.
the same time act as advisor or counselor, the last something most of the respondents seemed to be in favor of. Also the value-laden words attached to Swedish public administration are difficult to apply on the deviation presently the dominant style of reporting, at least in the regular supervision.

Discussion

Before turning to a discussion about constitutive effects (Peter Dahler-Larsen 2011, forthcoming) and the values in Swedish school inspections as presented in the analysis a few comments of the results are made.

The values exposed in the interviews have to be understood in relation to the present government’s and education minister’s ambitions to raise the standard of Swedish students when it comes to attainment and results on national and international tests, where Sweden has regressed lately. In 2006 when the conservative-liberal-centre parties coalition won the election, the minister of education announced that Swedish schools had to improve, raise the standards, increase national and international test results, and abandon the so called wolly pedagogy (‘flumpedagogik’ in Swedish). This was to be achieved by harsher and sharper inspections, a reformed teacher education, a new Education Act, new national curricula and course syllabi in the school subject, and a new grading system. All these far-reaching reforms have been decided in the parliament as the same coalition continues to stay in power.

As already mentioned, a new national agency was decided, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate, commissioned to control more frequently that schools and municipalities lived up to the requirements. New models for inspections were called for since the old model was deemed inadequate, and the reporting style was also changed. The new inspection processes emphasize “good education” meaning following the rules, regulations and instructions in the national policy documents independent of local conditions. Furthermore good education is interpreted in line with what is put forward in successful schools research. Indicators in the inspection are drawn from there and made into national requirements, as indicators for all schools.10 This is what is to be controlled. Within the agency there are arguments for more development oriented inspections as well, particularly visible in the concerns about the reporting style and in the recent possibility to give advice opened by the new Education Act. What is witnessed here and articulated in the what and how values in the SSI is the difference between control and development in the purpose of evaluation (e. g. Karlsson 1999, Vedung 1991). As in many other evaluative activities these two purposes are put together in the same evaluation/assessment/inspection process here leading to an apparent tension or even conflicting situation. The respondents’ experiences and views in the interviews are also similar to what was found in analysis of written policy documents from the former national inspection agency (NAE) and the present (Lindgren, Hult, Segerholm & Rönnberg 2011), strengthening the results of this analysis.

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10 It would be interesting to conduct a comparative analysis between the new Education Act and the main results of successful schools research. An intuitive hypothesis is that there are many similarities.
Turning now to the results of the analysis and their relation to constitutive effects some critical issues will be raised. Dahler-Larsen writes:

*By constitutive effects I refer to how QAE (quality assurance and evaluation, author’s clarification) redefines the meaning of education and the practices of education by means of installing new discursive and cultural markers defining standards, targets and criteria.* (Dahler-Larsen 2009, p. 153)

The point he makes is that “…social reality emerges out of tests…” (Dahler-Larsen forthcoming) Substituting ‘tests’ to ‘inspection’ this means that our perceptions of what education (in this case) is and ought to be emerges out of inspection. This is not to say that other activities like parliamentary decisions of new reforms are unimportant. It is merely to underline the importance of being aware of the values inherent in all evaluative activities and the potential directions of the effects of them. Evaluation is not an innocent activity – it is infused with values and in that sense also political.

What then can be said about the values in Swedish school inspection and their possible constitutive effects? As has been pointed out already it is not possible to paint a single homogenous picture, a fact that Dahler-Larsen also observes in terms of the “…‘unfinished’ and processual nature of constitutive effects…” (Dahler-Larsen forthcoming). The interviews represent views at a national level, and the ongoing process and shifts concerning what to inspect and how to do it points to the ‘unfinishness’ of inspection itself and thereby also its effects. What happens in municipalities and schools in relation to inspections is also an open-ended process that little is known about so far.

The *what* values of interest here are those regarding what here has been called the rule of law, that is, to obey rules and regulations, to do what is required in the interpretations of the law made by the inspectorate. Adaptability, obedience and adherence are virtues promoted by such values. Individual responsibility in terms of individual Rights is also emphasized, as distinct from responsibility to be a good citizen, which is a responsibility that extends to others welfare as well. This may foster a view of humans as self-serving individuals, and a view of education as a provider of resources like knowledge and traits that serves the fulfillment of individual desires and choices. Attainment is of paramount interest in inspections as is high expectations on students and headmasters’ ability to act as pedagogical leaders. Again, the concentration on individual responsibility is apparent but also leads to questions about what kind of perception of self for “failing” vs. “successful” students, teacher or headmaster this may induce. On the other hand the Right of the individual student is also promoting values of equality before the law, which is a central value in a democracy and “rechtsstaat”. And in the case of education, it also sustains the notion that education is good in itself and something that every child should be entitled to.

The *how* values underscore both inspection of all in the same way through the reliance on detailed descriptions of inspection processes, and inspection based on needs. “Bad” schools get more attention and inspection resources and are not left alone until the inspectors are sure they start to redirect their work along with the requirements. Again
ambiguities are prevalent in the interviews concerning different positions of what is more beneficial - to be a counselor or a judge, or to work with a stick or a carrot (see for example Bemelmans-Videc, Rist & Vedung 2003). The “unfinishness” is here displayed by the conflicting positions at work at the same time. Irrespective of position the inspection processes are dependent on a massive collection of data, particularly from the schools. All kinds of work and processes are to be documented and sent to the SSI. The reliance on written material, and on the reporting of particular areas as a representation of the educational work at specific schools, valorize a certain view of knowledge and also a hierarchy of different notions of knowledge. Not surprisingly knowledge used at a national level is more valuable than knowledge used at school level (comp. with Franek-Wikberg’s [1992] discussion of different needs of knowledge in relation to levels in an educational system, see also Own with Rogers [1999]). This is particularly interesting in an organization that has as its dominant societal mission to deal with knowledge. Local, contextual, experience-based, orally expressed knowledge (compare with the concepts “tacit knowledge” [Polyani 2009] and “communities of practice” [Wenger 1998]) is less valued, both as a basis for the inspections and as a legitimate way for teachers to communicate with students and parents about how the students are doing (see above about individual development plans). There is a deficit of values that promote plural notions of knowledge and knowledge residing in the local. Whether or not this will affect teachers’ and students’ perceptions of what counts as valid knowledge or what and how to communicate with students, parents and colleagues is of course an open question. Most probably it will vary in different local contexts.

The new Education Act, giving the SSI more power to use sanctions, opens possibilities for constitutive effects to become more far-reaching. Inspection is planned to be an ongoing activity engaging all schools with the inspectorate’s indicators, criteria in one way or another. This adds to the force of the inspections. Likewise the reporting style goes hand in hand with media logic, picking up on what seems to be out of order making headlines, and work as a megaphone putting pressure on schools and municipalities to adapt (Rönnberg, Lindberg & Segerholm 2011). Bad press in the local community most probably does not only impact on teachers’ and headmasters’ (perhaps also politicians’ and administrators’) experiences of success or failure, but also influence the citizenry and their views of education. But then again, as Dahler-Larsen points out, if constitutive effects are noticed, discussed and become visible, the present landscape of school inspection and its potential draw-backs might change (Dahler-Larsen 2009 p. 154)
References


