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Local enactment of the Swedish ‘advanced teacher reform’

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ABSTRACT
This article focuses on a new form of governing that targets a selected group of teachers. Specifically, it analyses how the Swedish so-called advanced teacher reform is enacted at the local level and discusses its implications for teachers’ professionalism. The methodological approach enables a local analysis in a broader international policy context. Using characteristic elements from curriculum theory to analyse the relationship between different levels and elaborating on the linguistic turn of curriculum theory, three concepts are central in the analysis: enactment, linguistic criteria and professionalism. Empirically, the study draws on material from a two-year application process in a medium-sized municipality. The result demonstrates that the local enactment process is clearly influenced by transnational policy trends and that less allowance is made for teachers’ own experience-based knowledge in the second studied year. The linguistic analysis shows how the applicants using the ‘right concepts’ were selected to become ‘advanced teachers’. As complex and qualitative aspects disappeared from the agenda, this type of governing, with its standardized use of language, may reduce schools’ educational potential. Changes like this raise new questions about how schools can maintain and develop democratic and professional values whilst being exposed to new policy trends.

Introduction
In the last decade, great efforts have been made in many countries to build education systems that are hoped to increase educational quality, often expressed in terms of better results and higher goal achievements. The role of the teacher has been deemed crucial, as also highlighted in central educational policy documents such as ‘Teachers matter’ and ‘Nothing beats a good teacher’ (OECD, 2005, 2009; National Agency for Education, 2010; cf. European Commission 2005, 2010). Starting from these arguments, this article contributes knowledge on how one country, Sweden, in the broader international policy context, decided on a career reform for teachers and specifically how this has been enacted at the local level.
The so-called ‘advanced teacher reform’ was formulated and implemented by the Swedish Government in 2013. It was a clear break from earlier traditions where teachers’ salaries were determined by years of professional experience and to some extent, extra responsibilities and/or differences between teacher categories. The new reform increased the salaries of advanced teachers by € 500/month (around 15–20%) in order to attract professionals to apply for the position. In addition to this reform being quite extensive and expensive, when fully implemented in 2017, it will include every sixth Swedish teacher (17 000 individuals) and will in one way or another affect all teachers. What is noteworthy is that local school boards can autonomously enact the reform following a few government directives. In addition to being a certified teacher with at least four years of teaching experience and a good pedagogical track record, the teachers applying for a position as advanced teacher must have the capacity to improve pupils’ study results and possess a strong interest in developing teaching methods. Prior to application, the local authority must also evaluate the teachers as highly qualified for teaching. Moreover, selected teachers must spend at least 50 per cent of their working time on teaching or related activities (National Agency for Education, 2014). From these national directions, local authorities have been given the responsibility to decide on specific tasks and to designate advanced teachers from the applicants (Bergh & Englund, 2016).

The aim of this article is to study how the advanced teacher reform has been enacted at a local level, from a curriculum theory perspective, and to discuss its implications for teachers’ professionalism. Empirically, the study draws on written material (application templates and teacher applications) from a two-year application process (2013–14) in a medium-sized Swedish municipality. The aim is operationalized by three research questions:

1. What desired teacher abilities are constructed in the local enactment of the national reform?
2. How do the language/formulations of the local authorities influence the language/formulations of the applicants?
3. What are the implications of the advanced teacher reform for teachers’ professionalism?

By regarding the linguistic dimension of the reform and by analysing the language surrounding the main concepts, we contribute to illuminating the tensions and power relations between different levels and actors involved in the local enactment process. The study also contributes to understanding this reform as an expression of a new form of governing, which specifically targets a selected group of teachers. We consider the advanced teacher reform to be one of the several examples of ongoing policy changes of the Swedish school system. This reform aims to enhance teachers’ professionalism; it should be seen in the context of wider transnational influences, and is not entirely a national initiative.

First, we elaborate on what we in curriculum theory terms refer to as a new form of governing, which is highly influenced by international trends and movements. Second, we present the theory and methodology used for the study, developed through the central analytical concepts of enactment, linguistic criteria and professionalism. Third, we present the empirical analysis of the local enactment process and answer the first two research questions. Finally, the third research question is answered and discussed.
International trends and movements

Previous studies have shown that the conditions for national education policy work have changed quite radically as a consequence of increased international policy cooperation and the influence of New Public Management and accountability trends (Nordin & Sundberg, 2014). Today, networks of policy actors, whether they are commercial, ‘grey zone’ (Lindblad, Popkewitz, & Petterson, 2015) or politically appointed, are interrelated in a variety of ways in transnational and intra-national spaces of policy (Ball, 2016; Sivesind & Wahlström, 2016). Such actors interpret international school system results and recommend specific national proposals aimed at educational improvement. Through various restructuring processes, national and local implementation of school reforms now takes place in a new political situation. In what Hopmann has called the management of expectation, there is an attempt to transform ill-defined problems into better-defined expectations as to what can be achieved with given resources (2008, p. 424). A central point in this strategy is that only those outcomes that meet the predefined expectations are considered successful.

The Swedish advanced teacher reform offers an interesting example of these contemporary restructuring processes. Although the national educational assignment remains the same as in the early 1990s, formulated in the national curriculum in terms of knowledge and values, the policy changes of the last decades mean that education is now framed very differently. Studies of national education policy have demonstrated clear shifts in several respects: the emphasis has shifted from goals to results (Wahlström, 2009) as well as from local autonomy to national control, with distinct changes in the educational rhetoric (Bergh, 2015). The latter is for example reflected in how central policy actors use concepts such as equivalence, quality and care (Englund & Quennerstedt, 2008; Bergh, 2010; Löfdahl & Folke-Fichtelius, 2015). An important methodological implication for this study is that, since central policy concepts not only describe but also value and create, they can be used with distinct and contradictory intentions by different language users.

Through text analysis of national expectations of the Swedish advanced teacher reform, Bergh and Englund (2016) show that not only national policy actors but also strong international actors like the EU and OECD, as well as international meta-analyses performed by actors such as John Hattie, have been very influential. The Swedish Government report (2012) on the reform identified the EU and OECD as important actors, while also stating that several countries have created systems to attract skilled teachers as well as develop, identify and recognize them. The European Commission, for example, has developed a set of common principles and recommendations for teachers to become well qualified: ‘The idea is that the recommendations will serve as a driver for national policies in order to improve the quality of education systems in the EU as a whole’ (Swedish Government, 2012, p. 17; cf. European European Commission 2010). The study by Bergh and Englund (2016) concludes that the Swedish reform aims to develop teacher professionalism for higher quality, but that it also deals with a kind of professionalization that creates hierarchies between teachers. What professionalism becomes when it is interpreted and enacted in local school contexts, is a question that needs to be further studied empirically.

The Scottish Chartered Teachers (CT) programme resembles the Swedish reform. Reeves and Drew (2012) explore a range of complexities in national educational policy, which emerged in the current drive to alter the basis of teacher professionalism through the application of principles of lifelong learning to teachers’ professional development. This implies
that CT can acquire professional recognition after completing an accredited Master’s programme. The policy change is described as ‘from a redefinition of teacher professionalism to the Standard to a postgraduate qualification to teachers becoming CTs to modelling and leading changes in teaching practice in schools’ (p.712, italics in original). During the implementation process, Reeves and Drew found that the professional standard for proficient teaching had been re-contextualized in several ways, which created difficulties when combining CT competencies with ordinary teachers in schools. Another study (Watson & Michael, 2016) of the same CT reform is based on the OECD’s guidelines that every teacher should be engaged in a career-long quest for better teaching. With specific interest in how language has been used in the local shaping of the CT reform, their study demonstrates a series of linguistic translations in school practice. When altering from continuing professional development to professional learning it seems like the teacher ‘embark on an endless journey of becoming’ (p. 272), rather than to engage in school development, which results in unpredictable school practices. Another study of Scottish teachers in the framing of the ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ also shows how the vocabularies of some teachers ‘appeared to be rather limited and closely connected to policy discourses within which they do their work, thus limiting their opportunities for critical evaluation and alternative courses of action’ (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2017, p. 52; cf. Bergh & Wahlström, 2017). The Scottish example stresses the need for increased research on transmissions of a central mandate from one social context to another.

A few studies of the Swedish advanced teacher reform demonstrate similar results. The preliminary results of an ongoing research project, which seeks to identify conditions in which the advanced teacher reform can be used in school development, indicates that the local enactment of the reform has generated tensions that instead undermine school development (Öhman Sandberg, 2016). The reform has been enacted in different ways and contexts but tensions arise regardless. Other results show how the first generation of advanced teachers felt a considerable lack of clarity about their mission, tasks and mandate to act (Löfdahl, Thelin, Hjalmarsson, & Westman, 2014). Further analyses of relations between advanced teachers and their colleagues reveal legitimate issues caused by the reform as well as the hostile treatment of advanced teachers by colleagues, and the former’s resistance to such treatment (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl Hultman, 2016). Alvunger (2015) discusses how the reform could be seen as a new form of educational leadership, thereby bringing challenges to existing collegial structures and highlighting the need to increase collaboration and interaction.

Another example of ongoing policy changes is a study of how national school inspections in Norway are guided through the use of fixed templates (Hall, 2017). Using the concept of ‘governing by templates’, Hall argues ‘that this new approach, as part of emerging expectations and external and hierarchical forms of accountability represents a greater level of intervention than what we have seen in previous inspectorial regimes in Norway’ (p. 177). Although Hall’s study is focused on control rather than on reforms aiming at developing teachers’ professionalism, it serves to illustrate how governing from overriding levels targets local levels and how the use of templates actively shapes the thinking of actors involved at different levels of policy enactment.

In brief, we explore a new form of governing which is characterized by the changing conditions of teacher professionalism, in which the role of new actors and perspectives needs to be further researched (cf. Biesta et al., 2017; Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb,
Therefore, local enactments of the reform would need to be understood in relation to a broader policy context of complex international trends and movements, which occasionally holds paradoxical expectations that also change over time. We consider the wider policy context of principles and recommendations to hold a dominating logic of certain concepts used in framing teachers’ work and professionalism that will be formulated and/or reformulated at national and local levels.

**Theoretical framework and methodology**

**Central analytical concepts**

Historically, education has been handled by institutions and professionals with specific training in dealing with complex and ill-defined problems (Hopmann, 2008). As the new form of governing described above now targets the local level of the education system, specifically teachers, central curriculum theoretical questions are brought to the fore, such the goals of education, what counts as knowledge, and the selection and organization of knowledge (cf. Lundgren, 1983). A methodological approach that enables local analysis in the broader policy context is needed to analyse the Swedish advanced teacher reform. Using characteristic elements from curriculum theory to analyse the relationship between different levels and elaborating on the linguistic turn of curriculum theory, we make three concepts central in the analysis: enactment, linguistic criteria and teachers’ professionalism.

Through its focus on local enactments, our curriculum theory perspective emphasizes the importance of viewing policy work as an ongoing process of doing that involves interaction within and between several levels (Ball, Maguire, & Braun 2012; Bergh, 2010; Englund, 1986; Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl Hultman, 2016; Hopmann, 2007). Focusing on the local enactment recruitment process, we are not interested in implementation as a one-sided process, but rather in the different contexts of policy-making processes involving institutions and human actors. The latter is central for the study as the advanced teacher reform is open to several different interpretations and thereby leaves scope for human action. The policy enacted at the local level by local actors is thus central to this study, and is analysed in relation to the wider context described above.

In examining the local enactment process, our theoretical and empirical interest is directed towards texts of different authority and the interplay between them. The linguistic analysis draws on speech act theory as developed by Quentin Skinner (1988a, 1988b, 2002; cf. Bergh & Englund 2014; Englund 2011). In our analysis, we identify the establishment of specific central concepts, their role in relation to the surrounding language, and their usage by local administrators and the applying teachers. As Skinner asserts, there are no ‘histories of concepts as such, there can only be histories of their use in argument’ (1988b, p. 283). As the language surrounding a certain concept changes, so does the meaning of that concept. Our interest in the local enactment of the reform is, thus, to view and analyse language as a tool with which politicians and local administrations shape their demands and desires through the reform, and how this might enable and/or hinder teachers’ descriptions of professional competencies. More specifically, we use Skinner’s notion of ‘criteria of application’, i.e. the linguistic conditions for using a certain concept (Skinner 1988a). However, since the term ‘application’ is also used for the study object of this article (the local application
process), we have chosen to term Skinner’s concept *linguistic criteria* (which is then equal to what Skinner calls criteria of application).

In order to contribute knowledge on the implication of the advanced teacher reform for teachers’ *professionalism*, we make a distinction between professionalization and professionalism. While professionalization is seen as a sociological concept related to questions of authority and status, professionalism is a pedagogical project concerned with the internal quality of teaching (Englund, 1996; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Sockett, 1993). One assumption is that the different ways of using language will frame and thereby condition the application process in certain ways, enabling some interpretations of professionalism and possibly preventing others. Language plays a central role in shaping our understanding and therefore has a performative function. Studying the performative functions of language and its implications for teacher professionalism therefore provides valuable insights which will be useful to different education actors, empirically as well as theoretically.

**Empirical data and analytical steps**

The local example represents a medium-sized Swedish municipality that employs approximately 650 teachers in the compulsory school system. This municipality was chosen as the administration worked very actively with the reform and developed a transparent application process. Since the start of the reform (2013), there have been annual application rounds and this study focuses on the first and the second rounds of applications. Between 2013 and 2014 a total of 178 applications were received, and 74 of the applicants were appointed as advanced teachers.

The local municipal school administration provided us with access to the applications, which are public documents. As the 178 applications consisted of about 100 pages each, we needed to reduce the amount of data. To guide us in this sampling process we had several talks with the civil servants. They provided us with lists of those who were appointed in the first round and those that were not and applied again in the second round. They also informed us about the different parts of the applications, such as the applicants’ own descriptions, different certificates and examples of lesson plans, etc. Based on this information, we decided to sample a smaller number of applications comprising both successful and unsuccessful applications from the first two rounds. Our sample consists of 40 applications (17% of those submitted 2013–2014) of which 24 failed and 16 were successful. We strived to represent both male and female applicants who work with diverse age groups and subjects. We have chosen to sample only those parts of the applications wherein the teachers describe their abilities (approximately 25 pages per application).

In the first analytical step, the focus was on how the reform was enacted at municipal level and what desired teacher abilities were constructed (research question 1). As a complement to our own reading, this analysis required several informal talks with civil servants who informed us on the development of the application process from the first to the second round. Such short informal talks (telephone calls and meetings) continued throughout the analysis process. We learnt that the application process from the second round onward was increasingly inspired by a commercial actor called Arete Meritering [Arete Qualifications], which provides criteria for teacher qualification. Arete specifically targets local authorities with a series of services that facilitate the implementation of the advanced teacher reform (Arete Meritering, 2015). In addition to offering a six-month qualification programme for
teachers, Arete freely provides, via its website, a compendium in which seven overall criteria for teacher skills are described in more detail. Arete was not engaged in the municipality’s process, but from our contacts with the civil servant responsible for the recruitment process we know that the municipality took inspiration from Arete’s criteria when designing their own second-round templates. A brief summary of the Arete compendium shows that prominent parts of the teacher qualification system deal with visualizing pupils’ learning abilities through teachers’ knowledge of assessment and various forms of feedback as well as taking pupils voices seriously by listening to them and helping them to engage in their learning processes. We regard Arete as an example of an agency that acts in what Lindblad, Popkewitz and Petersson (2015) call a grey zone, here operationalized at local level.

In the second analytical step, the focus was on if, and if so, how, the language/formulations made by the municipality level influence the language/formulations made by the applicants (research question 2). To operationalize this, we conducted thorough repeated readings of the selected applications, drawing on speech act theory (Skinner, 1988a, 1988b). Our focus was on studying the appearance of specific concepts or shifts between concepts through the application of linguistic criteria to support the analysis.

**Local enactment**

*Changes in templates and the recruiting process*

On examining the local selection process, we found that application templates were based on principles of teacher’s competence profiles according to formulations of the Swedish National Agency for Education (2013a). There was thus a clear link between formulations at local and national policy levels. The templates included the following headings: Encounter with the pupil; Leadership style; Cooperation; Responsibility for your own learning and professional development; The mission of being an advanced teacher; and Goal achievement.

We are particularly interested in the noticeable language changes in the templates between 2013 and 2014. Although the headings remained the same, several subquestions of a qualitative nature (such as views of humans, knowledge and gender) were omitted. Moreover, two new questions were added to the 2014 templates: (1) How to organize a safe classroom environment based on respect and cooperation and (2) A reflection on goal achievement concerning the result of pupils’ knowledge development in the preceding school year. In order to understand how and why these formulations were changed, we took a closer look at the local announcement, recruitment and judgement processes. From our informal talks with civil servants, we learned that views of humans, knowledge and gender were omitted because they were not deemed to be substantially informative. According to the civil servants, however, such content were supposed to be embedded in other descriptions. Why then were two new questions added? The short answer is that the civil servants viewed themselves as ‘mini-Arete’ and that the two new questions were inspired by Arete.

Based on the above, we conclude that the changes in the templates between 2013 and 2014 have moved local interpretations of the reform closer to both the national policy language and to a further concretization of the policy as interpreted by a commercial grey zone actor, in this case Arete. In this respect, the dominating surrounding language has had a strong impact on the local enactment of the reform (cf. Skinner, 1988a, 1988b, 2002). We
were also informed of changes in the application process itself: in the first round, only a few persons were involved in reviewing and assessing applications, but in the second, all school principals in the municipality were actively participating in the process. Principals were offered a couple of days of training by a researcher from the local university to ensure the quality of their assessments. The training session involved learning about and discussing the knowledge and abilities that should characterize advanced teachers. Another difference between the two rounds was that in 2013, the applicants did not have access to the indicators on the basis of which they would be evaluated. In 2014, however, this information was made transparent and published on the municipality’s homepage. Accordingly, most of the 2014 applicants were familiar with the assessment criteria and were guided by them in their applications.

One way to summarize the changes in templates and the recruiting process is that the complexity has been reduced as the local actors acquired specific key concepts with a performative function. In the next section, we analyse whether and how these changes affected the way that the applicants formulate themselves.

Changes in teachers’ applications

We have chosen to present our results by interpreting the language and formulations in the applicants’ responses in the application templates. The temporal aspect—the first and second rounds of applications—is important as we observed that the abilities desired from the applicants differed from one year to the next. These differences were related both to changes in the application templates as well as to an increasing awareness among the applicants about which skills were deemed valuable by the school administration. More specifically, when analysing the applications, we read and compared how the applicants described their specific abilities under each heading in the template in the first round and how this was described by the same applicant in the second round.

One example that demonstrates this increased awareness is the following excerpt from the second application submitted by Tommy, a male teacher with 21 years of experience. In his application, he expresses his surprise over the fact that he was not appointed even though he considered himself very competent:

I am not applying again because I think I have become a better teacher since the last application. Rather my advisors and several of my colleagues and my school principal asked me to make a new attempt and come up with a better application.

Tommy’s second application was successful, due to the use of certain terms in his self-description. This can thus be understood as an example ‘that any act of communication will always constitute the taking up of some determinate position in relation to some pre-existing conversation or argument’ (Skinner, 2002, p. 115).

Our analyses of the linguistic criteria indicate two major expressed abilities: the teachers’ abilities to work with assessment, and their abilities to work with pupils’ influence. We found obvious changes related to the concept of assessment between the two rounds. ‘Formative assessment’ appeared more frequently in the second round where we also noticed how words such as ‘legally secure’, ‘fair’, ‘equitable’ and ‘summative assessments’ appeared as reinforcements in the applications. Furthermore, phrases like ‘evidence-based’, ‘proven experience’ and ‘collegial learning’ appeared in the second round, and largely without any descriptions of their meanings. Formulations of pupils’ participation and influence did not
appear in the first round, but these were prominent concepts in the second. Descriptions of children in need of special education and emphasis on interpreting pupils’ body language were removed or reduced in the second round. We understood that the reduced content is related to the previously described changes in the templates.

In the following sections, we focus, in line with speech act theory, on the two linguistic criteria of assessment and pupils’ influence to illustrate how teachers describe their professional competence in relation to the abilities required in the templates, and how some resist the pre-defined professional abilities and continue to describe their experience-based professional skills.

**From assessment to formative assessment**

As parts of our empirical data consist of applications from teachers who failed in the first round and applied again in the second, our focus in this section is on identifying linguistic changes in the applications of individual teachers who applied twice. Drawing on speech act theory, we are specifically interested in how the concept of assessment is given meaning and significance in teachers’ descriptions of their abilities (Skinner, 1988a, 1988b). Thea and Bea, two female applicants with 10 and 13 years of experience, respectively, were among the unsuccessful first-round applicants who were successful in the second round.

In the first round, Thea only describes assessment once and she does not explicitly mention formative assessment. Nevertheless, her application includes a good description of the way she works with assessment. Her application starts with:

*I strive to give feedback as directly as possible. Therefore continuous follow-up and assessments are very important. Sometimes I do it together with the pupil during the class, sometimes afterwards. The assessment can be oral or written and may be presented at the local web-forum. It is important that the pupil is aware of what will be assessed and that the criteria are clear in order to increase the pupil’s influence and consciousness about their own learning. During the assessment, in the first place it is stressed what the pupil has succeeded in, and in the second place what the pupil is supposed to develop. The assessments form the basis for the pupil’s individual development plan.*

In the second round, her application starts with ‘I work with formative assessment.’ This sentence replaces ‘I strive to give feedback as directly as possible’, from the first round, then followed by exactly the same description which seems to be cut and pasted from the first application.

In Thea’s second application, the concept of formative assessment appears in nine additional descriptions of her work, which have no equivalent descriptions in the first round. On the one hand, these examples show how diluted the concept of formative assessment becomes when used in relation to almost all skills Thea employs. For example, formative assessment is used as a way to shape her own teaching, in communication with guardians, in keeping herself updated about pupils’ development and as a systematic reflection on her own work. As a reason for pupils’ better results, Thea writes:

*Generally, it can be said that the results have been better since I as a teacher started to more actively make use of formative assessment. The pupils have through my response, self-evaluation and peer response become more conscious about their own learning and thereby their motivation has increased.*

Thea’s description uses formative assessment in an informal way to explain how she would achieve the required goals:
… aiming at making clear what the pupils know and what the next step is for the pupil. In that way my teaching can be adjusted during the class, which will increase every pupil’s opportunities to reach the goal.

Furthermore, formative assessment is a means of visualizing pupils’ learning for the benefit of the pupils as well as for her professional development. However, formative assessment is not always enough:

… in addition to formative assessment I use screening on group level, especially concerning reading skills, to make sure all pupils develop their abilities.

On the other hand, Thea’s use of the ‘right concepts’ would imply that she had actively chosen to add this concept to her descriptions of her teaching abilities.

In the first-round application of another teacher, Bea, we found well-formulated descriptions of her methods of communication with guardians and pupils as well as the pupils’ possible development. She writes, for example:

I communicate with the pupils in direct talks in the classroom. I try to give feedback as soon as possible when I see a development in a pupil. It is important to see them all; it is challenging but I think I do it as much as I can. In addition to talking with the pupils in the classroom, I communicate with the guardians and the pupils on the web-forum, where I write assessments after a completed task. Though, it is important to clarify the different types of assessments for the pupils in order to make them understand what it means and so that they can have examples on different levels. The language in the assessments might be perceived as difficult and it is important that they understand!

In a similar description from the second round (additions and changes underlined), Bea starts by elaborating on the concept of formative assessment as if it were flexible in terms of more or less formative:

I communicate with the pupils in direct talks in the classroom. I try to give feedback as soon as possible when I see a development in a pupil. I do it as formative as possible by concretising to the pupil what has developed /…/.

These changes show how she presents herself as having abilities using the concept not only correctly, but as correctly as possible. Further, the following addition in the excerpt seems tautological as she indicates that formative assessment also gives feedback to the pupils. We wonder if she is aware of the relation between formative assessment and feedback, or if it is just a way to add a concept in order to strengthen her application:

Pupils (especially in grades 4–6) may perceive the language in the assessments as difficult and it is important that they understand! The way we read pupils’ examples together helps them, I think, to improve their understanding. In addition to the daily talks I have with the pupils and formative assessments in their working books, I give them feedback on which abilities they have developed after each work theme. I do it through matrices or assessments on the web-forum.

The examples of Thea and Bea highlight—in different ways—how using the right concept changed the descriptions of their teaching abilities in the second round and contributed to the success of their applications. They were both appointed after making these changes.

Making pupils’ influence visible

Another excerpt shows what we interpret to be a conscious way of strengthening the application using language performatively. In the first round, Peter, a male teacher with 12 years of experience, describes how he and a colleague were concerned about pupils’ declining reading skills and searched for possible advice on the National Agency for Education’s website:
We found descriptions of work from some teachers on the book about Zlatan. [Zlatan is a well-known Swedish footballer, authors’ note]. Now we have decided to purchase a set of books for the whole class in order to inspire those pupils interested in sports.

In the second round, Peter describes the same event in a different way, focusing on pupils’ influence and relating that to the current curriculum for the compulsory school (Lgr 11):

We encourage pupils’ influence at an early stage. The way in which pupils have been involved, for example, in choosing a book or in preparing a discussion is, in my opinion, in itself motivating for their reading. But, just like the first chapter in the curriculum [(on fundamental values, authors’ note), it is a way ‘to prepare them to live and work in society’ (quote from Lgr 11, authors’ note). In one of my study groups we are now ready to start working on the book *I am Zlatan* that has been purchased for school based entirely on the pupils’ preferences.

Resistance?

We may interpret the results of our analyses to be that the applying teachers surrender to the requirements using the right concepts. However, not all teachers surrender; certain examples have shown what could be seen as resistance on the basis of their skills and long work experience. On analysing the applications from teachers who failed in both rounds, we found descriptions of pupils’ influence to be absent and some cases even had explicit descriptions of avoiding pupils’ influence. One female teacher, Sofia, who has 12 years of experience, writes in the first round:

I judge my ability to involve pupils in planning right now to be low. It is a result of the large amount of time it took to become familiar with the new curriculum. I felt a need to plan activities that made me feel sure of making accurate assessments on a proper basis before grading. /…/ [She continues with different explanations, authors’ note] Then, the pupils’ influence in the planning phase was reduced.

In the second round, she still avoids direct influence from the pupils and describes the way she plans her teaching:

I start from the knowledge I have about the group, what used to work or not and the pupils’ previous opinions about what we did, what they liked or not, and based on this I suggest a plan.

We interpret the new description, which stresses Sofia’s knowledge about the group, as her being inspired by the new question in the template on goal achievement concerning the result of pupils’ knowledge development in the preceding school year. On the one hand, she does not follow the linguistic performative reasoning of the topic to allow pupils to influence the planning. On the other hand, a plausible interpretation from our point of view is that Sofia is actually responding to the pupils on their specific level, thereby describing a situated and personalized pupils’ influence based on her professional skills. In the second interpretation, it is neither about surrendering nor about resisting, but more of a deep and reflective description of the teacher’s abilities.

Implications for teachers’ professionalism

We have argued that the advanced teacher reform is a new form of governing that specifically targets teachers and their work. This change in governing is situated in a wider policy context
that clearly breaks with earlier traditions, in which teachers were given the authority to use different means to achieve curriculum goals. In recent decades, however, this tradition has changed towards predefined competencies, which policy-makers believe are possible to achieve through further education and/or practice-based collegial learning processes. Such competencies are often implemented via different local initiatives led by skilled and/or advanced teachers, who are offered a higher salary in exchange. The Swedish advanced teacher reform is one such example of the intentions to increase pupils’ goal achievements, contribute to school development and strengthen teachers’ professionalism.

Our results demonstrate how international trends and a national reform for improving teacher and teaching quality are being linguistically transformed at the local level, leading to concrete consequences. Based on the above analysis, we now elaborate on how the selection of teachers could be understood and evaluated. First, we discuss a central conclusion of the analysis based on the selected theoretical approach. Then we reflect on the implications of how this new form of governing affects teachers’ professionalism. Finally, we formulate some new questions that have been generated through this study.

Using the right concepts

One conclusion that can be drawn from the study is that the teachers applying for becoming ‘advanced teachers’ who used the ‘right concepts’ also were the ones who were selected. Formative assessment and pupils’ influence are two examples of such concepts implying that local actors imported vocabulary from the general school debate, from formal national policy actors as well as from grey zone organizations such as Arete, mentioned earlier. However, despite this conclusion, we argue that the teachers did not demonstrate broad conceptual awareness. This can be exemplified with the concept of pupil influence, which in our study has been used in a quite instrumental way as a linguistic criterion subordinated to the concept of goal achievement.

As mentioned in the introduction, this clearly mirrors the national intentions of the advanced teacher reform, emphasizing that applicants must have a strong interest in and ability to enhance teaching methods with the purpose of goal achievement (National Agency for Education, 2013b, 2014). Hence, pupil influence has been given a very specific interpretation in which the potential complexity of this concept has clearly been reduced, for example to the relation between influence and the schools’ democratic assignment. Similarly, it can be argued that formative assessment was also used as a linguistic criterion, which was framed by the strong emphasis on goal achievement, rather than all the goals formulated in the national curriculum. Thus, the effects of actions taken by the local authorities become quite obvious. Many applicants seemed to have been influenced when the abilities required were made public in the second round of the application process.

Our results show that complexities were reduced at municipal level in order to make the described content easy to assess. We have also found that the formulations of local authorities have influenced the formulations of the applicants, and that the teachers’ descriptions of their abilities changed from experience-based knowledge to including the instrumental use of the right concepts. The development of the language used seems to verify Quentin Skinner’s (2002) emphasis on how linguistic demands—in this case made by local authorities—prioritize certain concepts leading to specific linguistic consequences.
A new form of governing: changed teacher professionalism through professionalization?

An overall tendency is that teachers’ historically developed knowledge is not necessarily what is reflected in the reform, as certain abilities have been emphasized by national and local actors. The way this changed governing is enacted clearly conditions teachers’ professionalism (cf. Evetts, 2011). While those teachers who have a developed sense of linguistic competence are rewarded, implicit knowledge seems to be insufficient. Evaluating the future of the reform is difficult, but there are obvious signs of teachers becoming valued differently, indicating clear status differences in this process of selective professionalization. There is also an obvious risk that the autonomy and the outspoken professionalism of each teacher will be challenged and lowered in the new form of governing, where local politicians and grey zone organizations influence teaching methods.

What does it mean in concrete terms when some of the teachers at a school are appointed advanced teachers? To answer this, we must, as mentioned, distinguish between (teacher) professionalism as related to teachers’ knowledge and actions and (teacher) professionalization as related to teachers’ status and autonomy/subordinance (cf. Englund, 1996; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Sockey, 1993). In this specific process of enacting the reform of selecting advanced teachers, we can see that these two meanings of professional teachers are present with different consequences. Even if the aim is to task the selected advanced teachers with developing the abilities of all teachers, a division may be created among teachers, for example, in the fact that ‘A-team’ teachers receive higher salaries and possibly higher status than ‘B-team’ teachers. We may observe a professionalization process where the ‘A-team’ teachers are professionalized while the ‘B-team’ teachers are excluded from that process. In relation to this particular advanced teacher reform, the Swedish Government recently (2016) added another reform, ‘the salary reform’. Some teachers (around 10%) now receive a higher salary based on previous merits, but these teachers are not assigned specific tasks. Results of such new policy trends aiming to enhance teachers’ professionalism may split the teaching staff, thereby missing the opportunities to increase pupils’ goal achievement and to contribute to school development.

This reasoning highlights the risk of teachers becoming monitored by and adapting to the demands of municipal authorities. Instead, we are interested in how teachers are capable of utilizing their professional agency (cf. Bergh & Wahlström, 2017; Biesta et al., 2017). We have shown above that teachers appear to be surrendering, but also how their language usage either can be viewed as a kind of resistance or as simplistically instrumental. In this respect, the language use and the linguistic changes shown in the analysis reflect teachers’ professionalism in a field of tensions between governing and resistance.

We have also shown that views of humans, knowledge and gender disappeared from the agenda when the templates were adjusted. Instrumental ways of teaching are referred to as good while there is less emphasis on teachers as moral actors with the responsibility to act in line with moral judgements, or on teachers as promoters of democracy and equality by respecting each pupil. Consequently, this new agenda involves the standardization of language and may also reduce schools’ democratic potential and shift the power from local to national and international level, thus supporting new kinds of governing even on the schools’ fundamental values (cf. Hopmann, 2008).
Some new questions—looking ahead

Finally, our results demonstrate how teachers form part of local policy enactment and are captured by a specific logic that will probably, over time, become increasingly familiar to them. Hence, the language rewarded in the application process becomes a true and useful practical logic. However, more studies would be required to provide knowledge about whether the reform will create a possibility for teachers to develop professional language or whether it will result in a diffusion of strategic and rhetoric usage of selected concepts. Therefore, there is a need for further research on the processes of local enactment of teacher professionalism related to national and international policy trends and new forms of governing. An important conclusion in this study is that the growing interdependence of transnational and national policy has a great influence on local policy-making (cf. Sivesind & Wahlström, 2016). In addition to the influence from formal actors, it is also important that the changed governing has opened up a space in which commercial grey zone actors like Arete offer solutions to lubricate specific forms of educational change. Important questions to discuss further are not primarily focused on how strong the space of option at local level should be, or what implications might follow from the decentralization of the decision concerning the recruitment of advanced teachers. These questions must rather be part of a wider discussion on the role education plays and how different ways of governing education can hinder or facilitate teachers’ professionalism.

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