Managing quality in education in a multi-level governance system – strategies, constraints and innovations

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Det här papret har presenterats på Nordiska kommunforskarkonferensen i november 2015. Därför har kommentarerna ännu inte fullt ut tagits tillvara. Men en tanke efter de diskussionerna är att dela texten till två manus

1. fokusera kommunjämförelser och temat kring storlek och kompetenser och skicka till The Journal of Education Policy, Planning and Administration (http://www.jeppa.org) or

2 fokusera mediatorer och översättningsprocesser i ett flernivådemokratiskt system och skicka till: Quality Assurance in Education (http://www.emeraldinsight.com/loi/qae)

Abstract

When new forms of governance as New Public Management, user choices and competition in public services are becoming the normal praxis in Scandinavian public welfare services provided by municipalities and regions there are increasing demands for quality management. There is a basic need to follow up quality in services in particular when there are several providers of public services. The uses of quality management in private sectors are not completely applicable on these public services and thus the growing use of quality management in public services has to be addressed. In this paper the quality management in primary education is in focus both to focus on how these processes are arranged and what we can learn as more terms for quality management in public services.

In addition it is far from clear what quality is in these new organizational settings of mixed public-private contexts and actors. The mix of actors are not just public and private, there are also several different organizational levels that interplay here. In spite of the local focus and provision of these services there is a lot of interaction, comparison and structures framed on national and even international levels.

In this paper we will elaborate on the meanings of quality in education as a public service by analyzing the strategies, constraints and innovative responses in local schools as well as in municipal administration and policy-making processes. Case studies in five municipalities in Sweden is included, varying in size and thereby also by numbers of schools and structures of quality management. Based on this study we draw three types of more general conclusions and discuss three implications. First, we can notice that there is a need to clarify the roles and obligations of the different levels and actors in the education sectors. Second, there is a need to support and develop roles for mediating actors that can translate meanings of quality into public settings. Thirdly, there is need to elaborate on the meanings of quality management in public settings and also open up the meanings of quality in relation to education in particular and public services in general.
Introduction

Different forms of quality's management and control has come to play key parts in the New Public Management setting of welfare services. In relation to the increased focus on aims- and results there is need to follow up, visualise outcomes. Quality management and quality assurance can be seen as a concrete response to form and arrange methods for these processes. There are national as well local policy aims for educational services and there are knowledge control model, like the international PISA survey. These taken together put a pressure to deliver high quality services but there are different interpretations of the public service with good quality and different ideas about how it can be controlled, implemented and evaluated. High quality of public services is also essential for legitimacy of the welfare state in general (Rothstein, 2011).

New forms of governance as New Public management, user choices and competition in public services are more or less common in Scandinavian municipalities and regions today. There are new arrangements of public services as health care, education and social services. There is a basic need to follow up quality in particular when there are several providers of public services. Education is a complex policy area with several interest groups and the issue is also commonly on the public agenda and indeed open political debate. Quality can be seen both as a learning outcomes or more complex values relating to the social context and well being of the pupils. In addition it is far from clear what quality is in these new organizational settings of mixed public-private contexts. There are global challenges to address quality in education (Dickesson et.al. 2000). The mix of actors are not just public and private, there are also several different organizational levels that interplay here. In spite of the local focus and provision of these services there is a lot of interaction, comparison and structures framed on national and even international levels.

It is obvious that the Swedish school system has develop from regulations on detailed levels to more open and complex setting for service provision. In line with NPM there is now a mix of public management strategies and the most striking differences are the so called independent schools, run by other private organisations but fully funded by the municipality where it is located and the they have to follow the national regulations and ordinary curriculum. The impact is that the educational sector in Sweden has developed from a detailed regulated area to an openness of providers with a clear focus on aims and results (Jarl & Pierre, 2012). Hereby there is a change towards control and evaluation and he new national agency the Schools Inspectorates is a clear indication on this (Rönnberg, 2011) and there are new challenging roles added to the professions of teachers and principals. There is an increasing interest in quality management in the educational sector in Sweden (Svensson & Klefsjö, 2006). Thus this paper addresses the quality management in the Swedish educational sector from a municipal management perspective.

Aim of the paper

The overall aim of this paper is to analyse how quality in education is translated and managed locally in a multi-level governance context to analyse implications of quality in education; constraints and opportunities to manage as well as taking responsibility for quality. We focus on the municipal level that have to co-ordinate in-between on the one hand national regulations and control systems, and at the other hand the local schools,
the principals and the teachers. By applying a constructive approach we will consider implementation processes as chains of translation.

This draft version of the paper will proceed in four steps before ending up in some general conclusions and openings for policy implications. In the next section we contextualize the quality in education in a multi-level governance structure. In the third section of the paper we present a theoretical framing of quality management in public services and try to combine some of these perspectives into a common framing. Then we present the methods used for the case studies and the findings from the cases are presented. In the fifth section we analyse the strategies used for quality management in education in the studied municipalities, its constraints and innovative ambitions. Finally we discusses some innovative responses to these processes and their policy implications.

Motives and de-limitations of the study
This paper focuses on compulsory education in Sweden, where the NPM arrangements are dominating the education sector. In this context management practices and policies in five municipalities have been addressed through qualitative case studies, further described in relation to the case studies. This paper focuses on the level of compulsory primary education, for age 6-15. Thus we do neither relate explicit the growing field of research on quality management and comparisons in higher education. In the field of higher education there is more competition and openness why the drive for quality management is also indeed encouraged.

Even if there are indeed different outcomes regarding quality, this study rather focus on how municipalities, as policy makers as well as management, and schools do work towards increased quality in the processes of education. The focus on processes towards quality in services, is also a well established approach in the Quality and service management approaches (see for ex. Grönroos, 2008). However, there are several specific concerns that has to be made in relation to public service quality (Elg et.al. 2015). Hereby, the design and limitations of this study opens up for implications in other policy areas than educational in the Scandinavian setting. We will also argue that translation in multi-level context have general implications for most publicly regulated educational settings.

Quality of education – an overview of a fragmented field
In this section we will present a brief overview of the field of quality management in education [has to be developed in the next version of the paper].

National regulation on education and quality of education – The case of Sweden
There has been a rapid development and change of the public educational system in Sweden during the last decades. Most these changes are framed within the ideals and management models of NPM (Jarl and Pierre, 2012). Theses changes are also in line with developments in several others western states where educational reforms have taken place in recent years. There has been a quite quick process since the mid 1900’s from rigorous central regulation over a period of decentralisation and deregulation and, more recently new forms of re-regulation have appeared (Cribb et.al. 2007). They also find,
and notice the paradoxical impression, that even if deregulation includes and emphases increased local autonomy, there are parallel policy mechanisms, which tend to increase central control.

Jarl et.al. (2012) have shown that in the educational sector NPM have in Sweden had the effect to turn local schools into semi-autonomous organizations. Hereby, they also identified that numbers and levels of manager positions increased. They also point at the double localities for the principals of local schools, as they have to "serve two entities: the state and subordinated local authorities (municipalities)" Jarl et.al. (2012: 436). The national government regulates the general responsibilities of the principal mainly focusing on the curriculum and learning objectives. These are evaluated regularly by the national agency Swedish Schools Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen). The municipalities, as the other entities, arrange the employer responsibilities and are funding the education. For the independent schools there is a third entity, the owner of the school that can be private firm or in other organisational forms.

In this setting the action space for the municipal management, principals and teacher to deliver high quality education is constrained in several ways. The professional’s roles and ambitions to contribute to quality in educations varies and the leadership is schools appears to be more important (Jarl & Rönnberg, 2010).

The “independent-school” reform has also opened up different forms of providers of educations. Before that reform in 1992, only municipalities could provide and run schools in Sweden. The basic idea of the reform was to keep all funding public but open up for different providers of education (Nyhlen, 2011).

In line with the Swedish NPM ideal, all pupils are free to apply to any school within the municipality. It is also the responsibility of the municipality to organise free transport for children to and from school, and cover all costs for the school. There is a national control process before a new school starts. The municipality, where the school is supposed to be located, here have a strong voice. This not at least since the municipality has to fund the education of all the pupils, even those that choose to leave another school in the municipality. As a response to this more market form of education demands more control and evaluation. For this reason the government has formed and launched the national agency The national School inspection. Their main task is to control both results and processes in all schools, by surveys, students’ grades, self-evaluations from the schools and visits. The agency has come to form and also steer how quality is arranged in Swedish schools (Rönnberg, 2011).

Quality management in educations seems to focus on outcomes as grades, but in other sectors and not at least in service management there is a common focus on processes to measure as well as to improve quality (Elg?). There is a clear need to connect and might also coordinate the national and local management of quality assurance in the educational sector and here we address that issue through a case studies in municipalities.

Translation as a framing for quality in public services in general and the educational context in particular

The ambitions regarding quality accrualment and measurement have developed extensively in public services as a response to the New Public Management
arrangements. In the health care sector there are several studies of quality in relation to new organisational forms in public services (Engström et al. 2015). The ideas of NPM as well as quality are travelling through policy making and into different practices (Czarniawska-Joerges & Sevón, 2005), thus we apply a perspective of translation in this analysis of quality management of education.

The perspective of translation has its roots in the Science-technology-studies, but it relates to all practices impregnated knowledge-methods-power settings. The idea of translation indicates that there are processes when meanings and interpretations are formed and set in the actual context (Latour 1987; 2005). Commonly studies of translations have taken place in-between science a policy explicitly focus on practices, relationship and networks between actors and institutions, typically scientists (or other knowledge providers), bureaucrats and policymakers (Lidskog & Sundqvist, 2004; 2011). The perspective of translation, in line with Latour (1986; 1991; 2005), is formed through networks of practices where all different types of actors can be included.

The multi-level governance system opens for, and in some respects also relies on, such networks to be formed in each local practice, through the inclusion of actors. There has to be an actor network, where actors to make the translation processes take place. The actors get their functions and roles through the positions they take on in the network. The translation perspective, as Latour (2005) and his followers have framed it, would show that in each and every local context a specific network has to be formed to make the other levels of governance meaningful in relation to local objectives. As the other side of the coin of the network there are also local actors constraining the formation of the local network. Thus a network analysis, in this constructive approach, also has to focus on the outsiders of the network as they are constraining the formation and meaning making of the network.

Through the interplay with the network, meanings are translated and, vice versa, the networks are developing and formed through the processes of translation. Translations are made visible through the establishment of a new or changed relationship. Thus translations can be described as coexisting in a network, and at the same time they keep the network together, to achieve a common goal (Latour 1991; Wihlborg & Söderholm, 2013). The translation process refers to the prioritization of interests, which means that ‘things’ (e.g., artefacts, orders, goods) are, as Latour expressed it: “... in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or appropriating it” (Latour 1986, p. X). Thus, translation takes place in a multi-level context and actors here has to build the network together to make the desirable outcomes possible.

A critical role in the translation processes is played by the mediators. The mediator is an actor, in the broad sense (including also non-human actors, such as organisations and institutions), conducting the translation within the network. When an actor functions as a mediator, “it” does not produce new knowledge or other resources, but are translating and re-framing them to fit into the new context (Latour, 2005; Wihlborg & Söderholm, 2013). Hereby, the mediator is similar to what in the policy analysis literature has been seen as a policy entrepreneur. But the role of the mediator is indeed more flexible and it is extending the meanings of what happens in, and also who could be included into the network and thereby how translation takes place. The concept of policy entrepreneurs in turn has emerged from the perspective of networked governance to explain how policy problems have to be located into suitable political settings in time-space to formulate policy alternatives (Kingdon & Thurber, 1994). Hereby policy entrepreneurs,
as actors, are exclusively seen as human actors, or organisations of human actors. The policy entrepreneurs are knitting the policy networks together (von-Bergmann-Winberg & Wihlborg, 2011). In the policy entrepreneurship literature other actors than human ones are excluded from the potential analyses (Wihlborg, 2014). But here we open for a broader understanding of mediators in the translation process.

In analyses of translations another of the original concepts is “obligatory passage point”. This concept helps to reveal the initial stage that either opens for or constrain a translation process. An obligatory passage point can take different shapes, but it is critical for the continuation of the translation and thereby of the process of change as such. The point has to be passed and it does influence how translation continues. It can also include more general and even global processes that are given defining functions in the local setting, like law and regulations. The concept has been resembled with a funnel forcing the actors to converge on a certain topic, purpose or question (Law and Callon, 1994). Here we will identify obligatory passage points are constructed and managed in the municipal quality management in education.

By this approach we see implementation, in this case of quality management for education in municipalities, as a chain of translations that has to pass some obligatory passage points. The process is enhanced by the mediators that promote translations to make the processes go on. The simple framing of this process-based analysis is that we will consider implementation and public management as a process of translation. Hereby we focus on how meanings and other symbols are formed in the organisation and how they carry on the processes. In particular we will focus on the obligatory passage points where the translation becomes more visible and potential conflicts have to be addressed and coped with. This approach implies a broad understanding of actors and in particular some actors take on the role improve translations and thereby to enhance the process and its implementation.

Hereby the analysis will focus on identified strategies in translation processes, how and by whom are the translations made and how are they supporting or constraining the implementation processes. We also want to identify if there are any obligatory passing points in the formation of the municipal organisations and how they function in relation to the management of quality in the specific municipality. Finally, we will also highlight some innovative models and practices that have been developed to address these issues, not at least as consequence of the roles played by mediators.

**Methods for case studies building on our theoretical framing**

This study builds on case studies in five municipalities in Sweden. Two of them are, in a Swedish context small municipality with less than 10 000 inhabitants, one of them is a medium size municipality. The final two ones are large municipalities with more than 100 thousands inhabitants. This selection based on differences in sizes, builds on the impression and idea (that could be formulated as a hypothesis) that large municipalities have more resources and competences to include and thereby they can develop and manage new knowledge on quality management to support the principals in their work. Based on the research overview, as refereed above, there are demands for municipalities to adjust and adapt to national regulation as well as new actors in the schools sectors, the independent schools and the reinforced group of parents that in the new school context have got a stronger position.
The qualitative case studies have all been initiated with interviews and contact in the central administration of the municipality. In this stage we have also identified and analysed documents regarding the organisation of the educational sector in the municipalities as well as the municipal reports form the evaluation made by the national Swedish National School Inspection. The agency both publish a report on all schools in each municipality after their inspection and the underlying material as questionaries’ to parents, pupils and teachers; single inspection reports and the self valuation form the municipal board are available on the web-site of the agency.

In all municipalities we have conducted interviews in the central administration regarding education, most often called the “The unit for Children and youth” or “The unit for education”. In the larger municipalities they have employed professional staff focusing on these issues. In the smaller municipalities, on the other hand, these units only consist of a handful (or in the smallest municipality a single part time employed) of people doing administrative support. The two large municipalities have a function as “area manager” including several schools and principals. At the office for the area unit they also have administrative staff as budget and human resources responsibilities. We have also made interviews with principals at some schools in each municipality and in some cases even teachers. Here we have selected teachers that have a specific assignment to address quality development in relation to the subjects they are teaching, they are called first teacher. All interviews have been semi-structured and focused on what they consider to be quality management in education, how it is organized in their municipality, relations between policymakers, administration and schools. We have also discussed their experiences of being evaluated by the Swedish school inspection and if there are other forms of regular evaluations taking place in their municipality. Finally, we have opened up for questions regarding what they see as the best forms of quality management and the prospects for the future. In total the interviews ends up to app 24 persons (two group interviews including seven people together) as a complement to the document analysis. The analysis, based on the translation focus on implementation as presented above, focus on identified strategies in translation processes, constraints they experience in particular in relation to the obligatory passing points and innovations in particular how the mediators act and arrange for development in new ways.

Some basics on the studied municipalities are summarized below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Municipality B</th>
<th>Municipality C</th>
<th>Municipality D</th>
<th>Municipality E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of inhabitants*</td>
<td>540 000</td>
<td>150 000</td>
<td>26 000</td>
<td>11 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of population with exams from higher education (Swedish average 25%)**</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of municipal run schools</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of schools run in other organisational forms</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political leadership in the municipality</td>
<td>Broad coalition, mainly Social democratic</td>
<td>Broad coalition, Social democratic</td>
<td>Social democratic</td>
<td>Social democratic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different local situations, but same national requirements on quality – Our five case studies

In this section of the paper we will present the four case studies that has been conducted in variety of municipalities. They are selected to cover different sizes, but also different socio-economic settings and political leadership in the municipalities.

**Municipality A – centralization and decentralization of a large municipality**

Municipality A has a population of 547 000 people. It is the second largest city in Sweden and growing steadily. This is thanks to access to the sea and the continent, but a historical tradition of developing industries, which nowadays has changed into focus on business, education and research. Municipality A has for long been a Social democratic stronghold, however after the last national election also the city is governed by a minority coalition consisting of the Social democrats, the Left party, the Green party and Feminist Initiative. This large municipality has divided it's administration and management into ten district city councils with separated areas of responsibilities. Thus the schools are also managed in these districts. In each district there is a head of division, who in turn report to the municipal council for education (utbildningsnämnden).

At primary school level the municipality has 139 public schools and 42 independent schools (friskolor). However, the number of independent schools dramatically increase at secondary level (gymnasium); 34 versus 15 public schools. The educational level is high in municipality A. Each of the district councils decided upon the aims and budget for each year, but the central municipal council for education are strategically following up and controlling in line with aims formulated by the municipal council.

**Municipality B – [Linköping]**

Municipality B is Sweden’s fifth largest municipality in east of Sweden with 151 881 inhabitants. Since the election in 2014 the political majority is a coalition of Social democrats, the Green party and liberals. There is a high tech industry in the air force industry, formerly the army were dominating the city, but now the university and industrial park have taken over.

The educational administration in the municipality is managed from a central council for children and youth. There is an administrative office of education with a manager called director of education. There are four area managers for education. In each school area several municipal schools are included and the principal are subordinated the area manager. There are hereby several layers that are not complexly hierarchal, since both single schools and the area managers has a relative high level of autonomy to manage the daily work at the schools as they want. The area managers are also in charge of all specific projects that can go on in each of the areas, these are for example focusing reading, environmental issues or homework-support. The area managers are supposed to support the schools in their strategic quality work and for these processes they also have quality coordinator in each area.
Municipality C.... [Oskarshamn]

Municipality D – Addressing quality in a strategic way [Valdemarsvik]

This municipality has app 11 000 inhabitants. It is a declining industrial community that in recent years has welcomed a proportionally large amount of refugees. There are four school units and these are all run by the municipality. Some children in a peripheral area of the municipality do, however, go to a independent school in just across the boarder to the neighbouring municipality.

The political leadership in the municipality has for long been either social democratic or the agricultural Centre party, at the moment the social democrats are in charge. There has been a long political fight about two small schools and the last one of them closed down this year. The main reasons for closing down the small rural schools have been financial, but there has also been arguments refereeing to educational quality such as the struggles to recruit teachers and the social situations for children in small groups.

There is no secondary high school in the municipality. Instead the children have to go to schools in other schools in the region. They access the schools based on their final grades and thus the grades and access to schools is a key indicator for quality of education. An indicator used is the number of students that gets admission to their first hand choice for secondary high schools (interview management team in municipality C). Hereby, the further education becomes an indicator of the work on lower educational levels.

The municipality has recently employed a quality manager at the unit for children and youth. She has a background as a teacher and has for many years work in a private school company. Her key is quality management in education. However, the head of unit of children and youth is the one communicating with the policy makers in the municipality and also responsible towards them as well as in the relations to the National School Inspectorate.

Municipality D – Struggling to make it work [Ydre]

Municipality D is the smallest in the study and also one of the smallest in Sweden with app 3700 inhabitants. It is located in a rural area and there are several villages that the inhabitants consider to be their centre. Thus the identity of the municipality is weak and fragmented. But there is a main built-up area where the municipal administration is located. The village closet to the larger (20 000 inhabitants) municipality is growing and young families with children are moving in.

Also here the issues of local schools have been on the agenda (Cedering, 2012) and two of the former four schools were closed down in 2013. The two remaining schools are located in the main built-up area and the village were young families move in. Both these schools are municipal ones. A group of parents really tried to start a “independent school” to run one of the now closed schools (Assmo & Wihlborg, 2012). The conflicts around the closing of the schools are still present in the management in the municipality. The position as head of unit for children and youth at the municipality has been advertised several times and there have been different temporary solutions. Also
the function as principals for the schools have been unsteady, since they have had to take on other roles as well.

The political leadership of the municipality is now a coalition of the famers’ party and the Social democrats, and even if they highlight the importance of education and good schools (Municipal budget documents) they have not addressed the management challenges (interview principal at one of the schools in municipality D).

**Final remarks on the case studies**

We have selected municipalities of different sizes, but size here also clearly correlates to the level of education in the total population. The issues of educational quality are indeed on the agenda in all municipalities but the management approaches differs, as we will show in the next section. It is also obvious that there are huge differences between the municipalities in these respects.

**Strategies, Constraints and Innovations – A cross-case analysis**

Based on the four case studies we will analyse how the municipal management are addressing the challenges of quality in education in local schools by focusing on their strategies, constraints and innovations. In all studied municipalities it is obvious that the multi-level arrangement of quality management makes it complicated and tricky to manage. In addition an overall impression is that the large municipalities both have resources and capacities to address the issues more coherent, but at the same time the complexity of the practices increase not at least since there are more schools in other management forms and thereby partly out of the reach of the municipal management.

**Strategies in use for education quality and municipal levels**

There is a translation of general legislative structures into applicable regulations for the specific local management and the specific schools through the municipal management. Thus we have focused on the strategies developed in municipal management. There is a complexity of how and who is actually managing quality in education. There is a need for all teachers, and even pupils, to contribute if we should believe the quality aims in some of the municipalities.’ Legislation is expressed in terms of policy statements. Norms and values form policies and are expressed in the legislation. The network embeds norms and values, and these form both the networks around the issue (Box, 2015) and structure of public sector decision-making and administration. The national legislation, the school law (SFS 2010:800) is regulating what is seen as quality in schools, and it mainly points at the learning outcomes but also on the social environment in Schools for learning. In this case the National School Inspectorate is translating such norms and values in their municipal control. Their visits to municipalities is generally taking place on a three year basis, and these visits can be seen as obligatory passage point as the municipality has to pass.

In municipality D they had not really the best experience of the obligatory passage point of the visit from the National School Inspectorate. The newly recruited quality manager even said (interview, 151104) that the decision to announce the position she has, was a consequence of the criticism that municipality got at the last inspection three years ago. She explained that:
... the members of the municipal council have to understand what we do in schools and what it means when they are asked ... last time they could not answer the questions by the people from the National School Inspectorate ... and it got even worse when a journalist asked why we did not pass the control ... (interview, 151104)

This indicates that an obligatory passage point can open for new strategies to improve translation. Here the strategy was to employ a person that could act as a mediator to be able to pass the obligatory point next time the National School Inspectorate shows up.

However, in daily work in-between the visits from the National School Inspectorate there is a need to find ways to translate the quality work into ordinary practices and procedures. At one school in municipality C the principal showed their local aims for good education, including among other things:

... a good life and everyone’s desire to learn every day

The strategy, he told in the interview, is to address this general and broad aim in daily work and make everyone contribute. They have to make teachers and even pupils aware of the local aims as well as the national regulations and take their responsibilities. This translation strategy was summarized by one of the principals in municipality C:

In daily work it is actually about everyone being present and aware of his or her role and take responsibility for it all. That makes quality in education.

This indicates that each and everyone working in the schools has to take on their role and also have to be aware of what the are expected to do. It is an issue of leadership, as expressed by one of the principals that took part in the group interview in municipality A. The demands to address quality management have added new aspects and challenges to the local leadership in the schools. It is more about linking several pressures and coordinate them in daily practices and they actually express it as a translation process. One principal said:

... so you have to combine with good leadership. We have to translate into a reality and everyday life. We have governmental aims and municipal goals, and you break it down in every school. It is at our level of the systematic work is done, and then raised to a higher level and then sometimes it comes back (Interview, Principal in municipality A).

It is far from clear how such translations take place. But the principals’ strategies about daily work are in line with basic theories on quality management also in industries (see for ex Dean and Bowen, 1994).

It is obvious that knowledge of quality management is essential for a functional local management of school quality. In all studied municipalities the informants have highlighted the need to be able to elaborate and address quality and to have the competence and resources to do it. However, it seems here like if the key to research out into the daily practice in schools is not the size of the organisation or the municipality, but rather the competence to translate and motivate the implementation. In one of the small municipality the strategic role of the quality manager is seen as the key person for this translation and also management is highlighted. There were still constraints for the local quality management.
What types of constraints appear for quality management in education?

It is obvious that quality management is seen as an additional new task to the schools and it is not really embedded into daily routines even if that is what they are struggling towards. A first aspect of this is the clear emphasis on grades and results. In municipality B it is expressed in the plan for education (Mål och uppföljningsplan 2012-2015) as:

*The average merit points (based on grades) should over time increase at every school.*

Even if grades have been part of education for long time, there are new practices developing. As the quality co-ordinator in one of the school areas in municipality B expressed.

*... now I have to analyse all the grades and look for patterns and results of interventions. We can even follow single pupils, and we do that to see where to make changes to improve the overall results [she shows graphs and analytical spread sheets]. There are single pupils here and we can follow them over the years.*

These tasks are not just consequences of the new forms of NPM and quality management, but also something that has become possible to do due to new technological tools and types of measurements. It might even are possible to argue that just since it is possible to do these types of analyses, the schools and even municipalities get an impression that they have to.

The focus on grades as a key to measure quality is obvious in all municipalities. They are expressed in many ways and address both general ambitions and ambitions regarding grading in specific groups. As in municipality B that puts a specific focus on children that do not have Swedish as their mother tongue, in the (Mål och uppföljningsplan 2012-2015) they state that:

*The Principal is responsible for a specific monitoring and measurement of students at risk of not achieving the objectives in Swedish, Swedish as a second language and mathematics in grade 3. The follow-up and outcome of actions reported to the Children and Youth Committee annually.*

A constraint for achievements in quality is the mixed qualifications of the pupils. They have to meet each child at their level and capacities and the schools achievements are dependent on lots of aspects out of their control. Both in municipality D and E they raised the issue of new refugees and in particular children arriving in Sweden by themselves (ensamkommande flyktingbarn).

Even if there is a formalized quality management taking place in the municipalities, there is a common constraint that seems to be about how the work more strategic on the issue. A principal in municipality A expressed the situation, or even frustration, as:

*We have dialogue meetings on score, results, national tests and attainment, how schools are run and other stuff. But we do need clarity about what we want. We had earned more if the follow-up meetings had been in a more structured way.*

* (Group interview principals in municipality A)
The lack of formal structures for evaluations, follow up model are constraining the opportunities to learn and develop the quality management in education. A similar constrained is related to a weak leadership and this illustration is from municipality C.

The principle in one school in municipality C discussed in an almost wearied mood that it is a challenge to grasp, read and understand all the objectives of the national quality systems in the educational sector. And it is even more complicated and challenging to tell this to the teachers and make it work in pedagogical practice in everyday life. He summarized it as:

_The quality systems and management is so extensive and in many respect so complex that it is hard to grasp_ (Principal for school, year 7-9 in small municipality (C))

This points at the importance of mediators in public management when the policy instruments are partly hard to grasp. The management from different levels in the multi-level governance systems is far from clarified. In the large (A and B) and in one of the small municipalities (D) they had persons with functions as quality manager. They had had the opportunity to formulate and coordinate local and national aims and objectives of educational quality. By relating and integrating these objectives management, coordination and evaluation were improved, according to both policy makers and the daily practice by teachers. In the large municipalities (A and B) these quality managers seems to have much more complicated to reach out to schools and teachers, than the closeness in municipality D. It was also noticed as an advantage in the report from the National School Inspections. This can in addition be seen as an indication of the importance to make such a leadership embedded into the local context.

**What types of innovative processes takes place in the studied schools and municipalities?**

The use of quality managers appears to the most innovative strategy in the studied municipality. It can be seen as an innovative response to the challenge of translating the objectives of quality in education. These are mediators supporting the translation process and making it fit into the local organisational setting and the competences of teachers in school.

An other innovation seems to be to formulate general aims to strive towards and hereby embed quality of education into daily practice. One school in municipality C had a more creative formulation to this in their plans for the academic year 2014/15.

_To work for a “good life” and “everyone’s desire to learn everyday” in our organisation._

This could be seen as a more creative and encouraging way of expressing the aims, it is a translation from the formal aims in the legislation and municipal documents. This is a formulation that probably can support and help teachers to get more involved in quality work, might even without reflection upon this as a quality issue. (Could open for discussion on learning among the teachers) Maybe it could be seen as way of passing the obligatory passing point of quality criteria without noticing it.
Concluding remarks

Based on this study we will draw three more general conclusions and discuss their implications. First, we can notice that there is a need to clarify the roles and obligations of the different levels and actors in the municipal education sectors to make quality management clear. Second, there is a need to support and develop roles for mediating actors that can translate meanings of quality into public settings. Thirdly, there is need to elaborate on the meanings of quality management in public settings and also open up the meanings of quality in relation to education in particular and public services in general.

The first conclusion drawn from this study is the need to clarify how and by who quality management is arranged in the multi-level governance structure of the educational sector in Sweden. The municipalities that give an impression that they have a structured and coherent quality management system are those who have managed to combine the national regulation into the local policies and implemented in the schools. The two larger municipalities had such competences in their central administration, but if and how it reached out in the singles schools where far from oblivious. There is indeed a complexity in how educational quality is managed and what is seen as the responsibility for different actors. The small municipality D had employed a quality manager to address strategic issue. She became the mediator translating the core ideas of quality management both towards policy makers on local level and to the principals of the schools. She also had the capacity and resources to coach the principals and some cases even single teachers to improve quality in education and in schools.

The second point we will highlight here is the need for mediators translating ideas. Mediators appear in this study primarily as the quality managers that linked the general aims at the objectives of quality into daily practices in schools. They are promoting the translation and support it to be embedded into daily pedagogical practices. However, in the large municipalities (A and B) they were more distant from the teachers and had more problems to reach out and instead the worked more on general analyses. In addition also local aims and policy documents can function as mediators for translation.

The third general point we will make is that there is a need to translate the meanings quality into the public sector management and the type of services that is provided by public agencies (Elg et. al, 2015). Here it is obvious that the schools and the educational sector have to include everyone and thus the challenges are enormous. The pupils varying interest and competences are indeed framing the potential for quality work in compulsory education. Even if the independent schools would not admit it they sometimes have a form of cherry picking to get the best pupils to their schools. However, that is indeed the exception that confirms the rule that public services have to be completely inclusive. Here it was obvious that schools in less favourable areas had more of a challenge to reach good quality. There is a need to develop quality models that do support and develop strategies to provide quality given the indeed different situations, resources and capacities.

The translation of meanings of quality management in the educational sector, in these case sectors, do not appear to be a problem based on the multi-level governance system but rather the different interpretations and management models of the political and professional governing structures. There is a need for a new competence in municipal educational sector – the quality manager. The capacity to deliver what is seen as good quality education is indeed an issue of legitimacy since education is a wide ranging
public service and a critical institution for each nation. Such general policy aims has to highlighted as reasons for quality of education.

References


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