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Technologies of Power in a State-initiated School Improvement Programme

Governing by school self-improvement

MALIN KRONQVIST HÅÅRD

Educational Work
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Abstract

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This thesis investigates the power dynamics between state and municipal actors within the state-initiated school improvement program, Co-operation for the Best School Possible (CBS). CBS can be seen as an example of the numerous reforms driven by the global education reform movement (GERM), which is rooted in neoliberal ideologies. The thesis aims to illuminate how power operates within the CBS program, focusing on the construction and regulation of local school actors. It explores the intricate power relations between the Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE) and local school actors, including headteachers, local education authorities and local politicians.

A Foucauldian perspective serves as the overarching analytical framework, incorporating key concepts such as governmentality, sovereign, disciplinary, and pastoral power, along with neoliberalism, discourse, and resistance. The study also employs soft governance and policy instruments. The research adopts a case study approach, utilising data collected through interviews, meeting observations, and documents from a municipality, as well as national policy documents. The analysis methods include narrative discourse analysis, thematic analyses, and a scoping review.

The findings underscore the constitutive role of language in official policy texts and how local actors are governed through policy instruments such as carrots, sticks, and sermons. From a Foucauldian perspective, local school actors are identified as deviant under the normalising gaze of experts, internalising state-imposed norms and standards. Subtler methods of steering involve pastoral techniques, such as self-evaluation, requiring local actors to reflect on their weaknesses and how to better themselves. The Systematic Quality Assurance (SQA) work exemplifies a self-monitoring trend in education, where schools continuously self-evaluate based on preset standards, combining disciplinary, sovereign, and pastoral power to improve performance. The SNAE functions as both a monitor and a pastor, providing the local actors with a roadmap to redemption.

Eight years after CBS's implementation, research on its various aspects remains limited. This thesis contributes to understanding how power technologies operate in large-scale school improvement initiatives like CBS. It addresses gaps in existing research by examining how power functions in public education and how neoliberal reforms shape the professional identities and practices of local school actors.

Keywords: power, governmentality, large-scale school improvement, policy instruments, Foucault

Malin Kronqvist Håård, Educational Work

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To Svante and Elin

List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

- I Kronqvist Håård, M. (2021). Styrning genom samverkan? – En textanalys av dominerande diskurser i en statlig skolförbättrings-satsning. *Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige*, 26(1): 42–69
- II Kronqvist Håård, M. (2023). Government steering and government disruption: co-operation between government and municipal actors in a state-initiated school improvement programme from the municipal actors' perspective. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy* 9(2), 113–125
- III Kronqvist Håård, M. (2024). The Quest for Continuous Improvement in Light of Power. Disciplinary, Sovereign and Pastoral Power in a State-initiated School Improvement Programme. [Manuscript submitted for publication].
- IV Kronqvist Håård, M. (2024). School Leaders' Response to Neoliberal Education Reforms - A scoping review. [Manuscript submitted for publication].

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Abbreviations

CBS – Co-operation for the Best School Possible
GERM – Global Educational Reform Movement
LEA – Local Education Authority
NPM – New Public Management
PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment
SNAE – The Swedish National Agency for Education
SQA – Systematic Quality Assurance

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Preface

'People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does' (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 187, personal communication with Michel Foucault).

Introduction

In the current education landscape, neoliberal ideologies have permeated policy agendas worldwide, leading to significant transformations in educational practices and systems. This thesis mainly revolves around issues related to what has been called a global education reform movement (GERM, Sahlberg, 2011, 2016). Sahlberg claims that many educational reforms adopted worldwide respond to similar problems and priorities and follow a similar policy rationale based on accountability, standards, decentralisation, and school autonomy, followed by quantifiable quality measurements and evaluations, notions rooted in neoliberal ideas. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has become emblematic of the global education reform movement, driving competition between nations and shaping education policy agendas. States transform into what Ball (2009) has called ‘competition states’, where educational success becomes synonymous with national competitiveness. This competitiveness, in turn, has led to a ‘PISA-crisis’ in many countries with declining student outcomes, Sweden included (Nordin, 2014). As a result, governments have responded with numerous reforms.

A large amount of research has demonstrated the general influence of neoliberalism on education over several decades (e.g., Apple, 2004; Ball, 2017; Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2019). Neoliberal education reforms foster a culture of performativity, where success is measured by quantifiable outcomes and rankings (Ball, 2003). Soft governance mechanisms, emphasising autonomy and self-regulation, place responsibility on local school actors while adhering to externally imposed accountability standards (Ball & Junemann, 2012; Cardini, 2006; Watson & Michael, 2016). Regarding to the Swedish context, Lundahl et al. (2013) write that the Swedish school system is commonly recognised as having undergone one of the greatest changes in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to embrace the neoliberal principles of privatisation and marketisation. Hardy et al. (2019) further argue that a centralised and neoliberal agenda increasingly influenced the educational reforms implemented in Sweden between 2010 and 2017. They claim that the reforms are largely directed at teachers as individuals rather than wider schooling structures. This direction, in turn, risks de-professionalising the local school actors.

Imsen et al. (2017) explore how new education policies since the new millennium have affected the values of the Nordic model. The key shared values

in Sweden, Norway and Denmark include ‘equality, equity, democratic participation, inclusion, and national building’ (p. 578). The authors argue that while the Nordic model remains the dominant system for the majority of Scandinavian students at a national level, the introduction of neoliberal management reforms aimed at enhancing teaching and learning efficiency is gradually eroding the core values of the Nordic model (cf. Muench et al., 2023).

In this thesis, I investigate one of the most comprehensive school improvement programmes initiated by the Swedish government recently (Rogberg et al., 2020): Co-operation for the best school possible (CBS, in Swedish *Samverkan för bästa skola - SBS*). CBS can be seen as an example of the multitude of reforms initiated by governments worldwide. I situate CBS within the broader framework of the global movement in education reform shaped by the neoliberal principles outlined above. The initiative has been costly, and much time and effort have been required for the schools involved (Ärlestig & Johansson, 2020; cf. Bolden & Tymms, 2020 for the context in England and the US).

From the arguments advanced above, it becomes important to deepen the understanding and problematising the dominating discourses surrounding educational reforms and ‘a school in crisis’. I will analyse the power technologies visible within CBS through a case study conducted in a municipality participating in the programme.

The concept of power has been highlighted as fundamental to understanding society (Clegg, 2010). For a long time, institutional theory has been the dominating theory when studying organisations; however, Clegg asks for the need to ‘bring power and agency back in’ (Clegg, 2010, p. 11). In an audit society, the state is absolutely central to analyse, and Clegg goes even further and states that ‘where power is marginalized conceptually it is given a fuller remit to flourish unchecked, practically’ (p. 11). Møller (2017, p. 382) also emphasises that ‘reflective approaches and critical studies addressing the power structures’ need further investigation in educational research. This thesis mainly uses some of Foucault’s central concepts as analytical tools to investigate the discursive formations and the exercise of power in the given CBS-case. Furthermore, it examines the complex power relations between an educational state agency and local school actors (headteachers, local education authorities (LEAs) and local politicians). In this way, I move beyond the more common approach of analysing the implementation of top-down school improvement (McLure & Aldridge, 2022) towards a more theoretical approach to understanding the interactions between the state and local levels.

The Foucauldian perspective makes it possible to understand more fully how power works and is exercised within a school improvement programme such as CBS, as it focuses on social structures and relationships (Freie & Epley, 2014). Power relations in this thesis mainly refer to state power for two reasons: first, the case studied is a state-initiated school-improvement pro-

gramme and as such how the state steers through such programmes are of interest; second, as Foucault (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 224) says state power is central as ‘all other forms of power relations must refer to it [state power]’. In Foucauldian terms the state is not an entity but ‘a practice’ (Foucault, 2007, p. 277) a very important practice, as the quote above proclaims.

Although this thesis focuses on actors outside the classroom, the words and actions performed by those actors set the agenda for how teachers can perceive, understand, and conduct their educational practice. When ‘student and/or school performance fails to meet (often unrealistic) expectations, all eyes turn to teachers as in need of “fixing”’ (Gore et al., 2023, p. 454). In the wake of this need, we are seeing extensive global investment and interference in teacher education and teacher development with the aim of improving the quality of teachers and teaching (Gore, 2020).

At the heart of the thesis is the relationship between state and municipal actors within a state-initiated school improvement context. Several research gaps that are relevant to this thesis have been identified.

First, Triantafillou (2017) sees the need for more in-depth empirical studies to show how power works in public administration settings. He claims a lack of critique against public administration and management reform, partly because they rest on the optimistic idea that knowledge and better knowledge will lead to more efficient public sector governing (cf. Wrigley, 2008 on school improvement). Liljenberg (2015) has a similar claim regarding the Swedish educational context. She claims that more research is needed to investigate neoliberal influence at the local level in the Swedish school system. Third, little is known about how state agencies and local educational authorities ‘interact in decentralised and deregulated education systems’ (Nordholm, 2016, p. 394). Fourth, there is a lack of knowledge about how initiatives such as CBS affect participating schools; hence, the perspectives of local municipal actors in large-scale school improvement initiatives are important to investigate. Nordholm et al. (2022, p. 3) claim that more research is needed on the issue of ‘how professionals experience large-scale reform’. Finally, the state’s role as an actor is also under-researched according to Rönnberg (2011). My study is about critically examining a perhaps well-intentioned exercise of power, to see what consequences and conditions this exercise of power entails for the local school actors who, with Foucault’s (1995) wording, must ultimately be rescued, ‘fixed’, and normalised (disciplined) into docile subjects.

Aim and research questions

The overall aim of this thesis is to shed light on how power operates in a state-initiated school improvement programme and how local school actors are thereby constructed and regulated. The CBS case is used to discuss how power

can operate within the context of a school improvement. The relationship between the Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE) and the local actors are in focus, but *how power* operates is of main interest. Foucauldian theory does not analyse behaviour but rather what techniques, routines, systems, and norms are used to shape the conduct of others (Triantafyllou, 2017, p. 22). Two research questions guide the concluding discussion of this thesis:

- How is power exercised in the CBS case?
- How are local actors constructed and regulated through education policies such as CBS?

The four papers in this thesis address questions such as discourse in white papers concerning CBS, how the municipal actors make sense of the co-operation within CBS, and how their stories can be understood from a policy instrument perspective. The CBS case has also been analysed from a power-critical perspective. Finally, a scoping review of school leaders' experience of neoliberal education reform has been conducted. The overarching questions in the compilation part of the thesis bring together the different angles and perspectives of the articles.

According to the Foucauldian perspective mainly used in the thesis, power 'is exercised rather than possessed' (Foucault, 1995, p. 26). The how question posed above should not be understood in the sense of "How does it manifest itself?" but "By what means is it exercised?" (Foucault, 1982, p. 786). 'How-questions' make it possible to both study the empirical practice and simultaneously focus on the discourses and unwritten rules of this practice. I thereby combine the micro- and macro-perspectives, analysing how individuals are made into subjects, the 'on-going subjugation' (Foucault, 1980, p. 97), and the rules and principles behind these formations and power relations. My thesis contributes to the understanding of discourses and power relations within state-initiated school improvement programmes, contributing to both research and practice. It highlights factors that shape the experiences of local school actors, including headteachers and teachers, and explores how they navigate and make sense of these conditions.

The aims and research questions for the four articles

The articles will be described at greater length later in the thesis, but to provide a general picture of their content, I will summarise the aims and research questions here. First, I will connect the articles with the overall questions of the thesis. Generally, both the questions posed in the articles and the overarching questions of the thesis revolve around power and steering issues. In chapter six, after the summary of each article, the article's contribution to the overall questions of the thesis will be outlined in more detail.

Table 1. *The articles related to the overall questions of the thesis*

Overall questions	Article I	Article II	Article III	Article IV
Question 1: How is power exercised in the CBS case?	X	X	X	
Question 2: How are local actors constructed and regulated through education policies such as CBS?	X	X	X	X

The aim of Article I (*Styrning genom samverkan? – En textanalys av dominerande diskurser i en statlig skolförbättringsatsning*) was to investigate and write a possible narrative about CBS to make visible and highlight the discourses in the rhetoric surrounding CBS in the analysed texts. Three questions guided the article. The first is an overarching question: what is the story about CBS in these texts, and how is it told? Two more specific questions were asked: which discourses can be read in the identified story, and which subject positions can be discerned in this?

The aim of Article II (*Government steering and government disruption: co-operation between government and municipal actors in a state-initiated school improvement programme from the municipal actors' perspective*) was to illuminate how co-operation between state actors and municipal actors (headteachers, LEAs, and local politicians) in a government-issued school improvement initiative is perceived from the municipal actors' perspectives. Two research questions were posed in the article:

- How do the municipal actors (headteachers, LEAs and local politicians) in the given case make sense of co-operation with the SNAE in CBS?
- How can the municipal actors' stories be understood and put in a wider perspective by using, as analytical lenses, concepts of soft governance and relevant policy instruments?

The aim of Article III (*The Quest for Continuous Improvement in Light of Power, Disciplinary, Sovereign and Pastoral Power in a State-initiated School Improvement Programme*) was to analyse how power is exercised in a large-scale state-initiated school improvement programme and to discuss possible implications for the local actors. A Foucauldian framework was used to highlight the use of different forms of power. Two questions were posed:

- How are Foucault's different modes of power manifested within the context of a case study in a municipality participating in the CBS programme?

- How do these power techniques influence the practices of the local school actors in the case study?

The aim of the scoping review, Article IV (*School Leaders' Response to Neoliberal Education Reforms - A scoping review*), was to analyse research on school leaders' response to neoliberal education reforms. Three questions guided the study:

- What is the extent and nature of the empirical research on school leaders' response to neoliberal education reform?
- How can these responses be understood using resistance theory?
- How have the neoliberal reforms affected school leaders' professional identities?

The theoretical approaches employed in the articles all share a common focus on steering and power. Several of Foucault's key concepts including discourse, governmentality, sovereign, disciplinary and pastoral power are central to these theoretical frameworks and will also be central to this compilation thesis. However, Article II, in particular, utilises a governance and a sense-making perspective. I will discuss to some extent the implications of, perhaps, this pair of 'strange bedfellows' as Bevir (2011, p. 457) calls them, in the final section of the theory chapter.

Outline of the thesis

The compilation part of the thesis is divided into seven chapters. In the introduction, I have given a background to the focus of the thesis and presented the aim and questions of both the compilation part of the thesis and the four articles. The content of the following chapters is briefly described here. In chapter two, a brief background of the CBS case is given. In chapter three, I give an account of the theoretical framework, which has a central role in the thesis, including definitions of the most important Foucauldian concepts for the thesis. In chapter four, I position the thesis in relation to what broadly speaking, could be called education policy research. Especially, policy instruments in education and the neoliberal policy regime and its implications for local actors are in focus. Chapter five consists of descriptions of the methods used in the four articles, methodological considerations, and descriptions of the analytical approaches and ethical issues. A summary of the four articles will be given in the sixth chapter, as well as a presentation of the contribution of each article to the overall aim and questions of the thesis. In the final chapter, there will be a concluding discussion as well as a discussion on the limitations of the thesis and the need for further research.

Regarding the articles in the compilation thesis, I have decided that it is easier for the reader not to mix the words study and articles. Hereafter, the case of the CBS is presented in four separate articles (I-IV), meaning that the thesis should be read as one study (in the methods chapter presented as a case study) where different methods for collecting and generating data have been used and different methods for analysing the data, as presented in four articles.

Background

The Swedish educational system has been very reform-dense since the 1990s (Lundström, 2018; Nordin, 2014; Rönnerberg et al., 2019). The division of responsibility for schools between the state and local responsible organisers (*huvudman*) is an issue that has been much debated since the decentralisation reforms that started in the 1980s. These decentralisation reforms have been followed by a trend of re-centralisation by more indirect governance via performance steering, control, inspection, and economic instruments such as targeted state subsidies (Hudson, 2007; Lundström, 2018; Rönnerberg, 2011; Rönnerberg et al., 2019). Some reforms introduced following the negative PISA results and recommendations of the OECD, mentioned in the introduction, are career pathway reforms (Erlandsson & Karlsson, 2018), various ‘boosts’ such as a mathematics boost (see Sülau, 2019), and a literacy boost (see Kirsten, 2020). In connection to these various ‘boosts’ there is also the process of applying and competing for national funding provided by the national agency, which can be seen as an example of internal market mechanisms associated with neoliberal reforms in Sweden (Lundahl et al., 2013). Moreover, this approach is a way of regaining control for the state. The funding for these initiatives, CBS included, is vast (Hardy et al., 2019). These reforms collectively demonstrate how governments steer from a distance. Rönnerberg (2011, p. 695) comments that the SNAE has ‘become one of the government’s most important means to exercise governance over education by such use of target financial funding’. There is thus a seemingly contradictory movement of both decentralisation and recentralisation simultaneously. On the one hand, there has been an increase in control and juridification (Novak & Carlbaum, 2017; Rosén et al., 2021); on the other hand, more subtle steering mechanisms, such as career reforms and selective pay rises, have been put in place (Bergh et al., 2019; Erlandsson et al., 2020).

Hardy et al. (2019) have also commented on the role of the OECD in recent educational reforms in Sweden. The OECD has constructed a role in the background within the Swedish context, ‘as a support for necessary reform to reclaim earlier successes’ (Hardy et al., 2019, p. 356). CBS is thus implemented in an era marked by reform density and a competitive climate. It is an extensive national initiative, that as of autumn 2023, has engaged over one hundred headteachers and many hundred schools and preschools. As of August 2023, 164 municipalities and 19 independent responsible organisers have partici-

pated in CBS. To be noted, some have participated more than once. In addition, more than one hundred researchers and teachers from Swedish universities have also been involved in CBS (Håkansson & Rönström, 2021).

Co-operation for the Best School Possible – a Short Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction, schools appear to be constantly exposed to criticism, and in response, new educational concepts and organisational solutions are introduced. School is no longer just a matter of national interest. Globalisation processes, manifested in the PISA test for example, have come to continuously increase the pressure to develop new improvement concepts and methods (Hardy et al., 2019). According to various international studies, such as PISA, the academic performance of students in Swedish schools has declined in recent decades (Andersson et al., 2018). In response to critique in domestic and international reports, the Swedish government launched CBS, with the aim to turn around low-performing schools (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2015).

In 2015, the SNAE was commissioned by the government to establish CBS to raise the knowledge outcomes and increase equivalence within and between schools (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2015, p. 1). CBS targets schools with low results or a high proportion of students who do not complete their studies and/or schools with difficulties improving student outcomes and/or problems offering equal education (Skolverket, 2016). In 2015, CBS was directed at compulsory school (children aged 7–16), but in 2017, preschool (ages 1–6) and preschool classes (ages 6–7) were also added (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2017). The CBS involves co-operation between three different parties: the SNAE, the participating responsible organisers (and local schools), and universities. The universities are only part of the last two phases of CBS (see Table 2). The Swedish Schools Inspectorate can also be added since it hands the SNAE the selection of the responsible organisers who are offered to participate in CBS. The selection is based on regular audits made by the Schools Inspectorate (Skolverket, 2016).

The SNAE states that the initiatives in CBS should be based on the needs of the individual school and should be context-specific (Skolverket, 2016). The programme for the individual schools lasts for three years¹. The CBS process often starts with an approximately six-month mapping phase. The participating schools and responsible organisers conduct a situation assessment to pinpoint the initiatives needed at the schools. The SNAE is actively involved in the mapping phase, helping municipal actors analyse and produce an action

¹ The description of the CBS process is based on how it was designed at the time of the data gathering. It has since undergone some changes.

plan. Examples of initiatives stated in the action plans are developing teaching through the SNAE’s web modules in assessment, developing teaching through the SNAE’s web modules in special education, training in systematic quality assurance work and anchoring and implementing routines and plans. In the following action phase, universities and consultants take a more central role as implementors of the plans together with the involved municipal actors. Lastly, there is a closure phase where the local actors write a final report about the initiatives and plans for how to move forward. The report is submitted to and approved by the SNAE. The last two phases overlap.

The data collection for the thesis occurred the final stage of the action phase, overlapping with the closure phase (see Table 2). The study took seven months to complete.

Table 2. *Approximate Phase Structure in CBS*

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<i>Mapping phase</i>	Six months		
<i>Action phase</i>	→		
<i>Closure phase</i>	Three months		
<i>The research project</i>	→		

Translations used in the articles and the thesis

SNAE and others use different English translations for CBS. Article I was published in a theme issue; thus, a joint translation of CBS, Collaboration for Better Schools, was used. A further example is Nordholm and Adolfsson (2024) who use Collaboration for the best school possible. I use Co-operation for the Best School Possible in Articles II and III and the compilation part of the thesis.

In Article IV, the broad term school leader is used to encompass both headteacher/principal and deputy/vice headteacher/principal in compulsory education. In Articles II and III, the British English term headteacher is used; thus, these two terms are used interchangeably in the thesis.

Previous research on CBS

Some previous research has been published regarding CBS, mainly a thematic issue focusing on CBS in Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige 2021. The articles use different organisational, governance and school improvement perspectives as well as discourse analysis, and issues such as knowledge construction,

sensemaking, and systematic quality assurance are discussed (Adolfsson & Håkansson, 2021; Blossing, 2021; Glaés-Coutts & Nilsson, 2021; Kronqvist Håård, 2021; Levinson et al., 2024; Lundgren et al., 2021).

Adolfsson and Håkansson (2021) study quality management within CBS from an organisational perspective and what happens in the meeting between local actors and the national level regarding quality management. The study is based on interview data collected at four schools participating in CBS, from LEA in the same municipality and through an interview with a representative from the SNAE. The results indicate that quality management is characterised by soft governance with predominantly normative and discursive elements. This softer governance, however, gained legitimacy from more regulatory steering, such as the school law and the reports from the Schools Inspectorate. An important ground for legitimacy was also the many activities in CBS concerning the identification of school improvement and the systematic collection of data and analyses seen as a part of the international policy trend of data-based decision-making. Adolfsson and Håkansson also reported that the quality management in CBS, in many respects, took over the local level's quality management work. They see the co-operation within CBS as top-down initiated and an important part of government quality control. Finally, Adolfsson and Håkansson also point to a displacement in the division of responsibilities between the local and state levels and claim that CBS can be understood in light of an accelerating re-centralisation movement.

Blossing (2021) focuses on the situation assessment form and analyses it in relation to improvement capacity as functionalist structuring or as a professional learning community (PLC) culture. The results show that the forms are characterised by the former, a functionalist structuring of improvement capacity. This leads to a risk of making school leaders' and teachers' agency invisible and more hindering than facilitating the school leaders' and teachers' improvement capacity.

Lundgren et al. (2021) discuss the transformation of assessment and action plans into local staging plans in four municipal schools. The study builds on document analysis. The study showed that the staging of CBS initiates collective sensemaking processes but also creates uncertainty despite process support from external parties. Lundgren et al. claim that the different phases of the CBS staging process risk being disconnected when a master plan is transformed from decision logic to local action plans based on action logic. Finally, Kronqvist Håård (2021) has conducted a policy study, also part of the theme issue, identifying dominating discourses within CBS, such as co-operation and best practice (Article I in this compilation thesis; see chapter six for a longer summary).

Glaés-Coutts and Nilsson's (2021) article is not part of the theme issue. This article investigates how 'knowledge construction on school improvement literacy', in collaboration with external agencies, is a critical aspect of school improvement (p. 64). They write about how the knowledge construction can

be realised for teachers and headteachers within CBS. The study builds on individual and focus group interviews with headteachers and teachers at two schools engaged in CBS. The theoretical framework builds on the theory of situated learning. Glaés-Coutts and Nilsson (p. 73) ask ‘who owns the knowledge in the school improvement process’? They found that the knowledge construction of school improvement must be based on local needs. Moreover, incorporating local needs and historical context is essential in the process if the guidance of a knowledgeable other in understanding research literature on school improvement can support such knowledge constructions.

More recently, Nordholm and Adolfsson (2024) conducted a study from the perspective of SNAE officials and how they made sense of the CBS reform ideas and operationalised them in policy actions. The study is based on interviews with officials from the SNAE and document analysis. Nordholm and Adolfsson deploy neo-institutional theory where Scott’s (2014) three pillars – regulatory rules, professional norms, and cultural-cognitive beliefs – are at the centre. Weick’s (1995) sensemaking concept is also used as a theoretical backdrop. This article ‘explores the state governance of a large-scale school improvement programme and how officials at the state agency level make sense of the reform ideas and operationalize them in strategies and policy actions’ (Nordholm & Adolfsson, 2024, p. 304). The study indicates that the lack of regulatory directives in the CBS case meant that normative ideas and cultural-cognitive beliefs greatly impacted the sense-making process among the SNAE officials. This case can, for instance, be seen in the use of the dialogue approach and the focus on quality assurance as a key to both improving school outcomes and increasing equality.

Levinson et al. (2024, p. 2), use a meta-governance perspective, and their aim is ‘to investigate how SNAE operates as a meta-governor on behalf of the state’ within the CBS initiative focusing on continuing professional development (CPD). The data consist of various documents, produced by the SNAE, municipalities and business providers, as well as interviews with four headteachers that had participated in the CBS initiative. The analysis revealed that the SNAE acts as a meta-governor, replacing university researchers with private-sector actors as CPD providers. This substitution is achieved through three main strategies: hidden and authorised substitution, trust-building and hybrid participation, and collective reproduction and solutionism. Levinson et al. claim that these strategies demonstrate how national authorities facilitate the privatisation of CPD. The study concludes by advocating for new collaborative and autonomous strategies to improve CPD for teachers, aligning more closely with the interests of the teaching profession.

In addition, two more articles by Kronqvist Håård (2023; 2024a) have focused on the CBS phenomenon (articles II and III in this compilation thesis; see chapter six for a longer summary).

Theoretical framework²

Introduction

In this section, I will present the main theoretical basis for the thesis. Both a governance and a governmentality perspective have been used in the different articles; however, the latter, the Foucauldian perspective, is the most dominant and should be seen as the overarching analytical viewpoint of this thesis. Attempts have been made to ‘marry’ the two (see Bevir, 2011; Larsson, 2015). Towards the end of the theoretical section, I will comment on this potential marriage and elaborate on the concepts of governance and governmentality.

The writings of and about Foucault are legion. In this theoretical outline, I concentrate on the concepts most important for understanding and discussing the data I have gathered to answer the research questions posed in this thesis. Governmentality is a key concept that will be discussed, as well as sovereign, disciplinary and pastoral power. The concepts of neoliberalism, discourse, and resistance will also be explored.

Before delving deeper into the concepts important to the thesis, I will make some comments on questions of ontology and epistemology. Foucault strongly resisted any categorisation or labelling of his work. Many place him among the poststructuralists/postmodernists, but he refuted any such classification (Lindgren, 1991). The question of ontology and epistemology is thus not so easily answered regarding Foucault. It has been argued that Foucault firmly opposed all attempts to consider ontology (Oksala, 2010). Foucault claimed that ‘Nothing is fundamental [...] the foundations of power in a society or the self-institution of a society [...] are not fundamental phenomena. There are only reciprocal relations, and the perpetual gaps between intentions in relation to one another’ (Foucault, 2000, p. 356). However, to try to give some account of epistemology and Foucault, I will say something about the relationship between knowledge, power, and truth. On the question of episteme, Foucault has said that it ‘defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice’ (Foucault, 1994, p. 168). Thus, episteme makes it possible to speak of the true and the false, and epistemes are also the basis of discourses, or ‘discursive formations’ (Foucault, 1972, p. 107). Regarding power/knowledge, Foucault

² Parts in this section can be found in the four articles and have been printed with the permission of the publishers.

(1995, p. 27) says that power ‘produces knowledge’. The two directly imply one another, and ‘there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 27). In short, truth, in a Foucauldian sense, is about the relationship between power/knowledge that produces realities and subjects. Every society has its ‘regime of truth’ and ‘general politics of truth’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 131), which will be presented further on.

Although Foucault’s thinking is the most influential theoretical element in the thesis project, other theories, such as sense-making (Weick, 2005) and policy instruments (mainly Vedung, 2016) have been used. In a wider sense, a social-constructionist view applies to the thesis. There are multiple realities, and as such, there is no neutral description of reality. Knowledge is constructed through language, social, cultural and historical ways of looking at the world (Bergström & Boreus, 2005).

Foucault and Power

Power is THE central thing to study in the social sciences (Christensen et al., 2014; Hearn, 2012), or as Ball puts it in an interview with Avelar, it is ‘a fundamental ... organizing principle to social relations’ (Avelar, 2016, p. 4). According to Foucault (1980, p. 198), ‘power means relations, a more-or-less organized, hierarchical, coordinated cluster of relations’. As already mentioned in the introduction, power in a Foucauldian sense is seen as something ‘exercised rather than possessed’ (Foucault, 1995, p. 26). An individual or institution, therefore, exercises power to bring about particular effects. ‘Power exists only when it is put into action’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 788) and its outcomes can be both repressive and productive:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes,’ it ‘represses,’ it ‘censors,’ it ‘abstracts,’ it ‘masks,’ it ‘conceals.’ In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (Foucault, 1995, p. 194)

Crucial to Foucauldian analysis is understanding the actions through which power is produced and exercised, and not through the identification of individuals or systems that oppress. Foucauldian analysis explores the exercise of power, challenging the notion that power solely resides within individuals (Freie & Eppley, 2014). Instead, power is everywhere (Foucault, 1978). In this thesis, power is considered as both relational and institutional. Foucault does not deny institutional power, as described in the introduction.

I don't say that the State isn't important; what I want to say is that relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extend beyond the limits of the State [...] the State is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest in the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth. (Foucault 1980, p. 122)

According to Foucault, subjects are thus partly created through institutions. The subjectivation of teachers, for instance, is created through educational institutions. However, the relational view of power also makes the subject an active participant in power practices by reproducing power or by resisting it. Foucault's (1982) central project was developing a history of the different modes individuals in our society are made subjects, and he emphasises that 'power relations are only possible insofar as the subjects are free' (Foucault, 1997, p. 292). Power is creative and productive in Foucault's terms and a 'lot of the time it "makes us up" rather than grinds us down' (Ball, 2013, p. 30). After this general introduction to Foucault and power, I will discuss, for the thesis, important concepts in more detail.

Neoliberalism

Foucault observed a significant break between classical liberalism and neoliberalism regarding their views on the role of the market in social relationships. While classical liberalism aims to create a free space by minimising interference in the market, neoliberalism takes a more proactive approach. It seeks to apply the principles of a market economy to the broader realm of the 'general art of government' (Foucault, 2008, p. 131). It has been argued that within neoliberal thinking, schooling is increasingly framed as a mechanism for creating human resources, i.e. producing the next generation of workers (Ball, 2017). The concept of neoliberalism can be difficult to pin down since it has been used in many different ways and contexts. Some argue that it has become useless due to its prolific uses and should thus be discarded in the social sciences (Venugopal, 2015). However, I believe it has analytical value, especially regarding Foucauldian analysis and the analysis of the case example at hand, but the term needs to be clarified as to what it implies. Here, I will mainly describe neoliberalism from a Foucauldian sense, but I will first start with a short overview of different usages of the concept.

Larner (2000) conceptualises neoliberalism in three ways: as policy, as ideology and as governmentality. In the first and perhaps most common conceptualisation, neoliberalism is understood as a policy framework that supports the relatively unregulated functioning of markets (Schmeichel et al., 2017). Governments' focus on improving economic efficiency and global competitiveness is believed to have a great impact on governing (Larner, 2000). Neoliberalism as an ideology is closely related to Gramscian analyses of neoliberalism as a hegemonic project. Stuart Hall's analysis of Thatcherism

is perhaps the best known (Larner, 2000). According to Hall (2011, p. 10), neoliberalism is characterised by a focus on individual possession and a desire to limit state intervention in the economy and private property. The ideology opposes state control and prioritises corporate and private interests over social engineering and market regulation. Furthermore, it promotes social continuity and the continued control of the ruling class (Schmeichel et al., 2017). The third conceptualisation of neoliberalism, governmentality, is the most important for this thesis, where the reading of neoliberalism is seen from a Foucauldian perspective. In line with the discursive turn in philosophy and social theory, this interpretation presents neoliberalism as a collection of interconnected but contradictory discursive practices that aim to shift governance from the state to the individual. This shift encourages citizens to govern themselves based on market-driven rationality (Schmeichel et al., 2017). From this viewpoint, an individual is positioned as *Homo economicus*, i.e., as a moral, responsible ‘entrepreneur of himself’ (Foucault, 2008, p. 226).

In neoliberal societies the goal is not to ‘govern too much’ (Foucault, 1997, p. 74). One of the key problems in liberal rule, according to Foucault, (2008), is thus how to exercise state power without destroying the self-governing processes of civil society. Although there is a shift in the art of governing, the existence of authoritarian control is not gone (Dean, 2002). Olssen (2003) takes this point one step further and claims that in neoliberal societies where the state aims to conduct the conduct of the governed, the individual’s position as a subject is that of the ‘manipulatable man’ – who is willing to take full responsibility for themselves (Olssen, 2003, p. 199). Connected to education, this can be seen in the rhetoric of continuous improvement that permeates the educational sector (Watson & Michael, 2016). Neoliberal technologies work by making productive, enterprising and self-responsible employees (Ball & Olmedo, 2013).

Discourse

The concept of discourse plays a significant role in Foucault’s work (Gillies, 2013). Discourse is how we shape and construct our understanding of the world. It is important to note that this point does not imply a denial of physical reality or the belief that everything is purely textual. Rather, it recognises that our access to the world is mediated through language. Foucault (1972, p. 49) defines discourse as ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’. Many different expressions within the neoliberal discourse greatly affect the steering of schools, e.g., accountability, evidence-based practice and continuous improvement (Bates, 2016; Brady, 2016; Keddie, 2015; Watson & Michael, 2016). Discourse refers not only to the general role of language in constructing reality but also to the specific ways we understand and interpret the world. Foucault refers to these specific forms as ‘systems of

formation', such as political discourse, economic discourse, and medical discourse (Gillies, 2013, p. 10). Foucault states that in any society, there are various power relations 'which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body' (Foucault, 1980, p. 93). These power relations rely on the production, accumulation, circulation, and functioning of a discourse to establish, reinforce, and implement them.

In connection with discourse, Foucault uses the phrase 'régime of truth' (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). Regimes of truth are socially constructed ideas and beliefs from which society organises itself and creates its

'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1980, p. 131)

In other words, what the dominant discourse does is that it gives us words and tools to think and talk about ourselves and the business we operate in a certain way, such as 'efficient' or 'entrepreneurial'. However, Foucault problematises these formations by highlighting their contingent, provisional, and fallible nature (Gillies, 2013). These discourses shape and create the subjects they speak about, and the same is true for educational discourse.

Power is closely connected with knowledge, and these two presuppose each other. Starting from the perspective of the world as socially constructed through discourses opens up an investigation of the relation between knowledge and power in different forms of social practice. Power makes our world limited and possible to orient ourselves in and live in, but power in Foucault's sense also means examining what is excluded by the current order of power (Winther Jørgensen & Philips, 2000). Further refining Foucault's views, Ball (1994) draws the connection between the individual, ideology and policy:

We do not speak a discourse, it speaks us. *We are* the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows. ... In these terms we are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies (Ball, 1994, p. 22, italics in the original).

Knowledge and power are thus closely related, and the former also contributes to creating subject positions that determine the scope for freedom of action that the subject has (Bergström et al., 2017). What can be accommodated within a discourse depends on the discourse's way of creating and perpetuating truth-saying, which happens through various practices and according to rules that govern the interplay between knowledge and power.

Sovereign, Disciplinary and Pastoral Power

In this thesis I mainly discuss three modes of power: sovereign, disciplinary and pastoral, as well as the concept of governmentality. Pastoral power is a 'prelude' (Foucault, 2007, p. 184) to governmentality which Foucault developed later in his career. The governmentality concept is difficult to leave out when analysing modern forms of governing, and it will be described both on its own and in relation to the governance concept. It is important to acknowledge that the different forms of power do not supersede nor displace one another but rather work simultaneously (Foucault, 1991). Below, I will sketch the characteristics of Foucault's three modes of power and how they can have a bearing on discussing education.

Sovereign power

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1995) painted the picture of close to bestial punishments executed during the sovereign era of power. Punishments were displayed as grand spectacles meant to correct, educate and cure. Sovereign power is thus the power mode that most resembles forces of domination and control, which we ordinarily perhaps associate with the word power. The higher up in the hierarchy, the more power one possesses, and the more one is seen as an individual. This can be compared to a pyramid of power, where some individuals are at the top, and everyone else is at the bottom. Legitimacy of authority is thus a crucial point in sovereign power. It commands obedience and compliance. Sovereign power is visible, and individualises ascendingly (Foucault, 1995). In the educational setting, headteachers and teachers possess a measure of this sovereign power; they are visible figures who represent authority to their staff/students and exert influence over their lives through tasks and assessments. The governing instrument in sovereign power is the rule, and the goal is further submission. Simons (2014) has made a modern interpretation of sovereign power. In his interpretation of sovereign power, or the synopticon, the old classic power of reinforcing law and order has been replaced by the 'power of the best performances or good practices' (p. 166). This power operates under what can be referred to as the 'law of performance', which emphasises the most efficient and effective use of resources and attaining the highest outcomes. The modern technique used to achieve education goals is the example setting. Instead of the traditional arena for punishment, this power is manifested through public rankings or the presentation of practices that are decontextualised or recontextualised to serve as either positive or negative examples. In the modern synopticon we still have a spectacle the 'arena of the best performers or those representing in an exemplary way optimal performance or "good conduct" ... the happy few being watched and admired by the many' (Simons, 2014, p. 166). PISA reports and international ranking lists are examples of this.

Disciplinary power

In the subsequent era of disciplinary power, the focus is no longer on the sovereign's possibility to execute, but in this form of power, the power is about control and surveillance, and it wants to form, tame, and make people better themselves; in short, it disciplines them (Foucault, 1995). Disciplinary power operates differently from sovereign power in that it is not concentrated in a visible authority figure that establishes and enforces rules. Instead, this power exists everywhere and is integrated into the individuals' daily lives and actions. It functions as a complex network of power dynamics that connects and influences individuals. Disciplinary power is thus a more modest and suspicious power that 'makes' individuals into subjects (Foucault, 1995, p. 170) through the use of different technologies of power. Disciplinary power, in contrast to sovereign power, individualises descendingly as power here is more anonymous and the people on whom power is exercised are strongly individualised. No one is more individualised than the deviant, the one not complying with the norms. The punishment is additional training to make individuals conform (Foucault, 1995). There are many different technologies of power. Surveillance, normalisation, individualisation, and responsabilisation are most relevant to this thesis.

Surveillance singles out individuals and involves close observation, watching and the threat of being watched. The very knowledge of the possibility of surveillance becomes disciplinary. The panopticon is disciplinary power in its ideal form (Foucault, 1995, p. 205), and the gaze is one of its surveillance technologies. The gaze is an important concept since it denotes the feeling of being watched, often unconsciously, which leads to a will to self-discipline. People are disciplined through the normalising gaze of experts. The production of knowledge is thus also a technology of disciplinary power. The sciences, especially knowledge of the human sciences, provide us with information on how to behave, what is normal and what is good. Power and knowledge work in a spiral in which they reinforce each other (Foucault, 1995). Within education, the surveillance aspect of disciplinary power has been popular in research regarding inspection practices (e.g., Courtney, 2016; Perryman et al., 2018).

Normalisation is another technique where the demand for homogeneity and the desire to individualise work alternately to measure deviations from the normal (Foucault, 1995). Thus, by individualising someone, by singling them out and distinguishing them from the group, the norm becomes clear as the distinction either praises or punishes the individual. Behaviour that deviates from what is defined as normal and desirable is punished. The punishments are subtler, have a corrective function and aim to reduce deviations from the order. The behaviour becomes visible when the Schools Inspectorate, for example, targets and singles out a school that does not live up to the norm. When a behaviour is highlighted in such a way, it can be scrutinised, corrected, and

homogenised in accordance with the collective and current norms. Such an examination and correction also reinforce the norm by making others in the group, other schools for example, aware of which behaviour leads to ‘a pass’ or a ‘remark’ from the Schools Inspectorate. The inspection ‘works through the judgement of examined cases in view of a fixed set of norms and standards’ (Simons, 2014, p. 163). These norms and standards serve as reliable instruments for both those being inspected and the agencies conducting the inspection.

The concept of responsabilisation involves an actor granting another actor more autonomy while also increasing their level of accountability (Waslander et al., 2020). Over time, individuals are expected to take control of their own actions and are increasingly held responsible for various aspects of their lives. The importance of disciplinary power in modern society has been emphasised: It is a “tricky combination” of totalization and individualization through producing capable subjects for authoritarian objective in modern societies’ (Han, 2023, p. 408). Subjectivity can thus be understood as a product of disciplinary techniques and power/knowledge strategies. We now turn to the even more subtle form of power, pastoral power.

Pastoral power

More liberal forms of governance, with decentralisation and governing at a distance, thus demand yet another form of power: pastoral power (Larsson et al., 2010). Pastoral power encompasses disciplinary elements and builds on freedom, a special kind of freedom that builds on self-regulation (Dahlstedt et al., 2011). Foucault (2007) used the metaphor of the pastor or the shepherd and his flock to highlight a different mode of power from the two previously described modes. Pastors are supposed to be of service to their congregates. The flock is dependent on the shepherd, and the pastor is seen only to exercise power to protect and nurture the flock; therefore, it does not make sense to rebel against the pastor. Pastoral power is a seemingly more caring mode of power that is ‘salvation oriented’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 783). This point can be seen in the modern state as state agencies increasingly work on their public image as the ‘helping agency’ (cf. Gillies, 2008; Larsson et al., 2010; Rehnberg, 2019). Pastoral power is also about knowing the inside of a person’s mind, thereby getting people to reveal their secrets or to confess, and thus provides the ability not only to have knowledge of the other’s conscience but also ‘the ability to direct it’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 783). Producing truth is part of pastoral power; moreover, ‘pastoral power gives the subject responsibility for their own production’ (Perryman et al., 2017, p. 746). However, it is important to see pastoral power through the essential bond between pastor and flock which is central to Foucault’s description of pastoral power (Martin & Waring, 2018).

There is currently a self-evaluative discourse (Brady, 2016) that is part of pastoral power. Self-evaluation means self-knowledge and self-reflection; by

confessing your 'sins', you can better yourself to reach salvation or, in connection with education, the correct training. The knowledge obtained can be used both to reach a higher level of self-mastery and be used by the pastor to guide the subject to better obedience (Foucault, 2007). Pastoral power is thus a combination of the disciplinary and subjectifying forms of power. The pastor plays the role of both the disciplinary monitor and the promoter of self-governing subjects (Martin & Waring, 2018). As Foucault (2007, p. 184) says, pastoral power 'is a prelude to what I have called governmentality', which we now turn to.

Governmentality

Foucault introduced the concept of governmentality in his later publications, first appearing in his lectures at Collège de France in 1978 and 1979 (Foucault, 2007). The term is used to critique 'the common conception of "power"' (Foucault, 1997, p. 88) and to 'analyse the strategies/techniques/procedures through which power guides and controls people's conduct ... in more invisible and strategic ways' (Han, 2023, p. 410). In particular, the concept of governmentality describes 'the encounter between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self' (Foucault, 1997, p. 225). By that it covers both the macro- and micro-levels of government (Han, 2023). Before moving on, the concept of government also needs to be clarified. The concept of government is defined as 'the conduct of conducts' by Foucault (2000). It is thus used in a more general way to describe the more or less calculated direction of human conduct (Dean, 2010). The idea of truth is further elaborated through the concept of governmentality. Instead of questioning what truth is, the emphasis lies on what is considered as truth (Clegg, 2001). Hence, the main focus is on understanding how truth-effects are created.

Governmentality is thus about collective power processes that steer thoughts and behaviour in certain specific directions that are usually not questioned (Foucault, 2008). Control occurs at a distance and includes people's willingness to actively control themselves, as discussed above. This desire for self-regulation means that we ourselves contribute to becoming the subjects, for example, reflective and responsible citizens of society, that we are expected to become (Vallberg Roth, 2014, p. 409; cf. Hudson, 2007). Power here works in a 'capillary' manner (Foucault, 1980, p. 39), becoming intertwined with people's bodies, beliefs, and sense of self. It connects them as participants of institutions, both through coercion and empowerment. This power is not externally imposed or dictated but flows within social structures, generating individuals who mutually influence and control each other. The term subjectivation captures how the production of subjects takes place.

The practice of the self implies that one should form the image of oneself not simply as an imperfect, ignorant individual who requires correction, training

and instruction, but as one who suffers from certain ills and who needs to have them treated either by oneself or by someone who has the necessary competence. (Foucault, 1988, p. 57)

This quote can be said to epitomise the general discourse on how school leaders and teachers should become effective, self-governing subjects. Government practices and personal choices shape how individuals see themselves and strive to become responsible and effective members of society. The aim is for individuals to adopt thoughts and beliefs that align with what the system expects from them either by working on the self or via experts. The strength and applicability of the governmentality concept lies in the mediating function between power and subjectivity, which makes it possible to examine how power techniques and self-techniques are connected and to scrutinise the close connection between ‘techniques of power and forms of knowledge’ (Bröckling et al., 2011, p. 2).

Sovereignty is not abandoned in governmentality but re-positioned (Han, 2023). There is no direct shift of dominant power from sovereignty to discipline to government, but there is ‘a shift of accent and the appearance of new objectives, and hence of new problems and new techniques’ (Foucault, 1997, p. 67). However, in reality, there is ‘a triangle of power sovereignty-discipline-government’ (Foucault 2000, p. 219). This statement illustrates Foucault’s conception of how different forms of power interrelate and operate within societies. Together, these three dimensions create a comprehensive system of power that governs both the structures of society and the behaviours of individuals within it.

Governance related to governmentality

The concept of governance is used in the articles to some extent and needs some attention. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the concepts of governmentality and governance have been claimed to be promising bedfellows (Bevir, 2011), which will be discussed below. First, however, the concept of governance needs to be defined.

The term governance is understood to cover the whole range of institutions and relationships involved in the process of governing (Pierre & Peters, 2000). Fredrickson (2005, in Hupe & Pollitt, 2010) used governance to describe how the state steers through grants and contracts, which is illustrative of the case in this thesis. The notion of governance includes a paradox central to education whereby, on the one hand, there is decentralisation, but on the other hand, there is more control from the governing power via, for example, audits (Cardini, 2006; Keddie, 2015).

Comparing the two terms governance and governmentality, one commonality is that they both examine ‘the problematics of steering, regulating, governing, conducting etc. in modern society - with regard to individuals, organizations, systems, the state, and society at large’ (Amos, 2010, p. 83). They

are both concerned with the state but approach it from different perspectives and focus areas. They are, however, rooted in different disciplines and have different intellectual backgrounds. Foremost governmentality adds a critical perspective that is missing in many governance studies. Governance, together with governmentality can, however, help ‘clarify how regulation mechanisms become tighter with regard to both the systems and the individual levels’ (Amos, 2010, p. 86).

Others have suggested that governmentality should be seen as a certain policy instrument (Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). Bevir (2011) proclaims that there are indications that governance and governmentality may be drawing nearer to each other. I, however, follow Larsson (2015) and see the two as separate and to each complimentary approach. Governmentality is an analytical perspective of its own and can help move beyond the sovereign focus of governance. The critical potential of the concept of governmentality is its ability to de-construct and question that which is ‘taken for granted’. In other words, governance can be seen as a way of rule, but governmentality is a way of analysing it. Governmentality is thus not an instrument or a strategy that the state can use; it is an analytical perspective that can help ‘critically address new forms of governance’ (Triantafillou, 2012, p. 2). Governmentality also analyses unconscious governing, which is what people do without feeling controlled. In addition, governmentality as a concept not only describes the exercise of power as hierarchical and top-down but as a mentality that we are all co-creators of and help uphold without us always being aware of it.

Resistance

Finally, I will say a few words on the concept of resistance. According to Foucault (1982), resistance is not confined to overt acts of defiance but encompasses a myriad of everyday practices that contest and subvert dominant power structures. These acts of resistance are embedded within power relations themselves, emerging as individuals navigate and negotiate the constraints imposed by disciplinary mechanisms and regimes of truth (Foucault, 1995). Therefore, resistance becomes a site of contestation where power is both reproduced and challenged. Foucault (1978, 2007) also highlights the importance of counter-discourses and counter-conducts that challenge dominant narratives and disrupt power asymmetries. Through acts of speaking truth to power and engaging in alternative modes of conduct, individuals and groups can destabilise established hierarchies and foster spaces of dissent and critique.

Concluding words

Finally, I use the Foucauldian concepts outlined in the chapter as tools for analysis. I have used relevant aspects of these extensive ideas as tools to provide insight into the case in the thesis. Foucault (1994) himself also greatly approved of his concepts being used as tools and being used in new ways: I would like my books to be a kind of *tool-box* in which others can explore to find a tool with which they can do what they want, in their field ... I write for users, not for readers (Foucault, 1994, p. 523-524). Different concepts have been important in the four articles. The discourse concept is mostly used in the first article; in the second article the governance perspective is utilised as is policy instruments, which will be further elaborated upon in the next chapter, positioning the thesis. The third article is the most theoretical. All the power modes – sovereign, disciplinary and pastoral – and the governmentality concept are used to analyse how power can be discernible in the CBS case. In the fourth article, neoliberalism and resistance are the main focus. The Foucauldian framework has helped me understand how power operates in the examined CBS case.

In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the use of policy instruments in education reform and how local educational actors are constructed and regulated through neoliberal education reform.

Positioning the thesis

Introduction

This thesis aligns with other research that examines and criticises the increasing dominance of neoliberal ideologies and practices in public education. As already presented in the theory chapter, neoliberalism is seen by, among others, Ball (2017), as a comprehensive system of governance based on economic reasoning, which has influenced not only financial institutions but also every aspect of society, including education. Neoliberal policies aim to create productive and self-responsible individuals, and they are promoted through governmentality techniques that prioritise efficiency in education.

Positioning oneself within different research fields can be challenging. There is a risk that defining the boundaries of a research field can result in an overly uniform theoretical perspective. This delimitation can obscure the multiplicity of viewpoints and theoretical approaches that coexist within any given discipline. Thus, the following chapter positions the thesis in relation to what *broadly speaking*, could be called education policy research. Especially, I focus on research concerning policy instruments in education and research focusing on how local actors are constructed and regulated via neoliberal reform.

The chapter begins with a presentation of policy instruments followed by an analysis of selected research using the policy instrument perspective to analyse educational changes. Additionally, steering education without reform is explored. The next section presents research on the neoliberal policy regime and its implications for school leaders and teachers. Foremost research using a Foucauldian perspective is presented here, but in the Swedish context, the focus is on educational change set in a neoliberal framing.

Policy instruments in education

Policy instruments play a crucial role in conceptualising and understanding current public sector reform and changes in governance (Le Galès, 2011). Policy instruments are techniques used by authorities, government or public, to promote certain policies to achieve a predefined set of goals (Capano & Howlett, 2020). There are different takes on policy as instruments, Salamon (2002) sees them as the core of the process of policymaking and Vedung's (1998, p.

21) take on policy instruments is ‘techniques by which governmental authorities wield their power in attempting to ensure support and effect or prevent social change’. Salamon (2002) thus emphasises the significance of policy instruments within policymaking itself, and Vedung’s perspective highlights their role as tools wielded by authorities to achieve specific aims within society. It is the latter that is most significant for this thesis. From a functionalist perspective to change, the choice of instruments follows the identification of a problem. However, from the policy instrument perspective, the instrument is the goal, and it has constitutive powers (Capano & Howlett, 2020; Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007). The instruments themselves explain change, often independently of the goals or the intentions. Governance modes change over time, as do the choices of policy instruments (Capano & Howlett, 2020; Le Galès, 2011). Indicators of performance, widely used within education, are a good example of a policy instrument that can quickly and easily change, making local actors constantly adapt (Le Galès, 2011). These policy instruments have a seductive power, as they simplify complex educational realities into numerical categories, giving the illusion that deep problems can be solved by following predefined patterns and measuring performance (Verger et al., 2019a). They are also convenient as they are easier to agree upon than goals. Verger et al. claim that to fully understand their effects, it is necessary to explore how these instruments are used at the school level and analyse the different responses they elicit from teachers and headteachers. Policy instruments are not neutral; they reflect the political and educational philosophies they originated from. Therefore, it is crucial to analyse the logic exemplified in these instruments (Lin & Miettinen, 2019). The research on policy instruments is underdeveloped in the context of soft accountability systems, according to Verger et al. (2019a).

The policy instruments targeted at education are legion, but most prominent in education, as well as medicine and other social areas, are perhaps the quest for accountability and evidence-informed practice (Triantafyllou, 2017). Verger and Skedsmo (2021) claim that there has been a growing reliance on performance-based accountability (PBA) instruments in education governance over the past twenty years. PBA combines various tools, including data collection, external evaluations, information systems, incentive schemes, and school support services. These tools are aligned with outcome-based approaches and are often implemented alongside monitoring tools, learning standards frameworks, school improvement plans, and performance contracts for school leaders and teachers. These reforms and mechanisms may be diverse in terms of their rationalities, but according to Triantafyllou (2017, p. 150), they all try to provide an answer to the neoliberal problematisations of government: ‘how to make public administration govern themselves more effectively?’ Policy instruments are seen as autonomous sources of power with a great capacity to alter not only educational actors’ subjectivities but also

educational institutions more widely (Verger et al., 2019a). The matter of altering educational actors' subjectivities will be presented later in the chapter, but first, I will present some examples of the use of policy instruments as an analysis tool within education reform research.

Examples of the use of policy instruments in education reform research

Much of the research on educational change using policy instruments as an analytical tool has focused on Test Based Accountability (TBA) (e.g., Browes & Altinyelken, 2021; Camphuijsen et al., 2021; Pagès & Prieto, 2020; Verger et al., 2019a). Camphuijsen et al. (2021) studied TBA in the Norwegian context from a policy instrument perspective and as such it is of special interest, as the 'Nordic' model of education can be seen to have many similarities. However, the extensive marketisation and privatisation of particularly the Swedish context raise questions about whether these similarities will remain (see Imsen et al., 2017; Lundahl, 2016). Camphuijsen et al. (2021) draw on two kinds of data: white papers and interviews with top-level politicians, stakeholders and policy-makers. The results suggest that the negative attention surrounding Norway's decreasing PISA scores and the endorsement of standardised testing as an unbiased tool played a role in Norway's rapid implementation of national testing in the early 2000s. The prevailing belief that all educational institutions should offer the same level of quality and produce similar learning outcomes led to the establishment of TBA, which aimed to ensure equity and excellence in a decentralised education system. Heightened visibility, comparison to benchmarks, and administrative control were influential factors in pressurising local actors to change their behaviour towards internalising responsibility.

There is thus seemingly a heavy focus on TBA-reforms when using policy-instruments as an analytical tool. Fewer studies have focused on other types of school improvement reforms, the more subtle reforms focusing on for example changes of indicators (Les Galès, 2011) or templates (Hall, 2017). One example, however, relates to the Swedish context. Forsberg and Nordzell (2013) discuss dialogue as a policy instrument for school improvement. They also combine the policy instrument concept with governmentality, which is particularly interesting to this thesis. The article examines a method used in 2000 by Myndigheten för skolutveckling [the Swedish National Agency of Education] called development dialogue, an approach seen as complementary to inspection. Forsberg and Nordzell (2013, p. 191) claim that the use of the concept dialogue was a vital ingredient in the initiative, as it has 'positive connotations'. Forsberg and Nordzell conclude that dialogue is a complex policy instrument that uses various techniques to shape activities, practices, and ac-

tors in the context of school improvement. When combined with formal accountability and measurements, this approach can be an effective method for governing local organisations such as municipalities. Soft power is more about knowledge transfer than coercion. Overall, the authors emphasise the importance of understanding governing as a disciplinary practice that produces identities and the role of dialogue in shaping our everyday realities.

Steering education without reform or Governing by ...

As described under the heading policy instruments in education, the governing of schools takes many forms, and in a decentralised system such as Sweden’s, much of the governing is done without reforms (Simons, 2015). CBS can be seen as such an example. There have been many suggestions on how school governing occurs in decentralised systems. A basic search on Eric ProQuest and Scopus for journal articles using ‘Governing by’ in elementary and secondary education (2009–2024) yielded 16 results relevant to this thesis. The results are summarised in Table 3. This search is used to illustrate how different forms of governing can take place and should not be seen as a complete list.

Table 3. *Governing by ...* (the words in italics are discussed in the text)

Author and year	Governing by ...
Papanastasiou (2021)	<i>best practice</i>
Grek and Ydesen (2021)	indicators and the OECD’s INES Programme
Simons (2021)	personalization and debt
Grek (2009); Hardy (2018); Kim, 2022; Spina (2017)	<i>numbers</i>
Simons (2015)	<i>example</i>
Decuypere, et al. (2014)	<i>evidence</i>
Landri (2014)	standards
Grek et al. (2013)	inspection
Dahlstedt (2009)	partnerships
Segerholm (2009)	<i>objectives and results</i>
Hall (2017)	<i>templates</i>
Lewis (2017)	<i>what works</i>
Kim (2020)	comparison

Starting with one of the perhaps most quoted ‘governings’, *governing by numbers*, which entails governing by data. The term originates from Rose (1991), who, in an influential analysis of the power of numbers, argued that the act of governing relies on and creates different types of statistical information or state numbers. According to this perspective, numbers and politics are deeply

intertwined, leading to a phenomenon known as ‘governing by numbers’ (Rose, 1991), where decisions within modern democracies are made based on statistical data produced by the state. Numbers become the means by which we understand and assess the state. This concept has been adopted in various ways within the field of education. In Grek’s (2009, p. 35) article, she describes the use and impact of PISA data as ‘a form of domestic policy legitimation or as a means of defusing discussion by presenting policy as based on robust evidence’. Furthermore, the implementation of PISA, with its emphasis on applied and lifelong learning, has significantly impacted curricula and teaching in participating countries, promoting the idea of responsible individuals and self-regulated subjects. Finally, PISA serves as a crucial governing resource for Europe, providing knowledge and information about education systems and fostering constant comparisons among EU member states without requiring new or explicit regulatory measures. Grek concludes that overall, PISA appears to play a vital role in the complex task of governing European education.

Hardy (2018) examines *governing by numbers* from an Australian perspective focusing on teachers’ professional learning in Inquiry Cycles. Hardy concluded that teachers’ learning was heavily focused on students’ performance on various standardised tests. These tests determined whether teachers were considered successful and influenced their ongoing learning. However, the data also showed that teachers challenged these standardised approaches and sought to promote a more educative approach. Overall, standardised measures govern teachers’ learning, but this governance process is complex and contradictory.

Second, Hall (2017) suggests that the concept of *governing by templates* can contribute to school inspection studies. In the article, he investigates how the inspection handbook in Norway is adopted and enacted at the local level and how inspection guides and steers through the use of fixed templates. Hall (2017, p. 178) is sceptical of whether this form of ‘steering actually contributes to making schools better and more equipped to take on future pedagogical challenges in education’. Similarly, Segerholm (2009) writes about *governing by objectives and results* and claims that the national quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) policy and activities have strengthened this governing practice in the Swedish case. There has been a significant increase in the number of educational reforms implemented in Sweden. Segerholm concludes that there is a risk that long-standing Swedish educational values, such as equality and democracy, may be overshadowed by a focus on easily measurable competences (cf. Imsen et al., 2017).

Fourth, *governing by evidence, what works and best practice*, will be dealt with together. Decuypere et al. (2014) analysed three websites in the Flemish context and saw these websites as concrete tools for *governing by evidence*. Examples of evidence include feedback reports, publicly accessible audits, and examples of good practice. These websites establish what is considered

evidence and how it is deemed as such by presenting specific data and information in a particular manner. Lewis (2017) also explores the use of evidence to govern schools but does so from the perspective of *what works*. He explores how the PISA for Schools test and report can offer opportunities for steering school-level policies, practices and reform agendas. The article focuses on the ‘processes of decontextualisation and commensuration’ (p. 282), as well as the incorporation of successful educational models from high-performing systems such as Shanghai-China, Singapore, and Finland, in the report. Lewis also draws on Simons’s (2015) concept of governing by example, which will shortly be presented. Lewis concludes that the influence of PISA for Schools is problematic and can lead to policy borrowing by schools. The result is an OECD-endorsed global policy framework of effective educational practices, which tends to overlook the importance of local context, conditions, and requirements for both participating schools and the systems they borrow from. This normalisation of best practices becomes a strategy for the OECD to influence local policy-making and practices through PISA for Schools. Furthermore, Papanastasiou (2021) argues that *best practice* is a significant form of governing practice in education policy that is also under-researched compared to governing by numbers. Viewing best practice as a governing practice allows us to understand it as a type of knowledge that simplifies complex policy issues and provides clear directions for future reform through specific techniques. Papanastasiou explores how the Open Method of Coordination³ facilitates the development of effective education policies in Europe. Through observations, interviews, and document analysis, the paper applies political discourse theory to examine the behind-the-scenes and public interactions that shape the creation of best practices for governing school systems in a working group coordinated by the European Commission. The analysis reveals three primary logics that drive the production of best practice: the logics of participation (that all member countries in the working group share examples of best practice), what works and that context matters. Papanastasiou also points out that governing by best practice works alongside the practices of governing by numbers.

Finally, Simons (2015) proposed *governing by example*, relying on one part on the responsabilisation of schools, headteachers and teachers and on the other part of governing through what works. In other words, it is governing through soft modes of power. Simons claims that while there has been some focus on new ways of governing, such as ‘governing by numbers’ cited above, less attention has been given to the governmental use of soft evidence such as

³ Open Method for Coordination is a form of ‘soft law’. ‘It is a form of intergovernmental policy-making that does not result in binding EU legislative measures and it does not require EU countries to introduce or amend their laws’ (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/open-method-of-coordination.html>).

good practice, narrative accounts, and the exchange of experiences what Simons calls ‘the power of the example’ (Simons, 2015, p. 713, cf. Papanastasiou, 2021). Furthermore, Simons claims that ‘[g]overning without reform expects that reality speaks for itself through performance measurements and examples of good practice’ (p. 721). Examples of good practice largely correspond to examples of good performance, determined by available numerical performance data. Thus, governing by examples complements governing by numbers, according to Simons.

Simons (2015) further argues that educational practice is no longer primarily a field for implementation or application, but rather as a domain for learning that requires responsibility. Responsibilisation suggests that states, as well as schools and educators, recognise that their performance is no longer attributed to external factors beyond their influence. This strategy also includes techniques such as contextualisation and personalisation and monitoring. Contextualisation involves grounding abstract concepts such as numbers, performance indicators, or examples in specific contexts to make them more tangible and applicable. Contextualisation and personalisation are closely linked and instrumental in promoting self-knowledge and self-governance among countries, schools, or teachers. The following self-monitoring places responsibility upon the subjects for continuous learning for innovation. The case Simons (p. 727) makes is that we now live in an era where people are to believe that ‘there is no longer something beyond themselves that is an excuse for actual self-improvement’; it is all in your hands. Monitoring is a large part of self-knowledge, both of the actual self and the possible future self. ‘It is through assessment that one gets to know oneself today’ (Simons, 2015, p. 728).

Simons (2014) is not part of the search results for various *governing by ...*, but it is a text that binds the other *governing by... together*. Simons elaborates on *governing through feedback*. He claims that it is through ‘permanent data-driven feedback that enable the, for instance, self-monitoring school and member state to perform’ (Simons, 2014, p. 167). This process places the school actors in the middle, where feedback comes from all around. The best scenario occurs when the employee’s self-assessment aligns with the evaluations of others regarding her performance. Simons also points out the risk of relying on feedback and monitoring: without it, one is lost and does not know what to do (cf. Ball, 2003).

These illustrated *governing by ...* all have in common that they attempt to steer the local actors in different ways. Instead of relying on ‘governing by numbers’, which involves using benchmarks and indicators to translate and produce knowledge, ‘governing through feedback’ (Simons, 2014) sees feedback as a tool for monitoring the past performance of individual schools. Governing through evidence, best practice and what works all emphasise the effective educational practices and tend to disregard the issue of context. Governing through templates and QAE, on the other hand, puts an increased focus

on school self-evaluation, self-regulation and control of performance through the use of rubrics, and according to Hall (2017), it represents a new way of governing local school actors. As Simons (2015) puts it, it is through assessment that we get to know ourselves. Power is less visible in modern governing as these *governing by...* have illustrated, which does not mean that the exertion of power is less coercive than regulatory governing or that it has less effect (Waslander et al., 2020).

The neoliberal policy regime and implications for local school actors

The neoliberal policy regime has already been presented in both the introduction of the thesis and the theory chapter, so I will only add a few introductory words here. Neoliberal technologies aim to create productive, enterprising, and self-responsible individuals. This idea emphasises personal choice and freedom. Audit and accountability play a crucial role in instilling the notion of the responsible individual within these neoliberal ideals (see Power, 1999; Trnka & Trundle, 2014). An audit culture permeates various aspects of social and political life, where individuals and groups are continuously evaluated and publicly held accountable based on specific performance indicators (various *governing by...* for example). Moreover, they are expected to engage in self-surveillance and self-assessment to hold themselves accountable (Keddie, 2018; Simons, 2015). These forms of governance have had a significant impact on the field of education and schooling. While the state still intervenes to support school improvement, the primary responsibility for such improvement is now seen as the responsibility of the local level, the school, or the individual (Keddie, 2018). However, the definition of school improvement remains under the authority of the state and depends on the school's ability to raise standards on specific performance indicators (Ball & Junemann, 2012), situating responsibility for students' success or failure with teachers and headteachers while ignoring 'broader questions of systemic structures that produce inequity' (Stacey, 2017, p. 790).

Schmeichel et al. (2017) conducted an integrative, theoretical literature review of the empirical research on neoliberalism in US P–12 education. Schmeichel et al. (2017, p. 2) examined how researchers provided detailed explanations of real-life manifestations of neoliberalism, descriptions of local and contextual accounts of experiences of neoliberal projects. Schmeichel et al. (2017) conclude that the empirical body of research literature engaging with neoliberalism in the US context is inadequate. They found that there was extensive literature dealing with textual analysis from a neoliberal perspective, but few researchers have focused on neoliberal influences on school actors in real-life settings. Robinson (2019) reached a similar conclusion in his review

examining educational research regarding the role that information and communications technologies have had in the global spread of the neoliberalisation of education. He points out the need for more research using empirical data about the effects of neoliberalised educational technologies – a need to engage with those who are affected and not just scrutinise policy. After this short general introduction of the neoliberal policy regime in education, I will present some research concerning the construction and regulation of local school actors in a neoliberal setting following the call by Schmeichel et al. (2017) and Robinson (2019) to use empirical data and not only through scrutinising policy documents. The interest lies in research investigating the experiences of educational reform by local actors; in addition, I primarily focus on research using a Foucauldian lens. The section starts by turning the attention to school leaders and then I move on to teachers; finally, the Swedish context is highlighted.

The construction and regulation of school leaders⁴

Much of the research literature focusing on the construction and regulation of local school actors comes from the Australian context. Focusing on the subjectivation of school leaders, Niesche (2010) claims that school leaders are constructed through the disciplinary power of grants and submission writing, which also has a normalising effect. In the study, the headteachers spent much time writing and managing different grants and submissions, and Niesche warns that these types of managerial tasks risk taking time away from addressing curriculum and pedagogy issues. Similarly, Heffernan (2016) explored how system-generated data profiles on school performance influence headteachers' work. Heffernan concludes that the work of headteachers is steered from a distance, and the data directs attention to certain aspects of education, namely, what is measured. Moreover, some of the headteachers in the study not only changed their way of working but also changed their ideals and beliefs to align with the expectations of the system.

Staying in the Australian context, Gobby et al. (2018) write about the idea of school autonomy. The concept of Independent Public Schools (IPS) has been introduced to give school leaders more control over their work. However, this autonomy is limited by the demands of competitive performativity, which has become the norm in Australian and other school systems. Entrepreneurial policies focused on competition, compliance, and performance improvement mean that schools, leaders, and teachers are held accountable to external standards. Regarding the reform experience, school autonomy is experienced differently in primary and secondary schools due to factors such as school size

⁴ Many of the articles presented regarding headteachers are also part of the scoping review in Article IV. I have here only presented a selection of the reviewed articles; for a fuller account I refer to article IV.

and high-stakes testing in the senior years of secondary school. Gobby et al. (2018) conclude that school autonomy, within the context of managerial and performative policies, shapes the subjectivities of schools and teachers. Autonomy does not mean freedom from governance or power. The discourse around autonomy creates new systems that use the idea of personal choice to promote innovation, efficiency, and improved performance. The question at hand is whether school leaders can uphold older values such as public service, community involvement, and equity or if a new professionalism that emphasises performance, standards, and accountability will fully take over (cf. Imsen et al., 2017; Hardy et al., 2019). For more research from the Australian context focusing on the impact of the performative turn on headteachers' work, see, for example, Niesche, (2013) and Longmuir (2019).

Mifsud (2016a, 2016b) investigates the FACT (For All Children to Succeed) initiative in Malta, a structural reform aimed at fostering new professional identities and learning communities in which Maltese primary and secondary state schools were geographically clustered into ten colleges. Through interviews with educational leaders, observations and document analysis, Mifsud explores various aspects, including autonomy, accountability, networking, and power relations. Mifsud (2016a, 2016b) reaches a similar conclusion to Heffernan (2016), who writes that there is a tension between autonomy and centralisation and that the presence of state central control is very strong in the reform agenda.

Pinto (2015) conducted a phenomenological study focusing on nine school leaders in the Canadian (Ontario) context. The study aimed to understand how school leaders handle the overwhelming amount of policy and to gain insight into the process of enactment. The findings revealed significant pressure for school leaders to comply with accountability, even when they perceive certain policies as disconnected from their day-to-day reality. In the analysis, Pinto focuses on the participants' fears of facing consequences for not complying with these policies, particularly concerns about losing their jobs or hindering their career advancement. The participants' experiences with multiple policies were characterised by a disconnection between the neoliberal policies and the actual workplace, with a perceived lack of relevance and contradictions. They viewed these policies as mandatory and non-negotiable, considering them an integral part of their job in a context where their autonomy as school leaders had diminished. Pinto's findings shed light on policy enactment and the interplay between politics, leadership, and the increasing volume of new policies in the neoliberal era.

Collet-Sabé (2017) explores the implementation of neoliberal school policies in Catalonia and their impact on headteachers' practices, subjectivity, and identity. He has conducted in-depth interviews with four headteachers, focusing on how their goals, practices, and identities are being transformed or produced by the new neoliberal assessment regime. In 2014, the School Indicators

System (SIS), aimed to evaluate objectives, actions, and benchmarks, was introduced in Catalonia. All schools include this information in their annual report. Collet-Sabé concluded that there are signs of both resistance and capitulation to this new assessment regime, but ultimately,

The SIS as assessment technology appears to make schools more transparent but they are fabricating to present themselves in the best light related, for example, to the school market – school choice or professional promotion. It looks as if Catalan head teachers’ main identity, despite the differences between them due to age, gender and professional experience, is becoming that of ‘fabricators’ (p. 153 – 154).

This quote highlights the paradoxical nature of systems such as SIS. Moreover, the observation that headteachers’ primary identity is becoming that of ‘fabricators’ underscores the pervasive influence of these systems on school leaders. All of these studies point to a change in the role of the headteachers towards that of a manager and also towards a sense of diminished autonomy for the headteachers.

The construction and regulation of teachers

Before moving on to the research conducted in the Swedish context, some international research on the redesign of teacher identities will also be highlighted. Compared to the literature in which headteachers’ response to neoliberal change is in focus, there is more research written from the teacher perspective, which perhaps is not surprising given that one of the major drivers in system-wide school improvement research is to ‘invest in human capital, especially teachers’ (Barrenechea et al., 2023, p. 490).

Holloway and Brass (2018) examine in the reconstitution of teachers’ identities under accountability reforms in the US context. They have interviewed teachers, and they compare two studies conducted ten years apart and conclude that:

While teachers of the first accountability stage positioned NCLB’s [No Child Left Behind] (self-) disciplinary mechanisms as external intrusions on their autonomy, professionalism, and practice, the second group positioned RTTT’s [Race to the TOP] accountability mechanisms as the very modes by which they knew themselves and their quality. (p. 362)

Holloway and Brass thus observe a notable shift between the two reforms, with teachers embracing newer accountability measures such as RTTT as integral to their professional identity. This result echoes the experiences shared by headteachers in studies by Gobby et al. (2018) and Heffernan (2016). Their

study raises questions regarding what might be gained and lost as new discourses emerge and it points to the fact that new discourses can quickly be internalised and seen as the commonsensical opinion to have.

McCarthy (2008) also explores the NCLB Act but approaches it from a slightly different angle. McCarthy investigates NCLB's impact on writing instruction, emphasising classroom dynamics. McCarthy suggests that NCLB affects teacher morale and writing instruction, with school contexts influencing teachers' responses. Generally, teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the emphasis placed on testing, both in terms of the content of the tests and their utilisation for assessing whether a school achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (a measure by which schools are held accountable for student performance). They felt that the excessive focus on testing had led to various negative outcomes, such as a narrowing of the curriculum and adverse effects on students. However, there were differences in the teachers' responses depending on whether they taught at a high-income or a low-income school. Teachers at high-income schools were still critical of many aspects of NCLB but did not believe that it affected their instruction as much as teachers at low-income schools where the teachers felt tremendous pressure to improve outcomes.

In the Macau context, Huang (2018) seeks to understand the active negotiation process of teachers as they reconcile their personal experiences with the norms advocated by prevailing managerialism in their in-service learning. This negotiation, Huang suggests, shapes their identity as in-service learners through resistance and negotiation. Informants in Huang (2018) expressed dissatisfaction with institutionalised training programmes, perceiving them as ineffective and disconnected from their daily teaching experiences. Meanwhile, Holloway and Larsen Hedegaard (2021) aim to critique the pervasive 'evidence' discourse in education. They do so by using two quite different school improvement initiatives, one from Australia and one from Denmark, both aimed at changing the behaviour of teachers. The authors argue that both cases demonstrate how 'evidence-based discourses are reprofessionalising⁵ teachers' (p. 447) to resist the temptation to deviate from their colleagues' practices. Holloway and Larsen Hedegaard caution against the restrictive nature of evidence-based discourses, which they argue limit teachers' autonomy and promote conformity.

On the other hand, Povey et al. (2017) discuss similar circulating discourses but through the lens of past positive school improvement experiences such as Smile mathematics in the English context, a project promoting democratic professionalism. They advocate for the recognition of alternative teaching approaches. Povey et al. discuss the tension between democratic professionalism

⁵ To clarify, Holloway and Larsen Hedegaard (2021, p. 438) explain reprofessionalisation as 'the re-construction of the professional teacher subject, where teachers as individuals identify with and internalize the practices and attitudes perceived as professional'.

and managerial perspectives enforced through teaching standards, emphasising the growing demands and surveillance faced by teachers under neoliberalism. They highlight how engagement with past positive experiences can empower teachers to resist dominant discourses and build a teaching identity that rests, for example, on professional judgement and co-operation. (For more articles focusing on teachers, see, for instance, Acuña, 2023 and Macdonald et al., 2006, to name a few.)

The Swedish context

I will conclude this section on leading and teaching within neoliberalism by focusing on the Swedish context. Besides Forsberg and Nordzell (2013), presented under policy instruments, there seems to be little research within the Swedish context that focuses on local actors' experience of educational reform in a neoliberal framing that also uses a Foucauldian lens. Other theories are thus used to discuss neoliberal changes and how they affect local actors.

Erlandson and Karlsson (2022) performed an ethnographic study for ten years in a Swedish secondary high school and describe the various ongoing reforms and school development projects during that time. Both headteachers and teachers are part of their data. They mainly focus on the first teacher reform (see also Erlandson & Karlsson, 2018) and the teachers' salary boost reform, but other school development projects are also discussed. The theme of school change emerged as a constant and pervasive topic in their data. The authors describe that throughout their years as researchers in the school, not a single day passed without any form of change being implemented, discussed, critiqued, or planned. They come to a rather harsh conclusion that 'it does not matter much what kind of "development" or school change that is initiated, as long as there is a change initiated and one change after the other' (Erlandson & Karlsson, 2022, p. 102). Erlandson and Karlsson claim that the act of starting change or rewarding efforts to bring about change has become a prevalent method for resolving any kind of problem, regardless of its nature. The educational system is now primarily focused on effectiveness and measurability. In this 'strange' environment, teachers and school leaders are deeply embedded in and influenced by the ongoing process of neoliberalisation, where 'change is both the means and the end' (p. 104; cf. Capano & Howlett, 2020; Le Galès, 2011). In a similar vein, Erlandson et al. (2020) explore the effects of neoliberal ideas on eight local schools, specifically how they influence social and relational dynamics. They observe a shift towards focusing on individuality in teachers' daily work, replacing notions of equality and compensatory intervention. The teachers in their study reported that performativity, school competitiveness, and hierarchical structures among colleagues have become more prevalent. Erlandson et al. (2020, p. 422) conclude that 'not only bureaucratic and formal frameworks regulate the teachers' behavior. Instead, the teachers have successively, over time, been forced to learn a conduct

which is directed by the ongoing marketization'. Schools and teachers need to work on their 'image' to enhance the school's competitiveness on the market (p. 417). This finding points to a similar conclusion reached by Holloway and Brass (2018) that the influence of neoliberalism has had a great impact on the way teachers view themselves as professionals.

Lundström (2018) focuses on how different policy reforms affect how upper secondary teachers experience professional autonomy in the neoliberal reform climate informed by NPM, which has been prevalent in the Swedish context in recent decades. These trends have affected the teachers' work and the construction of the profession. However, what that entails at the micro-level in the work of teachers is little highlighted in research regarding teachers' professionalism according to Lundström. The article is based on a meta-analysis of three studies in which 119 teachers were interviewed. Lundström concludes that power and control have been displaced to actors other than teachers, thereby reducing professional autonomy for teachers. Teachers are expected to deliver efficient, tested, and measured what works knowledge (cf. Lewis, 2017). According to Lundström (2018), there are also clear signals that trust in teachers has diminished and that teachers are steered and controlled to a larger extent.

The final example focuses on school leaders. Liljenberg (2015) examines how school leaders make sense of and address external demands in light of the new policy landscape in Sweden. Institutional theory and the concept of coupling are used as a theoretical framework. The study, conducted in three compulsory schools, reveals that school leaders respond to external demands symbolically but also adapt these demands to align with the norms and values prevalent in their local organisations, thereby resisting the influence of neoliberalism. There were, however, significant changes in practice resulting from a shift in understanding regarding results and systematic quality evaluation due to pressure from the obligations to monitor and evaluate. Liljenberg sees this change as an example of accommodation. Nevertheless, notions of professional responsibility and democratic values continue to guide the school leaders' actions, with little evidence of managerial accountability. Liljenberg thus has a slightly more positive picture to paint regarding headteachers managing to balance external demands with democratic professionalism than previously presented articles. However, Liljenberg concludes that more research is needed to investigate the neoliberal influence at the local level in the Swedish school system.

Summary and positioning of the thesis

The research presented in the chapter revolves around the issue of steering education via various policy instruments and the issue of self-steering and re-

sponsibilisation of the local actors placed in a neoliberal setting. More research is needed in both of these fields. According to Verger et al. (2019a) research regarding policy instruments is underdeveloped in the context of soft accountability systems. The issues of *governing by...* becomes important to explore further as much of the governing takes place without reform. Neoliberal influences on education have also been highlighted in this chapter, and more research is needed on the experiences of neoliberalism by local actors (Robinson, 2019; Schmeichel et al., 2017). Liljenberg (2015) also points to this need specifically concerning the Swedish setting. This thesis aligns with other research that examines and critiques the increasing influence of neoliberal ideologies and practices in education. The thesis binds the macro- and micro-levels together with the help of Foucault and the use of policy instruments focusing on local actors' experiences. As such, the thesis answers all of the above-mentioned calls. In particular, a Foucauldian perspective can provide a different outlook on discourse and power within large-scale school improvement projects and highlight the powers at work within such projects. Applying this perspective to research using empirical data can help widen the understanding of the experiences of local school actors within large-scale school improvement efforts. I will return to the contribution of the thesis in more detail in the concluding chapter.

Method⁶

In this chapter, the methodological considerations of this thesis are presented. First, the case study as a research method will be introduced; second, the choice of case and data collection will be presented. This is followed by a presentation of the various forms of analysis utilised. Fourth, quality aspects will be discussed using the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and finally, ethical considerations will be elaborated upon. The methods used for data collection in the case study and how the data were utilised in the different articles are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. *Summary of methods used for data collection*

Method	Article I	Article II	Article III	Article IV
Interviews		X	X	
Documents	X		X	
Observations			X	
Scoping review				X

The case study as a research method

As mentioned earlier, the four articles included in this thesis are formed as a single case study since the case, i.e., power technologies used in a state-initiated school improvement programme, is studied from several perspectives and with different methods (Merriam, 1994; Yin, 2014). A case study is also seen by Clegg (2011) as the most appropriate method for studying power within an organisation because it enables the researcher to be sensitive to context. Ozga (1990, p. 359) suggests that it is important in educational environments to ‘bring together structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro-level investigation, especially that which takes account of people’s perceptions and experiences. This is what I have attempted to do in this case study. Furthermore, a case study is appropriate when it is about processes and not results and also when the research question is a how question (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Merriam (1994, p. 30) writes that the

⁶ Parts of this chapter can be found in the four articles.

main purpose of case studies is ‘to understand the meaning of a certain phenomenon or experience’. In qualitative research, the basic assumption is that the world is not objective but that there are many different ‘realities’ (Merriam, 1994, p. 31). The study thus builds on views and experiences and not a measurable objective reality. As a researcher, I interpret these views and experiences in light of a theory to make visible how power is exercised in a school improvement programme such as CBS. According to Yin (2014, p. 16), a case study is suitable when ‘the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident’. Similarly, a poststructural approach is also concerned with ‘the indistinct boundaries between the phenomenon and the contexts that constitute it’ (Mohammed et al., 2015, p. 103). Due to the complexity of the social reality studied, a case usually relies on ‘multiple sources of evidence’ (Yin, 2014, p. 17). In my case, this has allowed me to explore the discourses surrounding CBS from multiple data sources.

According to Bryman’s (2018) categorisation of different types of cases, my case is an exemplifying case. Stake (1995) has different categories, and in his terms, my case is instrumental with the purpose of understanding as much as possible about the phenomenon that the case highlights, i.e., how power technologies are used in a state-initiated school improvement programme. I am thus interested ‘in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation’ (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). The study intends to contribute both to the ‘world’ it studies and to other contexts. There is no claim of knowing actors’ intentions or the ‘true’ meaning of the actions taken (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008).

Finally, I would like to reflect on the issue of the normally postpositivist perspective of the case study, with Yin being one of its main proponents (Mohammed et al., 2015). A postpositivist perspective assumes that the ‘truth’ can be accessed through applying prescriptive and rigid research techniques (Yin, 2014). This is in stark opposition to the Foucauldian theory applied in this thesis. However, the flexibility and comprehensiveness of the case study methodology described above are well suited for the exploration of the discourses that shape a phenomenon such as CBS as well as for exploring ‘the power/knowledge relations that shape people’s behaviours and perceptions’ (Mohammed et al., 2015, p. 112). To some extent, Jensen and Sandström (2016) are also critical to Yin and Merriam, among others, who they believe have a positivistic approach to research. They argue that Yin’s programme for case studies is practically impossible to follow, and they advocate another less rigid approach. They believe that a case study is messy in nature. You can’t have too much order from the beginning. My experience working with this case study largely aligns with Jensen and Sandström’s (2016) reasoning. It is a bit messy, but I do believe that one is helped by reading the guidelines presented by Yin and Merriam to keep as much order in the messiness as possible. However, the order cannot prevent you from letting the case speak to you. I believe that a great deal of sensitivity towards the case is necessary.

Choice of case and data collection

Here, I will describe the process of choosing the case and collecting the data. Four different methods for collecting data were used: documents, observations, interviews, and a scoping review. The focus will mainly be on the process of the interviews and the observations, I will more briefly describe the discourse analysis made in Article I and the method of the scoping review in Article IV. As described in the background chapter, gathering empirical data for articles II and III took seven months to complete (see Table 2). It began in autumn of 2018 and concluded in the spring of 2019 (see Appendix 1 for a full description of contacts with the field and Appendix 2 for a list of documents).

The municipality in the case study is a small, rural municipality with fewer than 15,000 inhabitants (SKL, 2016). The participating schools were compulsory, with pupils aged between 6 and 16 years. The data collected consisted of meeting observations, interviews and local and national documents concerning CBS. The participating municipality was in the final stages of CBS and thus had experience of the whole three-year CBS process. It was important that the chosen municipality had reached the end of the CBS initiative to be able to talk about the whole process. Since CBS was established in 2016, only a certain number of municipalities were available that met the criteria for participating in the study. The final selection was based on convenience (Bryman, 2018). I had good access to the municipality and could thus return to it over time. To broaden the understanding and put the case in a wider context, I decided to supplement the data collection with a scoping review of scientific articles on how school leaders respond to neoliberal education reforms.

The interviews

Concerning the data collection in the abovementioned municipality, people with different functions were interviewed: five headteachers, two local politicians, and three administration employees at LEA, one of whom was the superintendent (see Appendix 1). One difficulty that emerged was that two of the ‘original’ headteachers had left their assignments, and for one of the participating schools, there was no headteacher at the time of the interviews. One of the heads interviewed was part of the CBS initiative but at a municipal school that did not directly participate in the CBS process, as it did not have any remarks from the Schools Inspectorate. This headteacher could thus ‘cherry pick’ the initiatives to participate in. Furthermore, another of the headteachers interviewed had just left the municipality when the data collection began. This headteacher consequently did not have any experience with the closure phase of CBS. Therefore, it was important to be responsive and adapt the interviews based on each person’s understanding of the CBS process.

In qualitative interviews, it is important to try to build trust between me as an interviewer and the interviewee (Holme & Solvang, 1997). The observations made in the study also had the partial purpose of building trust, in addition to gathering information. By the time the interviews started, I was a familiar face to most of the interviewees. The interviews are described as semi-structured, since, through observations and document reading, I came up with different categories of questions that later guided the interviews. The interview guide, however, left room for responsiveness to the interviewees' stories and only the headlines were fixed points in the interviews (see Appendix 3). I was interested in the interviewees' perceptions of the CBS process and tried to be sensitive to the various emerging stories (Bryman, 2018; Holme & Solvang, 1997). The questions concerned the interviewees' perceptions of the process of the CBS programme from start to finish, particularly focusing on co-operation in the programme and events that stood out in the process. Among the questions asked were 'How did you experience the mapping phase?' and 'How did you experience the co-operations in the CBS programme?'. Mostly, the interviewees told their stories about CBS chronologically from the mapping phase to the closure phase.

Seven of the ten interviews were conducted face-to-face, and three were conducted via telephone. The three people interviewed via telephone were not present during the three-day interview 'tour', and due to time constraints, telephone interviews were chosen. Telephone and face-to-face interviews do not necessarily differ in quality regarding the length and depth of the answers (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004; Vogl, 2013). I did not experience any greater difference between the face-to-face and the telephone interviews. The downside of telephone interviews is that body language and gestures cannot be noted. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. The interviews with the local politicians were generally shorter than the other interviews, as those participants did not take part in daily work with CBS.

The observations

Observations serve various purposes within a case study. As a researcher, they enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the environment, the individuals involved, and the interactions among those being observed. They can also serve as a reality check (Cohen et al., 2011). Observations provided an opportunity to cross-reference the interviews with how I had perceived, as a bystander, the meetings I had attended. Furthermore, they provided a good ground to stand on in the interviews, allowing me to ask follow-up questions in a manner that would not have been possible otherwise.

Regarding the observations, I attended three meetings with the headteachers and part of LEA, two meetings with LEA, one with LEA, headteachers and teachers who were process leaders in CBS, one meeting with SNAE and headteachers and process leaders and one meeting with SNAE and LEA and

local politicians (see Appendix I). The university in charge of the initiative was present at all those meetings. Finally, I also attended a closing conference where all the abovementioned categories, except the SNAE, were present. For the observations, I used a loosely structured observation guide.

In the observations, I took the role of ‘the fly on the wall’, a non-participatory observer, and the purpose of the observations was to try and capture as much as possible of the goings-on and the atmosphere of the meetings (Bryman, 2018). Merriam (1994) provides a somewhat more detailed account of various types of relations between the observer and the observed. In her terms, I took the role of observer-as-participant (see also Cohen et al., 2011, p. 457). My presence was known, and my aim was foremost to gather information for the study; however, at times, I was addressed, although my purpose was to be as unobtrusive as possible. There is a debate on how much the mere presence of an observer affects the events being studied. Even in a case such as mine, where I tried to take as little part as possible of the meeting, my presence was noted and addressed during the meetings. To what extent this affected what was said and how it was said is difficult to speculate, but that it had an impact is quite clear (Cohen et al. 2011). Merriam’s (1994) terminology of observer-as-participant might thus be a more accurate description of my role as an observer. I have tried to adhere to the advice to, in close connection to the observation, make notes and comments about what was experienced (Merriam, 1994).

The documents

Various national and locally produced documents regarding CBS were gathered for the case (see Appendix 2). The locally produced documents such as situation assessment plans, action plans for the different initiatives, and final reports, were mainly used in Article III. The national documents analysed in Article I were also part of the data used. Regarding the selection of documents, many more documents were gathered in the case than later used in the articles. For Article I, the selection was based on the original national documents concerning CBS and the public webpage of the SNAE to obtain a different view of the programme than is normally depicted in official government texts. These documents will be described in more detail when presenting the analysis of article I. In Article III, the focus was partly on the self-evaluating parts of CBS. Therefore, the situation assessment and action plans sent into the SNAE from the municipality were in focus. The final report written by the municipal actors is also part of the material used for Article III. Regarding Article II, none of the documents were used explicitly in the paper. Still, implicitly, they affected the research process by, for example, helping me ask follow-up questions in the interviews.

Analysis

It is important to create a case study database since case studies can, by nature, gather large amounts of data (Merriam, 1994). I have organised my material chronologically regarding contacts with the field (see Appendix 1). In regard to the collection of documents, the log is organised both chronologically and by the provider of the documents (see Appendix 2). The interview and observation transcripts were read many times in search of reoccurring themes. In this section, I have divided analysis description into three parts—Article I, Articles II and III, and Article IV—as the analysis differs among the four. Before mapping the various forms of analysis used, it is necessary to mention researcher positionality.

An important factor in the co-creation of research information concerns the researcher's relationship to the study. Researchers contribute their own ideas, theoretical understandings, and assumptions to research in the field (Yin, 2011). Positionality has been influenced by the selection of theoretical perspectives chosen to analyse the data. Critical research is about worldview, and its aim is to critique existing conditions and thus also open up for alternative viewpoints (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Context is thus usually more in focus in critical research, more so than individuals. The neoliberal context in which the CBS programme is situated has been highlighted in all the articles. Thus, the experiences of the participants in the study at the micro-level are related to the wider systems of society that shape the current educational environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I will further elaborate on the issue of positionality and my personal experiences relevant to the CBS case under the headline quality aspects.

It is important to remember that the analysis in a case study is an iterative process (Bryman, 2018; Yin, 2014), where you move back and forth between the gathered empirical material and theoretical perspectives. As Merriam states, the analysis process is not straightforward; numerous pieces of advice can be considered in the process (see, for instance, Yin, 2014 and Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014), but there are elements of intuition in the process that cannot easily be captured in writing.

The analysis in Article I

In Article I, *Styrning genom samverkan? – En textanalys av dominerande diskurser i en statlig skolförbättringssatsning*, a narrative discourse analysis of three government texts concerning CBS was performed. There is no strict method to follow in a discourse analysis following Foucault, but methodologically, the article draws guidance from the narrative method. Thus, the article combines 'what' and 'how', narrative and discourse; as Lindberg (2017) writes, a descriptive analysis needs to be performed before there is something to critically examine. In this context, the term narrative should be interpreted

as 'histoire' or story (Robertson, 2017) and the term discourse as previously defined in accordance with Foucault's thoughts. Both narrative analysis and discourse analysis have a social-constructionist starting point that binds them together (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008; Börjesson, 2003). We understand the story by understanding what the discourse surrounding it is about. Discourse analysis examines how social and cultural norms influence written text. Discourses shape the language used in the narrative (Paltridge, 2012).

This article analyses two official texts regarding CBS: the government's decision (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2015) and the Swedish National Agency for Education's implementation plan (Skolverket, 2016), as well as the Swedish National Agency's website regarding CBS. There are different methods for interpreting text in narrative analysis, but according to Riessman (2005), they are bound together by a narrative form. A narrative analysis contributes to the understanding of government decisions and other official government texts in that they have a narrative form: 'They are all tales of unsatisfactory past and better futures. The future will be better because the government is going to intervene in some way, wielding new techniques or ideas' (Pollitt, 2013, p. 901). Narrative analysis can become a useful tool in helping readers see past the surface of the text, how the story of CBS is constructed and what it says about what the school has been and what it will become in the future through co-operation. In the critical reading of the texts, the emphasis was placed on exploring the question of whose point of view on which problems, and which solutions are presented (Ball, 2017). Thus, the article is not only about stories and words but also their construction. In discourse analysis, transparency is important, and Bergström and Ekström (2018) advocate, among other things, that quotations may take a large place in the analysis, something I tried to adhere to in the presentation of the analysis in Article I.

The analysis started from four narrative dimensions (Pollitt, 2013, p. 903) and Bolander and Feje's (2015, p. 97) Foucault-inspired questions, albeit in a slightly modified form, divided into main questions and sub-questions (see Table 5).

Table 5. *Analysis questions Article I*

Narrative dimensions (Pollitt, 2013)	Foucault inspired questions (Bolander & Fejes, 2015)
1) Dominant themes – what dominant themes can be found in the texts?	a) How is the rhetoric around these characterised?
2) Proffered solutions and evidence base – What proposed solutions to the described problems are given? How much and what kind of evidence is the basis for the problems and the proposed solutions?	b) What is presented as good school development? Who are the authorities behind the evidence base?
3) Style and presentation – how are the texts laid out and presented?	c) What is signalled by the style of the texts?
4) Key assumptions – are there important underlying assumptions?	d) What is excluded or relegated to the background?

The analysis showed how narratives and discourses are constructed, what these do, which reality is produced through the texts and which truth claims dominate (Bolander & Fejes, 2015; Fejes, 2006). The texts were read in different stages: First, all the texts were read in their entirety several times to obtain an overall view of the content and character of the texts. The texts were then read based on Pollitt's (2013) narrative categories. Finally, Bolander and Fejes's (2015) questions were applied to the narrative categories, and the focus was then more on underlying assumptions. The analysis of the narrative and the discourse go hand in hand and cannot be clearly separated into individual units. Through the clear narrative dimensions and the Foucault-inspired questions, the intention was that the different steps in the analysis were made clear, thus enabling the reader to assess its coherence.

The analysis in Articles II and III

Articles II and III both rely, to various degrees, on the same data. Article II, *Government steering and government disruption: co-operation between government and municipal actors in a state-initiated school improvement programme from the municipal actors' perspective*, only uses the interviews explicitly, but as I previously wrote, the observations helped shape the interviews. All ten interviews were transcribed, not verbatim per se, but rather in the manner of readable written text. Thus, I have excluded repetitive words and humming, but I also tried to be close to the spoken words. Both Bryman

(2018) and Kvale and Brinkman (2014) address the issue of editing interviews as most people do not speak in full sentences, are quite repetitive, and hum when speaking. It is important not to change the meaning of what is said. However, as Kvale and Brinkman (2014) write, it is how I, as a researcher, will use the transcription that determines how detailed it needs to be, and in my case, it is not the language that is in focus but the meaning of what is said. It is important to note that an interview is never just a gathering of the opinions and thoughts of the interviewee. It is a co-produced material with the interviewer. The interview is an intersubjective enterprise where two people discuss topics of mutual interest (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014, p. 233). This is easy to forget in the latter stage of analysis. Still, the analysis is just a continuation of the conversation that started with the interview, according to Kvale and Brinkman.

The observations were recorded but not wholly transcribed. I made notes during the observations, and in the analysis, I read the notes several times and listened to parts of the recordings again for more detailed accounts. The relevant parts used in Article III have been transcribed. I summarised both the interviews and observation protocols after reading them. The process can, in other words, also be called condensation of a text (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). It is a process of shortening the original but still preserving the core content, and it was very helpful in the process of getting to know the data. I will now more specifically describe the analysis for the different articles.

For Article II, a thematic analysis was conducted, inspired by the steps in ‘concentration of meaning’ described by Kvale and Brinkman (2014, pp. 246-249). The transcripts were read several times to gain a sense of the whole interview. The next step was to establish the natural units of meaning in the interviewees’ stories, bearing in mind the focus on perceived co-operation with the government actors. Longer utterances by the interviewees were thus reduced to shorter expressions. These units were then condensed into three central themes: identity, communication, and government disruption.

The analysis was more theory driven in Article III, *The Quest for Continuous Improvement in Light of Power, Disciplinary, Sovereign and Pastoral Power in a State-initiated School Improvement Programme*. A reflexive thematic analysis was performed following Braun and Clarke’s conceptualisation of the methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). Braun and Clarke clearly state that thematic analysis has a distinct theoretical base, and the analysis departs from defined themes rather than content. I took a deductive theory-driven approach to coding with predefined themes. ‘[A] deductive approach is useful for honing in on a particular aspect of the data or a specific finding that could be best illuminated or understood in the context of a pre-existing theory or frame’ (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p. 3). The material was read multiple times to understand how the local actors perceived the relationship with the SNAE within CBS. A theoretical model based on Foucault was used to ana-

lyse how the SNAE exercises power within that relationship and in this context. In that way, the analysis process resembled what Jackson and Mazzei (2023) describe as ‘thinking with theory’. There is no claim of investigating the intentions or cognitions of the participants.

The analysis in Article IV

Article IV, *School Leaders’ Response to Neoliberal Educational Reform —A scoping review*, is a scoping review, and its analysis process is quite technical (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005; Boland et al., 2017). I will make some short comments here on the process of keyword selection, database searches and data charting. For a more detailed protocol of the procedure, see Article IV.

Article IV adopted the five-stage framework of Arksey and O’Malley (2005, p. 22): (1) identifying the research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data and (5) collating, summarising, and reporting the results. A PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram for scoping reviews detailing the identification, screening, and inclusion of articles was also used to give the reader a clear overview of the search process (Page et al., 2021; adapted from Moher et al., 2009; see Appendix 4). After identifying the key search words (education reform, school leader and neoliberalism) and searching four selected databases—Eric ProQuest, Scopus, Social Science Premium and Web of Science—905 references were screened according to the following inclusion criteria:

- 1) the population is primarily school leaders,
- 2) the context is primary and/or secondary schools,
- 3) the item type is journal articles written in English
- 4) the data include interviews, observations, surveys, and documents/policy only if combined with at least one of the above
- 5) the focus of the study is on school leaders’ response to education reform
- 6) the study is set within a neoliberal education reform.

Fourteen articles remained after the assessment. An additional citation search yielded another seven articles that were included in the review (n=21). As recommended for scoping reviews, a descriptive and content analysis was conducted on the 21 selected studies to answer the research question (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). The articles were initially charted for key information about the study, such as country and method, as well as specific information about the school leaders’ response to neoliberal education reform and changes regarding their professional identity. Resistance theory was used to analyse the school leaders’ response to the reforms.

Quality aspects

As mentioned in the introduction, I will use the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity as established by Lincoln and Guba (1985), to discuss the quality aspects of the thesis, even though Morse (2018, p. 1382) is, to some extent, critical to their sometimes ‘inappropriate application and political use’.

I used triangulation to increase the credibility of the case study (Cohen et al., 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1994). I have observed several meetings, interviewed various stakeholders, analysed policy- and municipal documents, and performed an extensive scoping review. Using multiple methods for data collection, including interviewing and observing various municipal actors, enhances the ability to illuminate the research questions asked. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also claim that the credibility of a study is determined when fellow researchers or readers can recognise the described experiences when confronted with it.

Transferability is about being able to transfer findings to another setting and context (Stenfors et al., 2020). In case studies, thick descriptions help the reader determine whether the findings can be applied to other contexts (Cohen et al., 2011; Merriam, 1994; Stenfors et al., 2020). The reader of the study must then conclude whether or not the result applies to the context in question (Merriam, 1994). As Stake (1995, p. 103) puts it, ‘Each researcher contributes uniquely to the study of a case; each reader derives unique meanings’. In the case, i.e., power technologies used in a state-initiated school improvement programme, the focus has been on describing the power relations between the SNAE and the local school actors and the power technologies utilised. Thus, the case description does not give a general thick description of the CBS programme but focuses on describing the aspects relevant to the thesis. The question of transferability or generalisation can also be connected to the combination of micro- and macro-perspective used in this thesis. The analysis of how power works at the micro-level is combined with the analysis of broader macro-level discourses, thus placing the CBS case in a larger context. The theoretical approach used in this thesis could also be used to study similar phenomena in different contexts.

Dependability is problematic in case studies. The case is a cut-out in time, and it cannot be fully repeated (Cohen et al., 2011; Merriam, 1994). To enhance the study’s dependability, I have described the steps taken for collecting and analysing the data (Stenfors et al., 2020). Peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is also an important dependability aspect. My texts, and some of the data have been presented at different research groups and national and international conferences at various stages of the process, which can be a way of gaining peer debriefing.

Confirmability is about showing a clear link between data and findings. I have done this by using many quotes and descriptions to show the reader the

basis for my interpretations (Stenfors et al., 2020). As I previously mentioned, I also kept field notes (a form of audit trail) during the time of data collection, and that is also a way for me as a researcher to check the findings (Cohen et al., 2011). However, the concept of confirmability still lends itself towards a positivist assumption of objectivity incompatible with the theories used in this thesis. It is important to note that I do not claim to describe an objective reality but rather an interpretation of the data collected where questions regarding power/knowledge and the construction of subjects have been at the centre.

Finally, a discussion on the concept of reflexivity is warranted. Many have highlighted it as important in qualitative research (Bryman, 2018; Resnik, 2018; Stenfors et al., 2020). Foucault also encourages reflexivity and problematising ‘what we ourselves are’ (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 204). Methodological reflexivity is about being aware of my position as a researcher and how that can affect the study (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). Regarding insider/outsider status (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), I have a background of working with school improvement from an ‘expert’ position in a municipality. However, this was not something that was discussed at any length with the participants in the study. They knew of my background of working within education, both as a teacher and in other positions, and that perhaps gave me more of an insider status, as I am quite familiar with what the school improvement process can entail. My own experience of CBS, in addition to gathering data in a municipality offered CBS, is that I worked in a different municipality, supporting the headteacher and the management team with school improvement issues at the time of the data collection. I believe the experience gave me a better insight and understanding of the CBS programme, as I had no prior knowledge of CBS before starting my PhD studies. However, after one year, I stopped working with CBS and concentrated on only seeing it from a research perspective. It is difficult to say how this experience affected the research process, aside from giving me insight from a different position in the CBS initiative. The theoretical framework in this thesis also calls for a more reflexive approach since Foucault’s conceptual tools help critique and reflect on normalised thinking patterns in new and analytical ways.

Ethical considerations

The Swedish Research Council (2017) describes various general ethical considerations that researchers must consider when designing a study. These are the four requirements for confidentiality, information, consent and usage in social science and humanistic research (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). The informants in my study received both oral and written information about the study, including information on how the data will be stored and processed and how to proceed if they regret their participation (see Appendix 5). The informants also signed a written consent for their participation in the study. The usage

requirement entails that, as a researcher, I guarantee that all material I collect will only be used for research and no other purposes. Regarding the requirement of confidentiality, I promise that the name of the municipality and the names of the schools and the informants will be fictitious. However, this is not the same as promising total anonymity. When writing up the case, it is important to make thick descriptions to fulfil the quality aspect of transferability (Stenfors et al., 2020); thus, it may also be possible to identify people in the study even if I have deliberately disclosed as little as possible about the participants. I have chosen not to put gender or place the headteachers at a school to remove exterior recognisable traits. The informants were also informed of the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council) and how to reach the data protection officer (dataskyddsbud) in the letter of consent.

Linked to the ethical guidelines, the case is quite simple on the surface. The study's informants were observed and interviewed in their role as civil servants in the public sector. The study does not concern sensitive personal data, but I want to obtain the informants' experience of a state-initiated school improvement programme. However, at my first meeting with the prospective informants, an interesting question arose: 'They [the Swedish National Agency for Education] do not know that we are the ones that have answered your questions?'. The informants pointed out the importance of being on good terms with the state level, not being the one who criticises or seems cumbersome. These statements made me think a little further about how I formulated myself. However, as previously discussed, I cannot guarantee any total anonymity. A person who knows the work in the municipality can recognise the case at hand.

Resnik (2018) discusses the concept of trust as a fifth and complementary principle to Beauchamp and Childress's (2012) ethical principles of dignity/autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice. Resnik (2018) writes about trust in different stages of the research process and trust between different actors in the research. It is ongoing work that can be changed at any time. Consent and confidentiality are some things that have already been discussed, but I would also like to highlight the study's scientific design, which is very much about trust. That one can trust my findings, that the process is transparent, that I am truthful in my communication about my research, and that I avoid various biases in the research process is also important. Resnik believes that the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence and trust are supportive factors in making the research design. If you have a poor research design, it is possible that your research does not generate useful knowledge and thus has low social benefit. The multiple sources used in the study have made it possible to present varying accounts of the studied phenomena; thus, the thesis can contribute with an empirical and theoretical account of how power is exercised in the given case and how this, in turn, is part of the construction and regulation of the local school actors.

Resnik also emphasises that these five principles can sometimes conflict, and that reflexive ability is important—in determining which principles are most valuable to consider in the situation. In conclusion, the issue of ethics does not stop when consent has been collected but continues during the entire research process. Throughout the research process and writing this thesis, I have particularly borne Resnik's (2018) overarching ethical considerations in mind.

Summary of articles

In this section, a summary of the articles is presented. At the end of each summary, there will also be a summary of the contributions to the overarching questions in the thesis.

Article I⁷

Kronqvist Håård, M. (2021). Styrning genom samverkan? – En textanalys av dominerande diskurser i en statlig skolförbättringssatsning. *Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige*, 26(1): 42–69

Introduction

Over the past three decades, the Swedish school system has been characterised by many reforms, largely following an international trend in which neoliberal ideology and New Public Management (NPM) have been at its centre (Lundström, 2018). Swedish school results have dwindled during the past decade according to different international measurements, such as PISA (Andersson et al., 2018). As an answer to the critique raised in both domestic and international reports, the Swedish government has initiated a school improvement programme called Collaboration for Better Schools⁸ (CBS). It is a programme aimed at turning around low-performing schools. The concepts of collaboration and school improvement are a special focus of the article. Collaboration has been called the new form of work in the welfare state (Danermark & Kullberg, 1999), a political fashion word, and an educational political ideal (Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2011, p. 149 f.). The concept of collaboration can be seen as a part of the movement from government to governance. New forms of steering, so-called ‘soft governance’, such as benchmarking or best practice, are ways for the state to strengthen its power over school.

This article is based on three official texts concerning CBS: the government’s decision, the SNAE’s implementation plan and the SNAE’s website concerning CBS. Official documents and policy discourses are important to

⁷ The summary of Article I is printed with the permission of Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige. Some amendments have been made from the original.

⁸ Translation of CBS used in the theme issue.

study because they frame the political motivation for a given phenomenon. Policy constructs meaning and identifies problems in education. The aim of the article was to write a possible narrative about CBS and to highlight underlying discourses in the rhetoric surrounding CBS in the analysed documents. Three questions guided the article. The first is an overarching question: what is the story about CBS in these texts, and how is it told? Two more specific questions were asked: which discourses can be read in the identified story, and which subject positions can be discerned in this?

Both a narrative approach and a discursive approach guided the analysis. A steering perspective based on governance and governmentality was adopted in the analysis. Foucault's (1972, p. 49) definition of discourse has informed the article: 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'. There is no strict method to follow in a Foucauldian discourse analysis, but methodologically, the article derives guidance from the narrative method. The article thus combines 'what' and 'how', narrative and discourse. The article is not about whether collaboration and school development are good or bad but about how truths, knowledge and subjects are formed through discourses.

Findings

The analysis is based on four narrative dimensions (Pollitt, 2013, p. 903) extended by Bolander and Fejes's (2015) Foucault-inspired questions. The findings are summarised based on the headings in the results section.

1) Dominant themes and how they are presented – Collaboration and tailor-made initiatives

The rhetoric surrounding the dominant themes presented, collaboration and tailor-made initiatives, indicates a duality in the statements around them. On the one hand, the analysed texts describe how the SNAE must be 'responsive' and 'open' towards the local actors but at the same time clearly 'assert' the national goals. The words responsive and open can be said to be in line with the word dialogue, while the word assert may seem to be in sharp contrast to an effort that speaks of collaboration and dialogue. The promise of tailor-made initiatives is also accompanied by talk of using existing national school initiatives to create a synergy effect.

2) Offered solutions and evidence – 'Best school'

The narratives in the analysed documents concerning what the problems are in Swedish schools are about a lack of equality and declining knowledge outcomes. The solutions offered to these problems are systematic quality work, educational leadership, and teachers becoming better teachers, which can be seen as examples of commonsense solutions that have become neutralised truths (Røvik & Pettersen, 2014; cf. Börjesson, 2016; Fairclough, 2001).

The evidence base for the solutions offered is largely self-referential; that is, the National Agency's own reports are most often given as support for the

proposed national initiatives. It can be interpreted in several ways; one way of looking at it is that it becomes a kind of evidence loop (Nolan, 2015, p. 895) where the National Agency's own reports are given as support to legitimise the knowledge they produce. It can also be seen as a form of persuasion about the right way to do school improvement and where the SNAE seeks support in its own texts.

3) Style and presentation

The description of CBS on the website is in positive terms. Happy children and references to successful efforts reinforce the impression of a successful government initiative. The state collaborates with headteachers and schools, but unlike in the implementation plan, headteachers and schools are portrayed as leaders in the collaboration. The National Agency for Education here positions itself as an equal party providing personal contact and support to the local actors in the collaboration. The website style is more of a marketing nature than the traditional government decision and implementation plan. This can be compared to other studies of public organisations where identity and image have become increasingly important (see, for example, Rehnberg, 2019).

4) Underlying assumptions and what comes in the background

Assumptions that are in line with governance thinking and the NPM-influenced policy discourse can be seen in CBS, focusing on best practice and knowledge outcomes (cf. Grek, 2009; Olssen & Peters, 2005). The solutions offered in CBS follow a few underlying assumptions; changing organisational structures and processes can change the effectiveness of headteachers and schools. Local actors also need to develop a 'self-renewal ability', which can also be attributed to the aforementioned discourses (cf. Hudson, 2007). Although included in both the government decision and the implementation plan, what comes into the background are the possible key structural reasons why schools are selected to participate in CBS, municipalities' lack of compensatory resource allocation, students' socioeconomic background, and segregation, for example.

Discussion

Collaboration or steering is the question. Can it be both? Many statements indicate that the latter role is dominant in the documents concerning CBS that have been analysed. The documents emphasise that headteachers and schools should participate in existing school development initiatives provided by the SNAE. In this way, the state can govern through information, soft governance (Hudson, 2007; Kirsten & Wermke, 2017; Moos, 2009).

The analysis highlights different competing discourses, the tension between collaboration and governance and between decentralisation and control. The study's knowledge contribution is that it critically examines an initiative

surrounded by commonsense ideology and the study also discusses some underlying assumptions identified in the analysis. To be critical does not mean to say how things truly are, but discourse analyses of this kind can contribute by lifting the gaze from these underlying commonsense assumptions that permeate public texts and thus open up to alternative ways of thinking and actions.

Contribution to the thesis

This article primarily points to the constitutive role of language in official policy texts. How things are framed matters as it creates certain expectations, for instance, regarding the tailor-made initiatives, which we will return to in Article II. These official texts also contribute to the regulation and construction of local actors, as the texts both emphasise that those in need of change are local actors and that possible structural reasons for perceived declining school outcomes are left out. The documents also state that there is a best practice and correct knowledge to be gained, thus ascertaining the power/knowledge advantage of the national agency.

Article II

Kronqvist Håård, M. (2023). Government Steering and Government Disruption. Co-Operation between Government and Municipal Actors in a State-Initiated School Improvement Programme from the Municipal Actors' Perspective. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 9(2): 113–125

Introduction

A certain discourse has been ongoing for some time on schools facing a crisis in many countries (Nordin, 2014), prompting some governments to act. In response to criticism, in domestic and international reports, the Swedish government launched, in 2015, a school improvement programme called Co-operation for the Best School Possible (CBS), which aims to turn around low-performing schools. The aim of this article was to illuminate how co-operation between state actors and municipal actors (headteachers, LEA, and local politicians) in a government-issued school improvement initiative is perceived from the municipal actors' perspectives. The questions that guided the study were as follows:

- How do the municipal actors (headteachers, LEAs and local politicians) in the given case make sense of co-operation with the SNAE in CBS?

- How can the municipal actors' stories be understood and put in a wider perspective by using, as analytical lenses, concepts of soft governance and relevant policy instruments?

Co-operation between different levels of the school system is a neglected but essential aspect to analyse in a decentralised system such as Sweden's, which is showing signs of re-centralisation. Empirically, the article is based on interviews with local actors in a small municipality participating in CBS. The interviews were part of a case study, and the analysis was guided by the theory of soft governance, Vedung's concepts of sticks, carrots, and sermons as policy instruments, and Weick's concept of sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005).

Findings

The findings are presented according to the identified central themes of identity, communication and government disruption. Identity is evident in the material regarding low self-esteem among the local actors due to poor results and school inspections. Communication can be seen as inflexible, and there is a strong rhetoric of choice for the local actors from the SNAE in the material, but the feeling is that the municipality ended up with ready-made packages. The SNAE demonstrates its power by making the local actors choose the 'right' school improvement or by simply offering current in-house training from the SNAE; thus, it is a form of sermon (Vedung, 2016). Technologies such as in-house training are soft, as they aim to inform and educate individuals (Kirsten & Wermke, 2017; Moos, 2009). They aim to deliver the best way to 'do school' and subject the local actors to the norms of the SNAE. Although CBS promises to offer tailor-made solutions, the solutions offered are what are now seen as best practices. Finally, government disruption is apparent in the interview data since locally identified improvement work was put on hold. Sensemaking, evident in the case study as a retrospective communicative notion, was employed to capture the local actors' stories of how they perceived CBS. The connection with past experiences also played a part in their sensemaking since a clear history existed and was noted between the state and municipal levels. Concerning the steering arrangements, the statements by the municipal actors point to the fact that they are in a subordinate position, at first in relation to the Schools Inspectorate and later to the SNAE. The relationship between the Schools Inspectorate and the school was one of hierarchical supervision with the threat of sanctions or sticks according to Vedung (2016). The carrots, namely, the monetary incentives for participating in certain improvement initiatives, are visible in CBS. The hidden influence, however, lies in guiding the local actors to what is considered 'good' school improvement, in setting the agenda and in real-time management (Moos, 2009).

Conclusion

The CBS example provided here can be seen as an attempt by the state to regain control and steer the municipality towards the ‘correct’ way of doing school improvement. The perception, primarily among the headteachers and the LEA, is of being pushed in the ‘right’ direction regarding the choice of professional development within the CBS programme, preferably towards the SNAE’s existing national in-service web education material. This nudging can be seen as steering through soft governance (Moos, 2009). Instead of imposing hard laws and regulations, the national agency has opted to steer the municipal actors towards the ‘right’ path for school development via sanctioned routines and methods (Moos, 2009; Perryman et al., 2018), provided in in-service web education or via approved consultants or universities. This article indicates in many respects that CBS promotes ‘what Sweden needs’ through professional education programmes provided by the SNAE. In conclusion, the analysis shows that CBS used sticks, carrots, and sermons (Vedung, 2016) to steer municipal school actors toward the right path for school improvement.

Contribution to the thesis

Article II’s primary contribution to the thesis’s overall aim is that it points to how the local actors are steered and regulated through policy instruments such as carrots, sticks and sermons (Vedung, 2016). CBS contains elements of all three, carrots, in the form of monetary incentives to participate in CBS. Sermons are a large part of the relationship between the state and local levels, as most of the school improvement initiatives in CBS are in-house training courses delivered by the SNAE. CBS also controls the time of the local actors as it is time-consuming and dictates on what time should be spent. This is also a way to regulate the local actors by controlling how time should be used. The issue of controlling time through systematic quality work is a large part of Article III.

Article III

Kronqvist Håård, M. (2024a). *The Quest for Continuous Improvement in Light of Power. Disciplinary, Sovereign and Pastoral Power in a State-initiated School Improvement Programme*. [Manuscript submitted for publication].

Introduction

In this article, I examine the dynamic interactions of steering and power between local school actors and the National Agency for Education in the context of CBS. I place CBS within the broader context of a global education reform movement informed by a neoliberal agenda (Verger et al., 2019b). The acceleration of the global economy, technological developments and the strengthening of transnational agencies such as the OECD and the European Union (EU) have transformed nation-states into what Ball (2009) has named competition states. A discourse of continuous improvement follows this neoliberal agenda, and national and international accountability systems put pressure on teachers and schools, individually and collectively (Bates, 2016; Watson & Michael, 2016). Schools are steered from a distance by performance measurements, surveillance and monitoring (Lingard et al., 2017), which puts local school actors under a constant gaze (Holloway & Brass, 2018) and endless pressure to perform. Foucault's theories on sovereign, disciplinary and pastoral power and governmentality are utilised to understand how power relations between the national and local levels in the Swedish education system can be understood in light of the global governance trends discussed above. The aim was to analyse how power is exercised in the CBS programme and to discuss possible implications for the local school actors. Two questions were posed:

- How are Foucault's different modes of power manifested within the context of a case study in a municipality participating in the CBS programme?
- How do these power techniques influence the practices of the local school actors in the case study?

Empirically, the article builds on observations, interviews and documents. About the method of analysis, a reflexive thematic analysis was performed following Braun and Clarke's conceptualisation of the methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). Braun and Clarke clearly state that thematic analysis has a distinct theoretical base, and the analysis departs from defined themes rather than content. In that way, the analysis process resembles what Jackson and Mazzei (2023) describe as 'thinking with theory'.

Findings

In actual interactions with the national agency, there are clear signs of both sovereign and disciplinary power. Being chosen to participate in CBS is being part of a spectacle. The basis for the selection of responsible organisers and schools to participate in CBS is negative. It is based on inspectorate reports and school results, which are all public documents. The responsible organisers

who are part of CBS are also publicly posted on the national agency's webpage, and thus, they are publicly pointed out as being the deviant.

At the beginning of CBS, the municipal actors have thus recently been put through the disciplinary and normalising gaze of the Inspectorate. This is something that is very much a part of their lived experiences. The phrase 'if the Inspectorate comes' or 'we'll be ready when they come' [LEA] can be heard throughout both the interviews and the observations, denoting a certain fear of the Inspectorate. The surveillance is not constant; however, the threat of inspection lingers over the municipal actors, and consequently, there is a strong incentive to internalise and self-regulate to become a 'good' school actor.

Time-management, which can be seen as a regulatory practice, is a large part of the relationship between the Swedish national agency and the local school actors where the local actors are busy writing reports, doing self-assessments or booking meetings with short notice. Much time and effort is devoted to systematic quality assurance (SQA) work in CBS. It is something that permeates the doings and the everyday lives of the school actors. Many observations and almost all the documents gathered from the municipality evolved around the SQA. The issue of systematic quality assurance work is, however, quite complex. One LEA member said, 'all these who should support, but they support on their own premises instead of looking at the conditions that are. It is not to blame anyone, but to show how complex it is'. Another LEA member commented on the same issue: 'We have three different ways of doing Systematic Quality Work, the university's, the national agency's, and our own'. The Schools Inspectorate's demands regarding the SQA on the municipality can also be added to this, as a member of LEA described conflicting demands from the agencies at the beginning of CBS. This makes it difficult for the local actors to understand one another in the process. Learning the 'correct' way to perform systematic quality assurance work may not be as straightforward as perhaps the national agency may imply.

Systematic quality assurance can be said to involve both technologies of power and technologies of the self, which together make up governmentality. The school agencies create the forms of what to assess and how to assess it, but the municipal actors do the actual work. The forms needed to be approved by the national agency, and the municipality's final report had to be rewritten several times. SQA is part of the trend of self-monitoring, where schools and responsible organisers are requested to continuously self-evaluate themselves in light of preset standards. Systematic quality work could be interpreted as the way to achieve salvation.

Conclusion

The case illustrates the pervasive and multifaceted nature of power in educational governance, prompting local actors to internalise norms, self-regulate, and continuously evaluate their practices. Sovereign power is evident in the

study through standards and being publicly pointed out as the deviant. Disciplinary power is manifested through inspection, norm enforcement and expert guidance. Pastoral power operates via confession, self-reflection and self-governance. These power modes are combined and operates within the overarching concept of governmentality. This study underscores the importance of understanding the interplay of different power modes in shaping educational practices and the professional lives of local school actors. The question is what this constant discipline, submission, and subjectivation do to the local school actors. Moreover, the study points to that the schools' problems are to be sought among the responsible organisers, the headteachers and the teachers (cf. Mufic, 2022), and the answer to their change is continuous improvement through the SQA (cf. Bates, 2016; Watson & Michael, 2016). Out-of-school factors affecting achievements such as systemic structures are left out from the equation (Nolan, 2018; Stacey, 2017). Using an analytical language based on Foucault makes the exercise of power recognisable. When we can recognise and assign words to the power being exercised, we also enhance our options for participation in relations of power.

Contribution to the thesis

In the third article, Foucault's theories are most prominently used to analyse how power is exercised in the CBS case example. In Foucauldian terms, the local actors are pointed out as the deviant. Disciplinary power is constantly present in the material. The two school agencies cannot be ever present physically but rely on local school actors to internalise the norms and standards of the state agencies. The local actors understand themselves through the normalising gaze of experts (Foucault, 1995).

SQA is a self-monitoring trend in education where schools evaluate themselves based on preset standards (cf. Hall, 2017; Segerholm, 2009). It is seen as a bottom-up approach that relies on expert knowledge and uses various initiatives to improve teaching. These initiatives combine elements of disciplinary, sovereign, and pastoral power. Self-evaluating reports and confessions are used to reveal flaws and receive feedback from the SNAE, who acts as both a helping hand and a controller. The SNAE monitors schools through self-reports and aims for better performance using both care and discipline, and SQA can be seen as a form of evidence of compliance.

Article IV

Kronqvist Håård, M. (2024b). School leaders' Response to Neoliberal Education Reforms - A scoping review. [Manuscript submitted for publication].

Introduction

The emergence of international testing and league tables regarding school systems has led to a growth in government responses to increase the outcomes of students' results. According to Sahlberg (2016), most educational reforms implemented globally respond to similar problems and priorities and follow a similar policy rationale based on accountability, standards, decentralisation and school autonomy. These are the main policy principles of what has been called the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), which are rooted in neoliberal ideas.

The scoping review focused on school leaders' response to neoliberal education reform. Niesche (2013) points out that it is 'vital to engage with empirical examples to bring these tensions to life'. There is a lack of empirical research critically examining the vast amounts of education reforms that have been mandated from a local perspective (Nolan, 2018; Robinson, 2019; Schmeichel et al., 2017). The local actors' perspective is important to highlight in a neoliberal era where governing is conducted at a distance and through 'the conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 2000, p. 341). School leaders are at the forefront of implementing neoliberal educational reforms (Tseng, 2015).

The aim of this scoping review was to analyse research on school leaders' response to neoliberal education reforms using empirical data, i.e., studies that included interviews, observations or surveys collected in relation to the project, excluding studies utilising only policy documents as the data source. Three questions guided the study:

- What is the extent and nature of the empirical research on school leaders' response to neoliberal education reform?
- How can these responses be understood using resistance theory?
- How have the neoliberal reforms affected school leaders' professional identities?

Answering these questions will help delineate a clearer problem space for further inquiry around the issues of school leaders' experience of education change.

Scoping reviews are ideal for examining what literature addresses a given topic in addition to providing an indication of the amount of available literature and an overview of its focus (Munn et al., 2018). A PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram for scoping reviews detailing the identification, screening, and inclusion of articles was used to give the reader a clear summary of the search process (see Appendix 4). The review consisted of 21 included articles. The analysis included a descriptive overview of the extent and nature of the reviewed articles,

a thematic analysis of different responses to the neoliberal reforms using resistance theory, and an analysis of the potential changes in school leaders' professional identities.

Findings

The studies included in the review came from ten countries, with Australia and the US being the most prominently featured. Regarding methodology, interviews are the primary data collection method, with all but one article (Ball & Olmedo, 2013) employing this approach. Ten articles specify the education reform initiatives under examination. However, 11 articles reference multiple reforms or claim to investigate the general influence of numerous policy reforms in recent years. Foucault emerges as the most cited theorist in the reviewed articles, with his work cited as a primary theoretical framework in 13 articles (e.g., Duarte, 2021; Longmuir, 2019; Mifsud, 2016a; Ward et al., 2016; Niesche, 2013).

Most articles discuss various forms of resistance or non-resistance taking place simultaneously. Responses are discussed in terms of aligning with the mandated reforms (Gobby et al., 2018; Ylimaki, 2011). Compliance is also described in terms of collaboration (Agbaria et al., 2022). More covert types of resistance are referred to as playing the game (Bernstein et al., 2021; Fuller, 2019; Rezai-Rashti & Segeren, 2023), fabrication (Collet-Sabè, 2017; Rezai-Rashti & Segeren, 2023); disappointment and frustration (Ritacco-Real et al., 2022). Only a few studies report overt forms of resistance via, for instance, counter-conduct (Cohen, 2014; Niesche, 2013).

The reforms also affected the roles and how the school leaders perceived themselves. Many of the studies conclude that the neoliberal reforms had profoundly changed the school leaders' professional identities and subjectivities. The role of the manager has taken over, sidelining the role of curriculum leader or putting social aspect of schooling to the sideline (i.e. Agbaria, et al., 2022; Duarte, 2021; Ritacco-Real et al., 2022). School leaders are also described as entrepreneurs (i.e. Montecinos et al., 2015; Rezai-Rashti & Segeren, 2023).

Conclusion

Regarding the extent and nature of empirical research—the inclusion and analysis of 21 studies show that interview studies are the preferred method for gathering data. Foucauldian theory is prevalent in the use of theory. Regarding how the school leaders respond to the neoliberal reforms, several authors conclude that even though there might be some resistance along the way, compliance is the ultimate result. The findings also point to substantial changes in the professional identities of the school leaders towards a more managerial focus, a decrease in the importance of the school leader as a curriculum leader, and less attention given to the social aspects of education. Overall, the review

underscores the transformative nature of neoliberal reform on education and the imperative for using resistance and power theories to help shed light on both the sometimes soul-altering changes these initiatives can achieve and point to possible counter-discourse and counter-conduct (Foucault, 2007; Holloway & Brass, 2018). Finally, the review points to the fact that there is a seemingly large gap to be filled in the literature regarding the impact neoliberal education change have on school leaders.

Contribution to the thesis

The scoping review contributes to both the overarching questions of the thesis in a more general sense and not CBS specifically. What is of special interest is how reforms promising more autonomy for the local actors can lead to the opposite, more control from central agencies through great surveillance and managerial tasks. The reviewed articles also pointed to extensive changes in the professional identities of the school leaders due to the neoliberal reforms implemented. Since many of the articles in the review use Foucault's theories to analyse the school leaders' response to the mandated change, this article also highlights the usefulness of Foucault's theories in connection to educational change. Most importantly, the review points to spaces where local school actors can critically engage with neoliberal education reform. However, it is important to acknowledge the conclusion reached by several of the authors that it is difficult to act outside of what is currently perceived as common sense, and the resistance to neoliberal reform cannot lie with the individual (Montecinos et al., 2015; Ward et al., 2016).

Concluding discussion

In this final chapter of the thesis, the four articles will be discussed in relation to the aim and the overarching questions asked. The overall aim of this thesis is to problematise how power operates in a state-initiated school improvement programme and how the local school actors are thereby constructed and regulated. The two research questions guide the concluding discussion of this thesis:

- How is power exercised in the CBS case?
- How are local actors constructed and regulated through education policies such as CBS?

Finally, the contributions of the thesis are discussed, followed by an examination of its limitations and suggestions for future studies.

Visible and invisible exercises of power

The CBS programme can be set within a neoliberal governmentality framework that, on the surface, looks like a modern form of governing where the state takes a step back (Montin & Hedlund, 2009; Årlestig & Johansson, 2020). CBS is an example of what Simons (2015) calls governing without reform. This is a convenient way of governing, as this type of policy instrument is easy to agree upon, according to Verger et al. (2019a). However, the issue of the state taking a step back can be problematised. As articles II and III have argued, this step back is perhaps best seen as discursive, as there are clear signs of the old modalities of power, as both sovereign and disciplinary power are palpable in the case example. Disciplinary power is most evident as the talk from the municipal school actors about being ready when the inspectorate comes show. This is what Perryman (2006) calls ‘the permanent panopticon’. The local actors live under the constant pressure of surveillance. Sovereign power, as discussed in Article III, is also visible, as CBS can be viewed as ‘a spectacle’ where the local actors are put in an arena to be watched by the many (Simons, 2014). The best practice prescribed to remedy their ills, the SNAE’s educational packages, are also part of these forms of power (cf. Papanastasiou, 2021).

The more delicate means of steering, however, are the pastoral use of confession via self-evaluation, which forces the local school actors to reflect upon their weaknesses and how they will better themselves. The SNAE plays the role of both a monitor and a pastor (Martin & Waring, 2018). They both supervise the process in CBS and have a roadmap for redemption.

The rhetoric surrounding CBS is important since it claims to be a programme built on co-operation, a word usually connected with positive connotations (Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2011; Pollitt & Hupe, 2011; cf. Forsberg & Nordzell, 2013), but as discussed in Article I, this can also be seen as governance as presentation (Gillies, 2008; Larsson et al., 2010; Rehnberg, 2019). Gillies (2008, p. 418-419) claims that politics today is increasingly about window dressing or what he calls ‘perception management’, and it has become increasingly important to present political initiatives in a positive way. In particular, the web page of CBS can be seen to follow the logics of window dressing, but also the ‘sell-pitch’ the municipal actors receive in entering CBS. There is a lure of tailor-made in CBS, but in reality, this freedom is more about choosing the correct and approved school improvement (cf. Foucault, 1995). The problems and the answers are predefined, and there is a discourse of local participation to legitimise the CBS initiative (cf. Cardini, 2006). In this case, power greatly relies on the power of expert knowledge. This expert knowledge has a performative quality, as it shapes the conduct of politics, the SNAE, schools and individual headteachers and teachers (Foucault, 1995; cf. Simons 2014, 2015). This expert knowledge also frames problems and envisages answers to their solutions. Gillies (2008) warns that preoccupation with appearance can lead to losses in transparency and openness and, in turn, to distrust and cynicism.

The conduct of conduct, the more indirect forms of regulation and governing at a distance, has been in the foreground of my analysis. The mechanisms of both disciplinary power and pastoral power are combined. There is fear of the gaze, the watchful eye, so the local actors comply (see Articles II and III). They also foster an inner self of how a good headteacher, a good teacher should be according to the measurements and standards presented to them (Brady, 2016). The state in CBS closely resembles what Ball and Junemann (2012, p. 133) call the ‘contractor, performance monitor, benchmarker and targetsetter’. One could thus link sovereign control through various disciplinary processes. The state structures the possible field of action (Foucault, 1982, p. 790) despite talk about autonomy and taking the local context into account.

However, as Foucault argues, real dominance lies in the acceptance that nothing bad comes from the government agency, as expressed by one of the headteachers in the study (see Article II). It is the power over people’s beliefs and interests (Christensen et al., 2014). According to Foucault (1980), power is productive as it can form and shape identities (worst in class), preferences (school improvement content), perceptions of what is real (nothing bad comes

from the SNAE), and opportunities for action (the programmes provided by the SNAE) (cf. Christensen et al., 2014, p. 87). Power implies that we are ‘indoctrinated’ into behaving in certain ways and having certain opinions (cf. Foucault, 2000, p. 341, ‘conduct of conducts’). Power is also productive, as the CBS co-operation creates a new agenda and controls the time of the municipal actors. It is important to recognise that the discourses that frame initiatives such as CBS are not neutral or self-evident. Many scholars point out the importance of studying the normalising knowledge and practices shaping current education reforms (Apple, 2004; Ball, 2017; Møller, 2017). This thesis can be seen as contributing to such research.

Finally, as Macdonald et al. (2006, p. 232) claim, it is not until we speak about the reforms, improvement programmes, and courses in terms of power that we can ‘understand patterns of acceptance and resistance’ to education policy reforms that try to shape local school actors’ performance. Local school actors do not have to oppose the reforms presented to them for a power perspective to be applied. Highlighting power and commonsense best practice solutions have value because they point to how we are governed both by others and ourselves in an intricate web of power mechanisms.

Local actors as self-improving subjects

Despite the multitude of power technologies at work within CBS, the concept of self-improvement is undeniably tangible. The solution to the perceived problems in Swedish schools in general and the CBS case presented is self-renewal according to the SNAE’s norms and standards. The problem is the schools, LEA and the responsible organisers, and the SNAE have the solutions—the best practice and what works (Lewis, 2017; Papanastasiou, 2021). This discourse of accountability also helps to place blame on local actors away from central government (cf. Cardini, 2006; Gore, 2023; Harris & Jones, 2017; Stacey, 2017). The problems are not to be found in central structures such as the grant system (75 grants for compulsory school to be applied for in 2024, albeit not 75 unique grants) or other central issues such as marketisation or segregation. The problem is the responsible organisers, the headteachers and the teachers, and the solution to their change is continuous improvement (Bates, 2016; Watson & Michael, 2016), or as Holmdahl (2011) calls it school improvement, as Sisyphus work (cf. Erlandson & Karlsson, 2022). As to the question of what these types of demands of constant improvement and surveillance can do to local actors, Ball (2003, p. 220) says that ‘[Educators] become ontologically insecure: unsure whether [they] are doing enough, doing the right thing, doing as much as others, or as well as others, constantly looking to improve, to be better, to be excellent.’ One could ask whether this quest for continuous improvement and self-renewal is part of the problem instead of

the solution. One could also ask what this pressure does to our headteachers and teachers. The concept of governmentality is about how

our understanding of ourselves is linked to the ways in which we are governed, the ways in which we try to govern ourselves and others, and the ways in which this occurs under forms of knowledge postulated as truth by various authorities (Dean, 2010, p. 14).

Thus, it is important to note that municipal actors are not created by power. Rather, 'it is the self that creates the subject in its relation to itself through power' (Kelly, 2009, p. 100). This point is different from saying that there is no power in subjectivation. Subjectivation is only possible because 'the self-relation is itself a power relation' (Kelly, 2009, p. 100). Therefore, the power relation between state agencies and municipal actors should not be viewed only in terms of external power over internal subjectivity; however, as the term 'conduct of conducts' implies, we regulate ourselves, albeit via the induction of external forces (cf. Theisens et al., 2016).

Programmes such as CBS discursively help to constitute local school actors as performative subjects. These school improvement programmes and policies largely build on the concept of what works and follow a neoliberal agenda of marketisation, individualisation and performativity (Ball, 2003; Lewis, 2017). They not only change what the local school actors do but also ultimately risk changing who they are and how they perceive the objective with school (Ball, 2003; Holloway & Brass, 2018). There is little criticism from the local actors in my CBS case towards the improvement initiatives handed them. On the contrary, there are claims such as 'nothing bad ever comes from the SNAE' (cf. evidence-based discourse, Holloway & Larsen Hedegaard, 2021). This points to the capillary effects of power that affect not only what we do but also who we are. Article IV also noted changes in headteachers' professional identities following the pressures of neoliberal reforms. The headteachers found their role as school leaders increasingly being defined as managers and entrepreneurs (i.e., Collet-Sabé, 2017; Duarte, 2021; Rezai-Rashti & Segeren, 2023). Few headteachers in the reviewed studies showed signs of overt resistance; ultimately, many complied with the mandated reforms. Ward et al. (2016) raised an important point regarding resistance: neoliberal managerialism may reduce the time and space for the critical reflection required to resist.

The concept of continuous improvement, which permeates the global movement of educational change (Bates, 2016; Watson & Michael, 2016), is also part of the CBS programme. Local actors are both expected to improve through approved school improvement initiatives and through constant self-evaluation through the SQA. This is part of the economic competition narrative discussed in the introduction (Ball, 2009). This examination through self-evaluation is both a disciplinary technique where the gaze of the examination helps create the 'docile' body (Foucault, 1995) and a technology of the self.

Pre-set standards are internalised, and the self works on the self to become a better school actor. Although CBS has been described as ‘a unique example of large-scale school improvement from both a national and international perspective’ by Nordholm et al. (2022, p. 13), it is important to recognise that numerous other countries have also embarked on similar endeavours, as exemplified in Article IV. There have been two notable new school acts in the United States: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, which was subsequently replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. Additionally, state programmes such as Race to the Top (RTT) have had a great impact on American schools (Duarte, 2021). Similarly, in England, there has been a series of substantial education reforms in recent decades, including programmes such as the National Strategies and the Academy School Initiative (Keddie, 2015). Furthermore, Improving School quality in Norway is also an example of a global trend of governments engaging in competitive narratives to improve education standards (Ball, 2009).

Contribution, limitations and further research

Regarding the case of CBS, eight years after its implementation, research on different aspects of CBS is still limited, which is why this study can contribute both to research about the CBS initiative and to steering within large-scale school improvement initiatives in general. None of the previous research concerning the CBS phenomenon has taken an explicit power perspective using empirical material, where this thesis can make an important contribution. My contribution has thus been to use Foucault, not only in analysing policy but also ‘at the level of on-going subjugation’ (Foucault, 1980, p. 97). I have studied both macrolevel—the policy level—and the microdynamics of how a large-scale school improvement initiative is perceived in a municipality.

In the thesis, I have argued that the unilateral focus on the local actors as the problem, through various audit activities, both by the Schools Inspectorate and the self-evaluating/confessional aspects of CBS, can lead to the risk that other possible narratives of the causes of the perceived problems are left aside. The local actors are seen as both the problem and the ones responsible for the solutions, albeit the right solutions according to the SNAE and the general discourse of what is currently seen as best practice (cf. Mufic, 2022). As highlighted in Article IV, resisting what is currently seen as commonsense solutions is difficult. Foucault’s concepts and theories are useful tools for identifying the constitutive role of these discourses (Anderson & Cohen, 2015).

Several gaps were presented in the introductory chapter. Addressing the gap identified by Triantafillou (2017), who emphasises the need for more in-depth empirical studies on how power operates in public administration settings, this thesis contributes to the literature by illuminating the mechanisms

of power within public administration contexts, specifically in the field of education. Triantafillou argues that not enough has been made regarding how ‘the quest for accountability, credibility and evidence, are linked to neoliberal power’ (p. 2). He calls for more research that tries to understand both the intellectual and ideational underpinnings of these reforms, and he also calls for more research ‘examining the link between the techniques and mechanisms of the ways in which neoliberal power is exercised through recent public sector reforms’. This thesis contributes to both of these calls by Triantafillou. Articles I, II and III address questions concerning the intellectual underpinnings of CBS as a case example and the techniques by which neoliberal power is exercised. Additionally, Article IV contributes to this call by focusing on neoliberal influence on educational change and how headteachers respond to these changes. I have also explored what power techniques can be seen within the CBS example. This is mainly discussed in Articles II and III. Additionally, I have discussed the interactions between state and local school actors in Articles II and III, following Nordholm’s (2016) and Rönnerberg’s (2011) call for more research. At the same time, the local actors’ perspectives have been in focus, and a discussion on how this subjectifies and affects the identity of local school actors has been conducted. The whole thesis project answers the call made by Liljenberg (2015) to investigate the neoliberal influence at the local level of the Swedish school system.

One important contribution that a critical analysis can make is to question the commonsensical and help acknowledge how these neoliberal discourses produce new subjectivities. Holloway and Brass (2018) give a rather bleak account of how much can change regarding what we perceive as ‘normal’, where they point to the fact that in the space of ten years between NCLB and RTTT in the US context, the teachers’ core was substantially altered towards accepting neoliberal accountability and personal responsibility as the normal for teachers working in schools. My thesis can help create greater awareness among school staff, headteachers, and teachers about their roles within the system and how discourses shape their actions and perceptions. By understanding these influences, local school actors can critically reflect on their own practices and the broader education policy discourses. Hopefully, this awareness can help them in better navigating policy reforms, understanding the truth claims inherent in these reforms, recognising what currently counts as good education leadership and teaching, and the myriads of other dominant education discourses. Article IV also highlights individual and collective ways of resisting these changes.

I would also like to make some methodological reflections. In my articles, I have been clear about my position and that research, to some extent, is about telling a story. I have not told THE story but A story. Other theoretical lenses would have produced a slightly different story or at least focused on other parts of the story. Good research practice in qualitative research may, to a

large extent, depend on reflexive ability to, in all stages of the research process, have an open mind and have the ability and courage to occasionally question issues taken for granted, in combination with following the laws and regulations for research.

Finally, it is once again important to clarify that the power exercised within the CBS example is not part of some master plan but rather the result of a wide number of rationalities and a 'diverse set of practices whereby some seek to influence the conduct of others' (Triantafillou, 2017, p. 22). Power is diffuse and passes through both the dominated and the dominating (Foucault, 2000). I have shown in the different articles that many techniques are used to change the conduct of local actors, some of which are more direct, such as the threat of legal sanctions or disciplinary techniques, while others are more indirect, aimed at changing preferences and thoughts. The freedom angle is not fully explored in the articles regarding the CBS case, but the local actors are free in the sense that they can choose to do differently. However, I agree with Angus (2004) that the exercise of agency is not only about resistance. Agency is exercised when we comply as well. '[I]f we wish to find "spaces" for resisting and challenging dominant discourses and agendas, we need also to investigate the ways in which we knowingly and unknowingly comply with those discourses and agendas and help accomplish them' (Angus, 2004, p. 40). Raffnsøe et al. (2019) argue in a similar way and emphasise that Foucault's account of power and freedom is a productive relationship that does not lend itself to the absolute dichotomies of compliance or resistance.

The freedom angle is thus something further research could delve more deeply into how local school actors perceive both pressure and freedom. Teachers' perspectives on the CBS process and implemented changes are also needed. Other aspects that could be highlighted include considering ethical consequences, the truth games, power relations within neoliberal rationality, and how they affect and produce a new educational normality and new school identity. More longitudinal studies are needed following the entire phase of educational change policies. Hopefully, my thesis can help school actors reflect both on how they are subjected to the neoliberal agenda described in the thesis and how they in turn subjectify others.

Concluding words

School improvement is often considered 'inherently good' (Wrigley, 2008, p. 129). Improving something means that something that has been bad or faulty now works better, but the thing with improvement is that it can also be cosmetic. Instead of fixing the leaking pipes in the wall, you put on new plaster and a pretty wallpaper and the problem disappears for a while before the cosmetic starts to crack and the problem is even bigger than before. School improvement can lead to long-lasting change for the better, but it can also lead

to something worse: an ill-forced-upon plan—a one-size-fits-all implementation that, despite talk of being context specific, truly does not consider context at all. Too many changes that are ill-fitted can lead to dissolution and change fatigue. It also risks eliminating the professionalism of the people working in schools (Collet-Sabé, 2017; Heffernan, 2016; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Lundström, 2018). Instead of framing school improvement in stories of success and failure – what if we look at education change from a different narrative – what story do we get then? In this thesis, I have written a story from the local actors’ perspective using mainly a Foucauldian framework. In my thesis, I do not try to deny that there are schools in need of support or that all schools are ‘good’ schools; rather, the problem I have tried from various angles to discuss is the ‘problematization’ of schools in need of improvement and of the discourse surrounding this phenomenon, such as the local school actors as actors in need of ‘fixing’ (Gore et al., 2023), where several technologies are used to place responsibility on the local actors. For instance, Harris and Jones (2017, p. 639) highlight the risk of preoccupation with PISA scores and the ‘global numbers game’, which put sociocultural and sociopolitical issues in the background situating responsibility for students’ success or failure with teachers and headteachers while ignoring ‘broader questions of systemic structures that produce inequity’ (Stacey, 2017, p. 790).

One major point is, as Perryman (2006, p. 150) eloquently puts it, ‘it is not my intention to argue that schools judged as “failing” should not be subject to some form of intervention’. What is put into question by Perryman and me is rather the disregard of context: ‘it is assumed that all schools can follow the same recipe for success, and any deviation from this norm can be an indicator that a school is failing, which of course ignores the individual socio-economic contexts in which schools are located’. In my thesis project, I have attempted to make visible how different power technologies are at work within initiatives such as CBS and how they, in turn, construct and regulate local school actors.

To conclude the thesis, I turn to Burchell (1996, p. 29), who has summarised the new relationship within neoliberal governance:

These forms encourage the governed to adopt a certain entrepreneurial form of practical relationship to themselves as a condition of their effectiveness and the effectiveness of this form of government [...] This involves ‘offering’ individuals and collectivities active involvement in action to resolve the kind of issues hitherto held to be the responsibility of authorized governmental agencies. However, the price of this involvement is that they must assume active responsibility for these activities [...] corresponding to the new forms in which the governed are encouraged, freely and rationally, to conduct themselves.

It is important to acknowledge that it is not primarily an issue of lost identity, from an idealistic view of the local school actors as moral bearers and ‘good’ professionals to managerial puppets. In Foucault’s (2010) view, identity is

constantly reproduced, but the issue at hand is what are the possible effects of the now prevalent discourses of neoliberalism that produces new truths and new identities in education (Collet-Sabé, 2017).

Sammanfattning

Inledning och syfte

Denna avhandling fokuserar på frågor relaterade till vad som har kallats ”a global education reform movement” (GERM) av Sahlberg (2011, 2016). Sahlberg argumenterar att många utbildningsreformer världen över svarar på liknande problem och prioriteringar och följer en politisk logik baserad på ansvarsskyldighet, standarder, decentralisering och skolautonomi. Detta följs av kvantifierbara kvalitetsmätningar och utvärderingar, idéer som har rötter i neoliberala tankegångar. Enligt Ball (2009) har stater förvandlats till ”konkurrensstater” där utbildningsframgång blivit synonymt med nationell konkurrenskraft. Detta har lett till en ”PISA-kris” i många länder, inklusive Sverige, med sjunkande elevresultat (Nordin, 2014).

I denna avhandling undersöks ett av de mest omfattande skolförbättringsprogrammen som den svenska regeringen har initierat på senare tid: Samverkan för bästa skola (SBS) (Rogberg et al., 2020). 2015 fick Skolverket i uppdrag av regeringen att inrätta SBS för att ”höja kunskapsresultaten och öka likvärdigheten inom och mellan skolor” (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2015, s. 1). SBS riktar sig till skolor med låga resultat eller en hög andel elever som inte fullföljer sina studier, samt skolor som har svårt att på egen hand förbättra sina resultat (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2015). Ursprungligen riktades SBS till grundskolan, men 2017 inkluderades även förskola och förskoleklass (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2017).

SBS innebär ett samarbete mellan tre parter: Skolverket, huvudman (och lokala skolor) och universitet. Universiteten är involverade i de två sista faserna av SBS (se tabell 2). Skolinspektionen är också inblandad genom att välja ut huvudmän som erbjuds att delta i SBS, baserat på deras regelbundna tillsyn (Skolverket, 2016). SBS kan ses som ett exempel på de många reformer som regeringar världen över har initierat som svar på PISA-kriser eller i kampen om att bli en ledande kunskapsnation. Jag placerar SBS inom den bredare ramen för den globala rörelsen inom utbildningsreform, formad av de neoliberala principerna som nämnts ovan.

Jag kommer att analysera de maktteknologier som är synliga inom SBS genom en fallstudie i en kommun som deltar i programmet. Begreppet makt är grundläggande för att förstå samhället (Clegg, 2010). Avhandlingen använder några av Foucaults centrala begrepp som analytiska verktyg för att undersöka de diskursiva formationerna och maktutövningen i det givna SBS-fallet.

Vidare undersöker den de komplexa maktrelationerna mellan en statlig utbildningsmyndighet och lokala skolaktörer (rektorer, förvaltning och lokala politiker). Det foucauldianska perspektivet möjliggör en djupare förståelse av hur makt fungerar och utövas inom ett skolförbättringsprogram som SBS, eftersom det fokuserar på sociala strukturer och relationer (Freie & Eppley, 2014).

Kärnan i avhandlingen är alltså maktrelationen mellan statliga och kommunala aktörer inom en statligt initierad skolförbättringskontext. Ett antal forskningsluckor har identifierats som relevanta för denna avhandling. För det första påpekar Triantafillou (2017) behovet av djupgående empiriska studier för att visa hur makt fungerar i offentlig förvaltning. Generellt sett saknas kritik mot offentlig förvaltning och förvaltningsreformer, eftersom de ofta bygger på den optimistiska idén att bättre kunskap leder till effektivare styrning av den offentliga sektorn (jfr. Wrigley, 2008 om skolförbättring). Liljenberg (2015) hävdar att det behövs mer forskning som undersöker neoliberalt inflytande på lokal nivå i det svenska skolsystemet. För det tredje är lite känt om hur statliga och lokala utbildningsmyndigheter samverkar i decentraliserade och avreglerade utbildningssystem (Nordholm, 2016). För det fjärde saknas kunskap om hur initiativ som SBS påverkar deltagande skolor; därför är perspektiven hos lokala kommunala aktörer i storskaliga skolförbättringsinsatser viktiga att undersöka. Nordholm et al. (2022, s. 3) hävdar att mer forskning behövs kring hur yrkesverksamma upplever storskaliga reformer. Slutligen är även statens roll som aktör underforskad enligt Rönnberg (2011).

Det övergripande syftet med denna avhandling är att belysa hur makt fungerar i ett statligt initierat skolförbättringsprogram och hur lokala skolaktörer konstrueras och regleras genom detta. Foucaults begrepp och teorier analyserar inte beteende, utan snarare vilka tekniker, rutiner, system och normer som används för att forma andras beteende (Triantafillou, 2017, s. 22). Två forskningsfrågor vägleder diskussionen:

- Hur utövas makt i SBS-fallet?
- Hur konstrueras och regleras lokala aktörer genom utbildningspolicys som SBS?

De fyra artiklarna i avhandlingen tar upp frågor som diskurs i offentliga styrdokument om SBS, hur kommunala aktörer förstår samarbetet inom SBS och hur deras berättelser kan förstås ur ett styrningsperspektiv. SBS-fallet har också analyserats ur ett maktkritiskt perspektiv, och en litteraturöversikt av skolledarnas navigering av neoliberal utbildningsreform har genomförts. Kappan samlar de övergripande frågorna och olika perspektiven från artiklarna.

Teoretiska utgångspunkter

Det teoretiska ramverket bygger främst på Foucaults teorier. Centrala begrepp inkluderar governmentality, suverän, disciplinär och pastoral makt, neoliberalism, diskurs och motstånd. Analys med Foucaults teorier fokuserar på att förstå de handlingar genom vilka makt produceras och utövas, snarare än att identifiera individer eller system som förtrycker. Makt ses som relationell och institutionell och finns överallt (Foucault, 1978).

Diskurs är ett centralt begrepp i Foucaults arbete (Gillies, 2013), och avser hur vi formar och konstruerar vår förståelse av världen. Diskurs formar de objekt vi talar om (Foucault, 1972, s. 49). Suverän makt handlar om dominans och kontroll, medan disciplinär makt är integrerad i individernas dagliga liv och handlingar, vilket gör individer till subjekt genom olika maktteknologier (Foucault, 1995, s. 170). Pastoral makt, som bygger på självreglering, kombinerar disciplinära och subjektiverande former av makt och är avgörande för modern styrning (Larsson et al., 2010; Dahlstedt et al., 2011).

Governmentality används för att kritisera traditionella uppfattningar om makt och analysera strategier och tekniker för att styra och kontrollera människors beteende på subtila sätt (Han, 2023). Makt fungerar kapillärt, sammanflätad med människors kroppar, övertygelser och självkänsla (Foucault, 1980). Motstånd är också centralt i Foucauldiansk teori och omfattar vardagliga praktiker som utmanar dominerande maktstrukturer (Foucault, 1995).

Även om Foucaults tänkande är det mest inflytelserika teoretiska elementet i avhandlingsprojektet, har andra teorier som meningsskapande (Weick, 2005) och policyinstrument (främst Vedung, 2016) använts.

Positionering av avhandlingen

Denna avhandling sällar sig till den forskning som undersöker och kritiserar den ökande dominansen av neoliberal ideologier och praktiker inom utbildning. Neoliberalismen, som ett omfattande styrningssystem baserat på ekonomiska resonemang, har påverkat alla aspekter av samhället, inklusive utbildning (Ball, 2017). Avhandlingen positioneras i förhållande till vad som i stora drag kan kallas policyforskning. Särskilt fokuserar jag på policyinstrument i utbildningen och forskning som undersöker hur lokala skolaktörer konstrueras och regleras via neoliberal reformer.

Policyinstrument är avgörande för att förstå styrning och nuvarande reformer av offentlig sektor (Le Galès, 2011). Dessa instrument återspeglar politiska och pedagogiska filosofier och är därför viktiga att analysera (Lin & Mittinen, 2019). Styrmedel inom utbildning är många, men framträdande är strävan efter ansvarsskyldighet och evidensinformerad praktik (Triantafillou, 2017). I decentraliserade utbildningssystem såsom det svenska, sker styrning

ofta utan formella reformer (Simons, 2015). Ett exempel på detta är SBS. Exempel på denna typ av styrning är: styrning genom siffror (Rose, 1991; Grek, 2009), styrning genom mallar (Hall, 2017), styrning genom mål och resultat (Segerholm, 2009) och styrning genom exempel (Simons, 2014). Dessa metoder har gemensamt att de på olika sätt påverkar lokala aktörer utan att införa en genomgripande utbildningsreform. Modern styrning är ofta mindre synlig, men för den delen inte mindre effektiv (Waslander et al., 2020).

Neoliberal policyregim syftar till att skapa produktiva, företagsamma och egenansvariga individer, med betoning på personligt val och frihet. Granskning och ansvarsskyldighet är centrala för att etablera den ansvarsfulla individen (Power, 1999; Trnka & Trundle, 2014). En granskningskultur genomsyrar samhället, där individer och grupper kontinuerligt utvärderas och hålls ansvariga utifrån prestationsindikatorer. Inom denna ansvarskultur förväntas individen att både självövervaka och självbedöma sig enligt förutbestämda normer (Keddie, 2018; Simons, 2015). Dessa styrningsformer påverkar i hög grad utbildningssektorn.

Forskning om skolledare visar en förändring i rektorsrollen mot ökat administrativt ledningsansvar och minskad autonomi. Trots reformer som lovar ökad autonomi, leder ökad ansvarsskyldighet och externt tryck till förändrade identiteter och praxis för skolledare. Lärare upplever också betydande påverkan på identitet, professionell autonomi och undervisningsmetoder på grund av neoliberal ansvarsreformerna.

Mer forskning behövs gällande policyinstrument inom ”soft governance” (Vergier et al., 2019a). Även lokala aktörers erfarenheter av neoliberal influenser inom utbildning kräver mer forskning (Robinson, 2019; Schmeichel et al., 2017; Liljenberg, 2015). Avhandlingen bidrar till denna forskning genom att använda både policyinstrument och Foucaults teorier för att undersöka makt och diskurs i ett statligt initierat skolförbättringsprojekt.

Metod

De fyra artiklarna i avhandlingen utgör en fallstudie av maktteknologier i ett statligt initierat skolförbättringsprogram, studerade ur flera perspektiv och med olika metoder (Merriam, 1994; Yin, 2014). En fallstudie är lämplig för att studera makt inom organisationer då den möjliggör en kontextkänslig ansats (Clegg, 2011). Ozga (1990) betonar vikten av att kombinera strukturell analys på makronivå med mikronivåundersökningar som tar hänsyn till människors uppfattningar och erfarenheter, något denna avhandling har gjort.

Det empiriska underlaget för artiklarna II och III samlades in under sju månader, från hösten 2018 till våren 2019 (se tabell 2). Deltagande skolor var grundskolor. Data bestod av mötesobservationer, intervjuer och lokala samt nationella dokument om SBS. Den deltagande kommunen var i slutfasen av

den tre år långa SBS-processen. Datainsamlingen kompletterades med en litteraturöversikt om skolledares navigering av neoliberal utbildningsreformer.

Intervjuer genomfördes med fem rektorer, två kommunpolitiker och tre förvaltningsanställda, varav en var skolchef (se bilaga 1). Sju intervjuer gjordes ansikte mot ansikte och tre via telefon. Observationer inkluderade tre möten med rektorer och förvaltning, två möten med förvaltningen, ett med förvaltningen, rektorer och lärare som var processledare i SBS, ett möte med Skolverket, rektorer och processledare samt ett möte med Skolverket och lokala politiker (se bilaga I).

I artikel I gjordes en narrativ diskursanalys av tre regeringstexter om SBS. Artikel II genomförde en tematisk analys med fokus på identitet, kommunikation och statlig störning. Artikel III använde Foucaults maktteknologier för en teoridrivna analys (Braun & Clark, 2019, 2021; Jackson & Mazzei, 2023). Artikel IV antog Arksey och O'Malleys (2005) ramverk för litteraturöversikter för att undersöka forskning om skolledares respons på neoliberal utbildningsreformer, med fokus på förändringar i deras yrkesidentiteter och motstånd.

Sammanfattning av artiklarna

Syftet med artikel I var att belysa diskurser i SBS genom att analysera tre officiella texter: regeringens beslut, Skolverkets genomförandeplan och Skolverkets webbplats. Två dominanta teman diskuteras bland annat: samverkan och skräddarsydda insatser. Analysen visade språkets konstituerande roll. Formuleringar i offentliga texter skapar också förväntningar, som talet om skräddarsydda insatser som vi återkommer till i artikel II. Dessa texter bidrar också till att reglerar lokala aktörer genom att framhålla att de som är i behov av förändring är de lokala aktörerna, eventuella strukturella orsaker till försämrade skolresultat lämnas utanför.

Syftet med artikel II var att undersöka hur lokala aktörer uppfattar samarbetet med statliga aktörer inom SBS. Resultaten presenterades under tre centrala teman: identitet, kommunikation och statlig störning. Gällande identitet finns det en påtaglig känsla bland de lokala aktörerna av att vara "sämst i klassen". Kommunikation med Skolverket uppfattas som inflexibel och det finns en strak retorik från Skolverket om skräddarsydda insatser. Känsla bland de lokala aktörerna är dock att de får färdiga utbildningspaket. Denna artikel bidrar med insikter om hur styrmedel som morötter, piskor och predikningar används för att påverka lokala aktörer. SBS innehåller monetära incitament och tidskrävande initiativ som reglerar aktörernas tid och beteende.

I artikel III var syftet att analysera hur makt utövas i SBS och att diskutera möjliga implikationer för de lokala skolaktörerna. Foucaults teorier användes för att bland annat visa hur disciplinär makt utövas genom självutvärdering

och expertkunskap, där lokala aktörer internaliserar statliga normer och standarder. Hotet om inspektion, rädslan av att vara ett ”spektakel” och den ständiga strävan efter självförbättring genom systematiskt kvalitetsarbete (SKA) är närvarande i de lokala aktörernas vardag. Den tredje artikeln visar på hur olika maktteknologier styr de lokala aktörerna.

Slutligen, i artikel IV var syftet att undersöka forskning om hur skolledare navigerar neoliberal utbildningsreformer. Tjugoen artiklar ingick i översikten. I tretton av artiklarna används Foucaults teorier. De flesta studierna pekar på att olika typer av motstånd eller icke-motstånd pågick samtidigt. Skolledares navigering av de neoliberal reformerna diskuteras i termer åttlydnad, simulering, dolt och öppet motstånd. Litteraturöversikten visade också hur reformer utlovar autonomi men ofta leder till ökad kontroll och förändringar av yrkesidentiteter. Artikeln bidrar till avhandlingen genom att bland annat peka på användbarheten av Foucaults teorier för att förstå utbildningsförändringar och hur lokala aktörer kan agera inom dessa ramar. Litteraturöversikten pekar också på hur skolledare styrs och regleras av neoliberal reformer.

Avslutande diskussion

SBS-programmet har analyserats utifrån ett neoliberalt governmentality ramverk och retoriskt sett framstår SBS som en modern form av styrning där staten skenbart tar ett steg tillbaka. Denna reträtt är dock mer diskursiv än verklig. De lokala skolaktörerna känner pressen av ständig övervakning, i linje med konceptet ”permanent panopticon” (Perryman, 2006). SBS-initiativet kombinerar disciplinär och pastoral makt, där självutvärderingsmekanismer får lokala aktörer att reflektera över sina svagheter. Retoriken om samverkan som omger SBS är viktig då den fungerar som en form av ”perception management” (Gillies, 2008).

Löftet om skraddarsydd insatser inom SBS är tydlig, men i verkligheten handlar denna frihet mer om att välja den rätta och godkända skolförbättring (jfr Foucault, 1995). Problemen och svaren är fördefinierade, och det finns en diskurs om lokalt deltagande för att legitimera SBS-initiativet (jfr Cardini, 2006). Makten handlar här om makten av expertkunskap. Denna expertkunskap har performativ kvalitet, eftersom den formar policy, Skolverket, skolors och enskilda rektors och lärares beteende (Foucault, 1995; jfr Simons 2014, 2015). Denna expertkunskap ramar också in problem och framställer svar på deras lösningar. SBS-programmet visar hur makt fungerar subtilt och påverkar uppfattningar och handlingar, vilket belyser vikten av att granska de underliggande diskurserna i utbildningspolicy.

Program som SBS bidrar diskursivt till att konstituera lokala skolaktörer som performativa subjekt. Dessa skolförbättringsprogram och -policyer bygger i stor utsträckning på konceptet om ”what works” och följer en neoliberal agenda om marknadsföring, individualisering och performativitet (Ball, 2003;

Lewis, 2017). De förändrar inte bara vad de lokala skolaktörerna gör utan riskerar också i slutändan att förändra vem de är och hur de uppfattar syftet med skola (Ball, 2003; Holloway & Brass, 2018).

Konceptet med kontinuerlig förbättring, som genomsyrar den globala rörelsen av utbildningsförändringar (Bates, 2016; Watson & Michael, 2016), är också en del av SBS-programmet. Lokala aktörer förväntas både förbättras genom godkända skolförbättringsinitiativ och genom ständig självutvärdering genom SKA. Detta är en del av den ekonomiska konkurrensberättelsen som diskuterades i inledningen (Ball, 2009). Denna undersökning genom självutvärdering är både en disciplinär teknik där undersökningens blick (gaze) hjälper till att skapa den ”fogliga” kroppen (Foucault, 1995) där förutbestämda standarder internaliseras.

Åtta år efter implementeringen är forskningen om SBS fortfarande begränsad. Denna avhandling bidrar till forskning om SBS och styrning inom storskaliga utbildningsreformer generellt. I den här avhandlingen har jag skrivit en berättelse ur de lokala aktörernas perspektiv med främst Foucaults teorier som ram. I min avhandling försöker jag inte förneka att det finns skolor i behov av stöd eller att alla skolor är ”bra” skolor; snarare är det problem som jag har försökt diskutera från olika håll, ”problematisering” av skolor i behov av förbättring och diskurser som omgärdar detta fenomen, såsom de lokala skolaktörerna som aktörer i behov av att ”fixas” (Gore et al., 2023, p. 454), där ett antal makttekniker används för att lägga ansvar på de lokala aktörerna. Avhandlingen problematiserar ett till synes ensidigt fokus på lokala aktörer som problem vilket riskerar att förbise andra potentiella strukturella orsaker till de upplevda problemen. Avhandlingen belyser också svårigheten att motstå dominerande diskurser om förbättring och ansvarsskyldighet, och visar hur dessa formar professionella identiteter och praktiker.

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Bilaga 1. Falljournal över kontakt med fältet

6 september 2018	Mötesobservation träff med lärosäte. Heldag på förvaltningen. Information om studien till berörda parter. (Förmiddag möte rektorer, förvaltning och lärosäte. Eftermiddag möte förvaltning, konsult och lärosäte).
10 oktober 2018	Mötesobservation träff med lärosäte. Heldag på förvaltningen. (Förmiddag möte lärosäte, rektorer och delar av förvaltningen. Eftermiddag möte förvaltningen och lärosäte).
Oktober 2018	Mailkontakt med Skolverket, förstelärare och lokal politiker om medgivande för mitt deltagande på mötet med Skolverket i oktober.
Oktober 2018	Mötesobservation träff med Skolverket på förvaltningen. Träff med förvaltning, rektorer, processledare/förstelärare och Skolverket kl. 10:00 - 12:00. Träff med lokala politiker, förvaltning och Skolverket kl. 13:00 - 15:00. (Skriftlig information om studien, medgivandebrev till nytillkomna.)
Oktober – november 2018	Mailkontakt med rektorer, förvaltning och lokalpolitiker angående tider för intervju.
19 – 21 november 2018	Sju intervjuer (tre rektorer, två förvaltningspersonal, två lokala politiker), mellan 30 – 90 minuter per intervju, lokal på förvaltningen alternativt på en skola.
21 november 2018	Mötesobservation träff med lärosäte. Heldag på konferensanläggning. (Förmiddag rektorer, förvaltning och lärosäte. Eftermiddag rektorer, förvaltning, förestelärare/processledare och lärosäte).
December 2018	Mailkontakt med skolchef och en rektor angående tider för telefonintervju.
21 december 2018	Telefonintervju med skolchef.
Januari 2019	Mailkontakt med rektor angående telefonintervju.
11 januari 2019	Telefonintervju med rektor.

Januari - februari 2019	Mailkontakt med förvaltning angående slutrapport. Fått uppdaterade versioner vartefter de reviderades.
28 - 29 mars 2019	Mötesobservationer träff med lärosätet. Internat två dagar med lärosäte, förvaltning, lokalpolitiker, rektorer och förstelärare/processledare.
April 2019	Mailkontakt med rektor som slutat hösten 2018 angående telefonintervju.
12 april 2019	Telefonintervju med rektor.

Bilaga 2. Dokumentlista

Lokala dokument

Typ av dokument	Kommentar
Fem nulägesanalyser	Skolverksdokument ifyllda av kommunen och skickade till Skolverket
Åtgärdsplan likvärdig utbildning huvudman	Skolverksdokument ifyllda av kommunen och skickade till Skolverket
Åtgärdsplan utveckling av undervisningen	Skolverksdokument ifyllda av kommunen och skickade till Skolverket
Åtgärdsplan utveckling av nyanländas lärande	Skolverksdokument ifyllda av kommunen och skickade till Skolverket
Plan för genomförande av insatser och offert	Skolverksdokument ifyllda av kommunen och skickade till Skolverket
Tre delredovisningar från kommunen till Skolverket	Skolverksdokument ifyllda av kommunen och skickade till Skolverket
Delrapport 1 från lärosäte	Lärosätesdokument skickad till Skolverket
Delrapport 2 från lärosäte	Lärosätesdokument skickad till Skolverket
Tre slutredovisningar för åtgärdsplanerna i 3 olika versioner n=9	Skolverksdokument ifyllda av kommunen och skickade till Skolverket

Nationella dokument

Typ av dokument	Dokument
Regeringsuppdrag	Utbildningsdepartementet. (2015). <i>Uppdrag om samverkan för bästa skola.</i> (U2015/3357/S).
Regeringsuppdrag	Utbildningsdepartementet. (2017). <i>Tilläggsuppdrag om samverkan för bästa skola.</i> (U2017/00301/S).
Skolverkets genomförandeplan	Skolverket. (2016). <i>Redovisning av genomförandeplan för uppdrag om samverkan för bästa skola samt redovisning av hur arbetet genomförts hittills.</i> (Dnr 2015:778).

Skolverkets redovisning om hur det gått hittills.	Skolverket. (2017). <i>Redovisning av genomförandeplan för uppdrag om samverkan för bästa skola</i> . Redovisningen omfattar perioden januari 2016 till december 2016.
Skolverkets redovisning om hur det gått hittills	Skolverket. (2018). <i>Redovisning av uppdrag för Samverkan för bästa skola</i> . Redovisningen omfattar perioden januari 2017 till december 2017 (U2015/3357/S).
Skolverkets redovisning om hur det gått hittills	Skolverket. (2019). <i>Redovisning av uppdrag om Samverkan för bästa skola</i> . Redovisningen omfattar perioden januari 2018 till december 2018 (U2015/3357/S och U2017/00301/S).
Skolinspektions rapport	Skolinspektionens rapporter gällande kommunen
Skolverkets hemsida	<i>Samverkan för bästa skola</i> . (2019). Utskrift från Skolverkets hemsida Hämtad 2019-02-11 från https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/leda-och-organisera-skolan/samverkan-for-basta-skola
Text från Nationellt FoU-center Samverkan från bästa skola vid Stockholms universitet	Rönström, N., Rogberg, M., & Nyttell, U. (2018). <i>Nationellt FOU-stöd inom Samverkan för bästa skola. Från pilotprojekt till fortsatt samverkan</i> . Stockholms universitet.

Bilaga 3. Intervjufrågor⁹

Inledande frågor

Hur länge har du arbetat som rektor/i förvaltningen/politiken?

Hur länge har du varit på den skola du är nu/ i kommunen?

Var du med från början i SBS-processen?

Inför SBS

Berätta vad som hände innan ni gick in i det konkreta arbetet med SBS.

Berätta om den inledande kartläggningsfasen? Vad hände, vem gjorde vad?

Vad var dina upplevelser?

Starten av SBS

Berätta om dina upplevelser av startfasen i SBS.

Vilka samarbeten med konsulter/lärosäten hade ni?

Berätta om samarbetet med Skolverket.

Hur upplevde du dessa samarbeten?

Det löpande arbetet med SBS i ledningsgruppen tillsammans med lärosätet/Skolverket

Hur har arbetet fungerat vidare i SBS-processerna?

Vem gör vad? Vem har ansvar för vad i processen?

Vad händer på mötena med lärosätet/Skolverket//övriga konsulter?

Vad görs mellan träffarna med lärosätet?

Har det funnits parallella skolutvecklingsprocesser samtidigt med SBS i kommunen/ på skolorna? Hur har det i sådant fall fungerat?

Förutsättningar för arbetet

Hur ser du på skolans/kommunens möjligheter att arbeta med SBS?

Har det funnits resurser i form av tid, pengar (från Skolverket?), personal, hjälp och stöd?

Hur har du upplevt stödet från externa konsulter/lärosäten?

Hur har du upplevt stödet från Skolverket?

Hur har du upplevt stödet från förvaltning/politik?

⁹ Intervjuerna utgick från rubrikerna och underfrågorna fungerade mer som en checklista för mig som intervjuare att vi hade samtalat om de olika aspekterna.

Skulle du vilja att något varit annorlunda kopplat till frågan om förutsättningar? I sådant fall vad?

Relevans/meningsfullhet

Hur relevant/meningsfullt upplever du att arbetet med SBS varit?

Har den känslan förändrats något under arbetets gång?

Hur relevant tror du att övriga deltagare upplevt arbetet med SBS? Lärare/övrig personal, rektorskollegor, förvaltning, politik? (Hur vet du det?)

Roller och relationerna i arbetet?

Beskriv de olika rollerna och relationerna i arbetet med SBS.

Hur har relationerna mellan er i kommunen sett ut under SBS-perioden?

Har relationerna påverkat arbetet på något sätt?

Slutfasen SBS - Vad har arbetet lett fram till?

Hur känner du inför att SBS-projektet med samarbete med lärosätet/Skolverket snart har nått sitt slut?

Vad tror du/hoppas du kommer att hända efter detta?

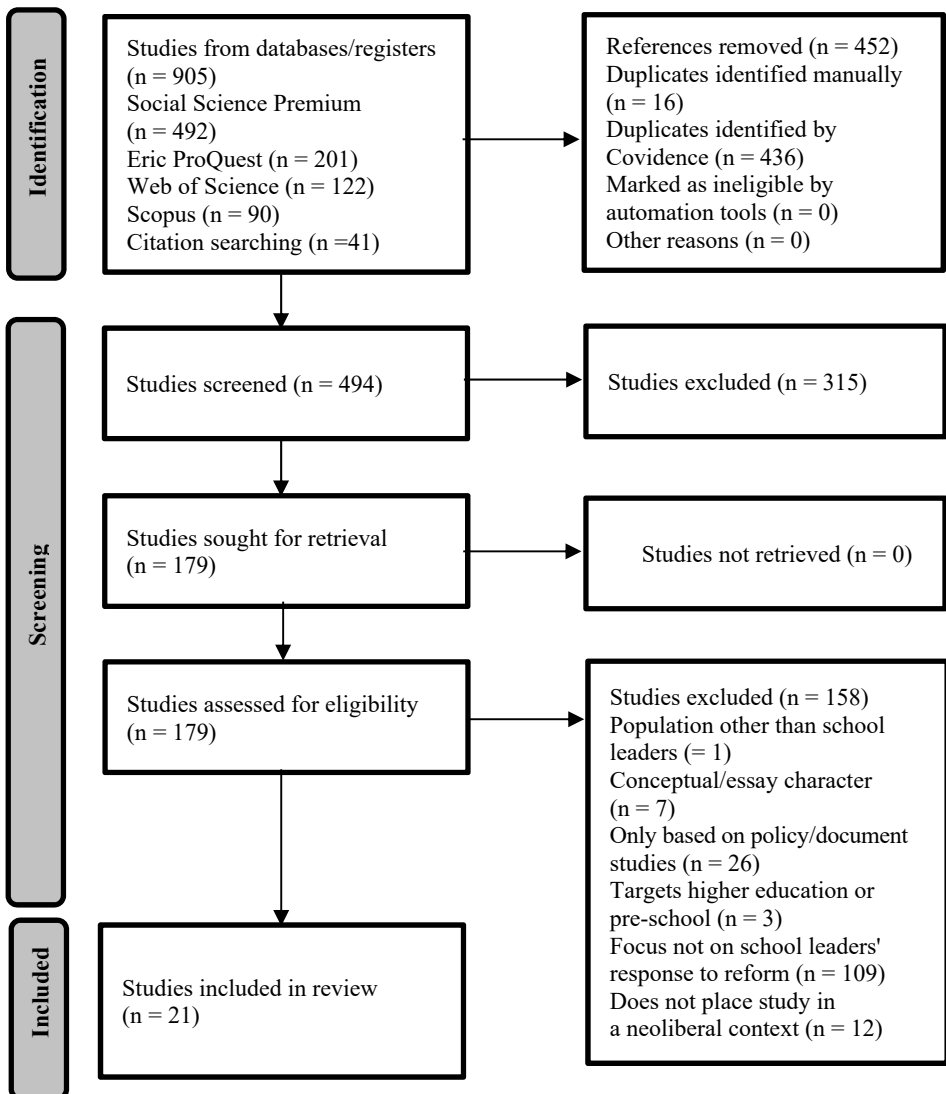
Kan du redogöra för någon/några specifika händelser som ägt rum som du tycker har haft stor påverkan på processen (kan vara både positiva och negativa).

Vilka fördelar och nackdelar upplever du med SBS i jämförelse med mer lokalt förankrade utvecklingsinsatser?

Avslutande fråga

Finns det något som jag har glömt att fråga om som du tycker är viktigt i förhållande till SBS-processen?

Bilaga 4. PRISMA flowchart



Bilaga 5. Medgivandebrev

Information angående deltagande i projektet implementering av Samverkan för bästa skola

Mitt namn är Malin Kronqvist Håård och jag är doktorand i pedagogiskt arbete vid Högskolan Dalarna. Jag är antagen som doktorand med inriktning organisation, ledning och ledarskap. Av särskilt intresse i inriktningen är att utveckla ny kunskap om betydelsen av nationella, regionala och lokala skolutvecklingsinsatser. Jag vill fråga dig om du vill delta i ett forskningsprojekt rörande Samverkan för bästa skola. I det här dokumentet får du information om projektet och om vad det innebär.

Syfte och innehåll med projektet

Skolverket fick 2015 uppdraget av Regeringen att starta Samverkan för bästa skola (SBS) ”i syfte att höja kunskapsresultaten och öka likvärdigheten inom och mellan skolor” (Utbildningsdepartementet, U2015/3357/S, s. 1). I satsningen sker samverkan mellan tre olika parter: Skolverket, ingående skolhuvudmän och de lärosäten som har beröringspunkter med rektorsprogrammet.

Syftet med det projekt som ni ingår i är att studera hur SBS-processen förstås och tolkas i en kommun.

Genom ... har jag fått information om att er kommun ingår i SBS och då ni befinner er i slutfasen av samarbetet så är er kommun också lämplig att studera då ni har erfarenhet av hela SBS-processen. Forskningshuvudman för projektet är Högskolan Dalarna.

Hur går studien till?

Jag kommer att samla information i studien på tre olika sätt: mötesobservationer vid träffarna med ... processledare, dokumentinsamling rörande projektet Samverkan för bästa skola ... kommun, intervjuer med förvaltningsledning och rektorer från ... kommun. Mötesobservationerna kommer att ljudinspelas, men inte transkriberas i sin helhet.

Tidsåtgången för intervjuerna beräknas vara cirka en timme per intervju. Intervjuerna kommer att ljudinspelas för att sedan transkriberas.

Vad händer med mina uppgifter?

Den information som samlas in under projektet kommer att behandlas så att inga obehöriga kan ta del av den. Det betyder att data jag samlar in bara får användas i forskningsändamål. Den insamlade informationen kommer under

pågående studie att bevaras på en lösenordsskyddad dator som bara jag som doktorand har tillgång till. I rapportering av projektet kommer all data att av-identifieras, det vill säga ditt namn kommer att bytas ut mot ett annat namn och kommunens namn kommer inte att nämnas. Resultaten av studien planeras att publiceras i artikelform. Materialet i studien kommer att arkiveras efter av-handlingsprojektets slut och gallras efter tio år.

Ansvarig för datamaterialet är Högskolan Dalarna. Enligt EU:s dataskyddsförordning har du rätt att kostnadsfritt få ta del av de uppgifter om dig som hanteras i studien, och vid behov få eventuella fel rättade. Om du vill ta del av uppgifterna kan du kontakta Malin Kronqvist Håård (se nedan för kontaktuppgifter). Dataskyddsombud nås på dataskydd@du.se. Om du är missnöjd med hur dina personuppgifter behandlas har du rätt att ge in klagomål till Datainspektionen, som är tillsynsmyndighet.

Deltagandet är frivillig

Ditt deltagande är frivilligt och du kan när som helst välja att avbryta deltagandet. Om du väljer att inte delta eller vill avbryta ditt deltagande behöver du inte uppge varför. Om du vill avbryta ditt deltagande ska du kontakta den ansvariga för studien (se nedan).

Stort tack på förhand för din medverkan!

Ansvariga för studien

Om du har frågor angående studien är du välkommen att kontakta oss.

Kontaktperson:

Malin Kronqvist Håård

Doktorand i pedagogiskt arbete, Högskolan Dalarna

Ansvarig forskningsledare och huvudhandledare:

Gunilla Lindqvist

Docent i pedagogik vid Uppsala universitet och lektor i pedagogik vid Högskolan Dalarna.

Biträdande handledare:

Maria Olsson

Fil. Doktor i specialpedagogik och lektor i pedagogik vid Högskolan Dalarna

Samtycke att delta i studien

Jag har fått muntlig och skriftlig information om studien Implementering av Samverkan för bästa skola och jag har haft möjlighet att ställa frågor. Jag får behålla den skriftliga informationen om studien.

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- Jag samtycker till att delta i studien Implementering av Samverkan för bästa skola.
- Jag samtycker till att uppgifter om mig behandlas på det sätt som beskrivs i den skriftliga informationen om studien.

Plats och datum	Underskrift och namnförtydligande