

**SEEING LIKE AN INSPECTOR:
HIGH MODERNISM AND MĒTIS IN SWEDISH SCHOOL INSPECTION**

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ABSTRACT

In this article, John C. Scott (1998)'s ideas are used in order to discuss how the Swedish state sees education, as it relies upon its technical and juridical rationality. Drawing on cross-case study data from inspection processes, it is suggested that inspectors' work involves a dual optic. On the one hand, regular supervision is explicitly conformed to a regulatory evidence-based model derived from ambitions to develop universal, objective, and neutral judgements. On the other hand, the concrete work of inspectors does entail modification, adaptation, and mediation of rules, templates, schemes, and standard procedures. Hence, the evidence-based design denotes inspectors' practical wisdom or *mētis*.

KEY WORDS

School inspection; Governance; Judgement; Knowledge forms; Equivalence.



SISYPHUS

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1,

2014, PP. 62-86

Seeing Like an Inspector: High Modernism and Mētis in Swedish School Inspection

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SEEING EDUCATION

John C. Scott (1998) argued that the governing of modern states relies upon certain forms of tools and knowledge. His book *Seeing Like a State* (Scott, 1998) detailed how strong state-initiated social engineering has involved a rational and technical administrative ordering of society based on universalistic, logical, formalistic, impersonal, and quantitative explanation and verification. On the one hand, this form of high modernism is related to the development and maintenance of democratic welfare and «[o]ur ideas about citizenship, public-health programs, social security, transportation, communication, universal public education, and equality before the law» (Scott, 1998, pp. 339-340). On the other hand, Scott (1998, p. 4) argued, these «well-intended schemes to improve the human condition» have simultaneously tended to dismiss important elements of local and practical knowledge that, by necessity, are parts of complex human activities. In his adoption of Scott's ideas to the governing of education, Martin Lawn (2011, p. 65) has argued that «[t]he gradual rise of the rule and framing of education over time by the modern state has enabled it to be tamed, to be reduced, to be rendered transparent, to be turned into aggregated units, and to be tested» [translated from French]. In other words are context-bound, complex, creative,

informal, and moral processes of teaching and learning reconstructed and simplified in order to be governed.

In this article, Scott's ideas are used in order to discuss school inspection as a mode of governing. School inspection has come to play a critical role in the governing process of Sweden and in the Europeanization of education. Drawing on cross-case study data from inspection processes, it provides insights on *how* the Swedish state sees education (i.e., how the state re-imagines and reshapes schooling today), as it relies upon its technical and juridical rationality (Cf. Lawn, 2011, p. 68). The paper draws attention to an on-going struggle within the domain of school inspection: the struggle between two different knowledge forms — high modernism and the practical form of knowledge that Scott (1998) labelled *mētis*.

The article starts with a section, which theoretically places the study into current discussions on state governing. This section also offers a short introduction of the Swedish model of school inspection. Second, the two knowledge forms are presented in the form of two mental models. These rather sweeping frame works are used to contemplate school inspection as a practical inquiry in terms of holistic views on knowledge, method, and culture. Third is a section wherein the methodology and data are briefly presented, then I offer some empirical examples of school inspection events as doing governing. Here, the focus is on inspectors' seeing, as well as their work and ideas. Empirically, I draw on cross-case studies, including observations and interviews with inspectors, but also with school actors who have experiences of being the locus of the state's vision. Finally, I offer a conclusive section, including a summary and discussion.

GOVERNING EDUCATION BY INSPECTION

This article is placed within an international policy context characterized by waves of deregulation and decentralisation, which are accompanied or succeeded by re-regulation and/or increased centralisation. In the Swedish context, Larsson, Letell and Thörn's (2012, pp. 262-282) analysis of contemporary forms of governing offers a starting point that is congruent with Scott's ideas on high modernism. They introduce the concept of 'advanced liberal engineering' in order to analyse the mix between, on the one hand, liberal ideals, including principles of freedom of choice and self-regulation through market



mechanisms, and, on the other hand, conservative ideals, emphasizing law and order secured by regulatory apparatuses pursuing standardization, monitoring, auditing, and evaluation. The authors (Larsson, Letell & Thörn, 2012, p. 264) argue that this concept acknowledges «continuities and discontinuities in relation to the era of social engineering» and describes a «'logical' ideological attempt to make a certain version of liberal government legitimate».

National school inspection is one example of a regulatory apparatus that serves to address public distrust, steering problems and negative or unintended issues of marketization within education. Today, school inspection is seen as an important policy tool that is utilised in order to enhance efficiency and provide quality in the competitive, dynamic, and knowledge-based economy. However, it is also associated with the increase of what has been defined as audit culture, audit society, performance management, the evaluative state, or the competitive-evaluative nexus (see Clarke, 2005; Neave, 1998; Pollitt et al., 1999; Power, 1999; Strathern, 2000).

Rönnerberg (2012) has examined how the reintroduction of national school inspection in 2003 equalled «the return of the state.» At the turn of the millennium, state trust in governing bodies' (e.g., municipalities and free school companies) own evaluation and governing was replaced by a thorough model of external national inspection, including a severe increase in resources and inspection activities. Rönnerberg (2012, p. 670) argues that «Swedish schools are now exposed to the most thorough inspection and checking in modern times», and the number of inspectors employed has increased dramatically since the 1960s and 1970s, when Sweden had one of the most centralised education systems in the world (Daun, 2004, p. 326).

A separate national agency, The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (SI), was founded in 2008 with a government expectation of a «powerful, distinct and regular supervision» (The Swedish schools inspectorate, 2008, p. 4). «Policymakers», wrote Rönnerberg (2012, p. 70) «appear confident in the utility of inspections as a means of steering, and the Inspectorate is repeatedly presented as a problem solver for diverse perceived problems».

As Rönnerberg has noted elsewhere, inspection is a complex and many-sided mode of governing. It is

simultaneously directed to, for instance, legal issues and/or sanctions, economic incentives and/or means of resource distribution, i.e. 'hard' instruments, but also, at the same time, contain more or less 'soft' elements such



as the promotion of self-evaluation, transfer of knowledge and other means allowing and encouraging actor's to coordinate amongst themselves with less central government involvement (2010, p. 5).

The Swedish case, thus, revolves around the somewhat paradoxical concurrence of what somewhat inadequately could be dichotomized as an 'older' style and bureaucratic mode of regulation and more modern forms of governance. The question that arises here is: how could these governing tensions fit theoretically with Scott's (1998, p. 4) analysis of 'muscle-bound' social engineering? Notably, Tilly (1999) has argued that Scott's work does not adequately theorise interactions between top-down and bottom-up power. Tilly's critique is related to more recent discussions on how to conceptualize contemporary developments in state governing, wherein scholars have questioned the so-called 'governance narrative' (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003; Goodwin & Grix, 2011; Grix & Phillpots, 2011; Marsh, 2008). In short, these discussions represent attempts to overcome the theoretical dualisms between understanding the state as: a) centric and hierarchical (the traditional form of big and bureaucratic government, by means of rules and external control); and as b) hollowed out, working through decentred network governance and soft power (via co-operation, consensus, self-organisation, self-evaluation, etc.). An important aspect of these attempts is to challenge the establishment of single narratives. This paper contributes to this discussion by acknowledging the diverse and conflicting beliefs and practices of inspectors as political agents.

John C. Scott argued that state-initiated engineering originated in a combination of four basic circumstances: administrative ordering of nature and society, high modernist ideology, an authoritarian state, and prostrate civil society. These circumstances are all relevant to the Swedish case, and in this article, I will focus on the first two elements and particularly on the force field between the two earlier mentioned knowledge forms that are present in the state's vision. Initially, though, I will say a few words about the latter two circumstances in order to situate inspection in a historical and socio-political context of governing.

THE AUTHORITARIAN STATE AND THE PROSTRATE SOCIETY

Following Ozga, Segerholm and Simola (2011, p. 93), I argue that it is important to acknowledge the ‘authoritarian potential of liberalism’ in the field of education. As noted by Wilkinson (2013), Europe is currently haunted by the ‘spectre of authoritarian liberalism’, a practice that works to conceal the underlying conflict between democracy and capitalism. Ultimately, authoritarian liberalism refers to the perceived «need to contain public interference with private market freedoms and immunities such as the right to accumulate wealth, to contract and dismiss freely, to dispose of one’s property and to exploit, wherever possible, the privatization of public assets» (Wilkinson, 2013, p. 543). This practice is historically rooted in Hayek’s neo-liberal ideas on state coercion and planning. What is the role of school inspection against this background? For one thing, Sweden, the country with the world’s most de-regulated education system — including a model with tax-funded, profit-making school companies equivalent only to the system launched by General Pinochet in Chile — is in need of a strong state control that works to persuade citizens that equivalence is compatible with de-regulation (Cannon et al., 2013; see also Rönnerberg, 2011). As noted by Carlbaum (2013), the Swedish Schools inspectorate is not only a market police that deals with the school market’s negative side-effects, it is actually possible to perceive the agency as «a planner for competition» (Hayek, as cited in Wilkinson, 2013, p. 544).

Scott (1998, p. 5)’s idea on the origin of state-initiated engineering is also related to the issue of emergency, particularly how urgent conditions «foster the seizure of emergency powers». According to Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003, p. 427) the «ongoing collection, production and publication of surveys leads to an ‘instant democracy’, a regime of urgency that provokes a permanent need for self-justification». My assumption here is that the international competition, ranking, and the PISA assessments places Sweden and other struggling countries in positions where the state becomes willing to put drastic designs into being (Cf. Meyer & Benavot, 2013). The legitimacy of such designs is related to Scott’s final circumstance: the prostrate civil society. Swedish school actors has been target of some 20 years of criticism over failing practices, declining results, poor efficiency, and general pedagogical fuzziness. Growing inequalities and local differences, in combination with a steadily stronger consumer culture with expectations for greater choice and

demands for good quality schooling, has led to an alleged educational crisis (see Clarke, 2004, pp. 126-146, for a discussion on the 'crisis of the public realm' and the 'performance-evaluation nexus'). This situation has weakened school actors and made them, as well as the populace, more receptive to authoritarian schemes. The reintroduction of a tougher and results-oriented school inspection with a power toolbox, including the possibility to use penalties, to shut down schools, to impose conditional fines or measures at the organizer's expense, and to revoke licenses for independent schools, is most arguably one such example. At the same time, and as argued above, the authoritarian measures are not the only features of SI. These measures co-exist with other forms of governing within the current inspection regime.

TWO MODELS OF INSPECTION

In Sweden and elsewhere, inspectors' work is characterized by tensions between increased regulation through technical means, such as performance data and the rules followed by inspectors in their school assessments, as well as their expert knowledge; professional judgement; and use of support, development, and persuasion in encouraging self-regulation in the teaching profession. These tensions respond to two basic models of knowledge use and production that can be identified in the literature and which are inherent in the fundamental characteristics of Scott (1998)'s oppositional knowledge forms — namely, high modernism and *mētis*. The following presentation serves as an orientation and is, by necessity, simplistic and ideal typical. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that although Scott clearly favours *mētis* over high modernism, he realizes that the former, by no means, should be regarded as 'the product of some mythical, egalitarian state of nature' (Scott, 1998, p. 7). In order to avoid a normative standpoint, I would like to put forward the assumption that these knowledge forms might serve different purposes and work to produce valid results within their own domains and according to their own logic.

In relation to school inspection, these two models can be described in terms of a regulatory evidence-based model and a model based on 'educational connoisseurship' and 'educational criticism' (Eisner, 1975, 1979, 1985). The former derives from ambitions to develop scientific methods and universal, objective, and neutral judgements that provide all educational practitioners, parents, and other stakeholders with explicit and clear knowledge and information (Biesta,



2007; Slavin, 2008). Here, standardisation and uniformity is important, and the personal values and ideals of inspectors are filtered away. Clarity, certainty, and order are the ideal norms of practice to cope with the unstructured and complex reality of schooling (Schwandt, 2005). This is a positivistic and behaviouristic approach where observable and measurable empirical data aim to determine whether or not the goals or criteria of the curriculum or assessment protocol are achieved. In this «world of measurement» (Noordegraaf & Abma, 2003, p. 853), school inspection is believed to establish, evaluate, and control secure links between objectives and output within a school organisation that is made transparent or, using the words of Power (2007, p. 34), «turned inside out». It is, thus, a model that seeks to reduce the complexity and the interpretative character of judgement making, which emphasizes results, rather than procedures or contextual factors (Bridges, 2008). Performance data are used to compare, evaluate, and monitor progress. Evidence is also used in order to generate cumulative knowledge, to make schools more efficient and effective, and to resolve competing approaches. Data is seen as both evidence and the absolute basis for judgements, and reliability and stability are secured by the quality of the instruments and techniques themselves. This means that relatively unskilled and inexperienced inspectors could carry out inspections using checklists, templates, and schemes or by following standard procedures. In line with this, the Swedish Schools inspectorate has recruited inspectors with non-educational backgrounds such as professionals trained in law.

Versions of this model are currently dominant as a part of the public sector management agenda of governments, and international organizations like OECD and the World Bank (Grek, 2009). National school inspectorates are related to these performance measurement systems, and school inspection is, thus, part of an evidence-based governance regime that is expected to stimulate and steer the development of the education system. Evidence is used by actors at different levels (politicians, administrators, principals, parents, etc.) in order to make rational choices and improve both the education system and their own performance within it. This model serves the administrative purposes of accountability within a de-regulated school market, and it produces statistics and results based on comparison. There is, thus, a close relationship to the ideology of New Public Management that affects public services, with an emphasis on outcomes assessment, performance measurement, and continuous improvement, favouring best practice and the standardization and manualisation of assessments (Schwandt, 2005).



The other model, which Eisner (1975, 1979, 1985) discussed in terms of ‘educational connoisseurship’ and ‘educational criticism’, bears a direct kinship to Scott (1998)’s idea of *métis*. Central here is the idea that embodied and encoded expert knowledge, manifested in a form of professional wisdom or artistry, forms the most adequate basis for the judgement of schooling. The starting point here is a fundamental critique of the previous model. Education and teaching are not seen as objective and nomothetic processes that are possible to control, measure, and transform by sets of laws and standard recipes. Teaching is regarded as an ideographic activity framed by individual and contextual factors. The usage of explicit guidelines and criteria might be considered, but the judgements are derived primarily from professional experience that allows the inspector to bracket phenomena so that they become defined and visible. The knowledge required must, therefore, be embodied and have «the characteristic of plasticity; flexibility in attending to the most important features of each situation» (Schwandt, 2005, p. 324).

In short, this model involves three inter-related steps; description, interpretation, and evaluation/appraisal, all of which together serve to help others to see, understand, and appraise the quality of educational practice and its consequences. Description requires persistent, on-site observations, which render possible the rich portrayals of the complex qualities of schooling. In order to do so, the language ought not to be merely technical and objective, but poetic and filled with experience, emotion, metaphor, and analogy. Interpretation involves efforts to understand the meaning of what is observed, whereas the evaluative aspect implicates value judgements about educational significance:

Educational critics ultimately appraise what they encounter with a set of educational criteria; they judge the educational value of what they see. To make educational value judgements requires not only the ability to see educational subtleties occurring in the classroom and to be able to interpret their meaning or explain the function they serve, it is also to have a background sufficiently rich in educational theory, educational philosophy and educational history to be able to understand the values implied by the on-going activities and the alternatives that might have been otherwise employed (Eisner, 1985, p. 98).

The ability to consider alternatives requires a sense of the practical realities of schooling that goes beyond what Eisner (1985, p. 112) called «the educa-

tionally naïve eye». In order not to condemn schools that «do not live up to our highest hopes», argued Eisner (1985, p. 112), it is important to recognize what is, and what is not, possible in the course of daily educational life. Ultimately, education criticism comes down to improvement (i.e., that description, interpretation, and evaluation speaks to education actors and that something is made out of it).

Ultimately, this model can be traced back to Dewey's theory of inquiry, which rejects the so-called spectator theory of knowledge (*knowledge as objective visual reception and representation of an external reality*) in support of *practical judgements* — a quest for better understanding of pragmatic situations and problems (Dewey, 1929). According to Dewey, inquiry is always contextual. The usage of *a priori* elements and fixed rules in inspection would, as such, have to be refined and modified, according to the particular situation and problem of each school (Cf. Dewey, 1938).

This brief summary indicates a range of differences or even incommensurabilities between the two models. Different inspection regimes might frame the work of inspectors differently in relation to the models. The British inspectorate, Ofsted, is explicitly linked to the evidence-based model with a heavy reliance on results. Interestingly, this model was partly introduced as a retort to criticism and mistrust concerning the independence and validity of inspectors' work (Clarke & Lawn, 2011; Clarke & Ozga, 2011). A contrasting example can be found in Germany, where the Baden-Württembergische model excludes out-put data/results and approaches the issue of school quality only through qualitative methods (Kotthoff & Böttcher, 2010). Overall, it appears as if the Swedish inspectorate has moved from expert judgement to evidence, but the characteristics of the balance between the two models remains relatively unknown. In practice, however, school inspectors often combine versions of the two models by bringing their objective data and expert judgement into relationship with one another. The empirical question is: how is this enacted in concrete inspection practice as the state sees education? Additionally, how in turn, does this mirror the way that the state 'sees' education through the eyes of inspectors?

NOTES ON DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Before going onto discussing the above questions, I will briefly describe the data and methodology. In order to explore the questions, I draw on cross-case studies

on regular supervisions carried out during 2011. Regular supervisions are conducted by state employed inspectors on a five year cycle in all municipal and independent schools, from pre-school to adult education. The case studies were planned and carried out by a research team, including myself. The municipalities and schools were chosen by diverse case selection (Gerring, 2007), focusing on demographic and economic structure (urban and rural areas) and previous inspection experience. The total number of schools studied was 11 (including three free schools). All names have been changed in order to preserve the confidentiality of the informants.

The case studies generated data on different aspects of the inspection process. Internal material of inspection includes interview manuals, judgement guidelines, memos, production schemes, and other working documents specifying how to conduct inspection. The case studies also included the official material accessible on the agency's website, such as the final inspection decisions, instructions for the schools, and the judgement points. Observations of inspection visits served to provide insights on the concrete and on-site usage and production of inspection knowledge and were recorded in written observation protocols. In a similar fashion, observations of the internal quality assurance meetings at SI where inspectors, team inspectors, and team lawyers deliberated on and finalized the official judgements were carried out. Observations also included informal discussions among the inspectors and inspectors' conversations during meetings, as well as before, during, and after the school visits. Interviews were conducted with inspectors (n 16) concerning their occupational and educational background, their views on what competencies and experiences are needed for adequate inspection, and the aims of and basis for their specific judgements. Finally, the case data provides comprehensive interviews with school actors, including teachers (n 22), head teachers (n 15), and responsible officials within municipalities and school companies (n 12), regarding different aspects of school inspection.

For this particular paper, I draw mostly on interviews with inspectors and officials representing organisers (municipalities or school companies) using the remaining data set as an implicit backdrop for validation and discussion. The chief executive officers (CEOs) of two large school companies became key informants due to their distanced overview, their rich experience, and their outspokenness in relation to the research themes. Inspired by Stake (2006)'s ideas on cross-case analysis, I worked with the cases and research questions in order to generate results and conclusions. The data set was familiar, as it had

been previously analysed and discussed in the project group. The analysis of evidence from the cases studies is selective, and in order to make a better view of the ‘mosaic’ possible, it postulates more homogeneity and logic in the inspection practice than daily experiences render visible (Stake, 2006, p. 40). Following Stake (2006), my working process is best described in terms of abduction (i.e., a continuous oscillation between theoretical concepts and data). I read the cases with the literature and the research questions at my fingertips. During the reading, I accumulated four themes while taking notes and underlining. In a phase of reduction, I then merged the data from the cases in a cross-case analysis and selected typical quotes that provided illuminating illustrations.

The first theme draws attention to the fundamental aspects of the inspectorate’s vision and inspectors’ seeing. The second theme is related to the potential conflict between the quest for formal rule compliance and the effectiveness of schooling — i.e., is schooling ultimately about doing things the right way or about doing the right things? The third theme that emerged is about equivalence and the inspectorate’s mission to secure children’s rights to equal access to education and the right to education of an equal quality. The final theme revolves around the basic conflict in an inspector’s vision between evidence-based and practical reason.

SEEING LIKE AN INSPECTOR

When the responsibility of school inspection was transferred from the National Agency for Education (NAE) to the Swedish schools inspectorate in the autumn of 2008, the state’s educational gaze changed. Lindgren et al. (2012)’s policy and document analyses show that key concepts before that time were more supportive of schools and municipalities and recognized local conditions. Later, a language with the intention of detecting shortcomings and supporting an ideology of juridification became apparent (Lindgren et al., 2012).

The focus on deficiencies is one important feature of contemporary regular inspection. Whereas the earlier NAE inspection’s reports offered positive *and* negative criticism, the SI reports focus mostly only on deficiencies — i.e., on aspects of schooling that depart from or fail to meet standards in legislation, curriculum, or school ordinances. This is an example of how the systems of ideas inherent in school inspection ‘make’ certain things in educational life visible and invisible.



Inspectors acknowledge that the current model of regular supervision is somewhat rigid and unable to capture complex and important aspects of educational processes. One inspector argues that:

[t]here is a risk with this model, that it is easy to count deficiencies [bullet points]. We all know that there might be one school that has three points that is not so good, while a school with seven points might be working just as good. If they [the school] has a really good work concerning the democratic aims, but has a plan against offensive behaviour that is not that good... well, then it is more important how this is [actually] played out in the school (...). It is difficult to capture this notion of quality in regular supervision, it is much easier to see what is right or wrong. There is a will to simplify, but this [schooling] is a complex activity, you cannot just translate it into statistics and whatever, it is much more complex than that (Inspector 2, Näver School).

Inspectors frequently refer to inspection using the analogy of vehicle inspection: a standardised procedure of box-ticking. School actors have also identified the formalistic approach of SI: regular supervision. The idea of a regular check directed to national requirements is not regarded as problematic, per se, but there are voices raised concerning the overall meaningfulness of such a design. As noted by one of the informants, school inspection is 'black and white per definition' because SI 'does not relate to the practical reality of schooling, but to the statutes' (CEO, Kornett School). The punctilious vision of inspectors, it is argued, tends to draw attention to extraneous problems:

They're coming in to look at paragraphs, and to see if paragraphs are being followed. They're not coming in to look at (...) they're not really scrutinising and examining the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They're not looking enough at the interaction between teacher-student. And they're not looking enough at what the principal does as a leader in the school to make it a success. I'm sure SI could visit a school that is run by an incompetent leader, but is extremely good with the school-law and make sure all forms and paper-works are in order and all his paragraphs are tipped, and they would leave and that particular principal would get a fantastic report. But the school would still be a disaster, so it's too geared towards meeting the little rules that just aren't that relevant (CEO, Eternell School).

In this respect, seeing like an inspector resembles Scott's notion of high modernism. Such a model of inspection serves certain political and administrative purposes, such as transparency, accountability, and control, but it tends to dismiss the practical problems of the disorderly world of schooling. In addition, SI also has other aims than the strictly regulative. For example, regular supervision is supposed to bring about *increased* goal attainment, quality, and equivalence. One way to analyse SI's vision is on the basis of its own aims in terms of performance. The inspectorate is geared to performance in congruence with the evidence-based model, which sees professional action in terms of intervention and effect. At the same time, SI is concerned with formal rule compliance in relation to national requirements. The question is whether the idea about performance is compatible with a formalistic and juridified vision.

DOING THINGS THE RIGHT WAY OR DOING THE RIGHT THINGS?

The case study data suggests that school actors sometimes frame the question of effects rather differently than SI. For example, when faced with a practical problem in school, teachers tend to reflect upon the situation using a repertoire of pedagogical knowledge and experience, rather than looking in the statutes. They might seek to solve local and pedagogical problems outside of the domain of formal rules or regulation. As shown above, school inspectors tend to see schooling more strictly from the horizon of what is formally correct. To put it in another way, SI tends to be concerned with efficiency (i.e., *doing things right*), whereas school actors are often more concerned with effectiveness (i.e., *doing the right things*). According to the informants, SI's primary focus is on how things are done, without considering *why* they are being done.

Their judgements tend to prioritize the details that they ask for (...) How does your plan look like? Is there a prescribed amount of teaching hours? Is there a school library? Are there routines for filed complaints? Is there information regarding the routines for filed complaints? These kinds of binary questions are very frequent (CEO, Kornett School).

When the inspector comes in, they're really there just to regulate the paragraphs in the school-law. And it seems to me to be very bureaucratic and



pointless in the sense, because although they seem to be much more focused on outcomes that schools produce now. A lot of our recent inspections have started with 'Oh, fantastic school, great results, very well-behaved students and excellent school', and then a series of injunctions where we haven't met a paragraph in the school-law. But obviously it's not really affecting our outcome. So my interpretation of the inspection here is that it's not very effective, it doesn't really improve schools. I think what it does is that it focus very much on aligning schools to the school-law. I don't think it's really designed to make effective schools (CEO Eternell School).

According to school actors, this mode of inspection influences education in unforeseen ways. There is a contradiction between, on the one hand, the strivings for equivalence and efficiency in the current education policies and, on the other hand, the effectiveness present within the realm of concrete educational settings.

I: How is that?

R: Yes, well, equivalence and the formalistic turn is ultimately aiming at unravelling that certain things are done. It is not aiming at developing how they are done or how they would be done best (...) The basic problem with Swedish education policy is the focus on how things are done and not on what shall be done. Nobody says, 'I don't care how you do, but you have a damn good school because you have a large quota of students reaching the goals' (...) Because you see, the big problem is that Swedish education is questioned and very criticised (...) Everyone wants to do the right thing, and that's why nobody is interested in discussing effects and results. 'Just tell me what to do and I will do it' (CEO Kornett School).

SI's version of regulatory evidence-based inspection, it is argued, is not geared toward effectiveness in schools and classrooms, but, rather, to efficiency within the particular frame work of the formalistic and juridified regular supervision. In the following, I address the circumstances that make possible this mode of knowledge production: What are the social, historical, and institutional historical conditions under which this particular form of inspection model can be authorised and legitimised?

INSPECTING EQUIVALENCE — EQUIVALENT INSPECTION

The claim for particular forms of equivalence is probably one important condition associated with regular supervision as a truth regime. One of SI's main tasks is to secure the question of educational equivalence — i.e., the individual child's right to equivalent schooling of good quality. In Sweden, the state's promise of equivalence is a utopian policy goal rooted in post-war social democratic narratives of education. During this period, education was seen as the most important vehicle for public welfare, economic development, and social justice. The fulfilment of this policy goal has become increasingly difficult because equivalence has appeared to be poorly compatible with de-regulation and marketization (see, for example, National Agency for Education, 2012). Following Scott (1998), SI's high modernism is fundamentally associated with the maintenance of democratic welfare (i.e., progressive prospects of securing individual rights and social justice).

However, equivalence is not only expected from the educational system as such, but from school inspectors' judgements. School inspectors are pressured to deliver reliable, independent, and objective judgements in order to make the reports explicit and clear, as well as to increase their potential to actually govern schools and provide accurate information to stakeholders (e.g., politicians, tax payers, and educational consumers). Formalisation of the inspection processes, internal programs (including surveys and self-assessments of inspectors' competencies), judgement points, templates, manuals, and internal quality assurance meetings are intended to secure equivalent judgements in the final decisions.

This quest for legally secure decisions and equivalent judgement leads to a preoccupation with simplification and formalities. Inspectors are inclined to use hard evidence, such as documents and statistics, rather than data contaminated with human interference, such as observations. As noted by Clarke (2010, p. 8; see also Cutler & Waine, 1998), this knowledge form tends to be associated with «generic management» — the belief that all organisations share common characteristics, and thus can be directed using a set of universal principles, knowledge and skills». It, thus, fosters a rationing inspection culture, a state vision that treats every school and governing body as precisely comparable and that deliberately and explicitly overlooks contextual aspects, including different local needs. Consequently, the SI decisions are void of contextual conditions. School actors, on the other hand, are sceptical to SI



judging all schools, whose preconditions are all radically different socially, economically, and culturally, by a standardized inspection model, including simple results measures.

In a way, the formalistic approach meet the need of defining the meaning of equivalence (...) But it is not very helpful to us as providers that SI are inspecting on the basis of their interpretation of the statutes. One would also like to have a more nuanced picture. I mean, it is not of very much help to get an inspection of a school in an exposed area that makes the observation that not all the students are reaching the goals. It is a bit nonsensical really (...) Can't they [SI] use SIRIS [the National Agency for Education's online information system on results and quality] and just relate their comment to that? It makes one wonder: who is the inspection for anyway? (CEO, Kornett School).

In sum, the case study data show a complex mixture and interplay between two different ways of understanding and judging pedagogical phenomena: the formal and juridical evidence-based model officially advocated by SI and the model based on practical pedagogical reason displayed in the realm of experienced inspectors and school actors. In the following, I highlight some examples of how these forms of reason are enacted by the inspectors.

REGULATORY/EVIDENCE-BASED VS. PRACTICAL REASON

In the data, there are many examples of how the more formal legal focus steers inspectors' seeing. In light of the inspection model, informal and local solutions guided by pedagogical intuition, experience, and values become problematic. One of many examples of this conflict between SI's formalistic and juridical perspective and schools' urge to solve pedagogical problems is derived from a feedback meeting after a school visit. The head teacher (HT) is asked about why they have placed a six-year-old student in special school (in Sweden, children can only enter this school form as they are about to start compulsory school at the age of seven):

Head Teacher: We think that special school is a proper environment for this child.

Inspector 1, Moss School: There is no special school for pre-school children. It is not correct to have a child in special school that is not registered.

Head Teacher: From a pedagogical point of view, it would have been wrong to place this child in a regular pre-school class — she would not have been given the pedagogical support she needs.

Inspector 1, Moss School: Formally, it is not correct (Feedback meeting, Moss School).

Sometimes, school actors might be ignorant of formal regulations. In other cases, they deliberately choose not to act on the basis of what is formally correct. During observations in one school, the inspectors noticed two different activities that were organised in order to meet the needs of students and that appeared to be some kind of remedial classes. In the interviews, they returned to this issue in order to determine the formal status of these activities. The thing was, if these activities were remedial classes, then the head teacher had to make the decision about it. The inspectors consulted the school ordinance in order to be sure about this, but they remained uncertain during the visit as to how to actually make the judgement. One of the responsible inspectors for this particular supervision reflected on this particular example and identified the conflict between the two forms of reason: «These are creative solutions to local problems outside the statutes (...) The question is whether they really know what they are doing (...) but, hey are trying to look after the kids, of course» (Inspector 2, Rönn School).

Sometimes, when SI staff members are out of public view, they reflect upon these issues. During one internal quality assurance meeting, there was a discussion about whether the head teacher of the small and rural Tall School was able to show that he had made the prescribed follow-ups of his school's results. At the meeting, the lawyer concluded that the inspectors needed to take a closer look at this, and he added: 'Small schools do not see any need for detailed documentation — for good reason. It is us that are so bureaucratic' (Quality assurance meeting, Lawyer, Tall school).

School actors' drive to find creative and informal solutions is often pushed by economic problems. During the SI interviews with teachers, they often returned to the issue of economic downsizing and its problematic consequences for the students. One striking feature of the SI judgement points is the silence regarding the schools' economic conditions. The SI decision-makers are very quiet about this issue; in fact, according to SI, it is the principle



organizer (municipalities and school companies) that is the guarantor for the economic situation.

Inspectors also describe creative and informal solutions associated with their own work. One of the inspectors explained how she approaches the dilemma of drawing lines between deficiencies and non-deficiencies in the process of making judgements and writing decisions:

[I] use to think like this: is this going to help this school? Do I think that they need to continue to work on this? Is it important that they do so? If so, I usually write about it. If not, if I see that they are already working on this issue, that they are on their way by themselves and I am confident that they will continue to work on it (...) Well, then I might not write about it (...) The important thing is to get the process going, if the process is already started, well then you can hesitate back and forth [concerning judgements] (Interview, Inspector 1, Moss School).

The inspectors' judgement-making looms largely as complex dilemmas, rather than as problems that admit to solutions applicable to some manual or checklist. This practical challenge is 'simultaneously cognitive and emotive' (Schwandt, 2005, p. 322): the inspector conceptualises the situation and reacts on it as she 'feels' the schools need. The above quote draws attention to the fact that inspection — for many of the inspectors — is not primarily concerned with finding evidence, but about *using knowledge* in order to develop the practices of schooling. This approach to inspection is not the only feature that bears resemblance to Eisner's notion of 'educational criticism'. Inspectors acknowledge the importance of good and close relations. They describe examples, such as the introduction of initial meetings before the regular supervision, in order to handle the nervousness of school actors. These meetings and conversations were not in the agency's process model, but they were introduced because the inspectors believed that they are a prerequisite for a fruitful dialogue and inspection.

Despite the detailed steering in terms of inspection manuals, the inspection process contains examples of inspectors going beyond formal instructions. In the accumulation of knowledge, experienced inspectors are asking supplementary questions that they find interesting and important, but that is not used directly as basis for judgement. One example in which an inspector goes beyond the manual is when Inspector 2 at the Rönn School asks the head

teacher, who is leaving his position, the following question: «Now, when you are quitting, you are leaving your computer and your office, but what else is it that you want to leave behind to your successor?» (Observation, Rönn School). These kinds of exceptions all touch on pedagogical aspects that seldom reach the final report, even though they are regarded as important by inspectors and school actors.

The inspectors' descriptions of judgement-making are often close to the idea of connoisseurship and outside of the manuals and official ideals of SI:

Usually, we can sense an atmosphere and we can 'read' how they talk to one another about the students. Such things say pretty much about how they perceive their own work....We have a trust in ourselves that we can judge when we see good and bad quality (Interview, Inspector 2, Rönn School).

Such 'tacit' and embodied bases for judgement are not congruent with positivist demands for hard evidence. Nevertheless, they are present in Swedish inspection activities and are regarded as inevitable by inspectors.

THE DUAL OPTIC — NOTES TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

Drawing on case study data from inspection processes and official documents, this article sought to provide insights on how the Swedish state sees schooling today, as it relies upon its technical rationality. Based on the data, I argue that Swedish school inspection could be described as a manifestation of what Scott (1998, p. 4) labels high modernism, or a 'state initiated social engineering'. Regular supervision is oriented towards goal attainment and deficiencies, as well as towards juridical aspects and results. The standardized regular supervision serves the legitimate purpose of detecting and pointing out deficiencies in a mission for equivalence and in the pursuit of poor quality. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate seeks to overcome problems of inspectors' judgement-making in terms of biased, nonfactual, and blurred descriptions. In the concrete work of inspectors, the demands on equivalent judgements, as well as the claim for objectivity and universality steer their foci to formal and juridical aspects about which it is possible to make judgements. Inspectors, thus, execute judgements foremost regarding the simpler or quantifiable aspects of



education manifested in evidentiary trails of documentation, and they tend to overlook the complex processes that produce certain results.

The focus on particular forms of equivalence tends to systematically dismiss local practices and knowledge that are indispensable to routine social life and solve pedagogical problems. The assemblages of tacit and oral knowledge that constitute pedagogical professionalism — both school actors' and inspectors' — is at conflict with the desirability of uniformity in the production of equivalence and rule compliance. To some extent, the well-intended protection of children's individual rights to equivalent education and educational wellbeing, which currently involves substantial state capacity, appears to be a threat to local practical knowledge.

At the same time, there are examples of inspectors bending the formal inspection guidelines in order to create space for and address aspects of the local pedagogical realities of schooling that they hold as important. Seeing like a Swedish school inspector, thus, involves a dual optic, an interplay between different forms of reason. In a sense, inspection processes resemble the knowledge use and production of most positivistic science, in the sense that the final text (the proof) has to follow a certain format and canon in order to be legitimate, whereas the actual and messy practice of inspection (science) always requires genius or *mētis* (Scott, 1998). Despite the attempts to blue print inspection activities, inspectors appear to find ways to navigate beyond the formal framework and discuss with school actors issues other than the ones directly advocated by SI policy. The school visits — and, particularly, the interviews — offer a space for professional deliberation and learning in the connoisseurship tradition à la Eisner (1985). To some extent, meetings between inspectors, as well as between inspectors and school actors, appear to function as relays where formal guidelines are mediated, renegotiated, and made meaningful. Drawing on the data, it is foremost experienced inspectors with educational backgrounds that make use of their discretion. To the extent that regular supervision is a powerful policy tool, this is partly due to inspectors' manipulation and adjustment of rigid models in relation to the realities of schooling. In a sense, decoupling of formal directives appears to be an important aspect of the *mētis* of school inspectors.

The notion of a dual optic, as suggested by the data, implies that the single continuum featuring an evidence-based model and a model based on educational connoisseurship, or *mētis*, fails to capture the complexity of school inspection as a mode of governing education. Further bottom-up empirical

studies is needed to provide claims about the linkage between practical work routines and contemporary performance and control regimes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges support from The Swedish Research Council (VR) for financing the project 'Governing by Inspection. School Inspection and Education Governance in Sweden, England and Scotland' (no 2009-5770, Segerholm, Lindgren, Rönnerberg). The author further acknowledges Umeå University for financing the project 'Inspecting the 'Market': Education at the Intersection of Marketisation and Central State Control' (no 223-14-09, Rönnerberg, Lindgren).

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Received: January 9, 2014

Final version received: March 10, 2014

Published online: May 12, 2014



