Local Quality Work – in the Age of Accountability

Abstract
This article analyzes how expectations about local quality work, formulated in Swedish national education policy, has changed over time and discusses how these changes can be understood in relation to the international education policy cooperation. The specific research question is: What can local systematic quality work be in the age of accountability, and what are the possible consequences for teachers’ practice? The concepts management of placement and management of expectation (Hopmann 2008) are used as a methodological frame to analyze the empirical material which consists of authoritative texts from successive Swedish governments and national school authorities during the last two decades. The analysis is relevant to curriculum theoretical research because of its focus on political processes, linguistic use and educational consequences (cf. Bergh 2010). The result shows that the expectations on local quality work changes radically during the studied period. The changes are, however, rather a consequence of the changed design of the education system than an answer to the question of what is educationally desirable. The article demonstrates both clear linguistic parallels between international and national policy, as well as how this is in the Swedish context is materialized through more concrete ‘breaks’. At the same time as the important question of what quality in education means has been denationalized, this is in the transnational cooperation subordinated expectations for Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. As a consequence paradoxical expectations land on the local level to be solved by the teachers, something that is discussed and problematized in the article.

Keywords: quality work, accountability, policy, teachers, Sweden.

Introduction
During the last decade educational researchers from different parts of the world have reported on a social transformation of education. In this discussion questions have been asked if this is the end of schooling as we know it, or why the question as to what constitutes good education has become so much more difficult to ask (Hopmann 2013, Biesta 2010). There seems to be no doubt that earlier education visions and traditions have been challenged, or even marginalized. Often presented explanations to this development highlight the influence from strong international organizations such as the EU (European Union) and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), and international trends as New Public Management, accountability and Total Quality Management (Bergh 2010). The many similarities on international and national policy level is today widely reported and discussed. However, what is also pointed out is that the formal curricula and their associated pedagogical practices remain largely under researched as elements in the governing of education (Sivesind, van den Akker & Rosenmund 2012). There is thus a need to gain more knowledge of how international policy takes shape in relation to national educational contexts.
In this article I will contribute to this by showing how local quality work has been highlighted in Swedish education policy during the last two decades and demonstrate how these efforts have changed over time. The analysis is based on a close reading of policy texts from successive Swedish governments and national school authorities from the last two decades, with a specific focus on the policy tools that have developed around the concept of quality for use at local level. The article will contribute with knowledge to the international education policy field by showing how international trends come about in the national curriculum context. The different structures connected to the quality concept, touching on all levels of the Swedish education system, can namely to a high degree be understood as closely related to the two last decade’s social transformation of the education system under the inspiration, or pressure, or influence of the international, or transnational, education cooperation (Bergh 2010). A central theoretical assumption in the article is that policy is not understood as a one-sided process of implementation, but rather as an ongoing process that implies interaction within and between several levels (Hopmann 2007; Gewirtz et al 2009). With this approach the overriding aim with the article is to analyze how educational actors on the national level, through their expectations about local quality work, do curricula and to discuss consequences of this doing, for teachers work at the local level. In addition to the contribution to international research, the article will also contribute to Swedish research about local quality work, both by a wider contextual understanding and by discussing what consequences the national governing might lead to for the local work with quality.

In Sweden, the quality concept was explicitly introduced in 1997 when the government stated that the quality of education is prioritized and that actions must be taken to raise and secure this on all levels of the education system (Skr 1996/97:112). When this was formulated, just a few years had passed since the early 1990s extensive reforms. After that, from 2006 and onwards another reform wave has been investigated, carried through and implemented. In this last reform wave the importance of local systematic quality work is strongly emphasized at the same time as the national control has been significantly strengthened (Bergh 2011; Rönnberg 2011, SFS 2010:800). From this double emphasis, i.e. on the local level on the one hand side and on the national level on the other, the specific research question for the article is: What can local systematic quality work be in the age of accountability and what are the possible consequences for teachers’ practice?

As already this research question indicates, I will argue that Swedish education policy has developed in line with what Stefan T. Hopmann (2008, p 418) characterizes as the age of accountability, “i.e. a fundamental transformation on-going in at least the Western world and which centers on how societies deal with welfare problems like security, health, resurrection, and education”. However, even if this can be said to be a clear tendency and thus dominant understanding, there are also other signals, or possible paradoxes, in the governing of education. For example, although the rhetoric as well as the design of the Swedish education system as a whole has changed a lot, as will be shown in the article, the government has stated that the education assignment is
still the same as it was formulated two decades earlier (Bill 2008/09:87). An important starting point is thus that the quality strived for in the early 1990s (even if the term quality was not frequently used in that time) emphasized ‘bildung’, democracy and an understanding of knowledge as constructed by people in interaction (Bill 1992/93:220). As an extension of these intentions expectations were formulated about a more qualified knowledge discussion where teachers were given increased responsibilities for the selection of content and decisions of how knowledge should be organized. This statement, that the education assignment is still the same as it was formulated twenty years earlier, will be problematized with starting point from how first quality reports, then quality work and later systematic quality work have been presented as means to achieve and improve equivalence and quality in Swedish education (cf. Bill 2009/10: 165).

The analysis is conducted in three steps. First, to understand educational policy in contemporary time, and to simultaneously make clear that the issue of quality supported by different prefix, is far from limited to Swedish education this article must be understood in relation to a wider context (cf Bergh 2010, 2011). Besides contextualizing, the purpose with the first step is also to develop methodological perspectives and concepts for the following analysis. Thereafter, in the second part, Swedish policy texts are analyzed from an interest in the expectations formulated about the local work with quality, and how those have changed over time. In the third part the focus shifts from expectations to experiences, with other words those empirical experiences that according to policy texts have been made from the local work with quality. Finally, in the concluding discussion the research question is answered and discussed, i.e. what local systematic quality work can be in the age of accountability and what the possible consequences for teachers’ practice are.

**Step 1: A social transformation of education in the age of accountability**

As a way to describe the stepwise transition towards what Hopmann (2008) calls the age of accountability, in which student achievement has become the prime indicator of the quality of schooling, he uses the concepts management of placement and management of expectation. The first, management of placement, is used as a way to characterize the development of the modern state in which schools, hospitals, prisons etc. were taken care of by institutions run by professionals, with a specific education on how to deal with so called ill-defined problems. The legitimacy of the whole placement strategy relied on its ability to cover new ill-defined problems, and the internal distribution of resources and evaluation of outcomes were mostly left to the professional themselves. However, with a growing mistrust and anxiety whether this strategy would be sustainable in the future it has successively been replaced by a management of expectation. In this, the attempt is to transform ill-defined problems into better defined expectations as to what can be achieved by whom and with given resources. A central point in this strategy is that only those outcomes that meet pre-defined expectations are considered as a success, something that for example very well can explain the status PISA today is given in many countries.
Even if most previous education policy research does not explicitly use the term management of expectation, I yet find it useful as a conceptual reflection of how a social transformation is going on in education. To begin with, earlier research demonstrates how the formulation of international policy has reshaped national frameworks for action, and concludes that it is appropriate to speak of a semantic of globalization (Maguire 2002, Schriewer 2000). In this way studies of educational borrowing and lending have become important for analysis of how foreign educational policy is referenced and adopted in national educational systems. Referring to existing models outside the national educational system, and appropriating the pertaining language, allows national policy-makers to implement educational reforms that would otherwise be contested (Steiner-Khamsi 2004). In this way imported policies produce a “hybrid homegrown version of educational reform” that meets local needs while drawing legitimacy from international policies (Spren & Valley 2006, p 101). Thus, according to previous research there is no doubt that national policies today is influenced by international trends and organizations (see also Biesta 2004, Ball, Maguire & Braun 2012).

However, in discussions about globalization, international and/or transnational influence etc. it is important to remember that cooperation between countries is in itself nothing new. From the Swedish case we can see that internationalization has been an important issue that has been discussed in relation to education at least since the 1970s, and probably much longer than that (Pettersson 2008). The ‘new’ is rather that the influence from powerful organizations, such as the EU and the OECD, have promoted a restructuring of horizon of expectation for the member countries and partners (Sivevind, van den Akker & Rosenmund 2012). Sotiria Grek and Martin Lawn (2009) use the term Europeanization and claim that the main arena for understanding education in Europe now is the emerging and common European space. They date a policy shift to 1997 where education shifted from being “a simple area of identity construction to a complex data-driven component of the new governance of Europe” (p 35; cf. Ozga 2009). A single event that is pointed out as an important turning point is the Lisbon Strategy, in which the EU in 2000 formulated the need for Europe to become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world” (Presidency Conclusions, 2000, p 2). This was two years later followed by a detailed work programme whose objectives included “Improving the quality and effectiveness of education…” (Council of the European Union 2002, p 15). Despite these intentions the Lisbon Strategy was soon after criticized in the so called Kok-report, because of its lack of ability to coordinate policy work between the member states (Kok 2004).

A decade after the Lisbon Strategy, in 2010, the European Commission presented the new strategy document Europe 2020. In a comparison between these two strategies, Andreas Nordin (2012) concludes that the softer governing attitude in the first is replaced by a more firm grip of education within the European countries (cf. Yates 2013). In EU 2020 education is pointed out as
one of the five areas where concrete measurable targets\textsuperscript{1} to be achieved are set (European Commission 2010). Under the head line “Delivering results – strong governance” the following is presented:

To achieve transformational change, the 2020 strategy will need more focus, clear goals and transparent benchmarks for assessing progress. This will require a strong governance framework that harnesses the instruments at its disposal to ensure timely and effective implementation (European Commission 2010, p 27).

From the influence of international policy follows that the issue of quality with its focus on clear goals and transparent benchmarks is a question for all countries within the EU, which national governments hardly can ignore (Bergh 2010). Despite this, researchers that have analyzed Swedish education policy claim that there on the one hand are many linguistic parallels, at the same time as there are few explicit references to documents or initiatives from the EU (Nordin 2012). This approach has been characterized as silent Europeanization of Swedish education, with silent borrowing and undeclared imports (Waldow 2009). So, despite the absence of problematization and an official debate, international standards-based curriculum reforms have exerted a considerable influence in Swedish education during the last years (Sundberg & Wahlström 2012). What also becomes clear from previous research is that the question of what quality more specifically means, in terms of what education is desired for, has not been central on the agenda, neither in the international education cooperation nor in the Swedish debate (Bergh 2010). As a consequence this question lands on the local level to be solved. Critical questions that then follows is what happens to those goals that cannot either be formulated in a clear way or be easily measured and benchmarked or, what happens if this ideal also becomes a norm for the social perception of what quality in education means? As Braun et al (2010, p 547) put it, “schools and teachers are expected to be familiar with, and able to implement, multiple (and sometimes contradictory) policies that are planned for them by others, while they are held accountable for this task”.

The increased influence from international trends and organizations is well documented in research, demonstrating similarities between countries on policy level. For the article the concept management of expectation is used to analyze changes in the governing, in the age of accountability, with its focus on restructuring of public institutions, re-tooling of legitimation and control patterns as well as “the pressure on systems and actors towards taking a reflexive stance towards themselves and taking responsibility for their own ‘well-being’” (Hopmann 2008, p 420). Several researchers have described similar changes in the governing of Swedish education, both in focus, in the language used and in discussions about the delivery of responsibilities between different actors. There are for example descriptions of how policy has changed from political and ideological standpoints to discussions about results and goal achievement, that there is a changed emphasis from “profes-

\textsuperscript{1} The measurable targets are set to tackle the problem of early school leavers and to increase the share of the population having completed tertiary education.
sional responsibility” towards “professional accountability” and questions have been asked what the demands on transparency means for the teaching profession (Bergh 2010; Dyrdal Solbrekke & Englund 2011; Levay & Waks 2006; Segerholm 2009). However, there is no previous research that have analyzed how the expectations on local quality work have changed over time, from an interest to discuss what local systematic quality work can be in the age of accountability and what the possible consequences for teachers’ practice are.

Step 2: Two decades of changing expectations of the local work with quality

**Early 1990s: Education for social equality – the quality concept on distance**

In Sweden there is a long educational tradition of the social and cultural project of building the nation and preparing for national citizenship (Sundberg & Wahlström 2012). In this tradition, which can be characterized as a management of placement strategy (cf. Hopmann 2008), the question of how teaching is to be conducted was primarily a matter for teachers to decide. As already mentioned this was a central point of departure in the early 1990s educational reforms. However, in addition to this there were also other signals in those reforms, with a potential to challenge the earlier tradition, especially the introduction of the new goal and result oriented system and, as will now be demonstrated, in combination with the way the quality concept successively has taken shape as a central tool in the social transformation of Swedish education.

In the years around 1990 the concept of quality was still on a distance from Swedish education. Despite that, quality was not a totally unfamiliar issue for the Swedish government. Already in the mid-1980s the Ministry of Industry was made aware of the problems faced by domestic industrial companies which were struggling to keep up with international competition (Hasselbladh & Lundgren 2002). As a response to this different actions were soon after initiated, with the purpose to actively promote quality development in the industrial and service sectors. Even if these concerns, by that time, not primarily included education the situation was in fact otherwise in other countries. When the government in the late 1980s report on tendencies from the international education cooperation it is namely pointed out that there in other countries is a concern for lack of quality in schools, that school is not good enough for driving the economic development and that there is an increasing interest for evaluation (Bill 1988/89:100). However, from the problems reported from the international education cooperation the government concludes:

> What seems particularly interesting in light of the educational reform ambition of social equality... is that school standards in Sweden is not only high... but even ... Differences between schools are smaller than in any other participating country (Bill 1988/89 : 100).

Nevertheless, already a few years later the government states that there is a well-established correlation between the quality of education, knowledge and economic growth (Bill 1992/93:220). As quality is a key competitive factor, the government argues, Swedish schools must be among the best in the world: “This is an inescapable fact in spite of all the reservations that can be made
about the difficulty of measuring school's quality…” (p 10). From these earlier standpoints the government ‘finally’, in 1997, explicitly announced that actions must be taken to raise and secure quality on all levels of the education system (Skr 1996/97:112).

1997: Introduction of the quality concept – emphasis on reporting quality

In 1997, when the government highlights the need to improve the quality of education, two new steering instruments are introduced: local quality reports and national quality reviews (Skr 1996/97:112). Through quality reports the expectation is to solve the problems noticed at local level with follow-ups, evaluations, and reported difficulties to govern through municipal school plans. One explanation that is given to why this has been problematic is that local civil servants and politicians are familiar with the complexity and thereby see the difficulties in doing fair descriptions and assessments. This, the government concludes, is in itself an important argument to why each level must be responsible for their own quality work: “There is otherwise a great risk that others with less good insight nevertheless make those judgments” (p 100).

The qualities that the government expected to improve in 1997 can be understood both in relation to the earlier social equality tradition and the challenging expectations of making Sweden more competitive in a globalized world. As an example of the first there is an argumentation where the municipalities’ evaluative role is pointed out as an important complement to the control conducted through the new grading system. The municipalities are namely particularly encouraged to bear in mind goals as justice and democracy.

Such an evaluation must take notice of basic goals as quality and equivalence in the education. Without quality equivalence is emptied of substance, and without equivalence the quality discussion leads away from the goals justice and democracy. Evaluations must ensure that students receive an equivalent education with the quality stated in the goals (Skr 1996/97:112, p 8).

What is important to notice here is the general emphasis on goals, and more specifically of the particular goals justice and democracy. The expectations are also directed at the local level, as it is there that segregation effects caused from the freedom of choice reform can be observed. However, besides those expectations that can be understood as expressions of a management of placement strategy, there are also expectations about reporting and improving goal attainment which can be understood in relation to the now beginning transformation according to management of expectation, even though this, in that time, is not particularly emphasized.

This tension is also reflected when the National Agency for Education2 (1999) two years later publishes their first general guidelines for quality reports. In the introductory lines it is made clear that the requirement with written reports does not mean that schools and local authorities impose new tasks “but only that the reporting of the follow ups and evaluations, which already is

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2 The National Agency for Education is onwards shortened as NAE.
an obligation… now should be made more clearly than before” (p 3). It is also emphasized that “national goals are open so that local circumstances and conditions can be expressed, when the goals are formulated locally” (p 7). So, on the one side there is an emphasis on the local work with school development through what can be called participatory goal setting (Forsberg 2000). On the other side there are ‘new’ expectations giving signals that the outcome of the education now will shall reported more clearly than before. This duality is also reflected when the overriding purpose is formulated, namely: “that reports shall serve as a means to develop and improve activities by making the school's results and work to meet the goals of the school are made visible” (p 2). One motive is thus to give teaching staff a joint picture as starting point for development oriented activities. In addition, besides these ‘internal’ motives there are also expectations that the quality of education shall be made visible for pupils, parents and other stakeholders, as well as for local and national school authorities. An interesting reminder of how things change is that the government just a few years earlier wrote that “teachers work […] cannot be controlled by state regulations” (Prop 1992/93:220, p 18).

1997-2002: A challenging period with demands on new solutions and actions

That the introduction of the quality concept challenged the division of responsibility between different actors in the school system and at the same time put demands on new solutions becomes clear from how quality is discussed in texts from the NAE around the year 2000. In 1999 the NAE (1999a) discusses the challenge that follows when they now, through the new national quality reviews, are expected to value schools in qualitative terms. Up to this time that has not before been done, as the standpoint has been that assessment of quality is a responsibility for the individual school and its local authority.

What we now face is a break from this position in the sense that we, through education inspectors, shall express us valuating in a wider scale... The requirement for quality reviews in fact means that the government has imposed the National Agency for Education to make (a certain kind of) assessments at school and local authority level (the National Agency for Education 1999a, 12).

In another text the NAE (1998a) discusses the possibility to use Total Quality Management (TQM) on the local level in Swedish education. From a tentative discussion the NAE concludes that there probably will develop "new formulas for quality" which don’t find its basis in the industrial development, but is more suited for education (p 36). The question of preconfigured quality models also comes back two years later when the NAE (2000b) report that they have experienced, from those municipalities that have acceded to special systems or models, that the character of the process becomes more of control than development, and that quantitative data are prioritized rather than qualitative.

In other typical discussions from the late 1990s work with goals and evaluations are emphasized as prerequisites for school development and management by goals (NAE 2000a). However, at
the same time as the explicit use of the concepts ‘quality work’ and ‘quality reports’ increases the argumentation about follow-ups and evaluations changes in character. From earlier discussions about school’s own development needs and pedagogical aspects of management by goals it successively becomes related to the governing performed by the local authorities. A typical comment that illustrates this is when the NAE (1998b) writes that there certainly are interesting things going on in many classrooms and schools, but that this is too easy to criticize as it is not documented. One hope is therefore that quality reports can contribute so that schools better describe their activities to others. But, when focus moves towards the municipal level a discrepancy arises between the municipal vision and everyday school life. As the NAE (2003, pp. 48-49) formulate it, the development of the education system seems to "rush on paper but hasten slowly in reality". This comment, I argue, can well be used as an example how the social understanding of education was about to change from the previous management of placement tradition to the management of expectation strategy.

2002: A linguistic break – from school development to goal attainment

In 2002 there is a clear break in the political rhetoric about quality, as the government that year declares the need to intensify national efforts, to speed up development and to raise the quality of education (Skr 2001/02:188). The message, that actions now must be taken to remedy deficiencies that prevent goal achievement, is expressed even more clearly in the government’s quality programme published the following year (Government Offices 2003). In that programme, democratic motives are no longer mentioned, but have been replaced by an emphasis on individualization and the need to develop straightforward information and quality control.

The quality reports will now get clearer rules and be further developed, so that they in an easily accessible and comparable way show how the school manage to achieve the national goals and what steps need to be taken to overcome possible shortcomings (Government Offices, 2003, p 10).

The dominant political expectation from 2002, that “Sweden shall be a leading knowledge nation”, is both in time and intention close to the Lisbon Strategy from 2000 (Government Offices 2003, p 2).

When the NAE (1999, 2006) a few years later replaces the first version of the general guidelines for quality reports with a later version this is in line with the changed political rhetoric. As a consequence previous arguments on the importance of local goal interpretations and the work with the municipality’s school plan and local working plan are no longer mentioned. The central expectation, already mentioned in the foreword, is instead that the guidelines "shall help to strengthen a systematic quality work and thereby improve the schools’ work and goal achievement" (2006, p 5). Compared to the previous guidelines the range of the text increases approximately three times, new requirements are added, the importance of participation and involvement is emphasized, as well as that the quality report should be used to provide information of school
activities and goal attainment. The increased use of the concepts systematic quality work, improvement and goal attainment gives a good indication of what the dominating expectations are.

**2006 and onwards: From political rhetoric to structural transformation**

With start from 2006 there is an extensive restructuration of the Swedish education system in accordance with the linguistic change a few years earlier. The dominant expectation is now that Sweden shall be a successful country and that Swedish schools can achieve significantly better results. This requires, the government states, “an education system that has the capacity to see the potential of every pupil” (Prop 2008/09:87, p 7). Such a system presupposes a chain of interrelated links: “The state is presumed to formulate goals in terms of steering documents curricula and syllabi that "talk to" the teachers in a clear and effective manner. The teachers, in turn, are assumed to read the state's intentions in an insightful way” (SOU 2007:28, p 166). From these starting points the education system as a whole is investigated, decisions are made and changes are implemented within the period of just a few years.3

Altogether this also means that the conditions for local work with quality changes. Some of the most visible changes is that the requirement of obligatory quality reports from 1997, as well as the earlier demands on school plans and local work plans are removed (SFS 2010:800). At the same time as this is done the quality concept is given a strengthened juridical position, as quality together with the influence concept now forms the fourth chapter in the new Education Act. The reason for bringing those two concepts together in a joint chapter, Quality and Influence, is according to the government, that there are several similarities between them, and also that “the government wants to stress the importance of these elements in a goal and result oriented system” (Bill 2009/10:165, p 302). With this linkage the demands on local school actors to make educational activities transparent are strengthened. Besides providing information for municipalities and national school authorities there are expectation that pupils and parents, by gaining access to important information, will be more involved, and thereby achieve better opportunities to make choices and influence the development. The ultimate purpose is increased quality and improved goal fulfillment. With these starting points the government states:

> National equivalence in a decentralized system requires that the state sets national goals and systematically follows up and reviews that the goals are achieved and that a systematic quality work is developed at the local level [...] The government's strengthened requirements with more frequent and systematic evaluation of school quality, among other things through an extension of inspection activities and more national tests, means that there is no longer the same need for

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3 For example, there is a new curriculum with associated syllabuses, a new grading system, new and more national tests, reformed teacher education and a reorganization of the national school authorities, with a changed assignment for the National Agency for Education and a significantly strengthened inspection by the new established National School Inspectorate.
detailed regulation of how the quality work should be conducted locally (Bill 2009/10:165, p 303).

That there now is a sharper national system for controlling schools’ quality is also the argument that the government put forward as a response to those remise bodies who have expressed concerns that the local quality work will deteriorate if the demand on written reports is removed. However, although the later decision of removing the regulation there are still demands that local authorities and schools must document their systematic quality work. Even though the government chooses not to specify any detailed regulation about content and structure it is nevertheless said that it is reasonable that the documentation include information on results and goal attainment, as well as analysis of areas for improvement and decisions on planned actions.

The concrete examples given of what the local authority is expected to do is about analysis of variations between schools’ results and achievement, and of equivalence in the schools' assessment and grading. The local authority is also expected to act if there are complaints, to correct deficiencies and to be responsible for the availability of a systematic and accessible documentation of results and quality work. Based on the given examples from what this documentation may include I conclude that it is primarily quantitative data respective subject oriented results, such as: “information on teacher ratio at school level, grades, results of national tests and inspection reports, which allow a comparison between different schools” (Bill 2009/10: 165, p 305). Also at school level goal achievement is emphasized: "That teachers and preschool teachers systematically act to develop their teaching in order to thereby improve goal attainment is central to enhance quality in preschools and schools" (p 308). The government also refer to the proposal from the inspection commission (SOU 2007:101), that schools before an inspection shall write a self-evaluation, and states that the investigator's intentions for quality work at school level is well in line with the government's opinion.

The Education Inspectorate’s review assignment ought to be based on a self-evaluation where the local school authority and the principal report the quality of the education they are responsible for. A self-evaluation may contain two parts. One can be a declaration of compliance according to the rules. The second may contain assessments of the work with the knowledge assignment (SOU 2007:101, s 14).

A conclusion that can be drawn from this citation is that the information asked for is just a limited part of the whole education assignment as formulated in the national curricula. While the knowledge assignment and legal compliance with the rules are highlighted other goals and values are not mentioned, such as the earlier emphasized democracy and ‘bildung’ concepts or the discussions about a dynamic knowledge concept with room for creative, aesthetic and ethical dimensions (cf. Bill 1992/93:220). There is thus a clear gap between the earlier education vision and the now dominating expectation of improving the results in order to make Sweden a successful country. The shift from an emphasis on goals to an emphasis on results is thus reflected in the
The use of the quality concept as well as in the way expectations are formulated about the local work with quality (cf. Segerholm 2009, Wahlström 2009). One thing that the systemic approach with a sharper national system for controlling school’s quality reflects is thereby that the 1990’s decentralization intentions with local school development have been replaced by national efforts to build a goal and result oriented steering system. These expectations are far away from those about local participation in goal setting in combination with evaluations made by competent pedagogical staff, formulated two decades earlier.

**Step 3: Empirical experiences of local work with quality**

While the Swedish situation in the early 1990s above has been characterized as an expression for management by placement this was successively challenged between 1997 and 2002, and 2002 there was a clear linguistic break when this tradition was marginalized by the challenging strategy of management of expectation (cf. Hopmann 2008). Even though there are few explicit references to the international education cooperation there are thus clear parallels in time, both to the international policy shift in 1997 and the development that was initiated through the Lisbon Strategy soon after the new millennium (cf. Grek & Lawn 2009; Nordin 2012). In this way a social transformation similar to what has been reported from other countries has taken place in Swedish education, where local actors in the education system now are held accountable for achieving the national goals and that the education meet the juridical demands on legal safeguards. Thus, from the early introduction of *quality reports*, with a rather limited focus on the yearly report itself, the expectations of the local work with quality have radically changed. Instead of the written document the attention successively rather becomes directed at the work with quality, i.e. the *quality work*, and eventually with an increasing emphasis on this to be *systematic*. But, what do we know about how the local work with quality works? To answer this question reports by the national school authorities are now referenced, with experiences from both controlling and supporting activities. Thus, we now shift focus, *from expectations to experiences*.

In 2000 the NAE (2000b, p 50) report that it is difficult to get a grip on how the Swedish school system "really works" on basis from the quality reports. It is also reported that there are few clear and assessable goals and that there is an uncertainty amongst staff at the local level on how to assess their own results. Not even when assessments are made, it is certain that these are used to analyze goal attainment and to formulate actions. The fact that teachers thereto often are unaware of both the ordinance on quality reports and the NAE’s general advice is said to be remarkable. There is also a discussion if the quality in the reports would be strengthened if the interval between the reports was longer: “Or could it be that quality report as an instrument promotes quantitative aspects at the expense of others? And what can then be done to counteract this” (p 50)?

The question of what the purpose with quality reports is, in accordance with the intentions of the regulation (NAE 1999), returns several times. Even if the observed problems are discussed in relation to the different purposes, the purposes themselves are not questioned and neither the
possible tensions that might raise between them. Explanation to why the work with quality reports does not function as it is intended is instead searched from shortcomings on the local level. Nevertheless, what is commented is that there has been a shift in the government’s commitment, as the requirements for municipalities to report on educational quality now are put forward in a much clearer way.

The Agency’s view is that the clarifications and actions by the state do not lead to conscious fabrication of quality reports where important shortcomings are withheld or information distorted. Rather, one can assume that the deficiencies in municipal quality reports, as noted, relate to difficulties in reaching the insights and skills necessary to work on evaluation and quality reports – a process that independently of external conditions takes time. That the work with quality reports can have several purposes - both in terms of local development instruments and national policy documents – will hopefully contribute to that transparency in Swedish schools increase, but also to keep the discussion of the Swedish school alive (National Agency for Education 2001, pp. 24-25).

A few years later, in 2004, the first year’s activities are reported from the new and strengthened education inspection. Despite all the earlier reported problems the NAE (2004, p 35) expresses that the inspectors believe there is a "great development potential in quality work at both school and municipality level". Nevertheless, despite this positive message it is also reported that a large number of schools are criticized. The shortcomings are described as serious, as the government already in 1997 stated the requirement and then later clearly has emphasized the importance of quality work as a way to improve goal attainment (cf. Skr 1996/97:112, Skr 2001/02: 188).

It thus appears as a number of schools and municipalities have not yet understood the possibilities of using systematic quality assurance work to support pupils in their efforts to achieve a good result in their school work or do not yet realize the duty they have according to the national curricula. Nor it appears that they have decided not to do quality reports as they have other established, well working tools for quality work (National Agency for Education 2004, p 35).

Based on a shortage recurrently noted, that employees often are not involved in quality work, it is concluded that this hardly promotes quality awareness and responsibility for development of education and teaching. The lack of participation “of course, reduces possibility for the school to gain knowledge and control over which processes are successful and which should be improved” (NAE 2004, p 35). The next following year it is reported that the deficiencies have even further been strengthened, which is said to be "serious indications that all opportunities to raise the goal attainment in the Swedish school system are not utilized" (NAE 2005, p 37). A similar conclusion is drawn another couple of years later when it is emphasized that planning and evaluation are not sufficiently and that the deficiencies are major in terms of quality reports. "Here the Edu-
To conclude, for about a decade the national school authorities have intensively reported on the discrepancy between the national intentions and the local work with quality. Instead of seriously problematizing the idea itself the focus has rather been to find practical explanations, to thereby search for solutions to overcome the difficulties. For example, the identified problems have been explained with that the local staff have not understood, that they have not taking the quality questions seriously and that they have not yet reached the insights and necessary skills. In the light of the strong criticism that the national school authorities recurrently have directed to the local authorities and schools for their analytical shortcomings, the absence of a more qualified analysis from the national actors might be seen as surprising. Despite all the problematic experiences made there is no critical reflection, for example in relation to the hesitation formulated by the government already in the early 1990s: “of all the reservations that can be made about the difficulty of measuring school's quality…” (Bill 1992/93:220, p 10). In the next following years, from 2006 and onwards, the unquestioned ‘truth’ is on the contrary that “an equivalent school demands that legal safeguards and the quality in education can be secured” and that it for the pupils’ best is of “utmost importance to early pay attention to and point out shortcomings” (Bill 2009/10:165, p 538).

**Concluding discussion**

To be continued…
References


SFS 2010:800. Skollag.


