Mediating school inspection –
Key dimensions and keywords in agency
text production 2003–2010

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Abstract
This paper reports on an analysis of how school inspection in Sweden – its aims, directions and procedures – is portrayed in texts produced by the responsible national authorities. The study involves a textual analysis of official annual accounts and plans (texts directed to the government, municipalities, schools and the public) produced by the National Agency for Education and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate. The analysis concentrates on key concepts conveying the dominant ideas of inspection and education. The analysis is structured around four dimensions that are based on an understanding of inspection as education governance and on the characteristics of the Swedish education system. The results suggest that the rhetoric and dominant ideas of schools inspection changed when the responsibility for inspection was transferred to the Swedish School Inspectorate in the autumn of 2008. Key concepts before that time are more supportive of schools and municipalities, recognising local conditions. Later, a language with the intention of detecting shortcomings and supporting an ideology of individual rights and juridification is apparent.

Keywords: school inspection, education governance, the inspectable school, equivalence, juridification

Introduction
The current policy drive to improve the performance of education systems in Europe is accompanied by a general increase in inspection activities (van Bruggen, 2010). Inspection is, by its very nature, also part of the contemporary governing of education in that it sets criteria for what is to be regarded as good education or a good school (Ball, 1998), and often incorporates some means to make schools and municipalities act in accordance with these requirements (De Wolf & Janssens, 2007; Ehren & Wisscher, 2006; Gaertner & Pant, 2011).

Like in other European countries, in Sweden policy-makers put great trust in inspections as a means of steering. One crucial aspect of inspection as a governing tool is the production of data and text. Inspectorates produce immense quantities of documents.
Following Scott (1998, also see Lawn, 2011: 68), we argue that such texts are expressions of how state agencies see education, “and in the process of ‘seeing’ it, simplifies, alters, re-imagines and reshapes it”. As pointed out by Börjesson (2011: 23), the Schools Inspectorate carries out “rhetorical work” in which the agency “linguistically constructs both itself and political goals that are to be achieved”. Accordingly, an intimate connection exists between school inspection, governing and text production. Education policy and practice change in and through inspectorate documentation, meaning that documentation has a constitutive effect on inspection, governing and education.

This article aims to advance our understanding of the Swedish inspection regime. We study the official discourse of state agencies responsible for the supervision of preschool activities, the welfare of schoolchildren, school management and adult education in Sweden. Attention is drawn to official texts (i.e. brochures, annual reports and plans, web pages etc.) in which Skolverket (the National Agency for Education) and Skolinspektionen (the Swedish Schools Inspectorate) describe their own activities and account for and report on their commission to the government, local policymakers, practitioners and the general public.

These texts are often based on topoi, seemingly accepted liberal and humanistic truths about education and individual rights and the consequent need to improve and review. However, our starting point is that they are also part of an argumentative scheme. We seek to trace ideas in text production and understand how systems of ideas change. Further, we hope to learn more about the constitution of the self-image of state agencies and their activities (Van Dijk, 2006). The analysis is centred on a number of ideological dimensions related to the values, aims and methods of the agencies, but also on their style and overall rationality as organisations.

The study is part of the bilateral research project “Governing by Inspection” which examines the ways in which inspection regimes may be understood as governing education in three national education systems: Sweden, England and Scotland.

**Historical and organisational context**

Before we move on to describe the design and basis for the study we need to briefly outline the recent historical and organisational context of Swedish school inspection. School inspection is not new in Sweden and dates back to the 1860s. However, its function, intensity and scope have varied over time. Moving on to more recent policy changes, inspection was marginalised in reforms of the 1990s. At this time, ideas on decentralisation and less central state involvement were seen as solutions to school problems, and the focus on supervision and control was downplayed. The national agency Skolverket was founded in 1991 and the dissemination of knowledge and information became central tasks along with evaluation and follow-up. The agency was to halt at the municipal border and not enter individual schools. Thus, there were, for instance, no systematic audits of an individual school’s compliance with the national regulations during this period. Yet this soft and dialogue-oriented approach
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employed by Skolverket attracted criticism (Rönnberg 2008; cf. Ekholm & Lindvall, 2008; Granström & Lander, 2000; Nytell, 2006).

Our focus here is on the most recent period of school inspection: 2003–2010. In 2003 it was decided by the then social democratic government to revive school inspection and make Skolverket responsible for its introduction, design and implementation. The inspection model involved three main areas:

- Results: Norms and values, Knowledge
- Activities: Work on norms and values, Teaching, Steering, Management and Quality Work
- Conditions: Access to information and education, Resources

After a shift in government, in 2007 a new structure for inspection with three main areas was introduced: Knowledge, norms and values, and leadership and quality work. Put another way, knowledge was emphasised over resources. In addition, a separate inspection agency, Skolinspektionen, was opened in October 2008. Several inspectors were transferred from Skolverket to the new agency. Skolinspektionen also hired additional staff with a background in education or, for instance, social scientists and people trained in law. Skolinspektionen has thus strategically recruited staff with occupational training other than in education. The inspection model drew explicit attention to attainment/goal fulfilment and leadership, and also introduced the individual rights of pupils as a separate area to be inspected. In all, it included four areas to be assessed:

- Attainment/goal fulfilment and results
- Educational leadership and development
- Learning environment
- Individual pupils’ rights

After the shift in government in 2006, the non-socialistic coalition now in government pursued an extensive education reform agenda. One of the four parties in the coalition, the Liberal Party, explicitly focused on education policy in its election campaign and its leader was also appointed Minister of Education. All in all, the reforms were to encompass, for instance, a new teacher and head teacher training programme, a new school act, curricula and grading system and a reformed upper secondary school system. These changes were also accompanied by increasing efforts towards evaluation and control. For example, the use of national tests was intensified. As previously mentioned, and as an important part of this extensive reform agenda, additional resources were also directed to school inspection. However, it should be noted that the Liberal Party’s education reform agenda was neither opposed nor questioned by the Social Democratic party (Rönnberg, 2010). Indeed, this party was in office at the time of the resurrection...
of school inspection in 2003. Instead, the Social Democrats formed an education policy agenda after the electoral defeat in 2007 that bore a strong resemblance to what the Liberal Party and the Minister of Education was proposing (Socialdemokraterna, 2007). After also winning the election in 2010, the non-socialist coalition was given four more years to implement and consolidate the far-reaching reforms.

As this study focuses on state agencies and their texts, it should be mentioned that Swedish agencies are often portrayed as largely autonomous from a comparative perspective (Pierre, 2004). This “provides the government agencies with pretty much free scope to complete the Governments general aims within the limits of some overarching instructions, a negotiated budget from the Cabinet, and with politically appointed General Directors. However, that does not mean that the agencies are left completely without steering and control from ‘above’” (Hall, Nilsson & Löfgren, 2011: 2f). Bo Rothstein (2005) and others have argued that, despite their autonomous status, state agencies have increasingly been used as tools to disseminate political propaganda since the 1990s (cf. Kjellgren, 2002). Recent governments have pursued an overall policy to reduce the number of agencies, especially those alleged to have an ideological or normative function (cf. SOU, 2007:79: 122). Yet the politically difficult issues concerning the governing role and function of agencies are by no means resolved.

Notes on data selection and methods
In our data selection, we sought to identify a particular genre of texts, i.e., published texts in the form of official annual accounts and plans, and texts and brochures directed to municipalities, schools, the public and the government. As far as we know, the selected texts were the total corpus in this genre (see the table below). The material was chronologically separated into two periods: the first period from 2003 to 2007 (Skolverket) and the second period from 2008 to 2010 (Skolinspektionen).

The selection of texts was based on our idea that the texts should display how the inspection agencies described their inspection activities in general terms; their tasks being to determine whether and how well schools are functioning in relation to the regulations set out in the Education Act: school curricula, programme objectives, course syllabi, grading criteria and other national steering documents that govern education activities. Inspection activities consist of four types of examination processes irrespective of the agency involved: supervision, quality assessments, certification of independent schools and certification of complaints, all described in the texts we examined. We were not interested in reports on decisions concerning particular municipalities or schools, or internal agency texts describing detailed processes, but texts that could tell us something about the directions, views and ideas on education and governing that underpinned the inspection activities as presented to outsiders.

The selected texts (approximately 20) were divided among us for reading and analysis. We were selectively inspired by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in that we focused on the historical and social contexts of the texts rather than their linguistic
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The site of text production, or what Taylor (2004: 437) calls “the networks of social practices” (described above), was continually considered as the context of analysis for the study. We concentrated “on the ideological work of the policy texts in representing, relating, and identifying” particular educational problems and solutions as well as what constitutes good education and good education governance (Taylor, 2004: 437). Throughout our reading, we identified and sorted terms, concepts and expressions that were both frequently used and carriers of central meaning or values in relation to the ideological dimensions and the research questions. In order to maintain some coherence in our collective analytical process, one central text from each period was analysed collectively. Our choice in this respect was the annual reports to the government from 2003 and 2010, i.e. texts that emerged in a similar format throughout the studied period. This joint inquiry was not an attempt to locate any objective truth about the content, but deepened our understanding of the texts and the ideological dimensions.

To illustrate some of our findings, we have translated some quotations from the texts from Swedish into English, fully aware of the problems such operations pose to the processes of interpretation and understanding.

Table 1. Overview of selected texts

| Period  | Agency | Primary audience | Documents/sources |
|---------|--------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1st period 2003-2007 | National Agency for Education (Skolverket), Established in 1991. Regular school inspections in individual schools on a six-year cycle from 2003 to 2008. | 1) Government 2) Practitioners and general public | 1) Skolverket (2003c) Annual report 1) Skolverket (2004c) Annual report 1) Skolverket (2005a) Annual report 1) Skolverket (2006) Annual report 1) Skolverket (2007) Annual report 2) Skolverket (2003a) Study guide. To examine and develop quality. 2) Skolverket (2003b) To examine and develop quality 2) Skolverket (2004a) This is the National Agency for Education 2) Skolverket (2004b) The Swedish National Agency for Education’s Educational Inspectorate. Inspecting for improvement. 2) Skolverket (2005a) Inspecting for improvement – a brochure about the National Agency for Education’s Educational Inspectorate. |
| 2nd period 2008-2010 | Swedish Schools Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen), Established in 2008, Regular school inspections in individual schools on a four-year cycle (approx.) differentiating depth and length of inspection and well-functioning schools receive less attention. | 1) Government 2) Practitioners and general public | 1) Skolinspektionen (2009) Plan for 2010 1) Skolinspektionen (2010c) Annual report 2010 2) Skolinspektionen (2010a) Supervision and quality assessment 2009 2) Skolinspektionen (2010b) We sharpen the pen 2) Skolinspektionen (2010d) several web pages at www.skolinspektionen.se: About us/themes/; Supervision; Complaints; Quality assessment; Regular Supervision; Our activities. |

features (Fairclough, 2003; Taylor, 2004).
Ideological dimensions

We sought to analyse processes of social change in the selected texts, and specifically attempted to identify and discuss a number of “ideological dimensions” (Bergström & Boréus, 2005). These dimensions, all related to the values, aims and methods of inspection, are regarded as continua where change is understood as “overlapping and simultaneous” and not of a certain quality within a dualistic framework (Segerholm & Lindgren, 2011: 54). Our starting point was a broad notion of ideology, i.e. that these ideas are part of some kind of organised belief system and not “merely long, unordered sets or mere lists of beliefs” about education and governance (Van Dijk, 2006: 118). In part, the reason for this is the nature of our objects of study; writers of these kinds of official documents normally strive to enhance coherence. However, this assumption about organisation does not imply that the ideas are in any way consistent. On the contrary, our approach to them implies that they might be heterogeneous and inconsistent.

We see the relationship between, on the one hand, language and knowledge and, on the other, the social reality of education and inspection practice as non-linear, unpredictable and fragile. Our perspective resembles Dahler-Larsen’s “third view” (Dahler-Larsen, 2011: 152) in that we ultimately see the problem of the constitutive and governing power of language or text as an empirical question. Since our starting point is based on CDA, and to use the words of Rose and Miller (1992: 176-177), we see the highlighted state agencies as “discursive devices” for “conceptualising and articulating ways of ruling” and we seek to explore relationships between the texts and wider social contexts. In the final discussion, we thus move beyond the studied texts, suggesting a few tentative interpretations about how they construct representations of education, social relationships and identities which are on one hand inter-textually related to other policy texts and on the other hand connected to overall changes in the education system (cf. Taylor 2004). In the following we motivate our choice of ideological dimensions and relate them to our research questions.

The first ideological dimension is about the balance between equality and diversity. The tensions in this dimension are made visible by the concept of equivalence. Equivalence is definitely the keyword in the history of Swedish education, and it has played an important role in shaping educational policy (Englund, 2005). It is a concept with shifting and contested meanings that holds a performative function in the sense that it simultaneously describes, constructs and legitimises different ways of representing education and its goals (Englund & Quennerstedt, 2008). As a keyword, it is a semantic magnet with positive connotations that are almost impossible to question (Rönnberg, forthcoming). Basically, equivalence is about geographical, gender, social and ethnic equality in education (geography and gender are mentioned in the curriculum, geography in the Education Act (the former SFS 1985:1100 and the new one valid from 1 July 2011 SFS 2010:800).
In the post-war period, the state used a common curriculum and equally allocated resources to ensure that all students would have a shared and equal educational experience (Englund, 2005). In the waves of decentralisation during the late 1980s and 1990s, the question of equivalence was solved increasingly by local and individual choices, solutions and adaptations (Englund, 2005). Interestingly, the current coalition government has returned to a more centralist approach. In the new School Ordinance (SFS 2011:185), there is a particular emphasis on structured and teacher-led teaching. The Minister of Education presented this shift in policy by promoting particular instruction methods (Björklund, 2011).

Diversity also relates to issues of stratification or elitism. The education minister has introduced elite classes in compulsory education, and the growing opportunities for school choice in the de-regulated school market have opened up new possibilities for ‘the elite’ to choose their educational paths (Lidegran, 2009). Overall, the state regards school inspection as one of the most important policy tools to address the problem of increasing school segregation and the adherent decrease in equivalence. The questions we pose here are: *What is the meaning of equivalence in the official inspection rhetoric, and how is the goal of inspection formulated in relation to the dimensions of equality and diversity?*

Another theme in research on state school inspection is the balance between development and control, and support and pressure (Barber, 2007). Research on soft and hard forms of governance and soft and hard policy tools becomes relevant at this point (Lawn, 2006; Jordan et al., 2005). Should inspection primarily support the development of schools through dialogue, or is absolute control the most productive strategy? The ambiguity between control and development has long been recognised in the field of evaluation, predominantly as an issue of different evaluation purposes and appropriate designs and methodologies (e.g. Dahler-Larsen, 2009). This dimension also highlights the question of whether inspection is to be carried out by an external agency or if is better left to the local actors themselves. Yet another aspect of this problem concerns the methods and techniques used to build the basis for development or control. Soft techniques usually involve internal or self-evaluation or sample-based thematic evaluations with qualitative methods, like interviews and observations. These approaches are often – but not always – based on nearness, mutuality and dialogue. Hard techniques consist of performance monitoring and the use of indicators, target setting, national testing, ranking lists and external evaluation based on distanced, neutral and objective approaches. Overall, this discussion relates to normative divisions in terms of external/friendly inspection and technocratic-reductionist/professional-contextualist views of education (Thrupp, 1998). The research questions are: *How can the official descriptions of the agencies’ work be understood in terms of development and control, external and internal inspection and soft and hard techniques?*
Related to these issues is the matter of technical independence (Clarke, 2008) or judgment in inspection activities. Here, we acknowledge that inspectorates stand in a particular relation to governing knowledge (Ozga, 2008). Two basic models can be identified in the literature. One is the evidence-based policy model which derives from supposedly objective and neutral judgments. The other model builds on the idea that embodied and encoded expert knowledge (a kind of inspector-connoisseurship or artistry) forms the most appropriate basis for judging schooling (Eisner, 2007).

In the first model, reliability and stability are secured by the quality of instruments and techniques themselves. Ideally, the personal values and ideals of inspectors are filtered away. Judgments are based on comparisons based on standards and ideas on a normal distribution. Data are seen as both evidence and the absolute basis for judgments. The validity of professional judgment, in contrast, is tied to the background, training and, most importantly, the experience of the inspector, and builds on standards that are internalised versions of corporate or collective judgments (Smith, 2000).

Our questions here are: Which forms of knowledge does the Swedish inspection regime prioritise, and what is the relationship between professional judgment and expertise, and evidence?

In the following section, we turn to our analysis of the texts using the ideological dimensions of equality and diversity, development and control, soft and hard techniques, and expertise and evidence. The analysis is presented chronologically, starting with the first period (Skolverket) and finishing with the second period (Skolinspektionen).

**The first period: 2003–2007**

**Equivalence and elite**

In the texts from the first period there is a strong emphasis on equivalence and the idea that every student has the right to an equal education. The provision of monetary steering instruments for municipalities and schools to better achieve goals, and guarantee quality and equivalence is seen as a policy tool to achieve the ultimate aim of review: “the right of each individual to knowledge and personal development” (Skolverket, 2005a: 7). As a question of an individual right, equivalence comes down to ensuring “fairness and consistency in grading students” (Skolverket, 2005a: 7).

The explicit references to equivalence are scarce in the annual report of 2003. Referring to the government approval document, (regleringsbrevet in Swedish) it is stressed that Skolverket ought to “maintain the students’ right to a nationally equivalent education” (Skolverket, 2003c: 31). In the 2007 report, there are more explicit examples of different aspects of equivalence in education for students. One example is the inspections’ focus on possible differences in equal opportunities for students in big cities versus back-country schools, and another is the lack of equivalence concerning the organisation of education for children with special needs and refugees in different municipalities. Topics of concern also include the schools’ work with norms and values.
and with quality assurance. At the end of this period of inspection, more emphasis is put on student knowledge and the need for schools to evaluate student progress.

**Development and control**

During this period, there is a mixture between the tasks of developing and monitoring schooling, but on the whole there is a stronger emphasis on development. In 2003, Skolverket implemented a new conceptual framework by replacing the words “evaluate” and “develop” with the words “review” and “improve”. Evaluation is seen as a narrow research concept that has caused an abstraction barrier and also an everyday hindrance for practitioners and the natural processes of seeing and valuating (Skolverket, 2003a). In contrast, improvement is seen as a more distinct concept than development. It is argued that the former concept always refers to something positive, whereas development can be positive or negative.

The keyword in this respect is “improvement” or, as the slogans reads: “We’re inspecting for improvement” (Skolverket, 2005a: 7). Reviewing to bring about improvement involves:

- “establishing through educational inspections whether – and how well – an educational activity is functioning in relation to the regulations set out in the Swedish Education Act and school curricula, and drawing attention to areas where a municipality or board of an independent school needs to invest more effort in their own development work

- using national evaluations to focus on areas where development is needed at the national level, as well as providing the underlying basis for this development; for example, by helping head teachers in their efforts to lead and rejuvenate activities at the local level

- participating in international evaluations in order to gain more in-depth knowledge of comparable education systems and how other countries have dealt with areas similar to those needing improvement in the Swedish education system” (Skolverket, 2005a: 7).

Although the focus is on improvement, control is simultaneously seen as the means by which development can be achieved, and this mode of reason is the underlying assumption behind the reintroduction of inspection. Control is mentioned in soft terms like “draw attention to” and “to focus on”.

In addition, the annual reports to the government indicate a rather soft inspection. The 2005 report states that a substantial part of the inspection concerns reviewing the schools’ and municipalities’ quality work and their ability to develop their own practice: “The goal is that the school inspection shall give a professional contribu-
tion to the local quality improvement activity – without taking on the responsibility for realising it” (Skolverket, 2005b: 34). Skolverket also introduces trials with self-evaluation where the inspectors evaluate the schools’ and municipalities’ practices at four levels: “[W]hat should be adjusted, what ought to be improved, what works well and what works very well” (Skolverket, 2005b: 37). Schools and municipalities receive an account that reports both strengths and weaknesses. In the 2006 report, a fifth level appears, including a more severe critique for when the schools’ and municipalities’ practices are really inferior.

There are signs of both an intimate, dialogical approach and an increasingly distanced, external inspection style:

“The Educational Inspectorate shall contribute to improvements at the local level but may not give direct advice, or take any action of its own in the local operations” (Skolverket, 2005a: 10, emphasis added).

This quote illustrates a tension that has continued to be a struggle within the work and role of the inspectorate.

**Soft and hard techniques**

The first period is characterised by a blend of soft and hard inspection techniques. The inspection methods are described in relation to the overall endeavour to ensure that the national objectives of the educational system are achieved in a progressive way: “This philosophy shapes the Educational Inspectorate’s working methods, which strive as much as possible to achieve dialogue and learning” (Skolverket, 2005a: 18). Instruments for data collection included: questionnaire responses, structured interviews, informal conversations, document analyses (e.g. of self-evaluations), statistics and observations of activities and work. Formal and informal interviews are conducted with a range of participants at the municipal level, including local politicians, centrally placed civil servants, the municipality’s joint development group at the school/activity level, head teacher and others in the school administration/management team, pupils, teachers and other staff, parent representatives etc. (Skolverket, 2005a: 13). It is argued that interviews are preferably designed like dialogues (Skolverket, 2005a). However, this relatively informal approach must never be too intimate: “The audit shall be carried out professionally, with objectivity” (Skolverket, 2005a: 10).

In the Skolverket reports to the government, one recurring issue is the concern with equivalence concerning the inspectors’ own assessment. Significant importance is attached to developing unanimous grounds for judgment “so that assessments and standpoints will be equivalent” (Skolverket, 2003c: 29) all over the country. Common instruments and assessment criteria are created, and a continuing dialogue within each inspection unit on how different steps of the process are performed. The analyses of documents from schools and municipalities, the interview situation and the feedback to schools after inspection were topics highlighted in the 2006 report.
**Expertise and evidence**

The approach to knowledge and judgment in the studied texts blends expertise and evidence during the first period. Evidence-based comparisons, based on statistical data, are used on different levels, including the international, national and local levels, and provide knowledge about variations and how students perform locally and internationally. Statistics are published in reports and on the web (e.g. Skolverket's online information system on results and quality, the SIRIS database which encourages school actors, students and parents to use local and value-added statistics).

The work of inspectors is also described as evidence-based. Inspectors produce statistics and facts, and they map out differences using interviews and questionnaires. However, in descriptions of the inspection process it becomes obvious that the inspectors themselves are the instruments. *They* conduct interviews; *they* examine; *they* observe, analyse, assess, judge and even *sense* aspects of the school reality. Thus, professional judgment precedes, or is the prerequisite for, evidence. The judgment sometimes concerns vague aspects of schooling, like the school culture, that most likely demands encoded knowledge. For example, one text states that “[e]very pre-school or school has an atmosphere, which the inspectors quite quickly sense” (Skolverket, 2003b: 111, emphasis added).

The concept of equivalence is used in the texts when describing the judgements that inspectors are to make. In this case, it refers to the impartiality of judgements and that all schools are to be judged in the same way, ensuring equal treatment and fairness to all inspected schools. It is argued that “[t]he audit shall be carried out professionally, with objectivity and with respect for local conditions...” (Skolverket, 2005a: 10, emphasis added). On one side, there is a focus on “equal assessments” that are made possible by the usage of “notes on set points in an assessment document” (Skolverket, 2005a: 15). On the other side, the employment of a basic model and fixed manuals is blended with a concern for local conditions and adaptions to each specific school and the relevant situation (Skolverket, 2005a).

In the annual reports to the government, there is a recurring headline concerning methodological developments of the inspection. The development of trustworthy evaluation methods is a frequent theme. In the first report from 2003, the inspection team is described as a team consisting, as much as possible, of inspectors with different competencies and experiences, “e.g. persons with experience of steering and leadership, experience from school juridical investigations and from pedagogical work in different school forms” (Skolverket, 2003c: 28). This reference to the importance of the experience of the inspector does not occur again in the reports.

The annual reports often declare the use of experts in different fields, e.g., different school subjects and children with special needs. In 2004 and 2005, Skolverket also reports on developmental work concerning “a structured way of making observations during visits in schools and during lessons, to evaluate the quality of the pedagogical work” (Skolverket, 2004c: 36). There are also reports of try outs with questionnaires
The 2007 report declares that scientific and proven experience should be the starting point, and it also includes an explicit reference to scientific knowledge and research.

**The second period: 2008–2010**

**Equivalence and elite**

A general observation concerning the texts from the second period is the strengthened emphasis on each child’s individual right to a good education as a new interpretation of the equivalence concept. The demands on schools and municipalities are also increased in these texts, meaning that a good education at a minimum incorporates providing pupils with the conditions needed to obtain a passing grade in a safe environment: “One baseline for today’s schooling is that it has to be possible for all pupils to attain all objectives to 100 per cent; however, in practice, not all schools seem concerned about this” (Skolinspektionen, 2010a: 15). This quote also demonstrates a shift in how schools are viewed by the Inspectorate, i.e., as lacking ambition to deal properly with all pupils. Such a view was not apparent in the texts from the earlier period.

These texts thus have a results-focused conceptualisation of equivalence (cf. Englund & Quennerstedt, 2008). Another particular problem identified that impedes equivalence is the lack of robust activities to prevent bullying and harassment. Other examples of problems given in the texts are: teachers not qualified to teach the school subjects they have been assigned; assessment and grading not fully aligned with the national objectives; quality assurance not systematic enough and inadequate individual formative assessments for pupils; and the guaranteed number of hours of instruction or the prescribed variety of school subjects not being provided.

There is also a parallel concern that schools do not sufficiently adjust instruction to the different abilities and needs of individual pupils. This concern addresses pupils with special needs or those who feel that they are bullied or harassed, explicitly encouraging them (or their parents) to file complaints through links on the agency’s homepage (Skolinspektionen, 2010d). However, this concern also extends to gifted pupils and their “right to develop to their full potential” (Skolinspektionen, 2010a: 24). This opens up possibilities for a restricted kind of elitism which shows the tension that is constantly present in this dimension.

**Development and control**

There is a clear shift indicating a more control-oriented direction which is indicated by a new and harder language, including the following terms: lack of, rules, education act, prescriptions/prescribed, make judgments, rule of law, supervision, take sufficient measures etc. (Skolinspektionen, 2009, 2010c). This semantic shift signals a need for assurance that rules and regulations are followed and that municipalities and schools are doing well enough. It is not enough to solely rely on reviews of documents and
to interview school actors. A greater amount of close inspection is promised. In the plan for 2010, it is stated that:

[t]he teachers’ didactic competence is also a success factor of importance. This means that we will enter the classrooms to observe and make judgments of how teaching is performed. The aim is not to examine individual teachers. Rather, it is a base for assessing whether or not the work is undertaken in line with what is proven successful in research and proven practice (Skolinspektionen, 2009: 5).

As this passage shows, the general direction of control is based on a specific perception of good education. The terms “successful” and “factors of success” are used more frequently in the texts from Skolinspektionen (Skolinspektionen, 2010b; 2010d) than in the texts from the first period.

**Soft and hard techniques**

Hardly anything is said about the inspection techniques and instruments in the texts from the second period. Efficiency and quality in the work of the agency is stressed in addition to a process orientation, the preferred strategy to achieve those goals: “process orientation means mapping each step of the work processes, responsibilities and roles in the inspections” (Skolinspektionen, 2009: 8-9). Data on attainment, test results, grades, and reports on a number of areas are requested from the schools and municipalities. Schools’ follow-up data on pupils’ progress are important. The comprehensiveness of the inspections is also based on previous inspection results, i.e., a proportionate inspection. In schools with favourable assessments, there may be a single interview with the head teacher. Otherwise, studies of more documents as well as interviews with teachers, parents, pupils and other school staff can be carried out (Skolinspektionen, 2010c: 22).

The texts contain expressions about the inspection now entering the classrooms to make judgments on teaching, emphasising an external and less friendly approach compared to the earlier period. For example, nothing is said about dialogues or learning. Another difference, particularly visible in the report to the government describing Skolinspektionen’s activities during 2010 (Skolinspektionen, 2010c), is the new style of accounting. Quantities are presented and comments given concerning production as well as costs per individual activity. Taken together, this leads us to understand the current Inspectorate and its activities as being more inclined to use harder techniques. The Swedish education landscape is changing fast, however, and there are already signs of a slightly different approach stated in the new Education Act (SFS, 2010:800), which says that Skolinspektionen also has to give advice and counselling to municipalities and schools, perhaps indicating a more lenient direction.
**Expertise and evidence**

Repeated expressions in these texts are systematic, impartial and independent, based on an analysis of risk and essentials, all referring to the examinations and assessments carried out by the agency (Skolinspektionen, 2009, 2010a, b and c). The terminology implies an ambition to substantiate the assessments and decisions with more scientific-like procedures and a reference group consisting of researchers was also engaged. In the most recent text, this stance is underlined by terms like “indicators”, “handbook of assessment processes”, “assessment/supervision model”, and “examination technique” (Skolinspektionen, 2010c). Another phrase used in the texts is “...based on research and proven experience” (e.g. Skolinspektionen, 2009: 5; Skolinspektionen, 2010c: 19). This is precisely the same expression used in the Higher Education Act, declaring the basis for all higher education in Sweden (SFS, 1992:1434, 1 kap. 2§ 1 pt). This well-established, scientific discourse is coupled with the idea of equivalent inspections, which do not take into account the local contexts of municipalities or schools.

**Discussion**

In this final section of the article, we reflect on the tensions in governing that are uncovered through our use of dimensions in the analysis of texts produced by the inspection agencies. We contemplate how to understand the tensions and changes we have observed, and suggest interpretations of this process as linked to an increased stress on success/good results in the knowledge economy and to the construction of the auditable or inspectable school (and municipality).

First of all, it is important to note that Swedish school inspection was in the midst of a profound movement during the two aforementioned periods. The first period starts with the re-introduction of inspection as part of Skolverket and leads to the second period with its new and refined objective of inspection under the new agency, Skolinspektionen. Around 2003, control is introduced within an organisational tradition that previously targeted school development. Review (or control) is now seen as a vehicle for improvement. The second period marks the turn to an ideology of school improvement relying on the belief that improvement may be accomplished through more control-directed inspections. “Improvement” is the key word here, and in a sense change within this dimension resolves the dualism of development and control into improvement. The notion of improvement might also imply a relatively narrow notion of what constitutes a ‘good’ education. As argued by Perryman (2009: 616) in an analysis of schools performing for the British Ofsted: “[t]here is no room for schools to ‘do their own thing’ in terms of improvement”. Following the work of Thrupp (1998), we interpret the inspection regime during the first period as both external and friendly, with a mix of technocratic-reductionist and professional-contextualist characteristics. The second period, on the other hand, exhibits a predominantly technocratic-reductionist view of inspection, including tougher assessments and inspections: “turning up the heat” (ibid. 195-196).
Further, we find that the keyword “equivalence” has been charged with different meanings. There seems to be a movement from a view of equivalence concerned with increased segregation and poor results for disadvantaged pupils to a view emphasising raised standards in subject knowledge in general, including the right for gifted children to obtain the support they need in order to reach their full potential. Put another way, we understand the tension in this dimension to be about an on-going ideological conflict between social justice/public good and individual rights/private good (Englund, 1993). The usage of equivalence in relation to the inspector’s judgments emphasises the performative function of the concept. In a deregulated school market inspections need to be impartial. The results are used as information for school choice, and today the new Education Act (SFS, 2010:800) gives Skolinspektionen the authority to shut schools down or impose economic penalties on poor schools. Thus, inspections can determine the future of schools.

The tensions within the ideological dimensions are related to an overall pattern of change concerning state attempts to use inspection as a mode of governing a deregulated education market. One predicament here relates to globalisation and the international competition stressed by the OECD and the EU (Ozga et al., 2011). The increased stress on success in the knowledge economy forces national education systems to put pressure on providers using statistical comparisons as tools. In a Swedish context, the shift in focus from the inspection of soft areas, like norms and values, to hard areas, like knowledge and attainment, is interrelated with both the inspection techniques and a growing increasing reliance on evidence, objective data and knowledge collected using standardised processes independent of the local context. In Sweden and elsewhere, the general political education rhetoric emphasises innovative and entrepreneur-based knowledge production and the consequent need for well-educated and knowledgeable learners in order to be successful in the global market. This means that there is not only a need for comparative data of the results of schooling; there is also a need to ensure that education practice (and inspection) leads to good results, i.e., success.

The need for success thereby extends to the inspection agencies, meaning that they seek to establish measures ensuring knowledge (data and text) production that feeds into the policy of the knowledge economy. In a Swedish context, this means that the Inspectorate has to develop procedures and techniques that balance fairness, based on the rule of law and on the principle of equivalence, and distinguish between good schools and bad schools according to criteria arising from the international school discourse (research on school effectiveness and development) and international indicators (e.g. PISA test results).

Taken together, the texts can be seen as part of the construction of the inspectable school that is an imperative for the new agency Skolinspektionen. Power’s (Power, 1996) notion of “making things auditable” becomes relevant here. Following Power, we argue that the mediation of school inspection and the making of the inspectable
school serve to negotiate a legitimate and institutionally acceptable knowledge base, i.e., certain inspection areas, criteria and statistics. This process also creates environments that are receptive to this knowledge base. However, the inspectable school is not only receptive; it is an actively documenting, self-reviewing, quality assuring knowledge-producer that co-constructs data on output and process in keeping with inspectorate guidelines. During this period, the demands on schools to evaluate and account for quality actually did increase incrementally in this respect (Segerholm, 2009). Further, the inspectable school is a school with a somewhat new and different relation to the inspecting agency. This relationship might be described as distanced and even hierarchical, placing the agency more explicitly above the school. In this relationship, actors in the inspectable school have had to come to terms with a form of assessment that they, as educators, seldom use: one that focuses and reports only on deviation, deficiency and failure. Finally, the inspectable school is noticeably regulated by law and held responsible by parents and their children who are claiming their rights, and also Skolinspektionen which is defending the same rights. As we move closer to the present time, there is a growing tendency to approach issues of quality in schooling as a formal legal issue. We understand this process as an example of “juridification” (Teubner 1987; Blichner & Molander, 2008; cf. Berg 2010), a concept that refers to a general increase in legal and regulative processes in society.

However, despite these increased demands and the changes of the orientation of inspection, there were no dramatic changes regarding the national curriculum or the education act during these two periods up until 2010. This means that the negotiation of a particular knowledge base, the increasing focus on knowledge and on individual rights, is not correlated to changes in the formal regulative documents. But the messages conveyed may have shed new light on the curriculum and the school act. This is an example of potential inter-textuality (Fairclough, 1992) in the sense that the selected texts are related to other texts and have the potential to change the ways these other texts are understood by municipalities, schools and parents.

In the light of our discussion above, it is possible to argue that Skolverket and Skolinspektionen are political forces. Even though the studied texts are not examples of explicit political educational agendas or ideas, they are ideological in the sense that they regulate the relationship between the visible and invisible, the imaginable and non-imaginable, particularly when it comes to questions about good education, good schools and, perhaps most importantly, about how to ‘improve’ education. Overall, we understand the increased stress on success/good results, comparisons and the construction of the inspectable school to be part of an overall shift in the way citizens conceive education and their relationship to education, i.e., as consumers and as legal subjects with distinct rights to education.

Another underpinning idea in this respect is the notion of schools as independent or self-acting entities decoupled from local contextual factors. This model resembles what is often labelled evidence-based knowledge: knowledge that is supposedly detached
from the individual experience expertise or connoisseurship (Eisner, 1976) and the professional judgments developed from actions in shared collective practice (Wenger, 1998). Schools are held responsible for their own success and failure according to the prevalent essentialist perspective. An ideological analysis of the contemporary usage of the term “equivalence” is that it is used not only in order to combat inequality in the school system, but also in order to preserve the notion of equivalence as feasible within a de-regulated school market. In doing so, potential criticism about the segregating consequences of market reform is avoided by placing the responsibility on municipalities and individual schools and holding them accountable for educational results and outcomes. In this light, scrutiny and control by a state inspection agency can be framed as a convenient and legitimate solution for steering, one that also signals the political ability to take action. All in all, these mechanisms nourish the prospects for governing by inspection.

**Acknowledgements**

The authors acknowledge the support from the Swedish Research Council (VR) for financing the projects “Governing by Inspection. School Inspection and Education Governance in Sweden, England and Scotland” (no 2009-5770) and “Swedish national school inspections: Introducing centralised instruments for governing in a decentralised context” (no 2007-3579). We also wish to thank the anonymous referees for their valuable comments.

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Notes

1 There is an extensive discussion on the concept of educational equivalence in the Swedish context, focusing on both its meaning and translation. There may be good reasons to translate the concept to equity rather than equivalence in some instances (Englund & Francia, 2008; Francia, 2011). However, the official Swedish translation is equivalence and, since we draw on official publications from state agencies, that concept is being used.

2 During the 2003–2008 period when the inspections were part of Skolverket, another national agency was responsible for supporting school development, i.e. the National Agency for School Development.
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