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Abstract

The paper conducts a critical policy analysis of the dominant administrative paradigm of the Danish public school and lays out three paradigms of school governance. In 2014 the Danish primary and lower secondary school for 6- to 16-year-olds underwent a reform involving enhanced performance management. This paper analyzes the level of reflection in policy papers with the aim of diagnosing whether the purpose of the public school has changed as new performance measures have been setup. I argue that three different public administrative paradigms exist with conflicting views on which types of rationality to strengthen in the primary and lower secondary school. The now dominating paradigm sees the purpose of the school as teaching the children ‘what they must learn’. This means primarily good skills in mathematics and Danish. I call this the *Complexity-Reducing Administrative Paradigm*. In the *Complexity-Containing Administrative Paradigm* dysfunctions and paradoxes of performance management are taken into account. Dialogical rather than top-down-management comes to the center as a means to improve street level motivation. The *Contextual Experience Paradigm* still give place for politicians and the public to have a say in setting up the general and abstract ends of teaching children. It challenges the other two administrative paradigms, however, because it sees the contextual relationship between the teacher and the children as an experiential and problem-focused process in which in principle nothing external should interfere with the agents mutually developed sense of common purpose.

Keywords

Management by Objectives, Performance Management, Administrative Paradigms, School Reform, John Dewey, Critical Policy Analysis.

¹ Notice: This is a translation of the paper by Simon Laumann Jørgensen: “Demokrati og rationalitet i skolen. Kritisk lys på folkeskolens dominante styringsparadigme” published in *Nordiske Udkast*. 43, 2, 2016 p. 20-41.

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“What is the use of noticing details that are not taken into account, since the measure *must be* applied in any case?” (Dewey, 2005, 125).

Introduction

Did the Danish 2014 school reform involve sliding away from democratic goals expressed in the mission statement of primary and lower secondary schools, even if such a thing is rejected? The continued discussion of this issue should not proceed without a critical examination of the understandings of rational governance and goal-setting in primary and lower secondary schools expressed in the administrative paradigm that the reform reinforced. To this end, the article presents three ideal-typical administrative paradigms, each with its own take on the governance and management of primary and lower secondary schools. The dominant paradigm sees comprehensive reforms of primary and lower secondary schools as a response to the problem that Danish children do not ‘learn what they should’. What they should learn depends on what children in countries we compete with are learning. It believes in performance management, quantification, aggregation and statistical comparison of objective achievement, evidence, and hierarchical principal-agent management. It differs from the next paradigm in terms of whether the nuances, dysfunctions, complexities, and paradoxes of performance management are recognized. While accepting top-down management, this other paradigm acknowledges that teachers’ motivation may depend on whether their professionalism and powers of judgment are recognized in the governance dialogue. The third paradigm, on the other hand, rejects top-down management. Society’s institutions, and especially schools, should still be understood as solutions to common problems, but this bottom-up paradigm would give children and teachers the main responsibility for managing goals. The focal point here is the child-teacher relationship, whose objectives should be able to be adjusted ‘experimentally’ in the light of the actors’ own experiences and judgment. By contrasting the dominant paradigm, the article attempts to expand the types of rationales that a discussion of the dominant administrative paradigm and school goals can be based on.

Management by objectives in key public institutions such as primary and secondary schools is not a new phenomenon (Meyer, 1970). Nor is it new that the goals for schools are controversial (Connolly 1993, Morsing 2008). There are many interests at stake, not least on the part of the state (Kristensen, 2014, p. 175). A recurring debate concerns the balance between the goals of the child’s general and free development, its democratic development and its development of

useful knowledge. The then President of the Danish Union of Teachers, Anders Bondo, claimed that the Ministry of Finance, together with the consultancy firm McKinsey, had disregarded both democratic and general considerations at the expense of work-related knowledge in the 2014 primary school reform (DLF 2014a). The consultancy firm McKinsey was indeed the central partner for “positioning, establishment and ongoing follow-up on production and performance measures”, and for “establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) that operationalize the goals of the reforms” and for preparing tests of goal achievement, as stated in the tender documents (Vangkilde, 2014). Apparently, school output was now to be measured primarily in academic skills in reading and mathematics rather than general and democratic education. However, others argued that if the reform would succeed in lowering the number of functional illiterates, it would actually strengthen democracy more than the democracy and education-oriented reform pedagogy that primarily benefited middle-class children (Andersen & Loftager 2015).

Nevertheless, it is unclear how the focus on reading and mathematics should be prioritized in relation to the provisions of §1 of the Folkeskole Act (the purpose clause). This states that the school must also enable children to “take a position and acting”, that it must “prepare pupils for participation, co-responsibility, rights and duties in a society with freedom and democracy”, and that “the school’s activities must be characterized by freedom of thought, equality and democracy” (LBK no. 665 of 20/06/2014). According to Professor Ove Kaj Pedersen, however, we should note that all adjustments to the purpose clause from 1975 to 2006 have downplayed the fact that primary and lower secondary schools should support citizens’ democratic participation. According to Pedersen, this indicates that the state has already fundamentally changed its normative view of citizens from that of the *welfare state* to that of the *competition state* (Pedersen, 2011, p. 197f). For Pedersen, these are two contradictory normative views on what a citizen is, because “the competition state is based on a critique of (some of) the welfare state’s central values – e.g. democracy” (Pedersen, 2011, p. 172). The fact that both politicians and citizens can agree to downplay democratic education in schools is partly due to the attention paid to the international rankings of children’s reading skills, which were first published in 1991 and then by the OECD in the 1990s (Pedersen, 2011, 171).

However, it is noteworthy that Pedersen (without support in the PISA rankings for children’s democratic education) believes that the democratic welfare state actually failed as schools reportedly did not succeed in making children independent and democratically participating (Pedersen, 2011, p. 186). Although Pedersen (2011, p. 191) adds that the “value struggle” is not “settled”, he reiterates in an opinion piece (2015) that he himself believes that the shift from

a welfare state to a competitive state is a rational consequence of the welfare state's failure to make all citizens democratically and labor market participants (2011, p. 186). Pedersen thus concludes from *is* to *ought* when it comes to the unfinished project of democracy, while he does not make the same conclusion when it comes to the welfare state's attempt to get everyone into work. Pedersen's conclusion thus contains a paradox. For while citizens' possible lack of democratic participation naturally and rationally leads to resignation, the lack of labor market participation naturally and rationally leads to attention and reform. Why can't the democratic project also be seen as an incomplete project?

However, if we think of democracy as an incomplete project to be realized through the school, we are confronted with yet another contested concept whose dimensions are disputed (Hansen 2010). For example, if we focus on democracy as a *form of government*, it was not unambiguously undemocratic to take power over the school by reducing the power of the non-democratically elected school leaders, teachers and children and give it to the democratically elected representatives in the parliament. If, on the other hand, the school's activities are assessed on the basis of ideals of democracy as a *way of life*, the school may be seen as constituting a democratizing bulwark against totalitarianism. This is expressed by Hal Koch, Theodor Adorno and Oskar Negt, according to whom the goal of education is to ensure that Auschwitz does not happen again (Negt, 2014, p. 11). The broad Danish purpose clause for primary and lower secondary schools also seems to aim at counteracting totalitarian tendencies in its focus on individual freedom and participation in democratic ways of life. On the other hand, totalitarian forces can also gain force if a generally educated and articulate middle class neglects the needs of the lower class to develop the useful knowledge that their parents may have difficulties supporting. Democracy as a *form of society* is thus perhaps rather promoted by creating equality in children's reading skills and other such academic measures?

The overall output of the school reform ultimately depends on how children react to the diverse impressions that schooling will continue to give them as they realize democracy as a form of government, a way of life and a form of society. In the following, it will therefore be necessary to address the question of the possible disregard for democratic considerations in the school reform more indirectly. I will therefore analyze some epistemological frameworks for the continuing value-rational debate about the form and place of democracy in our society and the role of schools in securing the conditions for democracy. This continued debate is, among other things, conditioned by our critical examination of governance logics, which in themselves can determine which types of rationality we allow to play central roles in shaping the school and determining its goals.

This focus on governance logics is also suggested by Bondo, among others, who claims that the reform is an expression of control and that teachers should be trusted instead (DLF 2014a). This raises a number of new questions: Why should school leaders, teachers and children be trusted more? What is wrong with control? Control can perhaps ensure that all schools in Denmark focus on the weakest students' opportunities to succeed in a demanding Danish labor market and in a complicated democracy where citizens are expected to be able to make independent decisions about their own lives.

Not all forms of control and monitoring are necessarily bad. However, problems with control and monitoring can arise if the benefits of monitoring are overestimated and the dangers underestimated. The new performance management strategies are defended as purpose-rational, instrumental and value-neutral. However, so-called neutral measuring instruments often contain interpretations of what public institutions are and *should be*. They can have constitutive effects when they are offered to actors as essential ways to give meaning to their activities (Dahler-Larsen 2014). The article thus has a critical focus on what types of rationality the different forms of administration support and block.

The paper is based on the theoretical assumption that policymakers (i.e. politicians, public administrators, and civil servants), researchers and frontline practitioners (street-level bureaucrats) tend to understand their professional practices on the basis of paradigmatic rationales and logics that, in a Wittgensteinian metaphor, can 'hold actors captive'. Paradigmatic understandings also help to keep alternative paradigms of understanding, meaning and action at a distance, even though these could also offer significant problem-solving perspectives. I also draw on Thomas Kuhn's understanding of paradigms, according to which paradigms constitute "a complex of generally accepted opinions, attitudes, basic assumptions, techniques" (Albæk, 1988, 71).

I will try to take policy makers at their word and analyze the rationales used in reports and on websites to legitimize the increased performance management by objectives in schools. The paper documents that there are three commonly held views on which rationality should govern schools. Focusing on the dominant administrative paradigm, as it is unfolded in the documents used to legitimize the school reform, the article examines whether this *overestimates the benefits* of externally setting goals and performance measures for what should happen between children and teachers, and whether this overrides the essential values that are gained by forms of governance that are more dialogically oriented when it comes to the relationship between management and teachers and teachers and children.

It might seem obvious here to focus directly on the dominant administrative paradigm, as is done in much current research (Kristensen 2014), but I follow a hermeneutic strategy of examining the near horizons by drawing in elements from more distant horizons. Thus, although the aim is primarily to understand the rationales behind the currently dominant paradigm, I also examine the rationales used in two additional ideal-typical school administrative paradigms. In order to emphasize the contrasts, I start with the paradigm that seems furthest from the current understanding of practice. Since my epistemological interest is primarily directed towards the dominant paradigm, this is most thoroughly addressed through textual analysis.

As the aim in relation to the other paradigms is to highlight differences, I have also allowed myself some methodological freedom in drawing on different types of sources. Thus, for the first paradigm, the primary source is the writings of John Dewey, for the second, research articles, and for the third, key reports and ministerial documents. Although the selection has been made with the aim of helping to highlight ideal-typical differences, it has also been central to the selection that the three paradigms are active and each have current bastions of power and socialization.

I will refer to the ideal-typical paradigms as the *Contextual Experience Paradigm*, the *Complexity-Preserving Administrative Paradigm* and the *Complexity-Reducing Administrative Paradigm*. In accordance with Max Weber's definition, they are consciously constructed cognitive tools rather than direct representations of reality. I design them "so that they emphasize and render precisely those aspects of reality that have societal and/or epistemological significance" (Jespersen, 1996, p. 33). They are constructed ideal types, which is why in practice we will find mixed forms even "if one of them is dominant" (Jespersen, 1996, p. 36). I would argue that they exist in parallel and in competition with each other in the Danish understanding of the governance of primary and lower secondary schools, but that the latter is currently the dominant one.

The paradigms differ in whether they attribute any role to teacher reflection and student motivation, and they differ in terms of which relationships they identify as primary for systematic observations and judgments of practice. Assessments and judgment unfold in the *Contextual Experience Paradigm* at the micro level (teacher-student), in the *Complexity-Preserving Paradigm* at the mid-range level (municipality, school principal, teacher), and in the *Complexity-Reducing Paradigm* at the macro level (ministries, municipalities). Although the *Contextual Experience Paradigm* also includes a hierarchy among the central actors (teachers and students), the relationship is characterized by a mutual communicative interaction and a joint search for meaning. In the last two paradigms, it is believed that rational practice

development requires the principal's systematic external monitoring of the agent's actions.³ The article is thus structured in the following based on the three paradigms.

1. The Contextual Experience Paradigm

The contextual experience paradigm recognizes the necessity of certain overarching goals for the school, but these should not override the teacher's judgment or limit the ability of key actors to adjust the more concrete goals. The key actors in the school are teachers and students. The contextual experience paradigm is expressed by, among others, the Danish Union of Teachers when it insists on putting the professional ideal and teachers' "responsibility" for students above the current top-down management mechanisms (DLF, 2014b, p. 2, cf. Herman, 2007, pp. 149, 161). In its fight against the current administrative tendencies, the Danish Union of Teachers emphasizes that teachers "more than ever" must be aware that even though they are bound by the objectives of the legislation, "these always require adaptation and interpretation to the prevailing conditions and thus place great demands on the teacher's professionalism and judgment. Thus, the teacher can never simply follow the regulations laid down" (DLF, 2014b, p. 3). However, the professional ideal also highlights goals that are particularly closely linked to the profession's self-understanding: "In general education, the teacher makes a significant contribution to introducing the rising generation to the basic structures and workings of society and to democracy" (DLF 2014b).

The rationale behind putting the relationship between teachers and students at the center is formulated by the American philosopher John Dewey, whose ideas on experience-based, practice- and project- oriented learning have had a major influence on the development of schools in Denmark. The child is the future democratic citizen, and the child must thus be prepared to live in "a democratic society [where] the principle of external authority is rejected" (Dewey 2005, p. 104). It is inherent in democracy that one cannot allow "the subordination of the individual to the higher interests of the state [...] [such as] the struggle for international commercial superiority" (Dewey 2005, p. 111). Here, Dewey prioritizes a particular view of democracy: "A democracy is more than a form of government – it is primarily a way of life in

³ The distinction between *principal* and *agent* originates from bureaucracy theory (Waterman & Meier 1998). The principal (national and municipal politicians and school principals) has the formal power over the agent (the bureaucrat such as the school principal or the frontline worker such as the teacher), but faces the challenge of being dependent on the agent to implement the policy and being dependent on the knowledge and information that the agent possesses. The focus is on the relationship between principal and agent as a structural relationship with common characteristics and inherent challenges. What is central is the relationship you have with another actor. The school principal is thus an agent for the local politicians, but a principal in relation to the teachers.

association with others, a shared communicative experience” (Dewey 2005, p. 104). The rationale for governing according to the ideal of democracy as a way of life is unfolded below, focusing on the connection between freedom and cooperation.

Freedom to understand and set goals for your actions

What is the rationale behind this prioritization of the child’s interests and authority? The rationale is based on a certain view of human nature, where disregarding one’s own experiences and interests leads to a slavery that is contrary to what democracy demands of its citizens. If individuals set aside their own experiences and “accept that others define the purpose that guides their behavior”, they make themselves slaves (Dewey 2005, p. 102). Goals should not only be judged by their social utility, but also by whether actors understand them and can see a personal interest in them (Dewey 2005, p. 102). Actors should have an understanding of the “technical, intellectual and social relations” of the practices (Dewey 2005, p. 102), but this understanding is not enough. Dewey warns against letting people perform activities that “reduce elements such as efficiency of production and methodical management to purely technical and external issues” (Dewey 2005, p. 102f). The learning process thus loses its intrinsic value and becomes an “evil” that “must be overcome” (Dewey 2005, p. 122). When an external authority sets goals and at most leaves the actor with a “mechanical choice of means”, reason is limited (Dewey 2005, p. 121). Then, the actors’ powers of reasoning and further development are at risk.

Focusing first on teachers’ understanding of goals, Dewey recommends general learning goals that “support observation, choice, and planning in the performance of an activity from moment to moment, from hour to hour,” and conversely, he warns against goals that “stand in the way of the individual’s own common sense (as it surely will if planned from outside or accepted because an authority has decreed it)” (Dewey 2005, p. 123). He recommends goals that “broaden the horizon” and that “stimulate one to take into account more consequences (contexts)” as well as “a broader and more flexible observation of means” (Dewey 2005, p. 125). We shall see that these notions stand in stark contrast to the *Complexity-Reducing Administrative Paradigm*.

There are limits to the knowledge an external goal-setter can have about the actual course of teaching. Setting goals for school activities at a distance from concrete encounters with children leads to “uniform” goals based on “things close to adult hearts” and to forget that “all learning is something that happens to an individual at a given place and time” based on “an individual’s specific abilities and conditions” (Dewey 2005, p. 124). Actors, on the other hand, can deal with flexible goals using their “anticipatory and observational consciousness” (Dewey 2005, p.

121). Once the goal is sought to be realized under “concrete conditions”, “overlooked things” are revealed, which “requires that the original goal be revised” (Dewey 2005, p. 121). Therefore, goals must be established and revised within the “action process” and must not simply stand as a “rigid” goal that can only “be insisted upon” (Dewey 2005, p. 121). An “experimental” goal can be based on “the learners’ present experience” and can be in sight and give direction to the activity while “changing” and “growing” in practical circumstances (Dewey 2005, p. 121). This softens rather than separates the relationship between ends and means (Dewey 2005, p. 122). Only an experimental goal allows actors to use “normal judgment in observing and dealing with the situation”, while an extrinsic goal, on the other hand, causes actors to overlook potentially essential details.

Problem solving as an end and a means

Therefore, if we focus on *students’ understanding of goals*, which the other paradigms completely overlook, Dewey points out that the intellect is stimulated by *problems* and by a processual understanding that attempts to solve problems can also lead to new problems. Encountering problematic situations stimulates reflection and thinking as a process of exploration (Dewey 2005, p. 165). In this light, it is problematic if the teacher wants to deliver the answer to the student as quickly as possible. “[C]ommunication may stimulate the other person to recognize the problem himself and devise a similar idea, or it may stifle his intellectual interest and suppress his nascent efforts to think” (Dewey 2005, p. 176). Learning is being a participant in solution processes, not being able to “reproduce correct answers with one hundred percent accuracy” (Dewey 2005, p. 176).

Dewey warns against “authoritarian superintendents’ dictates, methodical textbooks, prescribed courses of study” that limit teachers’ “minds” from getting “in touch with the mind of the pupil and with the subject matter” (Dewey 2005, p. 125). Dewey continues that even if children do not initially realize that teachers are merely subject to “superior authorities” who have unreflectively accepted “what is current in society”, they notice “the lack of confidence in the experience of teachers” which weakens “the pupils’ [...] confidence” in teachers and the school. Even if students don’t sense the lack of trust in teachers, we shouldn’t expect them to blindly follow the goals imposed on them “through a double or triple external imposition”. This is because they are “constantly confused by the conflict between the aims natural to their own experience at the time and the aims they are taught to accept.” Dewey loudly concludes that “Until the basic democratic principle that every evolving experience has value in itself is recognized, we will be intellectually confused by the demand for conformity to external goals” (Dewey 2005, p. 125).

For Dewey, it is a basic human strategy to work with others to solve problems. Therefore, collaboration is also natural. All our activities cannot be free in the sense that no one else has a say in what we do during the day. His educational philosophy is therefore not that the child should run around freely at will. We only become good problem-solvers if we develop understanding, interest, attention and participation in social activities, and this requires the child to be involved in shaping the goals of the learning process rather than practicing mechanical routines. (Dewey, 1969, 231). The individual's motivation depends on the experience that the activities are meaningful to them.

Nor should problems be presented to students as 'teacher's problems'. Rather than external discipline and measurement, students should work with "facts, ideas, principles, and problems" whose meaning they can recognize for themselves (Dewey, 2005, p. 251f). Rather than sequencing and monitoring goals, we should focus on what Dewey calls the real task of school: to develop students' "capacity to think" (Dewey, 2005, p. 169). Dewey thus warns against both slavishly realizing the goals of others and opening up to free play without goals. Developing the ability to think and autonomy is connected with the exercise of self-control and with freeing oneself from being a slave to free urges (Dewey 1969, p. 231). Individual emancipation, democratic education and cooperative problem solving thus go hand in hand.

2. The Complexity-Preserving Administrative Paradigm

The complexity-preserving governance paradigm is expressed by both Danish and international social scientists who do research on performance management but are not directly involved in policy development, as well as in some of the OECD and KORA reports (see below). Other representatives of the paradigm include teachers, managers and politicians. They express an understanding of the need for systematic evaluation of school practices (including performance management) but insist that assessment requires translation between levels. Two basic understandings underlie the idea of administration through performance management and monitoring. Firstly, performance management is thought to provide transparency and democratic legitimacy as well as opportunities for learning and political control (Bruijn, 2002, p. 579; Greve, 2003, p. 140). In addition, there is a concern with 'overload' according to which there is "asymmetry between the forces that push for increased public effort and the forces that want to keep taxes down" (Knudsen, 2007, p. 53).

However, based on this understanding of the necessity of state control, the complexity-preservers advocate soft forms of evaluation that stimulate self-reflection by welfare professionals and warn against the dysfunctions of the performance measurement paradigm.

For example, monitoring must not override teachers' own reflections and must be based on caution in relation to the potential dysfunctions of measurement. In general, the belief in the intrinsic value of monitoring, the quantifiability of public goods and the comparability of public institutions, which we will see in the Complexity-Reducing Administrative Paradigm, is rejected.

In previous OECD reports and in government papers from 2004-6, there are clear concerns about the undisclosed publicity of institutional comparisons. "The results of the tests for individual students, schools, municipalities and regions are confidential and must not be made public", the government wrote in 2006 (The Prime Minister's Office 2006, 18). These reservations have since slipped out. In the OECD's 2004 report on public schools, with contributions from Finnish, Canadian and British researchers, schools are to be improved through teacher involvement, from formal involvement (UVM, 2004, p. 128) to soft forms of self-evaluation and contextual studies of how problems can be solved in an exemplary way (UVM, 2004, p. 130).

They warn against simplistic rankings of schools that showcase schools with challenging student populations (UVM, 2004, p. 132). Super league rankings pretend that the data does not require nuanced interpretation (UVM, 2004, p. 132). This leads to "divisiveness" between schools and between parents and schools, and increases social divisions between schools (UVM, 2004, p. 134). In light of Albert Hirschman's distinction between the strategies of *exit* (i.e. leaving one's post) and *voice* (i.e. criticizing the organization but staying) (Hirschman 1970), policies stimulate parents' exit rather than *voice*. Feedback to parents should instead stimulate them to choose 'voice' over 'exit'; i.e. trying to draw attention to the problems through staying and using the existing democratic channels rather than changing schools. Parents are here seen as a resource in terms of being able to "put pressure on the municipality" (UVM, 2004, 131), rather than customers who can give the school the cold shoulder if it receives a lower ranking than others.⁴

Standards can be set for the different stages of the school curriculum and students can be tested, but the classroom teacher should be involved in both setting the standards (UVM, 2004, p. 129) and marking the tests (UVM, 2004, p. 133). The OECD report advocates for a "reflective" and

⁴ Finland has therefore chosen not to hold 'external tests' and not to publish 'data on individual schools' (UVM, 2004, p. 134). Samples are taken and are not claimed to constitute "a reliable assessment for the school as a whole" (UVM, 2004, p. 134). All data collection should recognize the "limitations as well as the complexity of the data" (UVM, 2004, p. 134). They recommend that "Simple, overarching goals – which are inevitably misleading – should be avoided" and that "tests and assessments should not be published in the form of simple rankings" (UVM, 2004, p. 134).

against an “ineffective” “autocratic leadership style” (UVM, 2004, p. 138). School professionals emphasize that while children’s intellectual stimulation should be increased, this should not be done by disregarding “the importance of social development, not to mention children’s enjoyment, but rather as an extension of this caring approach” (UVM, 2004, p. 135).

The warnings of performance management research

If we choose to manage by objectives, we must be aware of the new complexities that this can create. International as well as Danish research has long outlined a number of overlooked dysfunctions that can result from performance-based management (e.g. Smith, 1995; Greve, 2003, p. 139ff; Bruijn, 2002; Dahler-Larsen, 2014). According to Pollitt (2013), performance management inadvertently supports a number of independent alternative logics. The ‘synecdoche logic’ tempts principals to let simple indicators represent the performance of the entire institution. (Pollitt, 2013, p. 351f). Minimum targets⁵ can produce its own unintended logic, demotivating those who are already above target. If you add a desire for continued growth, you will try not to overperform, as overperformance leads to further pressure the following year.⁶ Performance management has its own growth logic. As interest in indicators increases, so does the pressure from actors with conflicting interests to innovate and reinterpret targets (Pollitt, 2013, p. 352f), resulting in increased transaction costs and bureaucratization (Kristiansen, 2014).

In public institutions, there are often warnings about *crowding out effects*, meaning that if frontline workers can’t identify with being seen as self-interested, they may leave the workplace, while new workers who recognize themselves in this identity will join. Actors may also change their behavior to more closely reflect the idea of the self-interest maximizing individual. These effects can thus change institutional practices by altering the motivation of public servants. Pollitt concludes that incentive systems must take care not to undermine employees’ motivation to provide *public service* (Pollitt, 2013, p. 358). The fear of the loss of professional behavior and motivation has also received increased attention in Danish research (Kristiansen, 2014, 5.1.2.; Jørgensen & Andersen, 2010). The key point here is that if “an extrinsic management tool is perceived as a control measure, it will crowd out intrinsic motivation”. Public service motivation, according to this understanding, can be diluted by the

⁵ As in the 2014 reform’s “At least 80 percent of students must be good at reading and arithmetic in the national tests” (KL, 2014, p. 3).

⁶ This could be the unintended consequence of the current target: “The proportion of the most able pupils in Danish and mathematics must increase year by year. The proportion of students with poor results in the national tests for reading and mathematics must be reduced year by year. The well-being of pupils must increase.” (KL, 2014, p. 3).

types of control that undermine the experience of autonomy. “([R]esults) management is perceived as interfering with the need to feel autonomous, competent and connected in the form of meaningful relationships with other people” (Kristiansen, 2014, 5.1.2.).

Those being measured learn relatively quickly to play the game to their own advantage and outright cheating can become rampant. In the UK and the US, there are several examples of school teachers trying to help students with their tests beyond what the rules allow (Pollitt, 2013, 354; Kristiansen table 5.2.). In such cases, the actors have an interest in hiding the perverse effects of performance management (Pollitt, 2013, p. 356; Bruijn, 2002; Kristiansen, 2014, table 5.1.).

A key observation is the possibility that performance management can have constitutive effects on the actual goals of the public institution. Here, performance targets affect the understanding of what the institution’s goals are (Kristiansen, 2014, 5.1.3.; Dahler-Larsen, 2014). Through this, understandings of purpose, policy and “problem” are shaped, changing the central content of the institution, how the given practice is structured over time (before and after the test) as well as the “social relations and identities associated with the delivery of a service” (ibid.). Like a cuckoo in the nest, old values are squeezed out (Jørgensen, 2003, p. 16), and actors close their eyes to the “problem of the problem” (Albæk, 1988, p. 84).

In school contexts, the focus on tests can thus give the perception that students’ problems, their diverse character traits and the relationships to them are less important, and students can instead be reduced to weak and strong, slow and fast (Dahler-Larsen 2014, p. 979; Kristensen 2014, p. 168). Dahler-Larsen also points out that indicators can help shape reality, such as when schools are ranked by final exam averages, and exam-oriented parents use these numbers to seek out specific schools, further increasing inequality between schools (Dahler-Larsen 2014, p. 975).

The Complexity-Preserving Administration Paradigm points in different directions in relation to whether quantifications and rankings should play a governance role, as the OECD’s 2004 report illustrates. On the one hand, governance is important, but communication between actors is essential to avoid unintended and undermining effects. Evaluations of public institutions should look beyond the immediate *output* to the consequences and effects (*outcomes*) in a broader societal and value perspective. Only then can we observe the actual costs of narrowing our understanding of rationality as well as our understanding of values. This reflexive and conscious observation and weighing of unintended consequences is the hallmark of the complexity-preserving governance paradigm.

On the one hand, Dewey’s ideas are well in line with ideas developed within the complexity-

preserving paradigm, emphasizing the importance of the central actors (teachers and students) experiencing their activities as meaningful. Dewey would agree that employees should “participate in goal setting” (Madsen, 1993, p. 21) and that “dialog” can counteract the perception of loss of autonomy (Bruijn, 2002, p. 591), while competition can threaten motivation (Bruijn, 2002, p. 583). One could agree on the importance of having insight into the goals you are guided by, without these points expressing the same basic rationale. As Madsen writes, too precise goals – “a new set of rules” – are not goals at all, but constitute “a plan of action or a statement of the means to be used in a given situation.” The goals then become prescribed means. They “prescribe which professional methods are to be used to achieve the actual goals” (Madsen, 1993, p. 25). For Madsen, this is not desirable because “If the goals prescribe in detail what is to be accomplished, they do not give the employee room to vary the effort according to the ever-changing situations and problems” (Madsen, 1993, p. 25). Without this space, “the professionals’ orientation towards the needs of the recipient and towards their own professional responsibility is killed” (Madsen, 1993, p. 25).

On the other hand, Dewey’s insistence that schools are part of a democratic society and bear a primary responsibility for the democratic reproduction of society marks a difference. In the Complexity-Preserving Paradigm, contextual experiences are important, but the rationale for this is not that it ensures the conditions for a democratic culture, as expressed in the mission statement of primary schools and Dewey’s thinking. Instead, the arguments are drawn from the Complexity-Preserving Paradigm’s rationale of avoiding dysfunction. It is about recognizing the complexity of setting goals so that they do not become too general, unrealistic, conflictual, inflexible or unattainable (Madsen, 1993, p. 24). Dialogue is thus management’s opportunity to realize performance management. Shared understanding is crucial for measurement effectiveness and Madsen therefore recommends involving everyone “in the goal-setting work” to try to create a shared understanding of the goals “instead of, as is traditionally done, only announcing goals from the top of the organization” (Madsen, 1993, p. 25).

3. The Complexity-Reducing Administrative Paradigm

The dominant Complexity-Reducing Administrative Paradigm, as represented in the last ten years of government announcements, by Local Government Denmark (KL) and Danish and international social scientists close to government policy, is based on a belief in monitoring, follow-up, and strengthening a hierarchical form of management, performance pay, efficiency improvements, measurements, operationalizations, clarifications of goals, and optimization of measurement methods, statistics, comparisons and evidence. We believe that judgment is

strengthened by reducing complexity; we believe in the comparability and quality of operationalized, quantified statements as an immediate information basis; and we believe that the central operating space of judgment is the macro level, where goals should also be set. It is accepted that the social rationalizations of modernity create a “machine-like structure with clear decision-making rules and chains of command”, as Weber described (Albæk, 1988, p. 72). There is a focus on efficiency improvements (also to ensure value for money); expressions such as ‘children must learn what they need to learn’ are used, and there is a strong focus on ensuring Denmark’s opportunities in international competition.

The following sections document and analyze the paradigm. First, I trace the sources of the paradigm’s rationales, and then, based on the reasons for introducing increased performance management in primary and lower secondary schools in 2014, I uncover the paradigm’s complexity reduction and inherent challenges.

Tracking the paradigm’s rationales

What rationality lies behind the belief in performance management? The ideas are stimulated by seeing the state in a globalization perspective (Kristensen, 2014, p. 167). Marcussen thus traces in the Ministry of Finance reports from 1996-7 a “structural deterministic globalization discourse” (2002 p. 168). In Denmark, this globalization logic blends in with the logic of performance management, where the Ministry of Finance works closely with the OECD (Marcussen, 2002, p. 205; Knudsen, 2007, p. 38, 251; Jørgensen, 2003, p. 12f), and where the OECD’s PISA measurements both expose international competition and focus on performance targets. The OECD has been a central meeting place for ideas since 1960, but since 1990 (with the establishment of PUMA), the OECD (with the USA as the driving force) has been behind significant recommendations for public administration reforms (Marcussen, 2002, p. 11; Ejersbo et.al. 2000, p. 179f; Bruijn, 2002) as well as interpretations of the rationale of the public sector (Greve, 2003, p. 145f). The Ministry of Finance acts as a link between the OECD and the public administration, and already in the Ministry of Finance’s modernization report from 1990 and in *Nyt syn på den offentlige sektor* (1993), performance management and management by objectives is highlighted as the way forward (Ejersbo et.al., 2000, p. 198). Marcussen (2002, p. 193) describes how the Ministry of Finance is relatively uncritically socialized into the paradigmatic understanding of public management via the OECD. In 1995, the Ministry of Finance expresses the paradigm as the slogan that *one measurement is better than a thousand opinions* (Greve, 2003, p. 144).

The logic of competition is of particular importance for schools. In light of the OECD’s and the Ministry of Finance’s competition logic, the workforce can and should be strengthened by

ensuring that as few as possible are functionally illiterate in the future. Thus, a standardized base level in the workforce must be ensured. Globalization requires adaptability and the New Public Management notion of generic basic skills (here: literacy and numeracy) offers a welcome solution. In addition, of course, it helps to legitimize the paradigm (not least for the Social Democrats and Radikale Venstre) that you can draw on a more value-rational thinking that there must be real opportunities for social mobility also for “children who grow up under difficult conditions” (UVM, 2004, p. 127).

Other logics present themselves. For the Ministry of Finance, we need to be able to assess whether public sector spending is commensurate with ‘what we pay for’ (Herman, 2007, p. 128). If the school performs in the middle and we pay at the top, then it is “not good value for money” (UVM, 2004, p. 127). The Danish Economic Council finds it “remarkable” that we have not developed tests for when the broad purpose clause of the primary school is “fulfilled” (UVM, 2004, p. 132). In 2010, the public School’s Travel Team calls students’ versatile development a diffuse concept (Skolens rejsehold, 2010, p. 75). The paradigm’s epistemic glasses thus focus on something that, in light of the paradigm’s self- understanding, is an anomaly that needs to be corrected. The Economic Council’s comments from 2003 are thus used by the OECD as justification for establishing “a methodology for evaluating primary and lower secondary schools that can measure the many different aspects related to the purpose clause” (Herman, 2007, p. 154). According to Hermann (2007), there is an entire worldview behind this observation: “The output and result orientation is only operational in terms of management when the academic goals can be operationalized and ultimately linked to performance” (Hermann, 2007, p. 136).

Here, the OECD contributes a crucial conception of knowledge and worldview by presenting reports that “are fact- or evidence-oriented in their ambitions and allow their knowledge to be formed through large-scale mappings of ‘factual data’ that are made statistically manipulable and allow conclusions to be formed through comparisons” (Hermann, 2007, p. 151). For such forms of knowledge to emerge, reality must be manipulated and adapted: “in other words, this thinking presupposes that the areas of society that are the contractual subject matter are described in numerical or particularly symbolic terms that make it calculable and thus communicable” (Herman, 2007, p. 157).

The central element of performance management is precisely the quantification of results and the selection of indicators (Kristiansen, 2014, p. 21). The idea that “education statistics and social science” should help “towards comparability” is a way of thinking “which is almost given a priori status – and which, it should be noted, involves a shift” (Hermann, 2007, p. 149).

Hermann traces the tangent in “official sources in various OECD works: PISA 2000 and 2003, OECD’s ‘Education Policy Analysis 2002’, the annual ‘Education at a Glance’, the OECD review of the Danish primary school in 2004” (Hermann, 2007, p. 151).

Both the Danish Prime Minister’s Office and the Danish Ministry of Finance are on board with the plan *Progress, renewal and safety: Strategy for Denmark in the global economy – the most important initiatives* (Herman, 2007, p. 130). Here, the apparent neutrality and objectivity of the tools and analytical apparatus serve as strong legitimizing tools: “it [is] probably the social science economics of education and educational statistics that have provided the strongest reference for the changes that can be observed in the purpose, practice, methods, etc. of primary and lower secondary education” (Herman, 2007, p. 154). The background understanding of the theory of science is, as Hermann adds, an “empiricist and positivist” [...] “engineering mindset” (cf. Albæk, 1988, p. 26). This draws on “the American social science of the 1950s and 1960s, where the ambition of scientific and evidence-based problem solving in the welfare state on the basis of secure knowledge, evaluations, etc. was the dominant trend” (Hermann 2007, 151).

Knowledge expressed in static comparisons is apparently the highest expression of rationality and a necessary tool when we are pressed by competition and must constantly consider our next move, but the Ministry of Finance also has an interest in this type of knowledge as a management tool: “knowledge is better than trust and control” (Hermann, 2007, p. 152). Here it is perceived as being of lesser importance than scientific engineering only apparently just supplies the tools (of management) (Albæk, 1988, p. 31).

A means is not just a means. It indicates understandings of problems and solutions. It is precisely in the light of such a narrow output assessment that schools are considered to have failed. The PISA studies and OECD evaluations of primary and lower secondary schools found low ‘academic proficiency’ and poor results in terms of social mobility, which became ‘strong references’ in ministries and then the public (Herman, 2007, pp. 128, 154). The statistical comparison enables simple suggestions for understanding problems and solutions: “The academic level is not on a par with most other rich countries” (The Prime Minister’s Office 2006, p. 13). The measurements are used uncritically to document that children’s “performance” is “questionable” (UVM 2004, p. 126). Now we must focus narrowly on “learning and education” and “that students learn what they should” (The Prime Minister’s Office 2006, p. 25). “The academic level [must] be raised significantly” because “academic knowledge is crucial” (The Prime Minister’s Office 2006, p. 13). Parents have also gradually understood the message and support a greater focus on academic skills (Herman, 2007, p. 128).

The 2014 reform

The above rationales play a crucial role in the 2014 school reform. A central goal of the 2014 reform was to “improve student learning” (UVM 2015d). The Ministry of Education’s (UVM’s)⁷ websites established in connection with the reform send the same message: “All children must improve academically” (UVM 2015d, KL, 2014, p. 2) through “more attention to learning, i.e. on results and effects” (KL, 2014, p. 4). The rationale was that clarifications of school goals as well as more comprehensive goal achievement monitoring in municipalities are necessary. This created a distinction between core academic competencies and broader competencies that should only be included if they can be concretized. As the Public School Travel Team wrote under the heading “clear goals for what students should learn”, they recommend clarification and prioritization. What “exactly [...] can we expect the 8-, 10- or 12-year-old to be able to do in the various subjects” (2010, p. 57).

The Public School’s Travel Team considered it absolutely problematic when the previous goal was “that the students in the year should be able to account for and assess ethical, aesthetic and historical aspects in literary texts and other forms of expression” (Skolens rejsehold 2010 p. 57). The unspecified criticism must be that such formulations both set out broad goals and allow the individual teacher and examiner in the specific meeting with a student to assess when the goals have been reached and what level of goal achievement is involved. The evaluation presents another example of diffuse objectives shifting the focus from the most important objectives (reading, spelling and speaking English): “the student” should “be able to express themselves in images, sound and text in complex productions and in dramatic form”. As it is stated: “This is great for those who have already mastered all the basics. But less essential if you can’t read and write. In short, there is a lack of prioritization of primary school goals and subjects” (Skolens rejsehold 2010, p. 57). Being able to write in a technical sense is clearly more important than having something to express.

For Local Government Denmark (KL), the question is obvious: “How can management by objectives strengthen primary and lower secondary schools” (KL, 2014, p. 3). The same logic was expressed by the The Ministry of Education (UVM): The reform sets in motion “a number of initiatives to support goal-oriented teaching” (UVM 2015d; Herman, 2007, p. 136). Management by objectives is considered to be an evidence-based, rational and systematic way to learn from other OECD countries. As Ontario has simplified school goals and raised student academic achievement (UVM 2015a), Denmark too must break down school goals into discrete observable (measurable) chunks (UVM 2015d). The question is not what children should learn

⁷ Today the Ministry of Children and Education.

(they should ‘learn what they should’), but how we measure it.

The purpose rationalization of the education system thus requires objective-oriented teaching (Weber, 1976, 12f). Since there is also a concern to monitor and compare the performance of individual teachers and students in light of the objectives, national learning standards are set and all teaching in the subjects is divided into small, separate, measurable sequences. So-called ‘New Objectives’ and ‘Common Objectives’ are formulated for the subjects. These goal programs express overall goals (‘competence objectives’) for “what students should be able to do at the applicable level of the subjects” (UVM 2015f). The binding overarching objectives for all students are systematically linked to phased sub-objectives and “binding attention points” (UVM 2015c). According to UVM, this is to ensure a systematic link between what “the student should be able to do” and “learn” and “the content of the teaching” (UVM 2015f; UVM 2015c).

This is a normative program. Learning objectives *should* guide teaching (UVM 2015f; UVM 2015b, c & d). Reading and math *should* be prioritized (UVM 2015a). Instrumental evidence-based rather than philosophical continuing education courses *should* be prioritized (UVM 2015a). We *should* learn from the experiences of others in linking goal descriptions and evidence-based resources (UVM 2015b). The cost of doing so is minimized: “Ontario, Canada, for example, has tried a curriculum that is as long as a bad year, but at the same time provides a lot of actionable guidance for teachers” (UVM 2015b).

The following phrases from UVM’s website are meant to defend the idea that that they have not reoriented the school in terms of values, but are simply doing things smarter:

- Now, “competence objectives are used – objectives that focus on what students should be able to do and what they should learn, and less on what the subject should contain and what pedagogical practices should be used” (UVM 2015b).
- “The new ‘Common Objectives’ are goals for what students should learn in the subjects. The content of the subjects has not changed” (UVM 2015c).
- “The purpose of the simplification of the goals has not been to change the content of the subjects and topics in primary and lower secondary school, but to focus on student learning” (UVM 2015f).

This expresses the belief that the content and pedagogy of the subject matter should not and will not be changed.

Quantified tests provide data on whether “objectives are being met” (KL, 2014, p. 4). Student performance is assessed in at least 11 national tests and continuously by individual teachers in

student plans; schools produce reports and children's scores are compared to international studies such as PISA, TALIS, ICCS. In addition, evaluations are regularly ordered from EVA (The Danish Evaluation Institute). KORA (The Danish Institute of Municipalities and Regions Analysis and Research)⁸ should get involved and the kindergarten children's learning progression was monitored. "Evaluations and tests" (The Prime Minister's Office 2006, 13) would lead to children "learning as much as possible" (The Prime Minister's Office 2006, 17). This requires not only that the tests are carried out, but also that they are taken seriously by actors who do not necessarily share the rationale.

A new distribution of power

The reform involves new power balances. The core actors of the reform express that measurements alone won't do it. The learning objectives can apparently only be achieved if everyone from the Ministry of Education, to the municipality, to management, teacher education, teacher and management training, to learning corps and curriculum developers and teachers, parents and students agree that there are a few narrow goals for the child's schooling, and that all the systematics that are incorporated at all levels have these goals in mind. Better learning is achieved by "working in an objective-oriented way with teaching and with student learning."

In order to ensure complexity-reduced management efficiency, countermovements must be overcome according to Weber's definition of power (Weber, 2003, p. 29). Frontline teachers are a threat here. Teachers' professional identity can thus be strongly linked to the broad mission statement, where they are committed to democracy and a nuanced understanding of human life.

In the face of complexity reduction, teacher's powers of judgment appear to principals as nothing more than a threat. When the school's goals are complexity-reducing, external management of the entire learning process appears rational. Thus, 10 years before the reform, Local Government Denmark (KL) writes a letter to all school administrations telling teachers to put "feelings" on the shelf and work from "knowledge" (Herman, 2007, p. 145). The message is reiterated in 2014: "initiatives" must be based on "knowledge about school results, so that hunches [...] play a smaller role" (KL, 2014, p. 14). Performance monitoring should keep teachers on track. This is in line with the OECD and the Public School Travel Team's (2010) recommendations of monitoring as a key instrument of change (Herman, 2007, p. 147).

The simplified goals for the school and the new data basis are intended to help the principals (ministry, municipality, school management) to get the secondary agent (the teacher) to put

⁸ Today VIVE (The Danish Center for Social Science Research).

effort where the light is directed (Herman, 2007, p. 147). School leaders can reportedly read the “quality of teachers’ teaching” in the new national tests (The Prime Minister’s Office 2006, 24). Goal shifting depends on teachers’ adaptation to what managers measure them on. Here, one should not underestimate the behavior-regulating effect of the very awareness that one is being monitored and that the principals have data on one’s class (that the leader, municipality and ministry are monitoring my results and that there are potential threats). Therefore, “more frequent monitoring of student progress through supplementary national tests and self-tests” is also the answer for underperforming schools (KL, 2014, p.14).

As stated in a key paper from Local Government Denmark (KL), higher principals are encouraged to believe that the aggregated figures are “clear and provide a good overview” (KL, 2014, p. 10), for example when “summing up to an overall score for each school” (KL, 2014, p. 10). The complex everyday experiences of teachers and school leaders challenge this belief, which is why school leaders can form alliances with teachers against upper principals. To ensure the adaptation of school leaders, municipalities must monitor and manage the school leader. In 2006, it was thus recommended to clarify that “school principals are solely responsible to the municipal council” (The Prime Minister’s Office 2006, 25) and to introduce “Performance measures for school principals” (The Prime Minister’s Office 2006, 24). To this end, schools’ scores must be compared with those of other schools (UVM 2015g). The “new quality report”, which “is to be published on the internet”, “can be used as a forward-looking performance management tool in the municipality (KL, 2014, p. 6). The operationalized performance targets must be out in the open and not hidden behind soft formulations. It must be clear if the set goals have not been achieved (KL, 2014, p. 5). UVM itself summarizes that “The target figures for pupils’ academic development [...] must be at the center of quality development in the relationship between the government, municipalities and the other parties in primary and lower secondary schools as well as the relationship between municipal administration, school board and school principal as well as between school principal and teacher” (UVM, 2015e). This shifts the activities and power hierarchy of primary and lower secondary schools. But makes the paradigm trust that top-down management is to be preferred?

Why externally set objectives are preferable

The following analysis reveals the complexity-reducing management ideology of the administrative paradigm by focusing on the notion that externally set goals in a completely objective (evidence- based and scientific) sense are better than goals that teachers and students can influence. The OECD’s 2011 report set the tone. Local Government Denmark (KL)’s 2014 report *Fokus på folkeskolens resultater med kvalitetsrapport 2.0*. states from the outset: “better

results are achieved if the goals are set by others than the school itself” (KL, 2014, p. 5). In the following, I will try to reveal what complexity reduction this claim implies. To document the claim, KL refers to a research article by Poul Aaes Nielsen (2013b), where the issue of decentralized goals is not the central issue in the article, and where this very issue is referred to as “ambiguous” (Nielsen, 2013b, p. 438). It is true that Nielsen claims that he is able to document and justify that when school leaders report that they set requirements for students, it has a strong negative influence on students’ final grades. However, there are several things in the article that should make Local Government Denmark (KL) more vigilant than the confident wording suggests.

Nielsen’s starting point for the article is that all previous research has pointed in widely different directions, and that several have listed reservations about external target setting being preferable (Nielsen, 2013b, p. 439). However, he chooses to disregard this research, which goes against his own conclusion, without further justification (Nielsen, 2013b, p. 451). The central source in Nielsen’s article is Donald P. Moynihan. He is thus the only source for the very conclusion through which Local Government Denmark (KL) legitimizes the school reform’s decentralized management by objectives. However, Moynihan himself (2010) writes that it is difficult to measure complex public tasks and strongly warns against using monitoring and incentive management in the public sector, as it has proven to have unforeseen costs of a moral nature. He accuses monitoring and reward/punishment systems of overlooking the fact that public tasks are best accomplished if values and norms are allowed to develop in the right culture (Moynihan, 2010, p. 25), and emphasizes that reward and punishment systems tend to change norms and values and subsequent behavior for the worse (Moynihan, 2010, p. 28).

Not only is the conclusion primarily theoretically driven and based on a theorist who explicitly contradicts the conclusion. Its data is also based on a single and highly problematic survey question answered by a number of school leaders. Here, school leaders were asked to answer how much influence they have on “Deciding the academic requirements of the students” (Nielsen, 2013b, p. 444). The question is problematic because, regardless of how much they believe they have the power and interest in emphasizing or de-emphasizing ‘the academic’ at their school, the leaders must relate factually to Danish legislation, and here two elements can point in opposite directions. On the one hand, it is obvious that it is not up to school leaders to decide what requirements students face in a 9th or 10th grade exam. There are external examiners and standardized national tests and grading scales in addition to common learning objectives. On the other hand, the individual school has a say in assessing whether a child has the study readiness required to enter upper secondary school. In this light, you could say that the

school has a say in “Deciding the academic requirements of the students” (Nielsen, 2013b, p. 444). So, what did the individual school leader actually think about when answering the question? Nielsen writes in a note that there were similar questions in the survey, but that he has chosen to disregard them because “they did not show the same conditioning pattern” (Nielsen, 2013b, p. 444). The conclusion that external measures are preferable thus depends on complexity reduction.

Let’s say that on this one question (as opposed to the similar questions) there is a correlation between schools with reported influence having lower grade point averages. Can Nielsen then know that causality runs exclusively from principal to student performance (as principal-agent theory prescribes)? Perhaps the results come first, and the principal’s post-rationalization comes afterwards? The rationale would be that a school with low averages will try to tell a different story about the school’s purpose, which relates more to social, humanistic and democratic purposes (cf. below).

Furthermore, the conclusion Local Government Denmark (KL) draws is also based on a veiled *petitio principii*, i.e. the fallacy of assuming the conclusion in the premises. Thus, one of the central assumptions in the article is that schools only have a narrow purpose: “Although academic ability [the student grade point average on nationally standardized tests in mathematics and Danish] may not be the only relevant educational outcome, it is certainly a principal – and perhaps the most important – goal of public school education” (Nielsen, 2013b, p. 440).

If, in a seemingly neutral assumption in the article, one can prioritize the school’s goals and put test scores in Danish and math above all else (Nielsen, 2013b), then it becomes easy to conclude that all other goals that take time away from working towards these narrow goals are problematic and lead to “goal ambiguity, which is likely detrimental to the success of performance management” (Nielsen, 2013b, p. 451).

Others, on the other hand, will see public institutions as characterized by having multiple and conflicting goals (Jørgensen, 2003). Looking at the school’s mission statement and the debates that revisions have generated, it is not a neutral assumption to claim that the primary goal of primary and lower secondary school is to achieve good test results in grade 9 (Jørgensen, 2015). Without acknowledging his own circularity, Nielsen himself writes, “This result is therefore perhaps not the most surprising” (Nielsen, 2013b, p. 451).

In this light, it becomes extremely unclear whether external goals are actually preferable. The claim is that if one goal can be made central to the school (grades in Danish and math), and a

middle manager tries to set goals that shift the focus in another direction (social and democratic goals), then the alternative goals will draw energy away from a more focused effort. Not only does the argument contain the conclusion in its premise. It is also not clear that the argument says anything at all about whether external goals are preferable. It is not a given that decentralized goal setting ensures goal alignment. It seems more likely that centralization opens up for political compromises, which the story of the school's mission statement is an example of (Morsing, 2008). If the goals are set by a group of experts with different interests, we do not necessarily get unity of purpose, as the following will illustrate.

What is thriving well?

The 2014 reform initially set goals for well-being (i.e. 'doing good' or 'thriving well') with a distinct "goal ambiguity". The ambiguity of the concept of wellbeing is overlooked (Jørgensen, 2014) and obscured behind quantification and aggregation. Indirectly, however, the goals express that well-being can be understood both as a question of whether children are learning what they should (thriving well academically) (ten to twelve of the questions are on this theme) and as a question of how children are doing (eight questions relate to whether children are happy, three to whether the physical environment is satisfactory, eight to whether they have social confidence, and two to whether they have a voice). Thus, a school can cut back on student empowerment or wellbeing at school and at the same time improve on thriving measures because children report that they now score higher on tests.

However, these contradictory tendencies do not exempt the new thriving measurement model from complexity reduction. Thus, both the problem and the solution approach to thriving well are seemingly both rational and objective but are based on a particular interpretation of student behavior and school goals. The point can be illustrated with the phenomenon of 'classroom unrest'. If the standard against which the students' actions were measured was 'democracy as a way of life', unrest could be interpreted in one direction, but since the focus is on learning in a narrow sense, unrest, as already suggested by the then Minister Bertel Haarder's *Committee for Discipline, Good Behavior and Bullying in Public Schools*, is interpreted as purely problematic (lack of discipline). Researcher Bo Jacobsen's studies of the school classroom as the *future democrat's* learning space, on the other hand, emphasize conflict and disagreement as a necessary condition, which is why tensions between students can constitute the necessary starting point for learning (Jacobsen et.al. 2004). Without experiencing disagreement, children cannot learn the basic democratic values of independence and tolerance. The new understanding of thriving well ignores this complexity.

The nuances of the KORA report

KL's complexity-reducing reference to Nielsen's article is not the only place where the Complexity-Reducing Administrative Paradigm is at play in the search for reports that can confirm its dialog-inhibiting principal-agent ideology. A report by Jill Mehlby of KORA (2010) is highlighted by the OECD (2011, p. 127) as justification that high performance requires focused performance management. Mehlby also writes that "Especially in municipalities with high-performing schools, clear goals have been set for the schools" (Mehlby, 2010, p. 28), but again the complexity is obscured.

The report as a whole nuances this formulation a great deal. Firstly, it is unclear how schools with focused external management can be distinguished from schools with less clear internal management. Mehlby herself writes that the municipalities' goals are "surprisingly similar across the board. Everywhere, goals are set to focus on academic skills and a special reading effort" (Mehlby, 2010, p. 27). In addition, Mehlby highlights a number of alternative variables that seem to determine whether a school has a high average in the standardized exit tests one year. She points out, for example, that high-performing schools provide extra hours in primary school, that teachers spend a long time preparing, and that teachers teach subjects in which they are trained (Mehlby, 2010, p. 66). She also highlights differences between "how close the cooperation is between the individual schools and the school administration" (Mehlby, 2010, p. 28). A municipality can thus conduct a close and mutual dialog with the schools and thereby show that they are concerned about how things are going at each individual school. In addition, money can be set aside for primary schooling, thereby indicating that the schools are a high priority. These are all significant nuances to the OECD formulation that the most important variables are clear goals and strong leadership.

Mehlby also highlights other factors that determine how schools perform: Poorly performing schools often have classes with "socially disadvantaged students" and "many different nationalities", "where the level of conflict between the children can be high" in combination with the fact that the "many socially disadvantaged students and many bilingual students" do not think "that being many different nationalities gives cohesion" (Mehlby, 2010, p. 54). Mehlby points out that in these schools, many teachers state that "social" is just as important as academic performance (Mehlby, 2010, p. 66). But is it primarily because teachers, managers and administration focus on 'social' rather than 'learning' that children 'perform' poorly? This causality does not seem to be a given.

The report does indeed focus on management leadership, but it is not clear that the high-performing schools have no dialog with teachers about the school's goals. Rather, dialog is the

recurring concept in the report. This is true between administration and principal, principal and teacher, and teacher and student. Among the high-performing schools, for example, “The democratic school, where it is ensured that everyone is heard in all decision-making processes” (Mehlby, 2010, p. 15). A pattern emerges here, because dialog was also a hidden conditional in Nielsen’s article. This is how I read his nuance of when goal setting can have a motivational effect: “at least if the goals are generally accepted in the organization” (Nielsen, 2013b, p. 433). This conditional means that dialog and shared deliberation, rather than externally driven goals, could be the key element in creating motivation and change. Only through systematic complexity reduction does performance management become better than dialog.

Goal shifting and simple operationalization

The dream of target rationalization of all activities from management training to learning corps and testing systems leads to an overconfidence that outsiders must be surprised by. For example, the UVM legitimizes the reform with this expert opinion: “Therefore, the so-called “teaching to the test” is not something to be feared, but something to be hoped for” (UVM, 2015a). In order to achieve this certainty, you have to reduce the complexity and cut the conclusions of the reports on which you apparently base your work. A closer look at these reports reveals a much more nuanced and contradictory picture. Local Government Denmark (KL) bases one of its central claims on an article that states the exact opposite of the above expert opinion, which UVM is trying to use to legitimize performance management. It states that “*teaching to the test*” is an expression of a *perverted* rationality (“the risks of perverse reactions such as “teaching to the test””) (Nielsen, 2013b, p. 440).

Perhaps new benchmarks, tests and simplified comparisons are introduced because of their ability to promote “a new way of thinking” (Herman, 2007, p. 158). They are “key instruments of political change” and “far more than guiding within the full range of responsibility structures and power relations in schools” (Herman, 2007, p. 157).

You reduce complexity when you don’t admit that technocratic reforms can displace key democratic objectives and when you don’t point out that comparisons can lead to a problematic sense of overview. As Hermann puts it: “The ambiguity of published grade point averages [...] is overshadowed by the simple metric attraction that, without visible hands, has action-coordinating capabilities” (Hermann, 2007, p. 158). But perhaps these focus-shifting strategies are not used consciously. Perhaps, the challenges are not being recognized. As with research paradigms, this paradigm is socializing in ways that blur the line between the rational and the cultic (Hermann, 2007, p. 151). The paradigm’s norms of action can apparently be transferred to the outermost ranks with visible consequences: “Performance information [...] appears to

offer a means to ensure continuous organizational adaptation” (Nielsen, 2013a, 48).

Thus, we operate with what William Connolly calls the simplistic operationalization thesis. The simplified operationalization thesis is expressed in the Danish school context through the notion that we can agree on a neutral determination of the school’s purpose (‘children should learn something’) by reducing the original ambiguity about the school’s purpose to goals that can be related to observable states in the world. This reduces the complexity of the real conflicts of interest about the school’s purpose as well as the related concepts of learning, skills, education, life skills, autonomy, democracy and tolerance. According to Connolly, it is unscientific not to reflect openly on the disregard of essential aspects of a contested concept (Connolly, 1993).

A democratic problem

In our context, complexity reduction also poses a democratic problem. For without such reflections, we may unreflectively allow the logic of globalization to change “the purpose, meaning and content of welfare policy” behind our backs (Kristensen, 2014, p. 167), and without further consideration of values, we may allow “new citizen roles and ideals” to play first fiddle in our society (Kristensen, 2014, p. 182).

As Local Government Denmark (KL) in its roadmap for performance management in the municipalities lists “the national goals” for primary and lower secondary schools, the central elements of the primary and lower secondary school’s mission statement are completely and unreflectively disregarded (KL, 2014, p. 30). McKinsey’s operationalizations are also not discussed in a reflective manner. They are simply listed:

“Folkeskolen (The Danish Public School) must challenge all students so that they become as skilled as they can. Public schools must reduce the significance of social background in relation to academic performance. Confidence and well-being in primary and lower secondary schools must be strengthened through respect for professional knowledge and practice. The well-being of pupils must be increased” (KL, 2014, p. 3).

Without an open ideological showdown, but with the ideological complexity reduction of the administrative paradigm, the purpose of a core institution in the welfare state has been displaced.

Thus, the complexity-reducing governance paradigm not only works against democratic principles, but complexity reduction also leads to paradoxes in light of the paradigm’s own yardstick, namely ideas of transparency and research-based rationality.

Conclusion

Any changes to the complex goals of public institutions should be publicly discussed (Jespersen, 1996, p. 141) through which the blind spots of paradigmatic rationalities can be revealed in the encounter with other paradigmatic conceptions (Dryzek 2012). The Complexity-Reducing Administration Paradigm, whose instrumental rationality seems to be ‘still spreading’ (Weber, 1995; Jespersen, 1996, p. 11; Negt, 2014, p. 16f) is reinforced by the school reform as the dominant paradigm. The article’s critical hermeneutic and democratic approach to critical policy analysis focuses on unmasking the epistemological understandings offered by the dominant paradigm. The concept of paradigm is used in this article, along with the concept of ideology, to focus critical attention on how epistemological logics also function as blinders. The analysis shows that the dominant paradigm has common features with what Raymond Geuss has called a total ideology, i.e.: “a program or plan of action, based on an explicit, systematic model or theory of how the society works, aimed at radical transformation or reconstruction of the society as a whole, held with more confidence (‘passion’) than the evidence for the theory or model warrants” (Geuss, 1981, p. 11). The warning against complexity-reducing management by objectives is that a lack of dialog about goals leads to dysfunctions, and that teachers can only live up to the ideals of autonomy and democracy of the mission statement if they can set flexible goals together with the children. However, objectives-setting aside, there is no contradiction between promoting a democratic culture and the 2014 reform’s social- democratic goal of giving as many future citizens as possible the ability to read and to stimulate them cognitively. The school reform’s strengthening of collaborative and practical activities is also in the spirit of Dewey. All of this can strengthen democracy as a form of governance, a way of life and a form of society.

The Contextual Experience Paradigm is also only seemingly opposed to the dominant paradigm when it comes to the overarching idea that there should be goals for schools. Here, too, children should learn with a view to participation in the labor market, democracy and life in general. They should be stimulated in their independent critical thinking skills, they should not take external authorities for granted, and they should find meaning in purposeful activities by being able to bring in their own experience, judgment and thinking skills. They must learn to collaborate on solutions. It’s an incomplete but not dead project.

Such a project can be legitimized by the fact that by shaping free and cooperative citizens, we can put public communicative reason at the center of societal development, through which we can subject our goals to necessary democratic tests. To shape free and collaborative citizens, we should also recognize that key welfare institutions are not only *productive* but also *relational* institutions. Nielsen writes in the preface to his PhD thesis: “Finally, I would like to thank Don

Moynihan for hosting me at UW-Madison for one semester and for providing me with insightful comments on my work, on baseball and on the workings of the US public administration community” (Nielsen 2013a, 6). The fact that the two have talked about baseball together is not insignificant, even though it was hardly part of the goal description for the stay. By talking about baseball, for example, we acknowledge each other and show that we are not just using each other for instrumental purposes. A teacher and a student who don’t just talk about exams show that they care about each other as more than instruments for their own purposes.

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