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DISCOURSES ON GOVERNANCE OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION

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Abstract

This article will describe four discourses relating to external influences on the working conditions of educational professionals, discourses which also reflect the ways in which such professionals are perceived. The background is the development of Danish society and the Danish education system since World War II, but a great number of Western European countries, members of the OECD, have been strongly influenced by the same transnational agencies and have therefore been influenced in the same ways. As a result, the findings are also relevant for countries other than Denmark. The first discourse was constructed in the welfare state era, which lasted from World War II until the beginning of this century. In this discourse, teachers were supposed to act according to a democratic Bildung discourse. The second discourse overlapped the first in the competitive state era from 2000 onwards. In this discourse, teachers are supposed to act according to an agenda of effectiveness and accountability. The third and fourth discourses focus on learning outcomes and technologies in the marketplace: eduBusiness and data-driven digital discourses.

Keywords

discourses, governance, professions, democratic Bildung, learning outcomes, eduBusiness

Introduction

Our views about professional work, professional associations, and individual professionals are formed by many factors. In the field of education, these factors may include legislation on education and the labour market, Danish and international policy and education discourses and regulations, and the social technologies produced and implemented on the international, national, and local levels. Professions—groups or unions of professionals—also produce their own discourses, reflections, and actions about work and workers in their own particular field (Moos et al., 2004). Individual professionals develop the foundation for their perspectives and modes of action through their professional education and experiences in work and life as a whole. Those relationships have been very powerful aspects of the ways the sociology of professions has developed to a stage where a profession is seen as a group of people with special competences based on science and professional, educational knowledge (Laursen et al., 2005; Foucault, 2001). This perspective has been pivotal to functional sociology on professionalization: the profession itself is in charge of defining and monitoring the quality of work and recruiting new members to the group and to positions of employment (Moos et al., 2004).

There is a continuous struggle among discourse influencers (external, groups, and personal) to be respected and powerful. External agents seem to have gained momentum over the past 20–30 years, and policymakers at the international and national levels have become interested in professions as part of their duty to manage the public sector. As a result, the main perspective this text will take is a policy governance perspective (Foucault, 2001). We shall investigate how some agents or agencies structure people's room for action through the production of frames and discourses (Jensen, 2005).

Discourse analysis understands discourses as ways of arguing and structuring the world and is often carried out by a specific societal or scholarly community. The purpose of discourse analysis is to reveal the existence of certain moral and ethical values which are otherwise not apparent (Foucault, 1972; Moos & Krejsler, 2006). The strategy which guides the analyses and interpretations in this paper involves diagnosing the times we live in by employing methods of social analysis: identifying empirical signs of change and interpreting these signs as indicators of a tendency showing a pattern or a direction or a discourse. The objective of this diagnosis is to elucidate indications in time periods and tendencies of transformation within those periods (Hammershøj, 2017), which ties this analysis to governance analyses.

This text is based on analyses of Danish discourses and history. Transnational influences over the past 40–50 years are global in nature, but different nations and societies will experience and interpret them differently, which

is why different countries have developed different systems of education. In the most recent 20–30 years, however, influences seem to have grown because agencies have chosen efficient and effective methods and social technologies, and so national systems tend to act in the same way, in a mimetic process (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), creating homogenized education systems. The interpretation of the influences is of course to be done in national societies.

The first discourse: Democratic *Bildung* discourse

Since World War II, a great number of Western societies have developed welfare states with a view to protecting their citizens through legislation on social welfare, taxation, the labour market, and education. One discourse that has emerged in welfare state policy is referred to as democratic *Bildung* discourse. Based on the work of Klafki (2001), the intention is to position children in the world, in democratic communities and societies, in ways that equip them to understand and communicate with other people and cultures. Klafki (2001) sums up the discussion in these three points: general education must be an education providing everyone with *self-determination* capabilities, *participation* capabilities, and *solidarity* capabilities. This reflection is a critical rethinking of the general purpose of education, to include everybody, and the demand on education to develop all human capabilities (Klafki, 1983; Moos, 2018).

During the development of the welfare state, the Danish school structure was decentralized with the state only prescribing broad and general purposes and guidelines for education. The local authorities in municipalities interpreted these guidelines and managed the financial, personnel, and practical aspects of schooling. Each school had a parents' committee and a principal, who did not interfere much in the teaching provided by the teachers.

Teachers were seen as autonomous and professional agents and were granted a great deal of discretion. They were regarded as being capable of making informed decisions in classrooms and in their relationships with students, parents, and policymakers. Important educational discourses were built on educational and philosophical investigations and discussions of purpose, history, culture and environment, and relationships with the state and society. General education was often regarded as involving didactic reflections and discussions on subject matter and methods and social/psychological insight into relationships between teachers and students (Moos, 2014).

One contemporary discourse is the discourse on global citizenship. This discourse is based on the idea that if students are to function competently in a globalized world, they need to be taught how a democratic society functions at a structural level, which means acquiring knowledge about the

parliament, government, legal system, and police. They also need to experience and live a democratic life: “A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 1916, p. 87).

This is particularly important in relationships at school because it means that not all methods of teaching and types of teacher behaviour are appropriate or acceptable. Global citizenship education thus needs to build on forms of democratic *Bildung* in order to capture the cultural understanding and acknowledgement of the other (Kemp, 2011; Moos, 2017). It should include a global world view and the idea of a global community in education, and not base the education of a global civilization solely on transnational standards and measurements such as those of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA; see the next section). Democratic education is described by Biesta (2003) as: “creating opportunities for action, for being a subject both in schools and other educational institutions, and in society as a whole” (p. 59). Besides the opportunity for action or participation, the most important concepts related to democracy are curiosity, critique, and diversity because they give a more precise direction to the concept of participatory and deliberative democracy.

In the democratic *Bildung* discourse, teachers are professional if they can support students in gaining democratic *Bildung* – if they have: qualifications to acquire knowledge and skills about the world; insights to socialize students to participate in small and large communities; and the will to subjectify students to become unique, autonomous, non-affirmative subjects. They are responsible to students, parents, and the community because they have insights into society and culture, general education, didactics, and leadership of relationships.

The second discourse: Learning outcomes discourse

At the beginning of the 1970s, many European governments started to base public governance on the economic logics of a neoliberal marketplace, involving rational choice, increasing market influence, and minimal state influence (e.g., deregulation, privatization, and outsourcing). Citizens are seen as participants in the labour force with full responsibility for their situation and as consumers. The public sector is seen primarily as serving production and trade in a national, innovative system (Moos, 2009).

This market turn in policy was strongly supported by transnational agencies. For instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union are working with the global trends to develop a new model of (and discourse for) the governance of education. As none of the former agencies can issue regulations—hard

governance—to national governments, they have developed forms of soft governance: advice, guidance, comparisons, and other social technologies.

The central theme is that policymakers and practitioners should build on quantitative sciences rather than on the traditional, qualitative science of educational philosophy. Education should be based on scientific curricula and scientific management (Blossing et al., 2014). Policymakers have developed more interest and competences in governance than in education. These processes have been described as the “political work of calculating education” (Lawn & Grek, 2012). Statistics becomes the science of the “numerical study of social facts” and the foundation for the emergence of “governing by numbers” (Nóvoa, 2013). This means de-ideologizing and objectivizing governance, leadership, and education, making it possible to treat social facts as things (Desrosières, 2000). Over the past century, this development has been the background for the emergence of a new group of experts in the educational field: experts in statistics and psychometrics. Politicians and policymakers are particularly interested in their work as numbers are regarded as the best and most efficient foundation for political and governance decisions. This trend is often called “evidence-based policy” (Moos & Wubbels, 2018).

The PISA has constructed its own transnational set of aims: “skills to meet real-life challenges.” It is believed that these aims are skills that productive workers anywhere in the advanced world need. Thus, the PISA only measures how well schools perform to the extent that there is an overlap between national curriculum aims and PISA-defined skills. PISA results might indicate how well the national curriculum and the PISA skills are aligned rather than indicating the quality of schools and teachers. The OECD has therefore reduced learning to the acquisition of skills that are economically useful—for employability—and measurement. The aim is to create a method of comparing outcomes, but the skills in question are not actually taught anywhere in the world (Labaree, 2014)

The PISA is more governance-focused than is usually acknowledged. This should be no surprise as the OECD is the originator of the neoliberal, new public management system of thinking and governance (OECD, 1995). Measuring outcomes, and in particular outcomes along one global set of criteria, is a very powerful technology of soft governance (Lange & Alexiadou, 2007; Normand, 2016). As time goes by, politicians, policymakers, and professionals become accustomed to this, accustomed to thinking that this is the new normal. The result will be the homogenization of views on education and the dominant discourses of education – something that is already apparent in many ministries and local administrations. This tendency carries the potential for a new, global view and practice of education that may also neglect national and local policies, culture, worldviews, and education.

In the learning outcomes discourse, teachers are professional when they can teach to the test. The national and international standards or goals do not have to be interpreted, they only need to be implemented, just like the international and national measurements of student outcomes. Teaching must be evidence based—meaning that it must be based on test results—according to programmes of best practice. Teachers are accountable to national aims and local governance.

The third discourse: eduBusiness

The third discourse has its source in the same global trend as the second discourse: the move towards a global, neoliberal marketplace policy in public governance (with a focus on market logics such as decentralization, output, competition, and strong leadership) as well as an accountability policy (with a focus on recentralization, centrally imposed standards and quality criteria, and governing by numbers). The trend was furthered in 1998, when the General Agreement on Trade and Services of the World Trade Organization (WTO, 1998) decided to move education from the field of culture, protected by nations, to the field of services, which operates according to the rules of free trade in free markets. In this way, education became a commodity in line with other commodities (Moos, 2006; Pitman, 2008). This trend is often known as neoliberal new public management (Hood, 1991).

The influence of transnational agencies, particularly the OECD, has been very visible in governance and education over the past 20 years (Hopman, 2008; Moos, 2009, 2011).

As mentioned above, one aspect of globalization is the emergence of global learning standards and measurements in the PISA and other international comparisons: the PISA set of competences and numerous packages of so-called evidence-based programmes and best practices. These are prerequisites for treating education and learning as commodities (Ball, 2004) and are therefore important factors in the homogenization of education all over the globe (Moos & Wubbels, 2018).

This tendency has reached the stage at which big multinationals are interested in the education market. Bank of America Merrill Lynch has estimated that the global education market is worth \$4.3 trillion. Consultancy firms such as Pearson, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and McKinsey as well as philanthropic foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation have become actively involved in the development and dissemination of education and governance programmes throughout the world. They are pivotal actors and agents of global homogenization, making education similar all over the world and thus downgrading the

importance of national and local cultures and democracies (Ball & Junemann, 2015; Ball, 2012; Gunter & Mills, 2017; Verger et al., 2016).

Two of the biggest players on the eduBusiness market are the OECD and Pearson. They have actually collaborated in producing competences for the PISA test “21st Century Skills and Competencies” (Pearson, 2014) and thus in developing the global policy and corporate governance of education as they look at education as a business opportunity driven by numbers (Ydesen et al., 2013). The Pearson (2019) website presents the company as follows:

Our Company

We are the world’s learning company with more than 24,000 employees operating in 70 countries. We combine world-class educational content and assessment, powered by services and technology, to enable more effective teaching and personalized learning at scale. We believe that wherever learning flourishes so do people.

Our Vision

Our vision is to have a direct relationship with millions of lifelong learners and to link education to the way people aspire to live and work every day. To do that, we’ll collaborate with a wide group of partners to help shape the future of learning. We believe that we all need to embrace lifelong learning, continuously acquiring new knowledge and skills to thrive in an ever-changing and increasingly connected world.

Our Strategic Priorities

Our capabilities are based on our deep expertise in how people learn, and we apply them to our three strategic priorities:

1. Grow market share through the digital transformation of our courseware and assessment businesses by shifting from selling ownership of our content to selling print or digital services.
2. Invest in structural growth opportunities that promote lifelong learning, such as professional certifications and licensure, virtual schools, online program management, and English language learning and assessment.
3. Become a simpler, more efficient, and sustainable company by eliminating duplication, increasing standardization, and improving access to and outcomes for our products.

This presentation is a perfect reflection of contemporary policy, using concepts related to the world of education such as “world-class educational content and assessment”, “effective ... and personalized learning”, “courseware”, “shape the future of learning” and “products.” The products are often education programmes for sale worldwide (see bullet point 3 in particular).

Many other companies also produce learning or teaching programmes. They are most often internationally produced and are often sold under the pretext of being best practices and evidence-based. This evidence is a kind of “global evidence” that pretends to be context free (Moos et al., 2005). Education theory, practice, and reflections are regarded as being free of local culture, policies, and relationships.

Many school authorities and municipal policymakers buy these programmes and ask schools and teachers to use them in education. This could be because the authorities lack educational expertise and feel that this is a good way of supporting and governing teaching at the same time.

In the eduBusiness discourse, teachers are seen as professionals who agree to use programmes that have been approved by the local authority and who focus on national standards, basic skills, and globally accepted and measurable learning content. In other words, teachers support and act in line with affirmative (and thus non-democratic) education.

The fourth discourse: The digitalization of education

As mentioned above, one way of developing education programmes is by building on big data and thereby downgrading the importance of national and local cultures. Global education programmes are constructed by using and harvesting big data through algorithms in huge databases of globally used tests and learning programmes (Williamson, 2016).

Firms of consultants, agencies, and governments use digital solutions for a multitude of purposes. One of these purposes relates to achieving the algorithmic governance of people’s everyday lives (Williamson, 2017) by combining thinking, institutions, technology, and activities that can be used to monitor, control, form, and regulate human activity and behaviour (Foucault, 2001).

The national legitimacy of such endeavours is a matter for governments to clarify. A global legitimacy, such as that of Pearson and other consultancy firms, has no forum to get legitimation.

Williamson (2017) commented that:

Big data are at the centre of future visions of social media, business, shopping, government, and much more. Rieder and Simon (2016) have characterized a *big data imaginary* as an attempt to apply *mechanized objectivity to the colonization of the future*.

- o Extending the reach of automation, from data collection to storage, curation, analysis, and decision-making processes
- o Capturing massive amounts of data and focusing on correlations rather than causes, thus reducing the need for theory, models, and human expertise

- o Expanding the realm of what can be measured, in order to trace and gauge movements, actions, and behaviours in ways that were previously unimaginable
- o Aspiring to calculate what is yet to come, using smart, fast, and cheap predictive techniques to support decision making and optimize resource allocation.

There are numerous examples of this kind of project, including universal-scale Chinese facial recognition and the attached social governance of citizen behaviour, internet companies such as Google and Amazon deploying targeted advertising through the use of algorithms, the World Economic Forum (2016), New Vision for Education project on emotional learning through the use of technology, and a big Danish project on learning platforms: “A thorough digitalization of the basic school ... shall support student learning and flexible planning and implementation of education independent of time and place” (KL, 2015).

This latter platform was intended to support the Danish School Reform of 2013 with descriptions of more than 3,000 outcome aims. It is constructed on the basis of national standards, test and digital learning materials, plans for the school day, student plans for learning progression, data on outcomes, digital working rooms, documentation, and assessment. It will be compulsory for all schools, teachers, parents, and students.

In the digitalization of education discourse, teachers find entirely new ways of putting humanity into teaching and learning because the platforms and other digitalized forms of education will change—or rather eliminate—relationships among students and between students and teachers; they will change traditional educational concepts of context and content because they offer context-free, content-empty technocratic learning. Teachers will also need to find ways of diminishing detailed state governance on education as well as making room for local interpretations and activities and introducing democratic relationships into schools.

Summary

The development analysed in this text illustrates a number of general tendencies that seem to occur in parallel to one another: from education towards governance, from bottom-up governance towards top-down governance, and from hard governance towards soft governance.

During the era in which the welfare state was being developed, there was a political focus on participation and democracy and so teachers were given a good deal of discretion to interpret and exercise their professional judgement. This was possible because state authorities only interfered to

a small extent at the local and institutional levels. The education system was not governed with a hard hand and the legislation under which it operated was expressed in brief, general terms. However, it is worth pointing out that this occurred during a period in which there was a culture of consensus with regard to the purpose and means of education as well as society.

In working according to neoliberal market ideology, the state needed to get closer to practice and gain greater control of aims and standards as well as outcomes. Hence the shift towards outcome-based education with strict accountability. Education was turned into a commodity on the global market. The focus shifted from education input and processes towards outcomes and more hard governance in terms of national standards and measures.

The general development has continued with commodification and digitalization, but the centre of power has shifted from being relatively hard and national or regional, towards disappearing into a global sphere of transnational agencies and global consultancy firms. Therefore, governance had to move towards soft means: notions of evidence, measurements, data, and educational programs where decision-making power is hidden. One could say that the centre gets over-the-top management and is meant to monitor people on a much larger scale as populations are on their way into a global society.

Analyses like these examine global and overarching policies, power, and influences, but do not go into detail on local and individual reception, interpretation, and enactment. Nevertheless, the overall perspective of this article is to examine the means of contemporary soft governance: May they be so extremely powerful that they leave governments, local authorities, and professionals with no option, and no room to manoeuvre?

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