

Governance in Primary and Lower Secondary Education

Comparing Norway, Sweden and England

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Foreword

This publication comes out from the project *Governance and professional Autonomy in Primary Education – Comparing Norway, Sweden and England* funded from the Norwegian Research Council. The paper was presented at the 20th EGOS Conference Ljubljana, Slovenia, July 1–3 2004, session on «New Modes of Governance in Public Sector Organizations» (sub theme 41).

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Summary

In this paper we discuss changes in regulation and governance in primary and lower secondary education in Norway, Sweden and England. During the last ten–fifteen years the three countries have implemented reforms, which seem to imply new governing principles and tools. The paper aims to examine important reforms in the three countries and start developing an analytical framework for further exploration. Firstly, we classify the policy changes taken place in the three countries, by highlighting similarities and differences in their regulative educational policies. Secondly, we discuss to what degree the choice of policy-tools represents a move towards increased convergence across the countries. Making comparisons while using the concept of tools as the primary analytical tool, implicates a potential danger for stressing convergence on behalf of divergence. The use of a tool doesn't tell us how it is implemented in practice or in which institutional context the tool operates. If we want to explain policy changes and how they are implemented we need to broaden our analytical perspective. The discussion demonstrates that which tools are chosen and how they are implemented are affected by the established historical institutional context within the different educational systems. All the same, the dynamics of change implicate breakdown of the traditional hierarchical governing structures. Accordingly, the term of governance with its focus on governing relations is a useful contribution to studies of policy changes.

Sammendrag

I notatet drøftes endringer i regulering og styring av grunnskolen som følge av reformer på 1990-tallet i Norge, Sverige og England. Alle land har i denne perioden gjennomført reformer som ser ut til å innebære nye prinsipper for politisk-administrativ styring. I tillegg er notatet et forsøk på å utvikle et analytisk rammeverk for sammenligning av reformer og praksis mellom land. Gjennom å klassifisere reformene i hvert land etter et analyseskjema basert på hvilken type policy instrument hvert land har valgt har formålet vært å diskutere konvergens versus divergens mellom landene. Analysen viser at reformene peker mot en re-orientering i alle land i retning av deregulering, desentralisering, konkurranse og resultatevaluering. Tiltross for konvergens i valg av policyinstrumenter er det grunn til å stille spørsmål ved likhet på andre nivåer i de tre land. Valg av samme instrument fører ikke til likt utfall i landene, ei heller sier det lite om hvordan det blir iverksatt samt om den historisk-institusjonell kontekst det virker innenfor. I en diskusjon om likheter og forskjeller er det viktig å understreke begrensningene ved ensidig å fokusere på styringsinstrumenter. Både den innbyrdes spenningen som oppstår mellom inkonsistente policyinstrumenter, den historiske-institusjonelle konteksten og studier av praksisfeltet er viktig for å forstå den faktiske iverksettingen av skolereformer i hvert land. Samtidig vil et bredere analyseskjema sikre en fra å dra forhastede slutninger om konvergens. Valg av policy instrumenter er preget av etablerte institusjonelle faktorer. Samtidig representerer 1990 tallets reformer en endringsdynamikk som impliserer nedbryting av tradisjonelle hierarkiske strukturer. Dermed må de fremvoksende relasjonene og innflytelsesmønstrene integreres i studier av policy endringer.

Introduction

Throughout various parts of the world there have, in recent decades, been an increasing number of attempts to restructure and deregulate state schooling. In the core of these initiatives are efforts to dismantle centralized educational bureaucracies and to create devolved systems of education, which entail institutional autonomy and school based management and administration (Whitty et al 1998). In this paper we discuss some changes in regulation and governance in the educational sector in Norway, Sweden and England. During the last ten years the three countries have implemented reforms, which seem to imply new governing principles and tools. In turn, these new principles may affect the division of responsibility between the different levels of authority and between different groups of actors influencing the particular policy area. Increasingly, the overall aim of school policy seems to be an ambiguous one in all of these countries: On the one hand, there is a tendency to give more autonomy to the local level in decentralising tasks and responsibilities to the municipalities and the schools. On the other hand, an opposite tendency is the central authority's intensification in developing tools for controlling schools activities. However, the ambiguities take different shapes in the three countries. Norway and Sweden belong to the same social democratic welfare state model, and have many economic, cultural, social and political traits in common (Esping Andersen 1990). Also, they share a range of characteristics in the educational system, such as the impact of the comprehensive school and the value of equality. Despite these similarities, changes in the educational system, especially in the 1990s have been proceeding quite differently. Sweden has placed a distinct emphasis on transferring powers to the municipal level (Hudson and Lidström 2002). Apparently, Norway has adopted the international pattern of stressing freedom of organizational forms over efforts to influence policy contents (Amnå 2000), although this could be an indirect path to power in the school system (Helgøy 2003, Helgøy and Homme 2003). Great Britain belongs to a different welfare state model, i.e. the liberal one (Esping-Andersen 1990), and compared to the two Scandinavian countries the traditions in education policy are different.

This paper is based on a comparative research project in its initial phase, and aims to examine important reforms in the three countries and start developing an analytical framework for further exploration. *Firstly*, we aim to classify the policy changes taken place in the three countries, by highlighting similarities and differences in their regulative educational policies. *Secondly*, we discuss to what degree the choice of policy-tools represents a move towards increased convergence across the countries. *Thirdly*, we point to a need for encompassing both policy tools, institutional context and the level of practises in analysing changes in policy outputs.

Theoretical approach

The changes in governing tools in the education sector raise questions of efficiency and legitimacy. The assumption underlying our theoretical approach is that fundamentally, choice of (educational) tools is a political decision and not merely a technical one. The choice of tools influences which actors that will be part of the implementation process and accordingly which actors structuring action. Consequently, whatever choice of adequate tools, it advantages some actors – with their own perspectives, interests, skills and incentives – at the expense of others in determining how policies are carried out. This approach implies a broadening of the analytical focus from merely internal hierarchic agencies to also include organizational networks. A wide array of complex exchanges come into existence between government agencies and a variety of public and private institutions participating in the operation of the public reforms (Salamon 2002). This can be conceptualized as *governance*. According to Kooiman (1993) governance is widely defined as patterns emerging from governing activities of social, political and administrative actors. The focus is on governing *relations* rather than merely on hierarchical–administrative structures. Empirically such governing relations can be observed as self-organizing, inter-organizational networks (Rhodes 1997). The perspective of governance captures patterns of authorities and relations that are not considered as part of the formal hierarchical institutions but that are distinct to each specific policy arena.

Our point of departure in developing the analytical framework is Ingram and Schneider's categorical scheme of policy instruments (Ingram and Schneider 1990). The categories seem useful in capturing the dimensions of the policy area we are studying. In addition, we are inspired by a study of higher education in the same three countries which has fruitfully applied the same analytical scheme (Bleiklie 1999, 2000).

Policy instruments

According to Ingram and Schneider, an important feature of public policy is the attempt to get people to behave different from what they otherwise would prefer to do. In this respect, five different categories of tools are seen as central. *Authority tools*, include legislation and reorganization of formal organizational framework, building upon the assumption that agents and targets are responsible to the organisational structure of leader–follower relationship. Legitimate governments' authority grants permission and prohibits or requires action under designated circumstances. Central dimensions within this category are that of centralization versus decentralization of formal decision making power and that of forms and degrees of systemic integration within a political system (Bleiklie 1999). *Incentive tools* are instruments relying on positive or negative tangible payoffs to induce compliance or to encourage utilization. These tools are based on the assumption that individual behaviour is motivated by maximising utility, and thereby to be encouraged or coerced by manipulation of different sorts of material or non-material incentives. *Capacity tools* rely on information, training, education and resources provided to enable individuals, groups or agencies to make decisions or to take actions. *Symbolic*

and hortatory tools assume that individual's beliefs and values, such as justice, individualism, equality and obligations motivate policy-related action. Thus target population are more likely to comply with behaviour desirable from a policy perspective if the behaviour is consistent with their own beliefs. *Learning tools* are set in when the basis for the problem solving action is uncertain or unknown. The idea is that agencies and target populations can learn about their behaviour and thereby select effective tools from other tools. Bleiklie (2000) holds evaluation as a common tool gaining acceptance the recent years. At the same time evaluation may be used as an authority tool, either as a standardization instrument or in order to effectively distribute incentives. Widely defined, evaluation includes performance measuring, testing and output control that is of great significance for this particular policy area.

We will try to characterize the policy changes in primary and secondary education in the three countries due to the categories of policy instruments introduced by Ingram and Schneider. The categorization below must be considered as a suggestion and we also want to point that some policy tools can respond to more than one of the five broad categories of policy instruments.

The Norwegian Case

Authority tools

Historically, legislation and formal structure have been the most evident and prominent forms of control in the Norwegian school system. Although historically the responsibility for schools in Norway has been divided between municipalities and the state, the Norwegian system is a typical example of a centralized educational bureaucracy. Schools have been parts of a strongly specialized organizational structure, a typical sector organisation with strong connections from the municipal bottom to the state on the hierarchical top. The authority levels were tightly interwoven which meant strong relations and collaboration between the principal of schools, the municipal school administration, the regional authority and the ministry (Farsund 1998, Telhaug 1997). More or less detailed, the school legislation acts have regulated teachers' employment conditions, their education, as well as organisation and content of this education by a national curriculum.

The Norwegian school system is characterised by a combination of strongly regulating national curriculum and legislation, a realisation of the unitary school and a national and standardized teacher's education. However, this particular and strong formal control has not meant lack of professional autonomy. The prevalence of administrative control over substance in schools activities has provided extensive trust and autonomy for the teachers. Moreover, the Norwegian model has included cooperation between professional and political actors. Until the 1990s the formal organisation gave the professions several channels for influence: through consultative systems, through their participation in non-ministerial councils committees, through their positions in municipal and central educational administration and through their participation in parliamentary committees. This decision making system gave teachers

influence in law preparations, the planning of the curriculum and assessment of the experimental and development activities in schools.

The formal structure and the detail oriented legislation remain stable until late 1980s. However, reforms during the 1990s redirected the use of authority tools. A White paper (St.meld. nr. 37 (1990–91)) formulated the political intention to introduce a national political consistent steering model.

The education reforms were initiated and implemented during a Labour party government period from 1990 to 1997, followed by a centre parties/conservative party coalition government period from 1997 until now, only disrupted by a short labour government period from 2000 until the election autumn 2001. The changes have taken place under two different governments. The labour party government started by introducing the Education reforms in 1997. Under the leadership of the minister of education representing the conservative party, Kristin Clemet, several regulations in the education policy have been introduced. As will be stated later, she makes use of other forms of tools than did the former government.

Incremental shifts in the Norwegian education policy from 1986 encompassing both the administrative structures, curriculum and teaching reforms. The Block Grant Act of 1986 changed the public service finance system radically from state determined earmarked allocation to municipality decided priorities. The Municipality/local government Act of 1992 gave the municipalities autonomy to organize their services, including primary and lower secondary school. The trend is to reduce the local education authorities to a minimum. Accordingly, schools suffer from a lack of coordination. On the other side schools are given institutional autonomy. The head teacher has increased autonomy over budgeting, recruiting, the organisation of education and pedagogical development.

The 1997 Education Reform/The 1999 Education Act aimed to transform not just school policy and curriculum for primary and lower secondary school, but also to connect the schools more closely with kindergartens, and local cultural life. Another distinctive feature of the National Curriculum, L97, was the changed status from recommendations to formal regulations. The curriculum has been characterised as the most detailed and regulated ever (Gundem and Karseth 1998, Broadhead 2001). The school reform also included an expansion of and the compulsory education from 9 to 10 years.

Primarily, private schools are regarded as supplements to local authority schools. Approximately 98.4 per cent of children at primary and lower secondary levels (and 96 per cent of upper secondary school pupils) attend schools administered by the local authorities (<http://odin.dep.no/filarkiv/176297/utdan.eng.q.pdf>). Most private schools are administered by religious denominations or by organizations representing specific views of life or alternative educational approaches. Authorized private schools receive financial support from the State. A new independent school Act of 2003 intend to make it easier to establish private schools.

In addition to changes in legislation the 1990s brought changes in the political-administrative decision making system: the non-ministerial professional councils were abolished. Moreover, the Ministry took control over some of their tasks; other tasks were taken over by the new administrative coordination body: The Centre for Learning (Læringscenteret). By this change the corporative influence was reduced. The planning

of the next curriculum proved this statement. The curriculum was taken care of by the Ministry and other kinds of expertise and actors outside education were invited to participate in the preparation process. The school has been more integrated in the municipal government. Municipalities have been legally obliged to provide day-care facilities before and after school hours for children attending the first four grades. Parents have been assigned a greater influence through school boards and committees, and as a body entitled to comment, both locally and nationally

Incentive tools

The strong and formal regulated school system in Norway in addition to the strong tradition of employment security and equal wage system have not prepared for use of incentive tools. However, to some extent the new legislation has loosened up the restricted wage system. Teachers negotiating rights have changed. While the Norwegian teachers have been employed by the municipalities, they have been negotiating with the state. Currently, the municipalities have full employment responsibility. To some extent the individual head teacher has the right to use wage as recruitment and reward tool, accordingly the long tradition of equality is broken. The beginning of wage differentiation is promoted against the policy of the teacher union. The differentiations have different sources, one of them performance based. The performance pay system has brought huge oppositions from the teachers' employers' organisation. Their main argument is that a performance pay system is based on uncertain and diffuse criteria due to the fact that teachers' performance is difficult to measure. Another form of incentive is brought into school through a bonus scheme. Schools which perform well, due to several central set standards, receive financial rewards. The scheme is supposed to stimulate for pedagogical development and to strengthen the institutions own sense of responsibility. However, this specific incentive tool is limited and currently it is only of minor importance. Another, also limited, incentive tool is represented by per capita funding which has been introduced in a small number of municipalities. Standing alone, this tool will be of symbolic character. Combined with open enrolments in school, however, the tool will be of increasingly importance.

Capacity tools

Resource allocation is a central capacity tool in Norway, as in other educational systems. Since its origin the state schooling system has gained broad political support, and represent together with the health sector, an area where a great deal of resource allocation are accepted and legitimated by the population. Norway is among the countries spending most resources per pupil in primary and lower secondary education. Resources per pupil seem stable during the last decade. The same pattern emerges when it comes to teachers per pupil. Averagely Norway has 11 pupils per teacher, ranking number four among selected OECD countries (OECD 2003). The relative high spending of resources in Norway is to be explained both by the scattered settlement and by the teacher density index. The tradition of local schools as «the heart of the local

community» combined with scattered settlement in a spacious country lead to more resources per pupil in the rural areas than in the urban areas. Anyhow, the predictable flow of resources combined with minimal insight in schools activities might have supported the capacity of teachers/head teachers as decision makers at the institutional level. Another kind of capacity tool has been the teachers' education and professional monopoly of positions in school. Worth to mention is also the tradition of school-developments measures and experimental activities supported by the Central Agency of Experimental activities established 1954 and laid down in 1986. Experimental activities were to a great extent initiated and carried out locally. This in turn implied an opportunity to improve the capacity of influence in the general schools policy, because many former experiments have been transformed into general education policy.

In the current situation contemporary capacity tools are undergoing reformulations. Head teachers have been responsible for the schools own budget, but municipalities' increased responsibilities on employment, organising and drifting schools make the financial support less predictable. In addition, the messages from the authorities, as formulated in policy documents throughout the 1990s is for the schools to provide more education of better quality for the resources set in. The extensive amount of resources allocated to the education sector is being questioned among others because the Norwegian score at the PISA tests so far is quite middle range. Thereby, according to the educational authorities, these scorings are not reflecting the resources spent. The signals sent out could mean that the capacity tools now are being concentrated more on output control and quality improvement due to an instrumental, rather than a professional, logic. A White Paper from 2004 (St.meld. nr. 30 (2003–2004)) clearly focuses on improving capacities at the local level. «Competence» is the key word in the suggestion of restructuring teachers' education. At the same time the frames for the capacity improving may restrict the traditional professional influence on core decisions.

Another ongoing change is the entry of new occupation groups in school. Pre-school teachers as well as social workers, nurses and different categories of unskilled assistants have – to a certain degree - been employed in school, creating a new professional system which until the mid 90s only involved teachers. In addition the new Independent school Act of 2003 has made it easier to establish independent schools.

Symbolic and hortatory tools

Schools are institutions with long traditions and a history distinguished by values and norms defining what the school is about, what it shall do and who to do it. Traditionally the school was supposed to provide not only education, but also leaving the pupils with a general sense of decorum. Other core values have been equality and uniformity. Those values are now being challenged by instrumentalist values. The objectives of the policy are formulated in a terminology stressing effectiveness and measurable results and products.

Moreover, in line with a productive way of thinking, the relations between the actors are changing too. This is materialized, among others, in a new teacher and pupil role and new forms of class room activities. New methods of teaching make pupils' more self-

activated and responsible for their own learning. Even though we don't know the penetrating power of these methods, implying individualization and pupils self evaluation, they may reflect goal orientation and productivity as new values imbuing schools.

Although open enrolment still is in the initial phase, rhetorically the value of consumerism is being brought into education policy. At the administrative level head teachers are defined as leaders of a service unit, while parents/pupils are defined as consumers. Also, it has become common for municipalities to perform consumer evaluations every year.

Learning tools

The introduction of evaluation activities are among the main changes in policy tools. The notion legitimating the increased stress on evaluation is that the Norwegian educational authorities are without adequate information on the activities taking place at the school level. Consequently, the authorities have been unable to learn from experience and to improve education. The first initiatives to design a system for evaluation were taken early in the 1990s. The concept of «Management by objectives and results» was introduced. Centrally formulations of objectives, counselling, reporting and evaluating results are key elements in this regulating model. However, teachers expressed massive resistance to the evaluation. The teachers saw the evaluation system as a threat to their professional freedom. At first, the evaluation intentions were transformed into a sort of self-evaluation in school. Information was reported neither to municipalities nor to the Ministry.

However, due to the latest learning tools we are observing changes that may imply a shift from a collaborative line to a confronting one. Systems for how to report and publish performance tables for leaving examinations' in lower secondary school have been introduced. Independent schools are ranged on the top of the performance tables. Currently, a debate is going on in the media concerning the credibility of independent schools. They are accused of manipulating the criteria's for giving marks in order to strengthen their market position. According to a national evaluation, 40 per cent of the private schools are breaking the independent school act by excluding pupils with special needs and extended use of unskilled teachers. In addition, the Secretary of Education is introducing national testing at four stages in primary and lower secondary school. The results will be published online. Other criteria for evaluating quality in school are being discussed.

The Swedish case

Authority tools

Norway and Sweden share similarities due to the uniform formal structure but the two countries do have different traditions when it comes to the position of the local and

central authorities. In Sweden the centrality was even more extensive than in Norway. This is due to the detailed legislation and curriculum in combination with the strong position of the educational administrative body, the National Board of Education (*Skolöverstyrelsen*), established in 1920 and maintained until 1990. In a Commission Report the Swedish educational structure was described as «the centralization is carried through almost 100 per cent» (SOU 1973:48). That meant that decisions about details such as location of schools, recruiting and engagement of teachers, organisations of the education and so on were taken by the National Board according to the detailed legislation and regulations. Additionally, even though the local authorities were established in the 1950's their influence was limited. The National Board of Education represented an effective, coordinated and uniform bureaucracy.

However, the strong status of the central authorities does not necessarily imply total insight and overview over schools activities. Rather they were criticised of not knowing what happened in schools and how the curriculum was implemented. Like in Norway, the control was concentrated on administrative issues which in turn might have given teachers trust to carry on their work without inference from outside. The policy changes in authority tools have, since the beginning of the 1970, been about decentralisation. The formal process of decentralisation started by the Commission Report, SOU 1974:53, and was repeated in the The Commission Report, SOU 1978:65, where an extensive decentralization was suggested. In addition to decentralisation, a third Commission Report, SOU 1980:5, introduced the concept of «Management by Objectives». However, the suggestions seem to be of a rhetorical kind, even though some limbering-up changes happened.

Minister of Education, Göran Persson got a specific mandate to radically reorganize the school system when he entered in the Ministry in 1989 (Haldén 1999). The mandate was based on a Commission Report, SOU 1988:20, which in turn relied on an experts report. However, it soon appeared that Persson intended to break with the line of the experts who suggested changes within the established and still, centralised system. In breaking with the established system two preconditions had to be fulfilled: firstly to put down the National Board of Education, secondly to decentralize the employment responsibility for teachers to the municipalities while introducing block grants. Due to the fact that the question had been on the agenda for more or less in forty years, this was not a new and radical suggestion. Still, the process ended in confrontations and a strike among the teachers supported by the Conservative parties. Nevertheless, the government succeed to get the decision through the parliament. The Proposition 1989/90:41 concluded that the states regulation of teacher's employment had come to an end.

One year later, the Proposition 1990/91:18 changed the grant system into a sector based grant system. That decision ended the possibility for the state to regulate the volume of teaching at local level. Accordingly, the results was that municipals got a new role in the schools system as employers for teachers, as organisers of the school activities and as allocators of recourses to schools on the basis of block grants from the state. After the decentralization the National Board of Educations' functions were no longer required. In 1990 it was decided to abolish the entire level of Regional Boards of Education (Proposition 1988/89:4). In 1991 the final decision on this issue was taken

and a new and much smaller National Agency for Education (Skolverket) was established (Proposition 1990/91:18).

Incentive tools

There are clearly tendencies to introduce some market forces in Swedish education policy. The number of independent schools has grown, but still independent schools constitute only between 2 and 3 per cent of all enrolments, most of them placed in urban areas. From the beginning of the 1990s there has been increased emphasis on competition and choice through supporting private providers of education and through various forms of 'vouchers' and per capita financing.

In addition, schools were encouraged to specialize within the national curriculum in order to introduce competition also among the municipality schools. During the decentralisation teachers' safety, represented by the standardization, was replaced by individualized agreements and wages. However, according to the teachers' association, the municipalities have not compensated for this loss. A negotiation in 2000 suggested a part of the wages increase connected to a performance pay system. The teachers did not accept the agreement. Due to the reductions in resources in school, the trust in the municipal policies seems to be lacking.

Capacity tools

Like Norway Sweden are among the leaders in OECD when it comes to spending resources on education (OECD 2003). However, during the 1990s the level of expenditure has decreased. The teacher staffing levels, calculated as the number of teachers (adjusted to full-time posts) per 100 pupils, shows a decreasing trend from 1991/92 to 2002/03. In the beginning of the 1990s there were 9 teachers per 100 pupils compared to 7, 9 in 2002/03. The total expenditure fell by almost 20% the same period, mainly due to the reduction in staffing levels (Skolverket 2003). It may be interesting to note that the reduction in staff and expenditures is concurrent with the decentralisation, as well as the slack of inspections and examination of schools' activities, which took place from the beginning of the 1990s. After the introduction of a renewed concentration on quality, inspections and evaluation, we see that again the staff rates are increasing.

The way the decentralization process was carried through may illustrate changes in the different actors' capacities to influence central decision making. The process was hidden to the public and to the actors representing the schools' interests. Instead a few invited experts were designated to participate in the planning. In addition, some of the participants in the expert group were nominated as leaders in the new National Agency for Education (Skolverket) (Haldén 1999).

In order to improve capacity of the agency the plan was to quit the traditional way of acting and to shape creative thinking by recruiting new employees in the organisation. However, because of protests from the employers' organisations, this was difficult to

achieve. The result was that 60 per cent of the employers of the National Agency were recruited from the former National Board (Skolöverstyrelsen).

The municipalities' roles in the decentralized model were to work out municipal plans, and follow up and assess the schools. In addition, they delegated responsibilities to schools. Schools have to develop their own local plans contenting how to achieve the knowledge standards which are decided at the central level. The logic is that schools are to transform the general national ends into practical measurable terms. Accordingly, this distinct capacity tool is aimed at making the local level responsible in order to secure their own capacities as policy implementing bodies. These points are illustrated by the agreement between the Association of Municipalities (Kommunförbundet) and the Association of Teachers from 1995 on how to develop and secure quality in schools (Lauvdal 2000). The agreement involved a radical change in teachers pay and working time. The principle of equality in wages was excluded while the agreement opened up for local and individualised wages and working hours.

Symbolic and hortatory tools

The long-standing tradition of unity, the stress on equality among schools and the strong tradition of centralism the Swedish system have been replaced by the introduction of instrumentalist rhetoric and practice in educational policy. In Sweden policy makers have gone further than their Norwegian counterparts in changing their symbolic tools as the vocabulary from the market spheres has been implemented to a greater extent. Although still regulated, «competition», «privatization», «consumerism», «free choice», «effectiveness» and «goal orientation» are vital elements in the Swedish education. The value shift toward quasi-markets in Sweden was largely driven by economic concerns (Miron 1993). There seems to be a shift from collectivism to individualism within the Swedish schools system, and increasingly education is regarded as a private rather than a public good.

Learning tools

Learning tools have played a significant role in the Swedish system and been an important instrument since decentralisation became an intentional issue in the 1960s. During the 1970s and 80s National Boards' evaluation role has been challenged, and especially their role as both evaluator and responsibility body (Jacobsson and Sahlin-Andersson 1995). In 1986 the question of evaluation was actualised. The National Board presented a suggestion on how to specify the objectives of the curriculum and accordingly on how to point out performance criteria that match policies and practices. The aim was to get a fully overview of the school situation. The National Board engaged researchers to participate in the evaluation, much as a buffer in case the implementation of the evaluation should fail. Due to the abolishment of the National Board, however, the smaller National Agency inherited the task of fulfilling the national evaluation in order to spell out objectives for the further development of schools.

The evaluation was carried out in 1991 and 1992, but both the performing and the analyzing turned out to be complex and problematic (Jacobsson and Sahlin-Andersson *ibid*). In the reports the initial ambitions of presenting the schools as separate units were abolished and the data was presented mainly at the national level. In that way the national evaluation connected two problematic issues. In addition, the National Agency was not comfortable in taken over these tasks, which very well could give the impression of a centralistic and old fashioned body. According to Jacobsson and Sahlin-Andersson, however, the National Agency made use of the evaluation in order to increase their legitimacy and credibility, presenting themselves as a serious organisation. Despite that the 1994 Curriculum downsized details, while emphasis shifted from control of input to control of output, the National Agency didn't want to play the role of a controlling body. It concentrated on counselling and service in the expense of the evaluative task. Focus was on formulating objectives according to municipalities and schools responsibilities for organizing and implementing the objectives in the local setting.

However, a new era of evaluation as a learning tool was started by the Governments' order of a new document of objectives in 1996 which resulted in a Commission Report (SOU 1997:21). The obligation to report, due to the concept of Management by objectives was strengthened (Wahlström 2002). In the annual reports, received by the government, the National Agency had to explain that several municipalities had problems with their duty to follow up and evaluate the quality in schools. Accordingly, the government acted and strengthened the states control. A quality investigation committee was sat down leading to reassuming of the schools inspectors. The government gave the assignment to focus on conditions for performance in the schools. Thus, inspections were for the first time concentrated on quality (Skolverket 1998). In addition, in 1997, the Ordinance on Quality Reports in the Education System (SFS 1997) obliged schools and municipalities to report their quality situation each year. In line with suggestions in a Commission Report (SOU 1997:121) this is a part of a continuous follow-up and evaluation of the educational system. The quality reports aim to inform to which extent the educational objectives have been achieved, as well as the actions required locally in order to achieve the objectives not yet realized. However the local level seems to have problems assessing their own activity relatively to centrally set standards. A new Education Act was prepared in 2002. Among others the mandate was to sharpen the states supervision and to strengthen further the elements of Management of Objectives (SOU 2002:121).

In 2003 another change was made to strengthen the National Agency for Education's examination procedures. The development support activities were moved to a new authority, the National Agency for School Improvement. From now on The National Agency for Education is responsible for educational inspection, national follow-up and evaluation and reviewing curricula and grading criteria.

The English case

Authority tools

Traditionally, the English state has only to a very limited degree interfered with primary and secondary education by use of legislation and reorganisation. Education policy were formulated and carried out by school owners and local education authorities together with the teacher professions in their daily work. However, *the 1944 Education Act* increased the role of English central government in education by establishing the first Ministry of Education with a member of government as its minister. The 1944 Education Act provided for free, compulsory secondary education for all children up to the age of 15, but did not introduce a common secondary school for all. A tripartite, selective system of secondary schools was set up designed to meet varying aptitudes (Hudson and Lidström 2002). The so called dual system of maintained schools was retained with schools directly provided by the local education authorities (LEA) and voluntary schools that were mainly attached to churches, which received grants from the LEA. The Act did not deal with the great number of independent or other private schools. There was a consensus over education in the period after 1945 that lasted until the 1970s (Hudson and Lidström 2002).

The Labour government legislated for universal comprehensive education in 1974, but the Conservative government elected in 1979 allowed grammar schools to continue. During the 1980s and early 1990s a series of Education Acts were passed to break the LEA monopoly (Whitty, Power and Halpin 1998). The central state now interfered in education introducing deregulating policy reforms. *The 1988 Education Reform Act* involved a comprehensive and deep-going transformation of the education system. The education system was to become more subject to market forces and the balance of power between central government, local government and schools was changed profoundly (Riley 1990, cf. Hudson and Lidström 2002:38).

The 1988 Act allowed existing schools to opt out of their LEAs and become grant-maintained schools run by a governing body with increased powers in relation to admissions, finance and staffing, but still dependent on the central state and the national curriculum (Whitty et al 1998). The 1988 Act introduced, for the first time ever in Britain, a centrally controlled compulsory national curriculum. The National Curriculum is said to have changed the status of the curriculum from the 'secret garden' of an autonomous professional community detached from public scrutiny (Ranson 2003:459) to a 'reign of terror' (Hood et al 1999).

The government increased its powers over local education through the introduction of the National Curriculum which consisted of both core subjects and foundation subjects. It was characterised by instrumentalism, commercialism and elitism (Kelly, 1990, cf. Hudson and Lidström 2002:39). Because of strong criticism a revised version was introduced in 1995. Another consequence of the 1988 Act was that local authorities lost power through decentralization of responsibilities to schools and increased parental choice. *The 1992 Education Act* replaced the former HM Inspectorate of Schools by a non-Ministerial department, Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), to organize a

system of more rigorous and regular school inspections. By the mid-1990s it seemed likely that the LEAs would be abolished, but in the 1996 White Paper *Self-Government for Schools*, the Conservatives saw them carrying through functions which the schools could not perform themselves.

Incentive tools

The incentive tools of the English education policy are tightly connected to a market forces philosophy introduced in the beginning of the 1980s. By permitting increased parental choice, introducing open enrolment and competition between schools requiring LEAs to publish examination results (Hudson and Lidström 2002:49), the school funding system was basically changed. Even though Prime Minister Major clearly expressed that the aim was that all publicly funded schools would be run as free self-governing schools like the grant-maintained schools, the system of funding did not change very much during the 1990s. The market oriented competitive educational system developed in England is supposed to improve pupils' performance. 80 per cent of each school's budget is determined directly by the number and ages of its pupils (Whitty et al 1998). The per capita funding favours popular schools which attract many pupil applications and vice versa, it punishes schools which are undersubscribed (Gewirtz 2002). A performance pay system is introduced as an incentive to inspire the school teachers. Schools that are assessed to be failing may receive grants to improve performance. If the performances do not improve immediately, they might be closed. The incentive tools in English education are very important. They are used both as reward and punishment.

Capacity tools

In England, the local education authorities were responsible to interpret the broad policies provided by the government. In accordance with the education acts passed in the 1980s and the beginning of 1990s, the funding system of publicly funded schools changed. Under *the 1993 Education Act* the Funding Agency for Schools (FAS) was introduced. FAS were given the power to take decisions affecting all schools, both within the local authority and the grant maintained sectors. The LEA's role was diminished to estimating the total resources available to schools according to a centrally determined formulae, thus the LEA's had little influence over how the resources should be utilized by the schools. First of all, the budget was to be allocated on the basis of the number of pupils, and the LEA was not allowed to earmark any resources. While the grant-maintained schools are funded directly from the state, the LEA allocates 85 per cent of their budget down to schools that are under LEA control. Most church schools are in the public sector too and they receive funding from LEAs (Whitty et al 1998). 2001 figures on resources allocated on education show that Great Britain spent below the OECD average amount per pupil. The number of pupils per teacher in England is 20 (OECD 2003).

Curriculum decision-making and pedagogy before the era of educational reforms in the 80s and 90s were largely entrusted to professionals on the ground (Whitty 1990, cf. Hudson and Lidström 2002). Ranson argues that recognition of the complexity of professional purpose and practice shaped the mode of accountability: «Public trust was afforded to the specialist knowledge of professionals and the necessary requirements of answerability could be fulfilled by delegating authority to heads, teachers, and advisors – only the trained eye could judge the quality of teaching and the pupil progress» (Ranson 2003:464). The introduced local management of schools gave school governing bodies much greater managerial discretion, control over the school budget and the appointment and dismissal of staff. The governing bodies of each school became responsible for the main policy decisions within the schools, and they were encouraged to include business expertise to provide financial and managerial assistance (Hudson and Lidström 2002:40).

The governing body has a range of duties and powers and a general responsibility for the conduct of the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement including setting targets for pupil achievement, managing the school's finances, making sure the curriculum is balanced and broadly based, appointing staff and reviewing staff performance and pay and more. School governors are drawn from different parts of the community, such as parents, the staff, the LEA, the community and other groups. This is to ensure that the governing body has sufficient diversity of views and experience¹. «The LEA's function was reduced to largely one of planning the supply of school places; co-ordinating school networks; supplying optional support services and special educational needs; and allocating and monitoring budgets and performance standards» (Hudson and Lidström 2002:41–42). Hudson and Lidström claim that many of the changes contributed to undermine the role of local government in education (Hudson and Lidström 2002:42).

Ofsted inspections have led to privatization of some education services and introduction of Education Action Zones which involve a partnership of business, community organizations, schools and LEAs. More and new actors are requested to take part in achieving higher standards and educate pupils for «the world of work» (cf the Ruskin speak, see below). The emphasis on diversity of provision, specialization and excellence with centrally steered testing, target setting and standard raising lead to a centralization of Education policies. The 1998 Education Act removed the grant-maintained sector (although it did not remove the already established grant-maintained schools) and to an extent brought all types of publicly maintained schools back under LEA control. LEAs were given statutory responsibility to promote high standards in education and produce education development plans containing targets, methods, and strategies for monitoring and evaluating. LEAs are to cooperate with schools in this process, but the relationship is regulated by a code of practice issued by DfEE in 1999. This defines the general principles informing LEA-school relations.

¹ The Ministry of Education and Skills: *governor net* www.governornet.co.uk

Symbolic and hortatory tools

The Labour Government elected in 1964 adopted a policy urging LEAs to abandon selective examinations and reorganise their schools into single status comprehensive schools (Hudson and Lidström 2002:34)². The conservatives opposed the comprehensive schools and defended the selective system. A speech given by Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, at Ruskin College, Oxford, in 1976 stated that schools should prepare pupils for the world of work, reconsider the curriculum and teacher methods used. Prime Minister Callaghan thus initiated a debate about the standards and quality of public education in Britain and the speech represents an instrumental shift in English education policy. The major political opinion was that British economy was underperforming because of inadequate basic schooling provided by public authorities. In the attempt to raise the standards the emphasis was laid on increased competition and increased oversight in addition to reduce the professional control over schools by the teachers and the local authority administrators (Hood et al 1999). The initiative also encouraged greater involvement by parents and increase lays' influence through school governing bodies. *The 1988 Education Reform Act* continued the process by making schools more responsive to market forces (Whitty 1990, cf. Hudson and Lidström, 2002:50). The public as consumer was empowered at the expense of the professional provider and the accountability of education depended on support of consumers (Ranson 2003).

The 1992 White Paper *Choice and Diversity: A New Framework for Schools* introducing schools' ability to choose to specialize in, for example music, languages or technology. This was followed up by a scheme for Centres of Excellence for science or arts etc which schools could design for and receive extra funding. The idea has been developed further by the Labour government and at the beginning of 2000 there were 480 specialist schools with plans to increase the number to 800 by September 2003. The most important market values which can be characterized as symbolic and hortatory tools are such as parental choice, academic ethos, equity (in opposition to equality), exclusivity, competition and performance (see for instance Hudson and Lidström 2002:58 or Gewirtz 2002:54)

Learning tools

Recently, evaluation has become one of the most often uses learning tools. It has been stated that it is doubtful «if any more ambitious programme of school-by-school evaluation and review has ever been mounted anywhere in the world» (Wilcox and Gray 1996:2, cf. Whitty et al 1998:20). The regime of public accountability in education was strengthened systematically during the new right period under Thatcher and Major. Accountability has become much more than an instrument or a component within governance of education. Accountability actual constitutes the system, claims Ranson

²Between 1960 and 1970, the number of comprehensive schools increased from 130 til 1145 (altogether more than 30 per cent of the secondary-school pupils).

(2003). Assessment is integral to the National Curriculum introducing a system for testing pupils in state schools in a range of subjects at 7, 11, 14 and 16. The Department for Education and Skills publishes the tests result on their website: «The Standards Site» and states for instance that result of the 2003 tests on Key Stage 2 and 3 are improving³. This demonstrates how testing and evaluating are used as learning tools and that the government finds the tools useful for its purpose to improve pupils' performance.

All National Curriculum matters are supervised by a central independent statutory body: the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. Learning tools assume that agencies and target populations can learn about their behaviour. Another important change in public accountability in English education is that of strengthening the audit state from early 1990s. Improving the performance of schools was understood to be requiring meticulous specification of targets and tools that were expected that schools should fulfil. To measure performances tests and examination results would be published and monitored. An important effort by introducing Ofsted was to organize a system of more rigorous and regular school inspections and to judge the «failure» of schools. School inspections were to be undertaken by freelance teams. Inspections are now carried out according to a rigour defined framework. All failing schools must be turned round within two years, closed or given a fresh start. The Ofsted inspection system was supposed to increase relational distance and to reduce «professional capture» of the regulators by using lay inspectors and contracted – out inspection. The inspection is individualised directed to individual teachers and not just head teachers (Hood et al 1999).

Discussion

The outline of changes in policy tools in the three countries works as an illustration of fundamental rethinking on how to cope with public issues. The rethinking challenges governments and public sector by downsizing, privatization, devolving, decentralization, deregulation, delaying, contracting out and performance testing. Words as revolution has been used to characterize the fundamental change in government actions basic forms. That means a proliferation occurred in the tools used to address public problem (Salamon 2002). We will discuss the similarities and differences in the change of policy tools in Norway, Sweden and Britain to explore the underlying mechanisms of change. The question raised is how similarities in tools reflect convergence between the countries. Why does the use of the same tools imply different outcomes in the three countries? Thus the discussion will in turn form the basis for a further development of an analytical framework for comparing policy changes in different national contexts and practices.

Apparently, the Norwegian and the Swedish education legislation policies follow the same direction, from strongly detailed regulations to 'frame' laws setting goals and objectives. The turning point appeared around 1990 in Sweden and a few years later in

³ <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/new/published/keystageresults/>

Norway. The English education legislation have gone in the quite opposite direction, from a minimum of state interference in local education governance to a radical shift by introducing a serial of education acts aimed at breaking the local education authorities power. Sweden and Norway have decentralised administrative and political decisions while England have been centralizing both curriculum and their control activities. All the same, seemingly during the last 15 years, there has been converges regarding the use of authority tools within the three countries.

The marketization of English education policy has promoted the use of incentive tools in policy implementation. In achieving the main goal of higher standards, rewarding and punishment appear as very important instruments in the English market oriented system. Moreover, the competitive feature is further strengthened by the implementation of per capita funding. Sweden has introduced a regulated, sort of «quasi market» oriented education system. Here competition is promoted, although only to a limited extend, by factors such as parental choice, various forms of vouchers and per capita funding. The Swedish schools are defended against closure which is the ultimate punishment of the English schools. In Norway incentives are currently being introduced, but to a limited degree. Elements of performance pay and per capita funding, which are important incentive tools in England, cause massive teacher opposition in both Norway and Sweden

The funding systems in Norway, Sweden and England differ in several ways. In Norway and Sweden there has been a change from earmarked state funding to block grants, implying that the allocation of economic resources is affected by local governments' priorities. In England there has been a change from locally administered funding to funding per capita. Per capita funding has been introduced in Sweden too, but has not yet become decisive in the same way as in England. The professional knowledge of the teachers as a capacity tool in its own right has been challenged in all three countries. Professional knowledge is no longer entrusted per se, but based on pupils' performances and assessment of teaching.

The English education system is characterized by increasing tensions between the comprehensive values stated by the Labour party and the differentiation and elitist values encouraged by the conservatives. The conservative governments of the 80s and 90s embraced both the traditional conservative values and the new liberal instrumentalist values. The Norwegian and Swedish unitary school system is based on comprehensive values. Nevertheless, these values are now challenged and transformed to match the instrumentalist values.

The English inspection and evaluation system is characterised as one of the most ambitious scheme of schools inspection in the world. The regulation style is confrontational deterrence-oriented with «Regulators armed with heavier weapons and battery of published information designed to stimulate improvement through fear and shame as well as the more concealed competition of the past» (Broadbent and Laughlin 1998, cf Hood et al 1999: 146). As highlighted by these characterizations, the English education learning tools are rather extreme and by no means comparable to learning tools in the other two countries. Sweden, nonetheless, has introduced a relative extensive evaluation system too. In Norway, a long standing opposition has hindered

the introduction of a system similar to the Swedish. In the current situation testing and publishing of performance results are the main learning tools in Norway.

Limitations in tools as the unit of analysis

Shifting the unit of analysis from policy programs or agencies to tools of public action we expect to move a step forward in exploring to which degree policy tools affect policy output. As a starting point, the use of the analytical scheme of tools is fruitful because it calls attention to the multiplicity of dimensions in policy change. However, a problem is that comparative studies of policy tools inevitably seem to conclude on convergence. At first glance, this also seems to be the case in our comparison. The outlined highlights point to a development of convergence in choice of policy tools. We find interesting similarities between these countries in terms of school reforms. The decrease in professional autonomy, standardization by national curriculum and centrally prescribed examination system are relevant characteristics in all the three countries. However, despite similarities in the use of tools, the outlining also points to different effects and implications of policy. Why has Sweden gone further than Norway in introducing incentive tools? How could it be that teachers have opposed and delayed the implementation of reforms in Norway, and to some degree in Sweden, but not successfully in England?

Thus, we will point to two critical remarks concerning the use of tools as a dimension in comparisons. Firstly, we emphasize the significance of analysing the combination of tools related to the different categories. Secondly, following Clarke and Newman (1997) we will stress the instability caused by implementing the same instruments in different settings. Accordingly, we cannot assume linear effects of change merely based on specific choices of tools. Due to our first remark, the comparison above apparently points to convergence because all the three countries have taken steps toward marketization. Yet, as should be clear by now, England represents a radical marketing standard compared to Norway and Sweden. This underlines the need to analyze the specific mixture of tools in each country. In England, the conservatives' values of elitism and differentiation strengthen the neo-liberalists' instrumentalist values. In Norway and Sweden an inconsistency between social democratic comprehensive values and instrumentalist values seem to exist. An example of this inconsistency of tools might be the Norwegian experimenting with per capita funding without following up with open enrolment. Another example is that of implementing management by objectives without evaluating the outputs. In Sweden, the incentive tools are extensive, seemingly, but the authority tools limit the effect of marketization.

In accordance to our second remark choice of tools is only one of several factors influencing policy output. As stated by Johnston (2003) the important issue is the relations between different dimensions that enables policies more than it determines. For our purpose in developing an analytical framework the dimensions of institution and practice will be important in explaining changes. This paper, though, is limited to

demonstrate the importance of revealing how, and the extent to which education policies in different contexts have integrated the different policy tools.

The need to contextualize

We will state that a potential convergence in policy output, deregulation and institutional autonomy not only depend on convergence in choice of tools, but also in the historical and institutional context to which the tools are being introduced. Changes in the choice of tools indicate institutional change. Certainly, there are different opinions on how standards of actions come into being, and how institutions change. The neo-institutional perspective on change relies on different theories. On the one side, the position of theoretical individualists promotes an actor-based institutionalism by putting the analytical focus on actors' choices. The institutions decide the logic of exchange between the actors. When institutions change, actors do not change their preferences but their strategies (Rothstein and Steinmo 2002, Bogason 2000). On the other side, the collectivists emphasize the obligatory character of institutional norms, rules and routines, to an increasingly extent understood as «the logic of appropriateness» (March and Olsen 1989, Bogason 2000). Through rules and logic of appropriateness, political institutions can bring about order, stability and predictability on the one hand, and flexibility and adaptively on the other (March and Olsen 1989). More to the point, we consider the worldwide revolution in governmental tools as a manifestation of a shared logic of appropriateness. Public actions' tools are increasingly the same across the countries. Moreover, they seem to reproduce. Thus, according to this perspective notions of appropriateness must have been changing in our three countries. An illustrative example is the change in the norms and routines of professional participation when making decisions and implementing school reforms in Norway and Sweden. The turning point was the radical break with centralism in Sweden in 1991. In Norway, the changes in norms and routines have been incremental during the 1990s. The changes carried through quite differently, but created similar outcome in the two Scandinavian countries. In England, a similar change could be identified as a shift from professional to public accountability (Ranson 2003). Even though the professional autonomy was limited to the local level it nevertheless constituted the education policies.

A third perspective, historical institutionalism, works as a respond to the two perspectives just outlined (Thelen and Steinmo 1992). This perspective sees the outlooks of institution and preferences as framed by the past rather than viewing human choice as influenced by static institutional constraints. In addition, historical institutionalists state that changes occur in an interaction between interest driven forces and institutional framework. In addition, the perspectives vary in whether they emphasis internal dynamics or external events. Another characteristic of institutional change is whether change is incremental or appears as a radical change based on some sort of crisis or imbalance according to Krasner (1984). In Norway, the reforms seem to be characterized by «path-dependency» in an incrementalistic tradition, as administrative reforms usually do in Norway (Lægveid and Pedersen 1999). It might be claimed that

small changes in the direction of neo-liberalism have been made during the last 15–20 years. Our hypothesis is that the strategy has been to convince the actors about the necessity of change as a mean to achieve both public and professional acceptance. The concept of «path-dependency» (Krasner 1984, Hall and Taylor 1996) reflects a situation where reforms are bounded by established norms, values and traditions that tend to resist radical institutional change. Although the last change in Norway, which gave the municipalities the total employer responsibility, appears as a radical and sudden reform, it is the result of a twenty-year struggle. In Sweden, transfers of power to the local level and the abolishing of the strong, central governing body represent quite a radical break from the established centralized school system. The concept of «punctuated equilibrium» (Krasner 1984) might characterize this peculiar form of policy change. The policy changes in England might be interpreted in terms of «punctuated equilibrium» too. The economical recession in the 1970s started the reform processes. The «Ruskin speech» has been characterized as the turning point. However, believing that institutional change is following from a shift in political power is not in accordance with institutional theory. Even though the changes appeared as radical, it can be argued that the reforms are following established values and traditions in line with the discussion on English hortatory and symbolic values above.

The importance of focus on practices

So far, we have demonstrated the importance of the choice of tools and the institutional context in the explanation of policy change. In addition, we will stress a third element, namely the significance of the level of practices. Following Clarke and Newman (*ibid*) the different conceptualisations of change each represent the potential pitfall of assuming that changes signalize effectiveness. Assumptions on how managerial institutions develop optimal solutions or how myths and legitimating practises will be functional for organisational survival are subjects not to be taken for granted, but to be handled as empirical issues. Thus, institutional change takes place in actual practices and is therefore to be studied in its specific organisational setting. Here the concept of governance becomes relevant among other because it is based on an assumption that the process of change is shaped by the interplay of power and interest in a local institutional setting. The specific governing relations related to education policy are not necessarily part of the hierarchical – administrative structure. The 1992 Local Government Act in Norway deregulated and changed the conditions for governing relations. This has caused variations in local school governance (Homme 2004). This means that influence of different actors on the school policy arena varies between municipalities. Studies have shown that networks dominated by parents, teachers or schools managers in different alliances may be decisive in the implementation of policy (Helgøy and Homme 2003). In England a study performed by Birchall et al (1995, cf. Clarke and Newman 1997) concluded that even though managerial ideology shaped the government agenda and rhetoric of change substantially it did not form the central consciousness of school managers. In the English Grant Maintained schools, the system goals on efficiency and profit transformed into goals on teachers' professional activity.

Another study underlines the high level of stress that preparation for tests and evaluations, shaped by the control regime, produces (Woods and Jeffrey 1998, cf. Gewirtz 2000). The growing number of teachers leaving the profession and severe recruitment problems are further indicators of this stress (Gewirtz 2000). Consequently, the teacher profession as the vital implementers of education policy is a vulnerable factor. In Sweden too, the practice level seems to be an important factor in the policy process. Even though it is claimed that apparently teachers have a high level of autonomy when it comes to input control, output control seems to be based on the relations between the professionals, local politicians and parents and other external sources (Klette and Carlgren 2000:382–83).

Concluding remarks

By focusing on change in the choice of tools in Norway, Sweden and England we have pointed out differences and similarities in education policy. Making comparisons while using the concept of tools as the primary analytical tool, implicates a potential danger for stressing convergence on behalf of divergence. The use of a tool doesn't tell us how it is implemented in practice or in which institutional context the tool operates. If we want to explain policy changes and how they are implemented we need to broaden our analytical perspective. In this paper, we have discussed how neo-institutional theories broaden our understanding of educational reforms in the three countries. The discussion demonstrates that which tools are chosen and how they are implemented are affected by established and traditional core values within the different educational systems. All the same, the dynamics of change implicate breakdown of the traditional hierarchical governing structures. Accordingly, the term of governance with its focus on governing relations is a useful contribution to studies of policy changes.

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