

RESEARCH BASED TEACHER EDUCATION; DISCURSIVE POSITIONING OF TEACHER EDUCATORS IN NORWAY

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As researchers in teacher education institutions we are facing ideological and economic shifts involving restrictions on the possibilities of influencing themes and methodologies for research projects.

BACKGROUND

Over the last two decades there have been political discussions on the *quality* of teacher education in Norway, both for schools and for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). This has resulted in a new specialised teacher education for primary and lower secondary school implemented from 2010, and a new revised teacher education for ECEC, starting in 2013. One common aspect is that a greater focus is placed on rhetoric's around a *research based education*. Our proposed project is investigating the term *research based education* and how this conception is positioning teacher educators as researchers. We have previously, through document analysis, examined ideological underpinnings for these new teacher education reforms (Braathe, 2012) and have found that travelling neo-liberal discourses been taken up, merged and transformed in relation to the Norwegian egalitarian school and kindergarten traditions.

THE GOVERNANCE TURN

Ozga (2008), and others, have pointed to the emerging new neo-liberal governance and defined it as a shift “from centralised and vertical hierarchical form of regulation to decentralised, horizontal, networked forms” (p. 266). The new governance produces a range of sophisticated instruments for the steering of education policy; standardisation, quality benchmarking, and data harmonisation. Governance shades into governmentality, particularly here, in our project, through attendance to the interdependence of governing and knowledge production of mathematics education. The new governance promotes the collection and use of comparative data on performing as a way of controlling and shaping behaviour of students and educators. These regulatory mechanisms “act as ‘political technologies’ which seek to bring persons, organisation and objectives into alignment” (p. 266).

Norway is strongly influenced by this turn in governance by international comparative studies and by the European harmonisation programs like for example the Bologna Accord. In this process education has been translated into learning. This transformation of the field of education is happening at the level of populations and institutions through the reshaping of the old institutions of schooling and post-compulsory education and their replacement with designs for lifelong learning (Braathe & Otterstad, in press). It is happening at the level of knowledge

management and knowledge production and policy making, including the steering of research, and “it is happening through the new connections between governing and the creation of new political instruments that are devoted to the creation of data and to constant comparison of data about performance” (Ozga, 2008, p. 267).

Ozga (2008) also points to three key elements in this process that have direct bearing on the research quality relationship on which we are focusing. They are *data*, *comparison* and the role of *experts*. In this logic there can be no quality without comparison, and data become the resource for comparison. Ozga claims that “Experts develop the new political technologies through which comparison is made possible” (p. 267).

THE QUALITY ERA

Norway entered the Quality era in educational policy influenced by travelling neo-liberal discourses during the 1990’s (Braathe 2012). One important influence and driving force was Norway’s participation in the PISA international comparative studies. Following Ozga (2008), PISA is one of the most influential representatives of the political technologies. PISA results for Norway were mediocre both in Reading, Mathematics and Science. Since then *quality* of the educational system has appeared in all discourses from Kindergarten to University studies, mathematics education has received special interest. Research in mathematics education in Norway has during the last ten years directly addressed aspects of quality, producing data for comparison, either qualitative or quantitative (Hopfenbeck et al., 2012). Increased focus on mathematics education research is based on the identification of shortcomings in current practices. This has resulted in implementation of new approaches, which are frequently accompanied by a conceptualisation of ‘progress’ as moving towards an ‘ideal’ or improved state of affairs (Tzur et al., 2001). Recent policy in Norway aimed at educational improvement prioritises the development of *high quality* teaching as a means of addressing perceived underperformance in the school system.

In 2008 the Government put forward a Strategic Plan for Educational Research (Ministry of Education, 2008). In this, the Government is taking up the language of the governance turn, identified by Ozga (2008). The point of departure for the new strategy is that “[w]e know that the learning in school is too low, and that the students’ abilities in reading, writing and mathematics is reduced, [and w]e know that student teachers do not get good enough knowledge on how they as teachers shall find, evaluate, and make use of results from educational research.” (Ministry of Education 2008, p. 4, our translation). Additionally, these rhetorical questions are asked: “Are we using the resources well enough?... Do we get enough out of the economic investments?” (p. 4, our translation). As an answer the government put up some priorities as a strategy for resolving these political challenges:

The Government wants to:

- Strengthen and prioritise research where the traditions are weak in Norway, such as effect-research, longitudinal studies, and empiric research based on quantitative data.
- Follow up work with data on individual students.
- Strengthen the scientific competence on pedagogical measuring by establishing a unit for psychometric research.
- Consider if it, within the regulations for buying research assignments, is appropriate to prioritise some research environments to build specific research competencies. (Ministry of Education 2008, p. 14, our translation)

In addition, the universities and colleges engaged in research shall *disseminate the results* that lead to *innovation and value creation*, based on these. Politicians require that educational institutions shall provide updated research. In teacher education this means that the kindergarten and the school, as fields of knowledge, are challenged more than ever both in content, and in methodological and theoretical perspectives. In this official publication politicians require that research contributes to performance, innovation and value creation by signalling that teacher education institutions shall become accountable for this.

Such a shift is perceived to stand in contrast to individual researchers' 'research interests', possibly because education research can be said to have been driven out of researchers' *autonomy* and a tradition of democratic right to *free* research. This discursive shift creates some dilemmas, such as concerns about the research to be controlled from above and/or the research ethics guidelines for educational research to follow.

METHODOLOGY

Our project is based on documents like governmental White papers, strategic research-political documents both governmental and from the Norwegian Research Council, as well as evaluation reports on educational research in Nordic contexts, as text-based data for analysis. A general remark to the content of public publications is that they come with recommendations for investment in strategies *for qualitatively good research*, ie the strengthening of research communities at teacher training institutions. In addition, emphasis is placed on the findings that students during their studies do not get enough knowledge about teacher educators' research projects. We want therefore to investigate discursive formations of *qualitatively good research* articulated in these documents in relation to the new political technologies pointed to by Ozga (2008).

By analysing education policy texts on research-based teacher education from discursive perspectives, this means that we look at education as a language-based community. A language-based community consists, according to Foucault (2005) of

the practices or discursive regularities contributing to individual research perspectives getting dominant position of power. Texts and text sections can serve as active participants, here related to national regulations for teacher training and knowledge and selected documents. Documents with its text, add premises for discursive production of research-based teacher education. We use Foucault's *discursive* thinking by looking critically for *production* of research power and research knowledge. Foucault argues that the statement can be read as discursive regularities. By examining specific methodological concepts regarding research in mathematics, we track some regularly discursive units/formations in the text material through the statements used. We are looking in the texts for surrounding linguistic designating nodal points, to look for patterns that help to create a certain discursive *order* around the selected concept, here mathematics education research projects. A discursive order of thinking implies a monitoring role and a position of power. This means that when the research-based teacher education is written into the documents, there is a diversity of *actors* and *networks* embedded in maths research that are keeping track of discourses on which research is in dominant positions. It is the different players we are interested in identifying in this project.

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