

Accountable for what and to whom? Changing representations and new legitimation discourses among teachers under increased external control

ABSTRACT

This article discusses how teachers construct new representations about accountability and professionalism in the context of increased external control. Over the last decade in particular, concerns about the quality of schooling and the quality of teachers has been raised by both politicians and the public alike, while prominent policy responses have seen an increased emphasis on student performance and the external control of professional work. Based on a one year long fieldwork in a Norwegian municipality, the findings imply how forms of external accountability are accepted by many teachers as a necessary and desirable development, but also one that is resisted as the policies are seen to downplay the broader aims of education. In this tension of external and internal accountability, however, alternative discourses have developed. In particular, an emphasis on scientific knowledge and research-informed practice becomes an important representation for enhancing professional legitimacy and trust. By opening up the concept of accountability, it is possible to investigate how teachers' representations of being accountable may take new forms when teacher professionalism is reconstructed in policy.

Keywords: accountability, education policy, legitimation strategies, teacher professionalism

Introduction

Accountability is currently a central concept within the policy field of education. It has increasingly become a prominent policy of action in the quest for improving educational performance in the United States, most European and several Asian countries (Fuller, 2008; Müller & Hernández, 2010; Sahlberg, 2010). Accountability practices are particularly manifest through the use of external control mechanisms (Ingersoll, 2003) and attention to assessment policies (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002). Goals and results are often placed outside the control of the teaching profession, with a stronger emphasis on individual self-discipline and performance (Svensson & Karlsson, 2008; Evetts, 2008). Policy levers such as mechanisms of accountability often ambitiously aim to change teachers' mind-sets and practices (Cohen, 1990), but can also activate forms of decoupling and resistance to maintain control over what is taking place in the classroom in particular (Arfwedsson, 1994; Furlong et al., 2000). More knowledge about teachers' reasoning for approving or questioning new policies can enhance our understanding of how and why some aspects of policy are placed within teachers' main frame of teaching, whereas other policies and practices are not. Yet, a decrease in trust and legitimacy can also boost redefinitions to (re)gain trust and legitimacy in the public, following concerns about the quality of schooling and teachers (Gewirtz, 2002; author, 2012). It is probable that tensions between policy and profession also create new representations of being accountable on the local level, yet there is less knowledge about in what ways this occurs.

The context for this study is Norway, where initiatives aiming to enhance student learning and to redefine teacher professionalism have been intensified over the past decade (author, 2012). International assessment studies such as PISA (from 2000 onwards) have played an important role in legitimizing new policies (Elstad & Sivesind, 2010), and in the aftermath of these results, the low quality of teacher education, education in general and results in particular have been addressed by the media and politicians, thus making the introduction of a new

outcomes-based curriculum easier than it may have been otherwise (Bergesen, 2006). A new education reform, *The Knowledge Promotion*, was initiated in 2006, which represents a shift from the curriculum being content-oriented to becoming outcome-oriented. The curriculum is based on competence aims after Grades 2, 4, 7, and 10, and five basic skills are integrated within each subject (the ability to express oneself orally, the ability to read, numeracy, the ability to express oneself in writing, the ability to use digital tools). A national quality assessment system (NKVS) was launched in 2004, emphasizing increased access to and use of data to improve quality and outcomes. The assessment system includes national testing in Grades 5, 8 and 9 and is described as holding both a formative and summative aspect. Yet, this twofold purpose is debated. For example, the summative aspect is found to be more emphasized than the formative (Allerup et al, 2009). In addition to increased output-control, there has been an increase in input-control in terms of laws and regulations, i.e. parent-teacher conference, individual student assessment and the curriculum as legally binding requirements.

Key policy documents highlight how teachers, principals and municipalities maintain flexibility and discretion in order to make decisions about changes in pedagogical practices to help reach the competence aims in the curriculum. This form of decentralization is described as “freedom, trust and responsibility” (Ministry of Education, 2004). Flexibility is, however, traded in exchange for improved learning outcomes, and the state remains a strong actor in the aim for systemic change (Skedsmo, 2009; Karseth & Sivesind, 2010). Still, accountability policies must be described as softer than in countries with more aggressive neoliberal policies, such as the United States and Britain. The emphasis on market mechanisms is downplayed, and the attention to students’ learning outcomes is closely linked with promotion of equality and quality, not only as a means to promote transparency and efficiency (Moos et al., 2008). Teachers and schools have traditionally held a quite strong status and autonomy, seen as

crucial for national building processes and in shaping national identities (Slagstad, 1998). However, such images are being challenged given a new context.

Based on fieldwork in a Norwegian municipality, this article aims to examine constructions of professional accountability and responsibility in a policy context in which teacher professionalism is reconstructed. The following research questions are addressed: How are accountability policies legitimized and delegitimized? And in this landscape of acceptance and resistance, if and how are perceptions of being accountable constructed? First, I briefly address aspects of internal and external accountability. Next, I outline the methodology of the analysis and describe the context of the study, the participants and the analysis. Thereafter, the main areas of legitimation and delegitimation are presented and, lastly, I discuss the findings and argue how there is a need to more closely investigate teachers' responses to new contexts and what is placed within and outside of teachers' main frame of teaching.

Theoretical perspectives

Perspectives on accountability provide a starting point for investigating teachers' responses to recent accountability and assessment policies, and the concept of legitimation is found to be fruitful to enable studies of acceptance and resistance to such policies. The subsections below address and discuss central concepts, as well as the analytical tools used in this study.

Internal and external accountability

Responsibility is a defining aspect of (teacher) professionalism (e.g. Evetts, 2008; Sugrue & Solbrekke, 2011), although more traditionally based notions of professional responsibility are challenged under policy initiatives that greatly highlight external control of the profession (Furlong, 2000; Simons & Kelchtermans, 2008). Conceptually, accountability is closely related to responsibility, trustworthiness and being answerable to one's actions (Charlton,

2002). Moreover, the relation between responsibility and accountability concerns actions and the reasoning for approving or questioning actions. In the context of teaching, prominent features of professional responsibility would be that all education is ethical and relational, characterized by holding a service-ideal (Lortie, 1975; Goodlad et al., 1990; Biesta, 2004). Thereby, teacher responsibility can be conceptualized as teachers' 'internal accountability' in terms of informal, relational and emotional sanctioning, and attending to the more democratic aspect of being accountable to students, parents and the wider public (Biesta, 2004; 2010).

Internal and external accountability thereby represent two broader, yet distinct, meanings: While internal accountability connotes responsibility and entails a looser and more general meaning, external accountability often refers to a formal and rather sharply defined technical meaning (Charlton, 2002). The latter emphasizes the managerial use of the term and the duty to present auditable accounts of activities (Biesta, 2010). External accountability in education is mostly imposed from above, from policy makers, for example through the use of performance targets and measurement of outcomes. Abelmann and Elmore (1999)¹ describe external accountability as holding schools, principals and teachers accountable for externally-set standards of student performance, usually defined as measured achievements on tests. However, such mechanisms are often questioned or resisted, as external control imposed from policy makers to increase teachers' efficacy and legitimacy often is seen to downplay professional values and relational aspects of teacher work (e.g. Poulson, 1994; author, 2013) as well as to weaken or redefine teacher professionalism (Sachs, 2001; Evetts, 2003).

Accountability is closely related to the idea of autonomy in professional work (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001). Teaching in many ways demands both internal and external accountability given how teachers are entrusted with discretionary powers. Therefore, the professional

¹ This article follows Abelmann and Elmore's definition of external accountability, but departs from their description of internal accountability. Abelmann and Elmore (1999) uses the term 'internal accountability' for accountability mechanisms that are internal to the schools, such as providing lesson copies or writing daily schedules on the blackboards.

should provide good reasons that can be understood, assessed, accepted or rejected by others (Molander et al., 2012). Whereas a certain degree of autonomy over classroom practice is given to the teacher on the basis of trust from the public, formalized external accountability deals with reporting upon actions in order for professional work to be controlled. Formal, external accountability would, however, typically build upon forms of informal, internal accountability. Internal and external accountability are thus not exclusive, but rather forms of responsibilities that work together in the field of education and where external control mechanisms challenge teachers' internal accountability. Thereby, it is of interest to investigate teachers' reasoning for approving or questioning new policies that to a greater extent focus upon external control of professional work and the responses that are constructed from the teachers to handle tensions in the field. However, given that internal and external accountability are terms that are not easily defined, they can be viewed as sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1956) rather than concepts with certain definitions to look for empirically.

Findings in previous research imply that earlier conceptions of teachers' professional responsibility were more concerned with broader educational goals, collegial relationships and teachers as reflective practitioners characterized by integrity, intrinsic motivation and commitment (e.g. Jeffrey, 2002; Locke et al., 2005). By contrast, a more managerial conception places a greater emphasis on the attainment of learning outcomes as the main pedagogical aim, as well as on the effectiveness, accountability and skillfulness of teachers (e.g. Helgøy and Homme, 2007; Stronach et al., 2002). Accountability measures are often seen as preventing the service ethics important in professional work and to weaken teacher relations, and as undermining classroom autonomy and teachers' professional status (Day, 2002; Lasky, 2005; Webb et al, 2004; author, 2012b). However, accountability has often been investigated and conceptualized through dichotomies or ideal types. While dichotomies help to describe a broader picture of changes in teacher work, they can also constrain research

from exploring the complexity around accountability and how teachers negotiate between expectations that co-exist in the field (Klette & Carlgren, 2007; author, 2012). In this sense, external accountability mechanisms create tensions for teachers both with regards to the moral and relational aspects, and to classroom autonomy and the use of discretion. Such tensions and how they are negotiated can, however, also boost new representations of accountability.

Legitimation and discursive legitimation strategies

One way to study how teachers give meaning to being accountable is by analyzing micro level processes of legitimation, e.g. of how accountability policies are accepted or resisted in teachers' talk. Legitimation is understood as how speech acts create a sense of positive, beneficial, ethical, understandable, necessary or acceptable actions that deal with social practices and how these are resisted or accepted (van Dijk, 1998; van Leeuwen, 2007). Legitimation is concerned with providing conditions of appropriateness, or with defending actions performed by oneself or a group. Legitimation discourses are usually accomplished within institutional contexts, also presupposing institutional restrictions defined by law and regulation. Given this institutional nature, legitimation may not only be restricted to the justification of individual actions, but also to the position of the institution itself. In this sense, legitimation also holds a collective aspect (van Dijk, 1998).

Strategies of legitimation and delegitimation are exercised through talk and text, i.e. discursive acts, and a discourse-analytical approach is used to surface processes of legitimation by examining how ideas appear through the use of language (Gee, 1999; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999; Howarth, 2000). This includes attention to how individual perceptions are embedded in the larger social and political environment. The discourse-analytic approach also helps us to see how teachers position themselves on certain policies, as discourses at a lower level of abstraction can be seen as systems of relations and practices that

are intrinsically political (Howarth, 2000). Discourses play a central role in the implementation and legitimation of institutional practices; however, Hardy and Phillips (2004) argue how discursive aspects of legitimation often remain unexplored, as well as the dialectics of legitimation and its resistance. A focus on discursive legitimation enables questions on values and practices (van Leeuwen, 2007), with legitimizing strategies being primarily analysed based on four different strategies: *Authorization* refers to institutional authority or laws, including scientific knowledge or experts. *Rationalization* relies on references to the utility of a specific action, function or practice. *Moral evaluation* appeals to value systems and legitimation that provide a moral basis, while legitimation through *narratives* occurs when texts provide a narrative to provide evidence for acceptable, appropriate behaviour (Fairclough, 2003; van Leeuwen, 2007).

There are several studies which attend to discursive strategies that teachers employ to position themselves as teachers, although few studies have focused on teachers' use of legitimation strategies. Cohen (2008) focuses on how teachers use specific discourse strategies in establishing identity during changes in discourses of teachers' roles and responsibility, highlighting how teachers often engage in discourses counter to public discourses by strategically positioning themselves in relation to others and to institutional practices. Trent (2010, 2011) investigates legitimation strategies that pre-service teachers use to explain their identity development, and argues how an "us-them" binary (MacLure, 2003) between "modern" and "traditional" teachers is created, which is an important strategy to help attain an identity as a modern teacher. In this article, I take a similar perspective with these latter studies by looking at legitimation strategies that are employed in talk, yet I investigate nuances, variations and aspects of both individual and collective senses of accountability and professionalism, thereby also moving beyond theorizing on the individual.

Contributions from previous research and analytical concepts developed in this section emphasize teachers' work as being situated in an area of tension between internal accountability and external accountability, in addition to where such aspects of external and internal accountability are intertwined. However, these ideas are not only individual, but also exist within the institutional context of education and are connected with teachers' value systems. Therefore, there is reason to believe that ideas about accountability are characterized by both continuity and change, though there is not much knowledge about variations in ideas about being accountable, as well as how these might take new forms. It is therefore of interest to investigate micro discourses and the use of legitimation strategies to help enhance our knowledge about how teachers make sense of being accountable when professionalism is reconstructed in policy.

The study, participants and analysis

This article is based on a one year long fieldwork in a Norwegian municipality. In Norway, schools report to the municipal level, although how the municipality is organized and what systems they have in place to support and follow up on education in schools can vary. This particular municipality is situated in the eastern part of Norway, and can be described as typical in terms of number of inhabitants and socio-economic background, being a predominantly rural area with three towns. The municipality has received awards for its work in the areas of school and professional development. Also, most principals and the school administrator have completed parts of a master degree in school leadership, implying a greater concern with leadership practices and scientific knowledge. It is therefore of interest to see how external accountability is given meaning in a context where the municipality is known to be development-oriented. A relevant question to ask, however, is whether there is reason to believe that the teachers differ in any significant ways from teachers in other municipalities

with an active school owner. A hypothesis could be that there is little overall difference since schools in Norway relate to the same curriculum, laws and regulations, all schools are obliged to participate in national tests and evaluations, teacher education is guided by national frameworks, and professional development has recently been more nationalized following the Knowledge Promotion Reform.

I particularly focus on three out of 11 schools, which were described as frontrunners in school development and assessment by the school administrator. New Town Secondary School is an 8th-10th grade school with 250 students, 35 teachers, a principal and an assistant principal, Hillside Primary School is a 1st-7th grade school with 150 students, 14 teachers and a principal and Lakeview Primary School is a small 1st-7th grade school with less than 100 students, 8 teachers and a principal. The school context concerning accountability was quite similar across the schools. The municipal level was concerned with common visions and close cooperation between principals, as well as having initiated various professional development projects for all schools and teachers to participate in. Examples on such projects are assessment in reading literacy and enhancing the learning environment, and some teachers had been or were currently involved in continuing education at universities and colleges.

Data consists of a range of data sources and methods, such as observation of teachers' and principals' meetings, focus group interviews, individual interviews of teachers, principals and municipality officials, informal conversations before and after meetings, and school and municipality documents. During the academic year, I observed approximately 30 hours of teachers' and principals' meetings within the schools and municipality, where the topics were assessment and students' learning results. Meetings on these topics were considered to be particularly import to study in terms of how teachers positioned themselves towards external and internal accountability. The study includes four 90 minute focus group interviews with teacher teams (teacher teams are stable units of 5-6 teachers on grade-level that collaborate at

least one hour a week), which are the primary data used in this paper. The total number of teachers participating in the focus groups was 22, including most teachers in the two primary schools and the 8th grade in the secondary school. Teachers were in different stages in their careers, with seven men and 15 women participating. Seven teachers had been teaching for less than 10 years, of which five worked together on the same team.

The focused group discussions were conducted after observations had taken place for six months. Since the teachers already worked together in teams, this allowed for the observation of interactions that approximate naturally occurring data (Kitzinger, 1995). The focus group discussions had many similarities with the group discussions observed during meetings, thereby also giving the participants opportunities for spontaneously approving, resisting and explaining viewpoints within the group (Morgan, 1997; Putcha & Potter, 2004). Preliminary analysis partly informed the broader questions, yet a main goal was to facilitate an open conversation about various aspects of teacher work, and the conversations following from each topic initiated took various directions in the discussions. The topics for discussion were broad, e.g. teachers' main tasks, how to succeed as a teacher, views on assessment practices, views on knowledge, how to prepare for lessons, etc. The focus group discussions constitute the unit of analysis as they capture meaning-making and negotiations around key aspects of teacher work in talk.

The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed, and in the process of analysis the transcripts were read several times and further coded and arranged using NVivo 9. First, the transcripts were coded according to the four legitimation strategies towards various forms of external accountability. Second, word frequencies and linguistic aspects (Gee, 1999; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999; Fairclough, 2003) were examined to investigate the main areas of (de)legitimation. Third, interrelationships and variations were focused on to discuss different ideas about professionalism, with the steps for analyses further outlined in Table 1.

[Insert table 1 here]

The analysis and possible interpretations have been discussed with other researchers as a way of communicative validity (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Although the findings are not statistically generalizable, they can be described as analytically generalizable. First, researcher-based analytical generalizations are made possible through providing transparency in the analysis and the theoretical interpretations in the discussion, for example by drawing upon findings in previous research. Second, a reader-based analytical generalization allows for judgments of how findings can be used to guide other situations in similar contexts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Thereby, the study offers movements from the concrete to the abstract and to analytical understandings of specific phenomena.

Findings

In the following, the findings are presented as themes derived and developed from the different readings and strategies of analysis. First, I focus on the main representations found when investigating how external accountability is legitimized, before presenting the main representations of delegitimation. Third, I present what I describe as alternative representations constructed by the teachers as responses in this area of tension between external pressures and teachers' internal accountability.

Legitimation of external accountability

The legitimation of testing and external forms of accountability was primarily accomplished through references to authorities and through the rationalization of views and practices.

To be accountable for student results

Student learning is given primacy over students' social development among one teacher team in particular. With the exception of one, all of the teachers in this primary school team had been teaching for less than 10 years. When discussing what they saw as their main tasks, teaching basic skills and student learning were described as the "number one task". National testing and new assessment practices was described as being important in giving important and necessary knowledge on the individual-, school- and national levels, which was rationalized through the opportunities that improved results give the students in the future, with assessment practices legitimized through the same line of argument. These teachers highlight how there is a need to know the effects of one's teaching in order to improve it, and this view is also discursively related to that of being a professional teacher:

Catherine: And then you see it for yourself, end of chapter tests and such, you see that, oops.. that was a poor result for everyone, and then you understand that, yeah, you think that maybe I haven't done such a good job, and made mistakes. I assess... look at my own teaching and how the students perform. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to do it this way.

Andrew: You can also compare with the same students from year to year (*yes, yes*) to see whether the results become worse.

Monica: And then if you're a teacher who has poor results year after year, you must start to take some action (*laughter*).

Catherine: Yes, for example, if there are poor results on all math tests this year, then I start to wonder what I'm doing (*laughter*).

Fredric: At least if I have had the same class for a few years and get poor results, and then you get a new class and you get poor results there as well, then you...

Catherine: Then you can't blame the class anymore (*laughter*).

The teachers construct themselves as being accountable by articulating how they change practice if their students' results are not good enough, a representation that developed from Catherine's narrative. This is done through being in opposition to teachers who do not take action, is further emphasized through humour and irony, and is also done by creating an oppositional, binary structure of "us" and "them". Fredric's articulation of what he would do if he was a teacher who achieved poor results is followed up by Catherine, who uses irony when referring to other teachers who have a tendency "to blame the class" when test results are not adequate. The use of "I" in what "I would do" (Fredric) is contrasted with the generalized other, "you". Being accountable for results is primarily represented as an individual matter, although the construction of "us" is done through how they build on each other's arguments and use humour and irony. The "I" and "us" are then teachers who are accountable and change their practice accordingly, while "them", a generalized other, comes to represent teachers who refuse to change or are somewhat "blind" to the need to change – a move from a positive self-representation to a more negative representation of others. Through such binaries, external accountability is viewed more positively, and that being accountable for results is desired within the group. The teachers articulate an understanding of approving testing as a necessary control mechanism that also protects the students.

To be accountable for curriculum and national policy

Legitimation through laws and regulations are examples of authorization strategies, which are important legitimation strategies for the beginning-of-career teachers in particular. A prominent representation is to be loyal and accountable to input control such as curriculum and new laws, in addition to output control. These teachers' position different forms of input control as central governing aspects of their work:

It is important to abide by the documents that govern my job, the curriculum and other things. And the fact that I do that... that I have a professional relationship to these, even though I might disagree with things, it's sort of my

job to follow them, and to keep up to date with and adhere to the documents. (Grade 6, teacher for less than 10 years)

Here, being accountable to curriculum and national policy is an element that is discursively related to professionalism, in which forms of input control are viewed as being necessary. The legitimization of input control through authorization strategies is also enhanced through the use of strong verbs such as “is”, “do” and “keep”. The teacher’s language is prescriptive and authoritative, giving strength to his view on how things should be. Disagreement and one’s opinion are subordinated authorities, and the teacher creates a binary towards those who do not adhere to external expectations and are therefore “not professionals”. Keeping up to date with new documents is also placed within teachers’ main tasks, and being professional is legitimized with references to external rather than internal forces.

To be accountable to parents and principal

Being accountable to parents is emphasized, and is mostly legitimized through the use of authorization strategies and is most prominent among beginning-of-career teachers:

Fredric: I think a lot about relations with parents. In a way it’s expected that I... mmm, have a good dialogue with the parents. I notice that a lot (...) Expectations that I am the one to take initiative in the relationship. We shouldn’t wait for parents to take the initiative; instead we should do it ourselves and involve them. I notice that that is expected of me.

Monica: But there has been a lot of focus on school-home cooperation, that we are important for that.

Being accountable to parents is discursively related to expectations from the principal and being loyal and accountable to him, making this representation of authority of the principal more an example of external accountability than internal accountability:

I think the principal governs quite a lot. In terms of what kinds of issues that he brings up for discussion, for example, what direction... Yes, what he’s good at and what he wants. In the last school I worked, I remember

this very well because we changed principals while I was there, and there was a pretty big difference in their expectations of what a professional teacher was with him and the other principal (...) that tells me something about what I should emphasize. “You must be up to date in this area, because we want to prioritize this.” Things like that. (Grade 6, teacher for less than 10 years)

Through the use of narratives, past experiences are used to explain and legitimize loyalty and accountability to the principal in particular. By looking at how elements are combined in the texts, being accountable is often articulated in hierarchical relations in the team of beginning-of-career teachers. However, this is not done in a negative manner, but rather in a positive way that also emphasizes the value of collegial loyalty that includes the principal.

Delegitimation of external accountability

Resistance to accountability policies is often legitimized through the use of moral evaluations or references to the profession and professional work of teachers.

To be accountable for social and humanistic aims of education

Moralization strategies are extensively used when teachers delegitimize assessment practices and forms of external accountability. Several teachers are concerned about teacher-student relations, with an important representation for the veteran teachers in particular of being accountable and responsible for the broader aims of education. To be accountable for students’ social development is continuously emphasized, and is also seen as the main task for teachers. Hence, this is also a representation that becomes antagonistic towards current policies that have challenged this discourse, as well as an example of a local antagonism, as beginning-of-career teachers emphasize how student learning and teaching basic skills are teachers’ main task - over social development. At the same time, veteran teachers also acknowledge that practices change following a greater emphasis on performance:

Siri: If you feel safe, then you can learn. And we also have Zippy [a programme for students' social development]. And we have practiced articulating our feelings. I think that has been very good.

Lisa: I also think that has been good. And we have decided to do it, so we have it on our schedule. Because I feel when I think about what teaching is, it is exactly about this. But I think that, as the "blue wind" [conservative] has blown in education, I think that a focus on learning and literacy...

Marcus: It has to be measurable and possible to quantify.

Lisa: Yes, and then I feel that, "Lisa, you have to slow down now". There are actually other things that are the foundation (...) Yes, and not only on the schedule, but I am also obliged to do it [focus on students' social development]. And then subject matter has to be put aside, though because subjects are so important now, I don't know if I can do that. Before, I was much more focused on this, and there was more variation in my teaching, and there was a lot that was better. But it's hard to regain that.

Marcus: I think I see a greater degree of uniformity, directed towards, for example, national tests. And it's thoroughly emphasized that the students should be prepared. And if so, that takes time.

Lisa: I have not used workshop pedagogy [integrated, Dewey-inspired, practical learning] in some years.

Marcus: That is totally on the side-line in terms of what there is room for now.

The teachers delegitimize accountability policies quite extensively by using moralization strategies in particular. At the same time, authorization is used by Lisa to emphasize how the law states that teachers are obliged to focus on students' social development. The representation of being accountable for the social and humanistic aims of education is strengthened by the use of metaphors such as "the blue wind", a metaphor that refers to (intruding) neoliberal policies initiated by the conservative ("blue") party, while emphasizing a negative evaluation of an increased focus on subject matter, testing and student results. Mark is carrying out moral evaluations strengthened by the use of irony, while he comments on the evaluations made by the other teachers. Words such as "quantification" and "measurable" are used negatively and appear as being antagonistic towards the qualitative and

broader aims of education. A binary of “before – now” is prominent in the narratives from Siri and Lisa, and is also used as legitimation for resisting the current development. Moreover, this contains a binary between subject matter, basic skills and a more progressive pedagogy, and suggests how teaching methods have changed as a result of new policies.

To be accountable for experience-based knowledge

Resistance to external accountability is also legitimized through a mixture of authorization strategies and narrativization strategies in terms of the profession and aspects of experience-based knowledge. One argument is how national tests and new assessment practices lead to less student learning, rather than the opposite, and several articulations also entail how accountability policies do not make sense for teachers based on their knowledge. As a result, many assessment practices are placed outside the main frame of teaching. For example, national tests are first and foremost seen as accountability towards the government, and not toward students and parents. These views contradict policy documents that highlight how the intention of national tests is formative, as the teachers mainly view the tests as summative assessments that are only used to a limited extent to develop students’ learning. Another example is how new laws that urge teachers to develop local assessment criteria based on national competence aims are resisted. First, this resistance is legitimized by references to the students since it is not fair to them that these criteria are unequal across schools and municipalities. Second, it is legitimized through the profession, that “we” do not have the knowledge to develop such criteria, and that the policies instead de-professionalize teachers:

When we used the old standardized tests taken to support grading, we were able to evaluate our own assessments in relation to how I have assessed the student, and whether it makes sense. That was helpful. But now, I feel that many of these assessment practices aren’t here to help the student, but for us to document that we are doing a proper job (*Other teachers: yes, yes*). Because before, people believed that the teacher could do her job, both in terms of knowledge and assessment (*chuckles*). But now, no one thinks that we know anything. This is how it

has been experienced for us who have been teaching for a while. Now, no one thinks that we know anything anymore. (Grade 8, veteran teacher)

This narrative strategy creates a dichotomy of “before” and “now”, an oppositional structure that strengthens ideas of internal accountability and more collective forms of professionalism. For example, by shifting the pronoun from “I” to “we”, the teacher expands her views to the profession as a collective. The other teachers support her views, and she also emphasizes this by twice articulating “now, no one thinks that we know anything”. The “before-now” dichotomy is prominent, in which teachers previously had autonomy and legitimacy – though not anymore. In the interviews, metaphors are also often used to view assessment policy initiatives as intruding on the school environment, e.g. “then you take that ball and throw it into the school” and “the blue wind”, both of which seemingly referring to policies seen as interfering with teachers’ knowledge, values and social practices. The moralization strategies that teachers employ therefore demonstrate how value systems are important for delegitimizing and also partially resisting external accountability, particularly for practices that are not sufficiently grounded in professional knowledge and ethics.

Negotiating external and internal accountability

When aspects of external accountability become more prominent in teachers’ everyday work life, this calls for various responses by teachers. While many teachers delegitimize the need for external control and are concerned about the implications both for the students and the profession, they also acknowledge a decrease in trust and legitimacy for the public. In these tensions between external and internal accountability and ways they are accepted and resisted, especially two representations of ‘being accountable’ become important for maintaining and enhancing professional trust and status. These two ways of representations are prominent across the three schools and teachers’ years of experience, and the ways of arguing and approving have also been prominent when observing teacher meetings in which

accountability measures were discussed. The first counter-representation highlights aspects of collegial control, whereas the other emphasizes research-based knowledge or what can be described as research-informed practice. The latter can be described in particular as an alternative discourse that teachers drew surprisingly much from.

To be accountable to colleagues and “the school”

Developing positive and nurturing relationships with students, colleagues, principals and parents are undoubtedly defining aspects of teacher work. Not surprisingly, this work is placed within teachers’ value systems and is therefore a prominent representation of being a good teacher. Articulations of such relationships are also closely related to internal accountability, commitment and moral perspectives:

Lisa: And then I also have a habit of repeating how important it is that we do things somewhat similarly, as I believe that would enhance our professionalism. Because we work in very different ways, and then this is seen by others, and yes, it is perceived very differently. So we should do more things the same way.

Marcus: To act the same from a given situation is also a part of being professional. In a situation where you are insecure, you can seek advice from colleagues and present cases and discuss them.

Lisa: And to be open about it, that no, I do not know, to seek advice (*yes, yes*). If you are not sure about something, it is ok to express that.

Lisa argues for a practice in which teachers seek more evidence to back their decisions and that they should work in more similar ways. Being accountable in collegial relations is situated here as an important strategy for maintaining professionalism when taking new demands for the profession into consideration. To do things similarly and cooperate are discursively related to raising professionalism by both Lisa and Marcus. Lisa acknowledges that there are challenges related to privatized practice, but suggests a solution other than

external control, thus raising a concern that teachers' discretionary powers should be monitored somewhat.

To be accountable for scientific knowledge

During the observation of meetings, references to research and researchers were surprisingly many, as well as in the individual interviews of teachers, principals and the municipality officials. References to research findings and names of researchers were often used several times during a meeting both by teachers and principals, and the field notes described how multiple references to research (ers) often occurred during several of the meetings that were observed. The same tendency was found in the focus group discussions. After coding, this subcategory of authorization ("experts and research (ers)") showed up more frequently than any other strategy of legitimation. Word frequency searches revealed how research is among the most used nouns in the interviews after, e.g. school, teachers, class and parents. For example, of note, authorization through experts and scientific knowledge is often done through references to the profession itself (van Leeuwen, 2007). However, legitimation through teachers' professional knowledge is primarily done through their own, experience-based knowledge, while scientific knowledge is situated as coming from the "outside", such as authorities. This form of authorization, through research and researchers, is then epistemic, while politicians have a practical authority in the sense that they implement new policies and laws. In the group discussions, however, this epistemic authority is more positively assessed than authorization through government, and a discourse of being accountable to research-based knowledge is compelling. Another way of framing this could be to say that more than external accountability, research is placed within teachers' value systems as something desirable. This alternative discourse includes representations that are frequently attached to elements of classroom autonomy, professional status and legitimacy in the public, thereby

becoming local counter discourses toward accountability policies. In the following, some examples are provided. In the group discussion at Hillside, Fredric states:

If I don't know anything about methods and organization and things like that, if I don't know what is new in a way, then I won't know how I can vary my teaching either. You have to know something about what the research says now to know what I can try and what I can't... That is, I think it's wrong for someone to say that you have to use the project method, but at the same time I need to know that research today says group work is a good idea. Then I know that I can do that as a variation, use that research for... you know.

Fredric uses a prescriptive language that puts weight behind his argument of more greatly taking research as a starting point for practice, and also situates research above colleagues in terms of deciding upon whether or not to use a certain method in the classroom. Another example is from a group discussion at Hillside (mainly experienced teachers):

Turid: (...) We have to stay up to date on what is new, what are the results, if we are to become a school that prepares students for society that begins right outside the school gate. So we have to do that, and that's what makes it fun too, to be able to know somehow what the research finds that gives such and such results. Because even if you have not worked in that way yourself, it'll be fun to see whether it works for my students too if I choose to do it that way.

Sidsel: Then we also address the question of being professional, if you can explain why you have done what you have done.

Marianne: And it provides more security to point to research, I think. Because when I held the introductory courses for parents, I felt more secure when referring to someone who is recognized, rather than "we at Hillside think that...". So you feel that parents take it more seriously, that there is more weight behind it.

Turid discursively relates the need to be updated on research to a changed society, which is followed up by Sidsel and Marianne. They relate justification of actions to security and professionalism. In another discussion, at Lakeview Primary School, research is discursively linked to the decrease in trust in the public and the need to justify actions:

Siri: And then we have a lot of meetings with parents. The population is better and better educated, so maybe they think that we teach in a weird way, but then it is good to have an educational background and be able to justify why we do it the way we do, because it leads to learning. And that we don't get into discussions because someone believes that "no, it is not possible to think like that". "Yes, it is".

Lisa: Yes, to have confidence in the work that we do. And sometimes we are criticized. Some of the criticism we can take up and work constructively with, and something we simply put in the box 'stupid things to say'. Which we simply should not spend much time and energy on.

Marcus: For example, it gives certainty in work to refer to research findings, in other words to refer to a pedagogical direction, that someone finds that it leads somewhere, that this is the way forward.

Siri refers to the general public and concludes by holding a conversation "with herself". Lisa follows up by expanding on the idea of criticism, and Marcus elaborates by providing an example of using research findings as a way of safeguarding practice. A narrative of the profession is strengthened by the use of the pronoun "we", situating research as an important collective value for the teaching profession. Additionally, the use of prescriptive language gives strength to arguments about the needs of the school, the municipality and the profession. Discursive aspects strengthen the authoritative function of research and research-based knowledge, e.g. through prescriptive verbs such as "is", "have" and "give". References to research are further discursively related to professionalism, and more specifically to aspects of autonomy, trust and legitimacy. Research can therefore be described as a counter discourse used when teachers disagree with policies or practices, and it is used to legitimize own practices. At the same time, the type of research, and how it is used, is often vaguely and not often explicitly described in terms of how it is used in classroom practice. Discursively, however, many teachers place being accountable to research within an oppositional structure to highlight a more forward-looking development in the context of accountability. Using

scientific knowledge is important for being seen as accountable in a more professional sense, while simultaneously being an authoritative, “strong” enough discourse to resist certain ideas.

Discussion

The aim of this article has been to examine how teachers give meaning to being accountable in a policy context in which discourses on teacher professionalism are reconstructed. The findings add to existing research on teachers’ perceptions of accountability policies by looking more closely at areas of (de)legitimation and how the representations are related to perceptions of professionalism. Nonetheless, by opening up the concept of accountability, it has been possible to investigate how discourses around accountable teachers take new forms, although not necessarily in a dichotomous manner that emphasizes “before” and “now” or “internal” or “external”. Internal and external accountability could then be viewed as co-existing logics that teachers need to negotiate between when new demands for performance and legitimation in the public need to be addressed and “resolved”. The decrease in trust and legitimacy for teachers and schools are generally acknowledged by the teachers, yet there are interesting variations. While the beginning-of-career teachers legitimize external control mechanisms to a greater degree than veteran teachers and do not perceive aspects of professionalism such as autonomy and discretionary powers to be under threat, the urge to be more aware of scientific knowledge and to justify actions with research findings is highlighted by most teachers. This is an important finding as the arguments that the teachers put forth are related to changes in the education policy in the recent years, suggesting that alternative discourses of professionalism may be developing. Moreover, previous empirical research has found how Norwegian teachers mainly were characterized by “old professionalism” (Svensson, 2006), which to a limited extent emphasized individual responsibility for performance (Helgøy & Homme, 2007; Carlgren and Klette, 2007).

When teacher accountability towards the government and the general public increases, the findings show how teachers respond to a new context of work by negotiating facets of professionalism. The importance of being accountable for various forms of input- and output control has been found in previous research (Müller & Hernández, 2010; Wilkins, 2011), though studies have reported contrasting findings on whether newly educated teachers are characterized more by external accountability. While LaBoskey (2006) and Ng (2006) found that newly educated teachers worry about the social aims of education under increased accountability, other studies found that younger teachers largely legitimized and approved external accountability to a greater extent than veteran teachers (Lasky, 2005; Wilkins, 2011). Resistance and articulations of less autonomy and discretionary power from veteran teachers have also been found in previous studies (e.g. Troman, 2008). When this study finds how new discourses may be in the making, one explanation could be that accountability policies have been effective for longer and that there has been a gradual acceptance of, e.g. national testing in the field. A second interpretation could be that new norms for accountability and professionalism have been developed in teacher education. A third interpretation could be the socialization that takes place within schools as teachers become more aware of normative pressures. However, these are questions that should be further investigated.

Being accountable to scientific knowledge is found to be an important legitimizing representation. Previous research has highlighted how there has been little emphasis on scientific knowledge, both within the teaching profession in Norway (Jensen, 2008) and beyond (e.g. Joram, 2008). However, the emphasis on research-based knowledge is much more prominent in the Norwegian policy discourse than just a few years ago, where such emphasis was limited in the field of education (author, 2012), and also more prominent than in other European countries (Heggen et al., 2010). Yet, the policy conceptualizations and initiatives related to research-based knowledge can be characterized as quite broad, albeit

vague, rather than experimental, evidence-based knowledge. Also, several research- and development projects have been initiated by the The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, and the Norwegian Research Council has initiated practice-oriented research programs in which a main goal was to strengthen research in teacher education and research relevant for the education system. Moreover, the teacher education reform from 2010 aims to become research-based (Munthe, Malmo & Rogne, 2011), and the teacher union has begun emphasizing that teacher practice should become more research-informed (author, 2012).

This legitimation discourse of becoming more accountable to scientific knowledge can be placed within a more occupational tradition (Evetts, 2008) as teachers argue for more use of both experience-based and research-based knowledge as a foundation for classroom autonomy and for creating trust in the public. However, such representations can also be placed within newer conceptions of accountability and professionalism that are concerned about evidence-based practice and “what works” for improving performance (Biesta, 2010; Cooper et al., 2009), and to the drift towards increased use of data and data-driven decision making in education (Datnow, 2011; Jensen & Møller, 2012; Little, 2012). Questions to be further investigated include the kind of research that is emphasized (for example, is the reason why research is mainly positively evaluated because it is characterized by being broader and not strictly evidence-based?), and the relationship between discursive strategies and classroom practice. Or put differently, is this representation first and foremost a counter narrative or is it actually productive in deciding on actions? The emphasis on knowledge may also address how there is a crucial difference between reporting upon actions on the one side and justifying judgments, decisions and actions on the other (Molander et al., 2012). While the former is placed outside the main frame of teaching, the latter is framed as an increasingly important part of teachers’ work and sense of professionalism.

The findings indicate that aspects of new policies to a greater extent are included in these teachers' value systems, which is especially true with regard to research-based knowledge and research-informed practice. The analysis is based on fieldwork within one municipality, and these findings should be investigated in further studies and other contexts to see whether and how development initiatives have boosted similar representations. The shifts in discourses could be used in further empirical work on this topic, as well as the analytical conceptualizations on teachers' constructions around accountability. Accountability is often analyzed with an emphasis on implementation, i.e. whether the policies are working or not and their intended and unintended effects, while this study has focused on how teachers' "do" policy, holding a relatively strong focus on teachers' agency (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006). In this sense, policy can be studied as on-going discursive and social practices (Levinson et al, 2009) and through investigations of how teachers' respond to changing educational policies through approving and questioning, but also reshaping policy in various ways. Thereby, this study also offers an analysis of educational change that attempts to discuss the relationship between policy discourse and professional discourse.

Concluding remarks

How and why teachers' accept or question accountability policies and practices should have implications for policy makers, as the arguments based on professional knowledge can bring more attention to teachers' voices and arguments when discussing accountability, assessment and student learning. Since the findings suggest that accountability policies are prominent in teachers' representations in various ways, there is reason to ask why some practices are regarded as legitimate while other practices are placed outside the main frame of teaching. Teachers' legitimation discourses around accountability have shed light on this issue by opening up the term accountability and investigating the area of tension between internal and external accountability – thus also contributing to question dichotomous notions around what

is perceived as external and internal to teachers' work. The curriculum and scientific knowledge is mainly placed within teachers' main frame of teaching although these elements both are external to the profession in the sense that it comes from authorities.

Yet, policies and practices related to increased control of the profession is questioned and resisted. Such variations in responses can also be seen as a way of negotiating new expectations towards teachers' that in some ways have to be "resolved". The delegitimation of accountability policies thereby also raises greater questions about teachers' sense making about professionalism that can illustrate how difficult it is for certain policies to be "effective". However, teachers also respond to new demands and expectations by redefining professionalism and constructing new responses, and more attention should be brought to teachers' representations when teacher professionalism is being reconstructed in policy.

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