Danish University Colleges

Inside the black box of educational leadership
Configurations of leading the core service of elementary schools
Piil, Signe

Publication date: 2017

Document Version
Version created as part of publication process; publisher's layout; not normally made publicly available

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

Download policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
Inside the Black Box of Educational Leadership in Denmark. Configurations of leading the core service of elementary schools.

“I’m interested in the process of knowing mess”. Those are the words of Law (1986; 2007), discussing his methodological approach in his research on ‘typical trajectories’ of patients moving through the health care system. What crossed my mind during my empirical study on educational leadership was exactly this. What I experienced was not finding order, system and clarification but crossing the doorsill into a world of messy, heterogeneous contradictions and coherences. In this paper as a part of my PhD, I am tracing the boundaries on the edge of the distinction between order and disorder.

One way to clean up the mess of disappointing international large-scale assessments and misgivings on declining economic growth has been a widespread conception of leading the core services of public organizations like schools, to navigate through the storm and setting the course for better and more efficient welfare. The massive wave of political and professional initiatives to increase the learning outcome of students in Denmark influenced by prevailing discourses, has divided the school debate into two apparently opposing positions. The question is whether target and purpose necessarily have to be complete contrasts.

The call for ‘evidence’ and ‘best practice’ on educational issues (Hattie, 2012; Helmke, 2009; Robinson, 2007, 2011), has during the last decades intensified the idea of leading the core service of schools to be one of the keys to protect, enhance and preserve the welfare state in Denmark. Inspired by New Public Management, governmental strategies seems to be based on linear steering logics building on a conception of causal linear implementation processes. What is interesting to me is what happens when different ontological positions cross swords and are translated into something different, and develop new habits. The development towards a management and competition state has been described extensively elsewhere (Gorur, 2013; Lingard, 2013; D. Pedersen, 2004; O. K. Pedersen, 2011), what is interesting in this paper is, how this focus on performance-based management and the idea of one coherent unison core service unfold and transform in a fluid, ever-changing and provisional reality through translations among actors in webs of relations.

My theoretical approach is actor-network theory. The strength of a socio-material approach, specifically on this topic is, to use the words of Fenwick: “to unpick the history of negotiations that build the networks that are producing the practices, and the different kinds of work holding them together. This not only exposes the lumps, tangles and patches that had been smoothed over to appear impenetrable, but also point out openings for alternatives.” (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011)

This paper is a part of my PhD on educational leadership in Denmark and includes my preliminary findings so far. What on the first hand has aroused my interest in this topic was to which extend certain aspects and qualities of school management came into vogue, and how concepts like Visible Learning (Hattie, 2012) and Student-centered Leadership (Robinson, 2007, 2011) has spread like wildfire in Denmark. The first part of my inquiry was about how educational leadership has been black boxed politically and how leading the core service of schools came out to be one of the main answers to the most frequently asked questions in
contemporary societies: “How to improve the learning outcome of students?” May be as well, derived from that question, to restore the self-esteem and the self-confidence of all us, scoring under average: “How to beat Finland in PISA?”

What in the light of contemporary ideas of leadership, quality, accountability and evidence-based practice (Røvik, Furu, & Eilertsen, 2014) and optimization of the public sector seems reasonable and plausible, on closer inspection meanwhile shows anything but simple. This paper is about upcoming and changing enactments of educational leadership and governmental influences on the performance of school leadership in Denmark. The purpose of this paper is to describe how interactions and translations in webs of relations (Callon, 1986; Law, 1981; Mol, 2002) shape and construct possibilities and conditions of principals expected to improve the learning outcome of students (DuFour & Marzano, 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Robinson, 2011). This part of my inquiry investigates the inter-linkage between the notion of one coherent unison core task as point of orientation, and the emergence of actors intermingling in webs of relations (Latour, 2005).

This paper show, how tracing the construction of educational leadership throughout networks is conducting and establishing new conditions and truisms among actors because of demands for evidence-based practice. By following the actor (Blok & Elgaard Jensen, 2009; Latour, 2005), in this case starting from an office of a school principal in Denmark, the empirical field study will unfold the linkages between educational policy and translations among practitioners. According to Latour (1986; Wæraas, 2016) “the amount of power exercised varies not according to the power someone has, but to the number of people how enter into the composition”.

In the wake of international large-scale assessments and comparisons (PISA, TIMMS, PIRLS) on student-outcome, literacy and numeracy and politically intensive and persistent demands on improvement of the learning outcome and wellbeing of pupils at elementary schools, my research question for this paper turned out to be:

"How is educational leadership constructed and configurated through translations in networks? and How are conditions and possibilities contained and maintained in fluid realities?"

Theoretical approach and central notions
My theoretical approach is translation theory. ANT is a sociological school of thoughts arisen in the eighties launched by Latour, Law and Callon (Blok & Elgaard Jensen, 2009). A central notion in ANT is the ‘generalized symmetry conception’, which requires using the same system of terminology to analyse social phenomena as well as natural. Latour (2005) explains the symmetric correlation between human and non-human agency by imagining a group of soldiers in a battle without tanks, rifles, paperwork and uniforms. ANT accentuates how human and non-human actors constantly relates and intertwine through translation processes. From this point of view data, documents, digital platforms, development dialogues and evaluations have agency in constructing configurations of educational leadership as well as human and political intentions. “To be symmetric, for us, simply means not to impose a priori some spurious asymmetry among human intentional action and a material world of causal relations.”

sipi@edu.au.dk – mobile: +45 22 82 92 15 – linkedin.com/in/signe-piil-a1341985
ANT is “a family of tools and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and the natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located” (Law, 2009). The point in this view is capturing the influence of non-human actors and therefore ANT rejects conceptions solely regarding the social. Reality in this approach is constructed through actors in networks and the links between them (Latour, 2005; Law, 2009; Ratner, 2013). Educational leadership is in this sense seen as enacted into being in the realm of performativity. The point in choosing this ontological perspective is opening the black box of contemporary constructions of educational leadership. Not to condemn dominant ideological positions, who favour standards, large-scale assessments, measurability and accountability, but to re-focus on Latours (2004) distinction between Matter of fact and Matter of concern.

Translation is a central notion in ANT. To translate is making to words equivalent, but translation also implies betrayal according to a French phrase: Traduction est trahison = Translation is treachery because making two things equivalent also implies changing them (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987; Law, 2009; Law & Hassard, 1999). In this sense, interactions always change the involved. ANT is interested in any actor or relation being conducive to stabilize or destabilize a network. Translations are understood as displacements (Callon, 1986), negotiated among actors and often unpredictable. Translations are connections that transport, so to speak, transformations (Latour, 2005).

A third conception in ANT is a Black Box. The notion refers to actors, ideas, entities in networks configurated stable enough to be accepted and able to enter into other networks without responding on the elements they are build of (Latour, 1987). Black boxes are truisms, things taken for granted, about whom we need nothing to know but the input and the output. How dominant conceptions of ‘educational leadership’ for instance are appeared is no longer called into question.

Method and design
Methodological this paper has it’s starting point at a school in a municipality in Denmark where I am doing my empirical study. To trace how school leadership at a policy level has been framed during the last decades, I have constructed my preliminary empirical findings for this part of my inquiry on observations, semi-structured qualitative interviews, focus group and informal ethnographic interviews, policy documents, reports and homepages. It is a case study on one municipality at primarily one school and in this sense ideographic.

Qualitative methods are often criticized for their lack of generalizability (Flyvbjerg, 2001) and contemporary preferential treatments of large-scale quantitative inquiries are reinforced by global and governmental requirements on ‘best practice’ and measurability. My contribution to this conference as well as into a field of two very different discourses in contemporary educational policy and practice is not to take a position on who is right and who is wrong, but to illuminate the complexity and controversies by observing how some positions become such a penetrative power as it is the case in Denmark. By opening the black box of educational leadership, it is my hope to put back in, what Latour (2004) defines as matters of concern into the debate.

The object of my inquiry is educational leadership. The interesting thing to me is how this notion is reshaped and black boxed (Latour, 1987, 2005) at a policy level on the background of dominating neo-liberal steering strategies like large-scale comparisons, competition, benchmarking and marketization to optimize the public sector. My study takes it’s point of departure empirically to scrutinize and explore how
negotiations and translations in networks configurates and favour certain understandings of leading the core service of schools. The purpose is to show how these possible conditions are translated and constructed locally. In short: What is inside the black box of ‘educational leadership’ and what is the possible output of those constructions?

To answer my research question I made use of “following the actor” (Latour, 1987, 2005; Law, 2009; Law & Hassard, 1999) as research strategy and for this paper I have selected an extract of my empirical material. I have constructed my data during a period of approximately one year so far. I am following translations of a comprehensive research and development programme (the LSP-project) regarding student outcome on every single school and of every single class of the school system in the actual municipality. It is a research and development project financed by the A. P. Møller-Foundation, the biggest business enterprise in Denmark, which in 2013 donated 1 billion DKK for research and capacity building projects for the benefit of the public school. The LSP-project is probably the most comprehensive research and data based development program in Denmark ever. 13 municipalities and over 600 schools are involved.

Basically, an empirical approach requires participation and observations to examine and describe interactions, negotiations and translations in networks. To trace trajectories of actors constructing facts and black boxing different issues as results of those practices, I had to trace and follow actors involved in the process of shaping constructions and configurations of educational leadership.

Activities underlying this particular part of my PhD are:

1. Observations of meetings with the management team and the PLC team (Professional Learning Communities)
2. Observations of annual dialogues between development consultants from the local authority and the management team of the school
3. Observations of development programme sessions with an external consultant employed by the local government to support the management team developing professional learning communities
4. Observations of management team meetings
5. Interviews with the principal, the school chief and consultants from the administration
6. Analysis of policy documents, ‘development schemes’ and the LSP-report, the so-called Mapping Study

The project has as such generated a wide-ranging empirical material, which makes it possible to analyse emerging processes in its organizational and relational complexity.

The political context

As in many other countries disappointing results in international large-scale assessments like PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS caused extensive reforms of the public school in Denmark. The official problematization (Callon, 1986) of the lack of the learning outcome came as the Danish Prime Minister, in his speech at the Opening of Parliament in 2003, proclaimed to break away from what he called “roundtable talk” at schools (Statsministeriet, 2003). By problematizing the lopsidedness of earlier pedagogical discourses, he simultaneously addressed disadvantages and pointed out the solution: increased demands on outcome.

The tendency of focusing on ‘best practice’ as an outcome of averages on global measurements regarding educational issues (Busch, 2011; Lingard, 2011; Piety, 2013) increased with the financial crisis in 2008. A strong governmental macroeconomic interest in ‘best practice’ and learning outcome improvement at elementary schools was underlined by establishing the Productivity Commission in the beginning of 2012. It
was an assemblage of almost exclusively economists and the terms of reference was to come up with recommendations on enhancing the Danish economy. Including efficiency improvement of the public sector. The linkage between economic growth and education was made clear by the commission itself:

“How could we organize and arrange schools and education in a way that young people acquire competences making them productive on the labor market?”

(Productivitetskommissionen, 2013)

Autumn 2013 signatory parties of the Danish Parliament, an overwhelming majority, agreed on a new school reform. The most comprehensive one for decades. The reform came into force at the beginning of the subsequent school year and it is to a great extent based on the recommendations of the Productivity Commission regarding schooling improvement (Produktivitetskommissionen, 2014).

Approximately, one year before that the collective bargaining negotiations between the National Association of Local Authorities (KL) and the labor union of the teachers reached an impasse and the teachers were lock-outed for approximately one month until the Government intervened. The political target was a new working hour agreement expanding the managerial space and rights of principals.

The emergence of new configurations


The findings of Robinson on student-centered leadership had a tremendous impact on upcoming development programs up and down the country and several stakeholders proclaimed educational leadership to be of significance. Recently, the Commission of Leadership (appointed in 2017) has added definitions of public management.

“God management and leadership provides better quality in welfare benefits and contributes thereby to the best possible welfare for the money for the benefit of citizens and enterprises.” (Finansministeriet, 2017)

Educational leadership turns on the one hand out to be one of the main answers to better large-scale assessment scores, and on the other hand, to be an instrument of governmental control motivated by the hope for global competitiveness. According to the OECD:

“School leaders have to be able to adapt the teaching program to local needs, promote teamwork among teachers and engage in teacher monitoring, evaluation and professional development.” (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008)

The same expectations formulated in several statements, programs and policy documents in Denmark and carried into effect by the National Association of Local Authorities in Denmark (KL):

“Political goals and performance requirements are more directly linked together and both objectives and results are made more visible through e.g. development of data.” (KL, 2015)

Those are some of the political statements configuring and constructing expectations and possible outcomes of black boxing educational leadership. Demands, which can be traced back from the office of a local principal to transnational organizations. As pointed out by Latour (1986) “the amount of power
exercised varies not according to the power someone has but to the number of people who enter into the composition.” A huge amount of stakeholders are mobilized into this movement (Piil, 2017) like, DAFOLO¹, KMD², consultancy firms, The A.P.Møller Foundation, Clearinghouses, COK³, KL etc. etc. as well as opponents are. In this particular performative perspective are opponents to the dominant evidence-discourse seen as well as constructions in webs of relations.

My empirical study

The starting point of my empirical investigation was at the office of a principal, with whom I had an appointment about a year ago regarding my PhD. It was the 1st meeting of many following. His office looked like any other of that sort except may be the electronic screen to the right of the entrance door. What I noticed as well, was his clean desk and an unexpected order accompanied by a few conveniently located treasures unveiling the history of former teaching - and a non-fiction book. The title was, ‘What we know about professional learning communities’. A book purchased by the local authority for all employees at schools in the municipality, he told me. He asked me if I wanted to have it. The remarkable thing was not the gesture in itself. It was undoubtedly pure friendliness helping me to produce my empirical data. The remarkable thing was the attitude. What crossed my mind that second was how many books purchased by local governments there are placed on bookshelves up and down the country without ever being opened. Law (2009) wrote “the most interesting places lie in the boundaries between order and disorder, or where different orders rub up against one another,” and further “translation is always insecure, a process susceptible to failure. Disorder – or other orders – are only precariously kept at bay.” This has been the essence of my research strategy by “following the actor.” Where were the boundaries between order and disorder? The aim of this paper is to illuminate translation processes by following the origin of the Development Scheme constructed and changed over time by the local administration as steering and development tool on the background of the School Reform and the participation in the LSP-project. The format has changed and is produced in several processes by different actors. The figure beneath illustrates trajectories over space and time.

¹ DAFOLO is a growing publishing company, which has special agreements with particular researchers to translate their books. DAFOLO supplies as well municipalities with consultancy services all over the country regarding competence development for staff at mainly elementary schools, and is one of many emerging consultancy companies who delivers tools, ways of doing and possible solutions to comply with contemporary demands on student outcome.

² KMD is a growing company who delivers digital solutions of every kind needed in the educational system.

³ COK (The National Academy for Government Management and Training) is an organization established in 2003 and owned by the National Association of Local Authorities (KL).
The figure shows on the one hand, (from a governmental view?), expectations of a, more or less, linear implementation process and on the other hand different entities, reports, plans, schemes and dialogues, constructed through translations in different networks during the process. Temporal, the period spans for the present over approximately four years. The assignment was in an overall perspective to implement the School Reform.

One of the strokes in my empirical study, I will highlight in this paper is the Development Scheme, which plays an important role in the dialogue between the local administration and a particular school management team. It is constructed through the process at earlier stages. The Development Scheme is in actor-network theory seen as an actor. An actor is a working entity while an worked-up and assembled entity is an actant (Latour, 1999). In other words when translations has succeeded, the entity that is being worked up is mobilized to assume a particular role and perform knowledge and practice in a particular way (Fenwick et al., 2011).

Another aspect of assumptions and anticipations of linear 1:1 implementation processes and causal logics is challenged by understandings of power – and exerting power - in translation theory. “Power over something or someone is a composition made by many people” (Latour, 1986) and furthermore: “The amount of power exercised varies not according to the power someone has, but to the number of people who enter into the composition.” In this sense power is an effect of assemblages, negotiations and interlinkages in networks and never a cause. In this understanding, the immense penetrative power of the evidence discourse in Denmark and an emergent hegemony of neoliberalism ideologies and global capitalist economy, are effects of translations in webs of relations. On the other hand, administrations and authorities exert force and power by expecting and monitoring documented school improvement. Practitioners are forced and educational leadership is constructed and mobilized in certain ways by a normative pressure and soft governance. Which explicitly was articulated by the principal at the end of a Development Dialogue with consultants from the local authority: “When are we expected to go to the next ‘parent-teacher consultation’?"
Tracing back how things went this way, I will return to the book I was given. The reason why it was handed out, was not simply because professional learning communities contemporary is seen as one of the keys to capacity building and improving student outcome at schools. This can be traced back to the quote by the OECD mentioned above as well as the number of books published by DAFOLO on this subject. Primarily about feedback, professional learning communities, educational leadership, taxonomies and practice relevant books like: how-to-do-this-thing-of-evidence-based-practice.

This was one of them and as I mentioned before, DAFOLO has special agreements on publishing literature. Most of them support the evidence-discourse. According to their own homepage, they are “one of the biggest players on the market in the field of competence development.” (DAFOLO, 2017). DAFOLO has cooperating partners like e.g. Challenging Learning⁴, The Danish National Centre for School Research⁵, Auckland University⁶ and others.

Another reason was the participation in the LSP-project. The development program PFL (Program for Learning Management) is lead by the LSP (Laboratory for Research-based School Development and Pedagogical Practice) affiliated to Aalborg University and in cooperation with COK (The National Academy for Government Management and Training). A main part of the project is an extracted study on the performance of all participating municipalities and schools regarding student wellbeing and different aspects of teaching and facilitating increased learning outcome. Data are collected three times during the whole research process in 2015, 2017 and 2019 and consists of questionnaires answered by leaders, pedagogical employees, parents and pupils. The same questions are repeated each time and every data-collection results in a Mapping Study (T1, T2 & T3) to generate database school development. On the background of this Mapping Study, compiled in the spring 2016, and in relation to demands of the School Reform, the participating schools in the municipality, where I am doing my empirical study were asked to choose a development program conducted by the PLF-program. They were offered seven different ‘Qualification Parcels’ including modules and exercises. All topics research-informed and relevant regarding capacity building at schools – development programs, inspired by the school system development in Ontario, Canada (LSP, 2016).

The Mapping Study included a huge amount of data concerning wellbeing, learning outcome, feedback, social relations, behavior and adaptation, cooperation of teachers, professional competences and classroom management. Data were collected at a municipality-level, at school-levels and in every single class. They were presented afterwards for further discussion and reflection in year group teams.

The target and goal of the PFL-program is to get participating schools to act up to the goals of the school reform (LSP, 2016) to:

1. challenge all pupils to become as proficient and skillful as they can
2. minimize the influence of the social background in relation to the learning outcome
3. strengthen the confidence in and the wellbeing at the elementary school through respect for professional knowledge and practice

⁴ Challenging Learning is a British consultancy firm owned by James Nottingham. Supplies a large amount of municipalities with consultancy services regarding Visible Learning-concepts.
⁵ The Danish National Centre for School Research is charged with providing practice relevant research and conducting collaboration between research institutions and practitioners. Founded in 2016 at the Danish School of Education.
⁶ Viviane Robinson is employed at University of Auckland. She has been invited many times by DAFOLO and UCC (University College Capital) and is, like Michael Fullan (the former dean of the University of Toronto), a member of an expert monitoring group affiliated to the LSP-project.
On the background of the Mapping Study of each school, the respective management team had to analyses their school data and come up with topics they wanted to develop on to increase the learning outcome and the wellbeing of pupils. 52,63 % of the schools in this municipality chose the Qualification Parcel about Feedback and 31,57 % chose the one about Professional Learning Communities. The rest were spread on two other subjects, Motivation and Data. 10,52 % chose Motivation and 5,26 % chose Data. A remarkable thing is the coherence between the amount of schools choosing Feedback and how much attention the topic has in the school debate in Denmark. ‘Feedback’ is often mentioned in the same breath as ‘Teaching by objectives’ – the operationalization of the notion of Hattie: ‘Visible Learning’ (Hattie, 2012), launched by the Danish Ministry of Education (Skovmand, 2016).

In the process of incorporating new entities in the school field paradoxically the PLC-teams, I think, has been a much bigger challenge than introducing feedback as a facilitating tool. What on the drawing board often seems to be reliable and plausible, at many schools turned out to be Frankenstein’s Monster. “How to turn this thing on?” a principal once asked. I am considering if the choices of Qualification Parcels actually relied on results from the Mapping Studies or if the spreading in choices of development topics among management teams at schools more likely was caused by contemporary discourses.

In parallel with the LSP-project as development program, there are several other developing initiatives in this particular municipality. E.g. a new digital platform, Min Uddannelse, teachers are expected to make them self-acquainted with, new ways of organizing including informal leading roles like PLC-teams, as I mentioned before and Development Schemes prepared by the local administration. Materiality like numbers, schemes, documents, digital platforms etc. appears to play an anything but insignificant role while framing educational leadership.

Non-human actors like the Development Schemes have agency and are results of translation processes. In STS (Science and Technology Studies) and ANT translation does not have only its linguistic meaning but are as well seen as transcriptions from one repertoire to a more durable. Schemes are delegates and representatives – or as Latour put it: lieutenants (Johnson, 1995) – (from French lieu tenant, i.e., holding the place of, for, someone else). He wrote: “Knowledge, morality, craft, force, sociability are not properties of humans but humans accompanied by their retinue of delegated characters.” (Johnson, 1995).

A consultant at the municipal administration replied to my question about how to define god educational leadership:

“At any time you should be able to put into perspective... what is...”The decisions we are going to take now... in which way are they a contribution to increase the learning outcome and the wellbeing of the pupils?” At any time... all big decisions... then this should be the pivotal point.... and then... it stands to reason that employees as resource are the most important factor at all to raise the learning outcome of pupils and their wellbeing... so... being attentive to improve the skills of employees... their wellbeing... and strengthening their professional learning communities is completely decisive.”

(Consultant at the municipal administration, March 2017)

Later on in the same interview, the consultant said this:

“The reason why I am saying this so clearly... the thing about the core service as point of departure regarding learning and wellbeing... it is because we saw the first few occasions regarding the Development Scheme... we saw principals being extremely qualified to set specific targets for the employees. Some very overall pedagogic targets, but there were, generally speaking, no goals for the learning outcome and wellbeing of pupils. It was related effects...and that made us strongly concerned... we challenged them...
and we decided... it was the administration who decided it... that the learning outcome and the wellbeing of the pupils should be moved to the top, to be the overall and steering object for the Development Scheme.

So, the great efforts underneath should... make sense and be mirrored in the overall objectives for the learning goals of the pupils and their wellbeing...and these goals had to be data-informed. They (the management teams) should be able to point at, where in their analysis and their... the data, they had, there were the pupils accomplishing too badly or they were thriving less fine... and that was, what we decided one and a half year ago. It was a decision of the school chief, but as far as I experienced...as far as my colleagues experienced, no one addressed this as a problem. It made sense to everybody, but it was astonishing how absent it (the goals for the learning outcome and wellbeing of the pupils) was the first two times.”

(Consultant at the municipal administration, March 2017)

...and another school consultant amplifies:

“Good educational leadership is one, who can... or a team, able to direct...em... getting employees committing themselves on the mission lying underneath... which pedagogical practice should characterize X school? And then going absolutely close and... may be not oneself, but be able to... be able to build a capacity of supervisors so employees together are being able to challenge the practice theory of each other. So, where are we going, and what is it we are doing, so that we do and look at the interplay there. What are the benefits for the kinds of it? It is... and then you can call it one thing or the other or the third... there... there is of cause something superior. We are having three keys and of cause, they have to be in play... and someone who obstinately from time to time can... can hold on to the importance of learning and wellbeing. That is something that goes hand in hand. Yeah, I think that is competent educational leadership. Not becoming obsessed by implementation processes, but using it wisely.”

(Consultant at the municipal administration, April 2017)

The characters, schemes and key concepts produced and used by the local authority stabilizing the process of progression in a certain way, fitting with contemporary ideas of leadership, quality, accountability and evidence-based practice (Røvik, 2007; Røvik et al., 2014) are assemblages of networked practices at different times and with different purposes during the years after the School Reform was passed by the Government.

Both Latour (Latour, 1999) and Law (Law, 2009) proclaim ANT not to be a theory, but “a sensibility to the messy practices of relationality and materiality of the world.” This sensibility towards translation or delegation as a process and a function of semiotic materiality illuminates the stabilizing effect of and the delegation of power into material representations by which those susceptible processes are precariously kept at bay, as Law so nobly describes it (Law, 2009). The one below, is hanging on the noticeboard at the office of the principal at my case school and operates as an immutable mobile in remembrance of and adherence to the purpose of the job – the core service of the school. Immutable mobiles are stabilized entities circulating in and out of networks whilst holding their shape and form constant (Latour, 1987).
The illustration is an image of and an extract of the vision of the school development at this particular municipality until 2020. The plan is published in the late 2016 and covers both - the vision and how to get there. The important aspect of it are the three circles in the middle of the image. They are representing the three key areas the local administration has pointed out to secure the organizational development at all levels and are covering the answers to the question: “How to do it?” What is the local authority focusing on to realize the vision?

The first one with the eye is about visualization of learning and wellbeing. It is about “a learning culture, where learning and wellbeing are visualized for the individual pupil and the parents, and where professionals systematically and collectively create knowledge about the interplay between efforts and effects.” (2020-Perspectives, 2016)

The second key area is the one in the middle. It is about inclusion and motivation. “The learning environment should be informed by knowledge on inclusion and motivation and be based on the prerequisites of all pupils and support the potentials of them all.” (2020-Perspectives, 2016)

The last one is about professional learning communities. “The teams of the school, the management team and the local authority are expected to operate like a professional learning community, who collectively and systematically work on learning and learning processes, and all the time is focusing on the learning and wellbeing of the pupils.”
The management team is met by demands and expectations on carrying out the key areas in connection to their own goals and development initiatives at regular Development Dialogues. The image of the key areas appears from time to time as an immutable mobile to remind the management team for the time present of the commitment to common goals of the municipality as a whole.

According to the principal, the key areas are not present in the minds of the employees yet. Whether it over time will have influence on their mindset is depending on the focus the areas are given by the management team. What is up front and urgent to them is one of their own development processes, the ‘value process’. At the Development Dialogue they are talking about how to “turn them on”, the professionals - challenging them and expecting and demanding the best possible in their interplay with their pupils regarding academic achievements, personally and socially.

The principal responds to the question of one of the consultants on how they could make use of the key areas in developing the school for the benefit of the pupils:

“The work and activities of the professionals at a school, where you are in close connection with each other and with kids etc.... it is worked up on... for this reason you would like to make a difference and you have typically opinions about things you do. Teachers and pedagogues have... therefor are we forced to... not just to talk about which learning paradigm is functioning the best way for the kinds... Were you feel people being turned on and energized... the professional flame being ignited...that is when you are talking about, what is it we want with those kids? And when we are doing things together... so professional learning communities... you should be aware of not just talking about professionality in theoretic terms... vi have talked a lot about binding communities... what do we want to do together?

We want to give the children the best... including high academic competences so they are able to get on in a globalized world etc.... but that’s not the only value. High academic competence is one of them. Values are the greatest and biggest dynamo and generator, you can introduce to professional communities – also with kind – that can activate some of these things.”

(The principal at the Development Dialogue, 2017)

The last ‘lieutenant’ (Johnson, 1995) I wanted to show is the Development Scheme every school has to, if not fill out accurately, then at least addressing status quo, strategic goals, focus areas, how to get there and evaluation of the process and outcome. Schools are supposed to fill out those schemes once a year. The Development Dialogues are held two or three times a year. As mentioned above, such schemes delegates functions to non-human actors. In this case to keep the management team on track regarding outcome goals of the municipality. Such immutable mobiles are more reliable and stable and takes possession of the monitoring role of the consultants. They are delegating the controlling part of their mission to relief the dialog, construct a co-operative relation and simultaneously maintaining the direction. The different schemes constructed and changed throughout the chains of events by the municipality are all actors in the process to redeem the assignment of the municipalities and the school: to fulfill the claims of the School Reform.

The figure below shows such a scheme with space for tasks and strategic goals placed at the left and images of the three key areas at the right. In remembrance of, what all is about, the learning outcome and wellbeing of the pupils. There is no doubt of the influence, the effect and the power of such delegations, but they have to be negotiated in webs of relations in a susceptible and precarious world.
Figure 3: Development Scheme used for annual Development Dialogues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Udgangspunkt:</strong> (Her skrives ganske kort, hvordan motivationen for de valgte mål og indsatser er)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indsatsområder:</strong> (Her skrives de valgte indsatser)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mål:</strong> (Her skrives de valgte mål, som indsatserne skal indfri/arbøjde i relation til)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan for gennemførelse:</strong> (Her skrives ganske kort, hvordan indsatserne skal gennemføres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan for løbende opfølgning:</strong> (Her skrives ganske kort, hvordan indsatser og mål løbende monitoreres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluering:</strong> (Her skrives ganske kort, hvordan indsatser og mål evalueres)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nationalø og kommunals mål for elevernes læring og trivsel**

**Skolens strategiske mål (længere)***

**Udviklingsregnskabet**

---

**Conclusion:**

To answer my research questions I have shown how assemblages of networked practices construct configurations of educational leadership. I have shortly highlighted main contributions to the political framing of how educational leadership is understood on the background of transnational influence and neo-liberal discourses regarding educational policy. To redeem the political demands on increased learning outcome for the pupils at elementary schools in Denmark, the principal has become a pivotal role. Leading the core service of schools is seen as essential to supply the labor market with capable working capacity and to economic growth. As it is highlighted by the Productivity Commission. These conditions reinforce a strict steering paradigm directed towards measurability and control, resting on the faith in learning to become visible, measurable and predictable. The critique of this paradigm has been tremendous and has divided the debate in the educational sector into roughly spoken two fractions, which are represented by the evidence discourse and the Bildungs discourse. Nevertheless, has this focus on the core service of schools intensified the cooperation. By black boxing a notion like ‘educational leadership’ or ‘learning’ the content of the notion is been compressed and made manageable. Those
References:


sipi@edu.au.dk – mobile: +45 22 82 92 15 – linkedin.com/in/sign-piil-a1341985


