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Reforming “time” in Danish Schools?

Ideological struggles, ritualized events and inverted dreams around a reform

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This article is about a public school reform in Denmark. Or rather it is about a struggle over “time” that took place immediately prior to the reform, but has been resurfacing over and over again in many public schools as well as in political debates about schools and teachers since the so-called “implementation” of the reform. Over and over have teachers published their critique in newspapers and on social media, have quit their jobs because they “could not stand seeing themselves in the eyes” or reported in sick with stress. Pupils have walked the streets and occupied schools waving banners saying “we want our time back!” or “you take our time, we take your schools!”, and parents have moved their children to free schools in dissatisfaction, while newspapers and TV programs have been busily reporting on the situation.

In this article I will concentrate on the aspects of the reform related to notions of time, and I will analyze how a shift from one way of counting teachers working time to another, ended up having profound implications not only for teachers' working lives but also for the public school system. The change in ways of “counting time” was from the managerial side an attempt to be able to steer the public schools into a better and more productive future, but instead ended up reopening the past – even recalculating the past according to a “market logic” – raising questions about teachers' productivity and contribution to society. During the article I will argue, that the struggle was in a sense not really about time, but about different understandings of value and about how to translate the value of teaching work into a salary. By drawing on psychoanalytically inspired theories of fantasmatic logics, Marxian inspired theories of abstract time and work, and anthropological theories of reciprocity and ritualization, I will argue that the ways in which teachers and employers respectively understood and framed what they considered “work” in time, was connected to different logics and moral ideas about what the good society is imagined to be, and how different people can or cannot “count” (on) each other.

Background

In spring 2013 public schools all over Denmark were more or less closed down, and most children sent home for almost a month. The reason was a “lockout” why most public teachers¹ were not allowed to enter the schools. Prior to this, The Teachers' Union and The Association of Municipalities, representing the employers' side had been negotiating for months about teachers' working time, and how to count or measure it. The two parties were according to what is often referred to as “the Danish model” supposed to

¹ With the exception of the ones that were not member of a union, and the ones that were old enough to be employed as “tjenestemænd”, meaning that they could not be locked out, and could not legally go on strike.

negotiate and reach an agreement without state interference, and if an agreement was not found, the two sides had the possibility of putting pressure on each other by either initiating a “strike” or a “lock out”. Since the negotiations had broken down, the employers had locked out teachers from all public schools in the country, and many teachers were therefore to be found outside the schools or along the roads, waving banners and signs declaring their willingness to teach and their love for their work. After almost a month, the conflict was still not resolved, and the summer exams were approaching, but the pupils were not in school. The government decided to interfere. Since the two parties could obviously not reach a “working time *agreement*”, to regulate teachers’ working time for the following years, the government passed a “working time *law*”. To many teachers the government had not only violated “the Danish model” by interfering with what was supposed to be negotiation between the parties of the “labor market”, they had also interfered in a way that had in their eyes sided with the employers by shifting from a “norm based” model of counting working time to a model based on “outer limits” to working time.

After this schools reopened, teachers and pupils came back, exams were held, and everything did in some ways look like before the lockout. But in the years following, the lockout and the sense of someone having been wronged kept “haunting” the public school as an absent presence (Bjerg and Vaaben in review). As a ghost from the past, memories of the lockout could appear and take over a meeting completely, as e.g. when the school manager in a public school North of Copenhagen in an attempt to start planning the following school year (2014), wanted to talk with the teachers about who would take on which tasks - and several of the teachers burst into tears.

Based on the seemingly profound ways in which teachers felt “misrecognized”, “humiliated” or “treated as second rank people”, as some of them expressed it, I will explore the logics, values and ideas about society at play in a shift from one way of measuring working time to another.

Theory

Theoretically the analysis will primarily draw on Jason Glynos and David Howarth (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Glynos, 2010, 2011) supplemented with Slavoy Žižek (Žižek, 1989, 1992) and David Graeber (Graeber, 2001, 2013). From their writings notions like ideology, imaginary and fantasmatic logics are useful concepts in attempting to capture the profound ways in which political struggles are also about identification with desired futures, possible selves, and with imagined gazes by someone upon the (educational) subject. These theorists draw on a psychoanalytical inspiration, based on Lacan, as well as on Marx.

Glynos and Howarth explain how social objectivity or reality is always constructed and political in the sense that people in their attempts to understand social life, always end up with incomplete understandings, leaving out some of the messiness and contingency of social relations (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, pp. 11–14). Precisely because something is always left out or lacking, such incomplete constructions are not neutral, but tied up with negotiated and contested regimes of practices, political actions, and ideological identifications, and they suggest looking for “logics” as a theoretical tool to unravel such processes (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, pp. 11–14). They describe how to look for logics in different dimensions of sociality, but what is especially relevant for this analysis is their concept of “fantasmatic logics”, that is similar to ideology and Lacan’s concept of “*jouissance*”. Fantasmatic logics can according to Glynos and Howarth be seen as the driving forces giving political practice direction and energy by supporting it with promises of recapturing a lost or impossible imagined fullness or dream, making the practice appear natural and thus preventing the

political dimension to emerge (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, p. 147; Žižek, 1989). They argue that many management and governance techniques (not least within educational policy, which is their own object of analysis) can be seen as such fantasmatic logics. They describe how they are often constructed as a more or less linear narratives or fantasms pointing to a desired future of fullness to be realized, and some barriers, threats or obstacles to be overcome by the help of certain policy solutions (Glynos & Howarth, 2007, pp. 146–147, 174). As such they draw attention to the ways in which fantasy plays a role when desired futures or “outcomes” of policy legitimize actions and “naturalize” them in ways which make them appear as objective and self-evident rather than ideological. But they do of course also address the struggles between different logics and ideologies, being energized by different desired futures.

David Graeber, who is also to some extent inspired by Lacanian psychoanalysis, argues that such ideological struggles about values, always involve an imagination of how the good society should ideally be organized. As such Graeber takes Benedict Anderson's ideas about “imagined communities” a bit further and argues that not only do people imagine a society or a community as some sort of totality, but people also imagine how that totality is ideally organized, which values are its central references, what relation the individual has to that totality, and not least does he draw attention to the ritual events and arenas, where celebrations of and struggles between different understandings of value are staged and performed (Graeber, 2001, 2013). Precisely this performative aspect puts the audience into a central position, and he argues that value can be seen as something that can only be realized in “other people’s eyes” (Graeber, 2001, 2013, p. 226). Someone has to acknowledge something to be of value, and often an imagined “society” will be that audience.

Žižek too has pointed out, how imagined gazes or audiences play a crucial role, when people attempt to identify with and find a place within the world of others. He explains that such a process of identification actually holds two theoretically separable processes. One has to do with putting oneself in the place of the Other, identifying *with* that perspective. The other has to do with recognizing oneself as a likeable person *through* that perspective. As such there is both a “looking from” and a “looking at” involved in this identification with an imagined gaze (Žižek, 1989, p. 116), and the individual will continuously try to understand “how the Other sees me” and “what it is the Other wants from me”.

In a way what Žižek describes about the two identification processes can also be found in Graeber's writings, although he has more emphasis on imagined societies, than on an imagined other. But here too the imagined society plays a double role. It plays the role as an audience, and a role as the desired future society organized according to certain values – or, one might follow Glynos and Howarth and call it the desired “fullness” to come. What makes Graeber's approach relevant in the analysis, that I am about to write, is that Graeber describes how the identification process can be understood as the individual's continuous attempts to understand his or her relation to an imagined society or simply to “them” or “they”. How do “they” see me, what do “they” want from me, and how do I see myself, if I look at myself from “their” perspective? As such Graeber puts the relation between self and society into center of attention in his research on the celebration of and the struggle about what counts as value in other people's eyes.

But he also has something to say about how matters involving the imaginary might be studied empirically by focusing on ritual events. One of his points is that years back, social scientists would without much hesitation, analyze staged performances and so called rituals and draw out “the social structures” of a society on this background. He exemplifies with a reference to Terence Turner's fieldwork in a Kayapo

Village, where the villagers insist they are organized in two moities, although this particular "social structure" seems to be quite invisible in the messiness of everyday life. In fact it seems as if these moities have no materialized existence except in ritual events, where this invisible and imagined "social structure" is made to appear in order to provide an arena for the realization of social value, such as solidarity and unity expressed through e.g. initiations, namegiving, and gifts (Graeber, 2013, p. 227). As such Graeber argues that "ritual events" constitute arenas, where e.g. the values of a society can be expressed, staged or perhaps even verbalized, but he also argues that in contrast to this old-fashioned and somewhat simple "village example", most contemporary societies will have multiple arenas for the realization of social structures and values and little consensus about what counts as value and according to which imagined societies or desired futures. This brings us right back to the ideological struggles and to a contemporary welfare society such as the Danish, which is precisely not characterized by a singular and unchallenged "social structure" such as the moities in a Kayapo village, but rather by a multitude of understandings of value, around which "society" could ideally be organized (Graeber, 2013, p. 228).

In this article I will look at the school reform and the struggles about time as such ritual events, constituting arenas where different imagined and desired societies centered on different notions of value are staged and contested, and where implicit and tacit ideas about groups of people - here teachers - and their relation to society are verbalized. I will explore the fantasmatic logics supporting and legitimizing various actions taken, and I will examine how they influence possibilities of identification. I will argue, that what appeared to be a struggle over different notions of time, was rather a struggle between different imagined societies centered on different values, implying different relations and exchanges between teachers and society. And I will further argue, that this shift in ways of understanding and counting (on) teachers' work, did contrary to the intentions not pave the way towards a desired productive school in the future, but ended up not only re-opening the past, but recalculating the past according to different values, calling into question whether or not teachers contribute sufficiently to society.

Methodological approach and data

As mentioned above I want to study the struggles over teachers' working time as a ritual event, where otherwise tacit or implicit ideas about how society is organized or ought to be organized, are staged, performed, contested and verbalized. The obvious question to ask therefor is: How do I decide what constitutes a "ritual event"? In this regard I turn to Catherine Bell, who stands out as one of the most influential writers on ritual. She sets out telling off many of the established theorists within ritual research for making circular arguments, by theoretically constructing ritual as an opposition, and then confirming empirically how exactly that opposition is overcome by people through ritual – even though the people in question might claim to be doing something entirely different (C. Bell, 1992, pp. 13–66). In this way she ends up arguing that ritual is not something that can be theoretically defined, but something that is empirically defined by the people performing it. They are the ones, framing certain social acts and loading them with meaning, making them special distinguishing them from other activities (C. Bell, 1992, p. 70). This process of framing, staging and making certain activities special is what she calls "ritualization", and what ends up being ritualized is therefore an empirical question. In this way Bell takes people's own agendas, strategies and thoughts about what they are doing, quite seriously, but she also explains with reference to Foucault how people might be quite aware what they are doing and why they are doing it, but can perhaps not see, what what they are doing does (C. Bell, 1992, p. 108). By addressing the struggle as a ritualized event, I will attempt to make "what what they are doing does" apparent.

It is not the first time that labor union negotiations have been addressed as a ritualized event. As an example of "ritualization" Bell in fact refers to a previous study by Murray Edelman, where the term has been used to explain how exactly labor union negotiations, by being ritualized, enable the two parties to deal with conflict and resolution simultaneously in a framed way, that does not completely destroy the relation between them (C. Bell, 1992, pp. 88–89). In this sense one might say, that in the case of the struggle over teachers and their time, the problem and the teachers' sense of being wronged might have to do with the fact that the government stepped in, and "broke the frame", causing the "ritualized struggle" to become a "real" struggle with the capacity to destroy the relationship. In the analysis I will however, not primarily focus on this aspect, but as argued in the section above, my attention will be focused on unravelling the fantasmatic logics, imagined societies and central values played out in the ritualized events.

For this reason I have not only observed staged performances, such as demonstrations, TV-debates, occupations of schools and similar events, clearly directed to an audience, I have also in the wake of the conflict interviewed 26 teachers, 5 school managers, and 3 municipal leaders with responsibility for the schools in the municipality. I have been asking them (among many other things) what the struggle was about, what it had meant to them, and who they were struggling with. As can be seen from the numbers of interviews, very few people from the employers' side were willing to talk to me, and among the ones, who did, most actually sided with the teachers. Thus, in order to examine the logics, understandings of value, and desired future societies at play from this perspective, I have examined a number of reports and policy documents published by the Association of Municipalities, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education prior to the conflict. Finally I have drawn into the analysis an electronic survey, in which 400 teachers have in free text described their reason for leaving a public school after the reform.

Marketization of time

I will now turn to the analysis, and as many of the interviews revealed, the conflict was by the majority of the people I talked to understood as a struggle over "time". According to both teachers and managers the issue of "time" was also in the wake of the conflict and during the following years where the school reform was supposed to be "implemented", by far the issue that caused most trouble in the schools. The wording and the ambitions of the reform itself, was according to some teachers actually quite okay for the most part, but the shift from one way of measuring working time to another was really problematic.

Interestingly, teaching work was both before and after the new law on working time, counted in "hours" and then translated into a salary. In this sense one might argue that the theme of this article remains safely inside a strictly Western and postindustrial and economic understanding of time. Many theorists have pointed out that cultural ideas about time changed in the Western World following the industrial revolution (Adam, Whipp, & Sabelis, 2002, pp. 12–13; Adam, 2004, p. 38ff; Baudrillard, 1988, p. 132ff; Weber, 1992, pp. 14–19). Prior to the industrial revolution, it did according to Baudrillard not make any sense to talk about production or work or about time as a resource, since everything of value in this world was seen as a gift from God, and thus rather "deduced" from God than "produced" by people (Baudrillard, 1988, pp. 128–129). But with the arrival of factories and clocks, human activity over time began to be viewed in a different way - as something possibly creating value, and although Marx did not especially concentrate on notions of time, it is according to Barbara Adam clear that in his theories, time plays a significant role in the emergence of the concept of labor (Adam, 2004, pp. 36–38). To Marx it was only "clock-time" as empty or abstract category that could be commodified and translated into money, but this commodification of

abstract time was also precisely what enabled employers to attempt to intensify the amount of work being done within a length of abstract time in order to get more done faster, and thus being able to compete with business rivals (ibid.). In this way a specific “empty” notion of time, as something linear and dividable into units, in which any type of activity could be put, was connected to ideas of how the market would because of competition ensure efficiency.

Such understandings of time have clearly dominated the Western World increasingly and ever since, so that it now seems just as obvious for us to think of time as a resource closely connected to work and money, as to think of it as natural or biological rhythms such as the changing seasons or flows of life directing people from birth to death (Adam, 2004, p. 56; Guerlac, 2015, pp. 30–31). Actually, alarm-clocks and other objects of time, shaping our thoughts, have far greater influence on the temporalities of our lives and societies than does the sunrise, or other natural rhythms which the clocks and calendars were initially supposed to imitate (Birth, 2012). Also within education has objects of time such as “standards” shaped the temporality of the educational system in ways influenced by an understanding of time as a resource that can be chopped up in small bits, “spent” on various activities, and the outcome and efficiency measured (Brøgger & Staunæs, 2016). In a sense the teachers and their work was both before and after the new law, marked by this way of thinking about time as a resource which could not only be spent, but also bought and sold. As the analysis will show, teachers and their work was *both before and after* the reform in question, spoken of and translated into salary by means of a western understanding of time as something dividable into time-units and translatable into money. However, the reform of “how to count time” still had quite profound consequences for the ways in which teachers and their work was seen or not seen as valuable “contributions” to society, and also had profound effects on teachers’ ability to identify with the imagined gazes involved in those processes.

Paying work in “hours”.

Prior to the conflict and the lockout, teachers’ time had been calculated in “norms”, meaning that for every responsibility a teacher was assigned to, he or she would “receive a number of hours”, and when the top limit was reached, the teacher could be assigned no more responsibilities. This model had been criticized a lot over the years for being rigid and for involving far too much counting.

The teachers maneuvered quite pragmatically in the system, and talked about “getting hours” as the most natural thing in the world, not really understanding what I meant by asking questions about how they actually “received” those “hours” (did someone prolong their lives, add extra days in their weeks or how did it work?) “*Well, we get hours! What do you mean?*”

The school managers had a list of responsibilities that counted for “hours” including, of course, all the various teaching tasks, but also including a number of hours estimated for different sorts of meetings, for preparation, for being responsible for the library, for being a “class-teacher”, for going on trips or for taking turns in the school yard during breaks. In this system, once the responsibilities had been assigned to different teachers, nobody was counting or checking how long time teachers actually spent working. The system suited some teachers well, as they could redistribute their time and spend more time on what they found important (e.g. helping children with conflicts or problems) and less on what they found unimportant (often meetings and paperwork). Besides they could work at night and do other things in the afternoon right after teaching, where many of them felt “worn” and couldn’t concentrate anyway. To others the

system was a nightmare, as they ended up “always working”. My concern here, however, is not to evaluate good and bad sides of this system, but to unravel the fantasmatic logics linking notions of time to understandings of value and of “the good society” legitimizing certain policies, and implying certain processes of identification.

In a sense what was valued and translated into money by being paid for in “hours” was taking on certain responsibilities, that “counted” as work to be paid. In this sense the teachers were not payed *for* their time, they were paid *with* time, but could just as well have been paid with any other currency such as silver coins or EUROS. The important thing is that the teachers were in spite of being paid in “hours” not selling their abstract and empty time, but their responsibility for getting certain things done or taking care of certain pupils.

Deciding not to count

Many teachers had decided not to think much about the number of hours they actually spent on their work. They had a more or less definable amount of responsibilities, and maybe some of them took a little longer or shorter than estimated, but they assumed it would probably all end up in some sort of balance. One teacher, Geert, explained:

“because we have had this freedom – if you felt really bad one day, and you had finished working at 13.00 and had no meetings, you could actually go home. Then that would compensate for some of the long days. All last week for example some of the pupils and teachers were away on camp, so I had to take over the 9th graders for 13 lessons, meaning that in some lessons I had more than 40 pupils, and I had my own lessons plus the ones of a college. That amounted to a lot hours and a lot of pupils. But then probably at another point I have done something else – well, probably I haven’t because I have a lot of extra work - but that is of my own choosing. We needed someone to take over something so I did, and I can’t blame anyone. So no, I am rotten at keeping track of time, but I don’t need to, because I have my freedom. And this has been taken from me now. Then you start thinking somehow: “well, then they can get what they pay for”. I know that is a terribly bad attitude, I am aware of that...”

It is interesting that the teacher quoted above, talks about how his “work” sometimes ends at 13.00 and other days amounts to a lot of pupils and hours. Clearly he does not understand his work as something that stops at a certain time, but as something that stops when he has fulfilled what he is responsible for. But it is also interesting, that he and his colleges had within the “norm-system” developed a pragmatic and informal “economy” on top of the formal system of assigned tasks and “received hours”. In the formal system certain tasks counted and were expressed in or paid for in hours, which had more or less become a currency. In the informal system, however, they didn’t keep counts explicitly, but they still had a pretty good sense of whether things were balanced or not, and the lack of keeping counts was by many teachers, including the one quoted, felt as a freedom but also as being entrusted a responsibility, that many teachers chose voluntarily to take very seriously – some to the extent that they felt they were never done with their work.

In this sense the system “framed” or “ritualized” some specific acts, which “counted” and were paid in hours, but precisely this distinguishing made it possible for the teachers to organize their activities differently and prioritize what they found most important. However such reprioritizations had become more difficult with the new system. Line, who was very frustrated, explained how the conflict had made her

start counting, even though she really didn't want to become a "time-counter", and had made her think of some of her work as "working for free".

If we have to come to a meeting for an hour and a half on e.g. a Wednesday where we normally don't have meetings, we have begun saying that we want to get hours for participating. But come on - an hour and a half in the bigger picture! If I work an hour and a half more that week – that doesn't matter. But then it counts somehow anyway. Those hours matter, and we want them. Suddenly you become...I mean if I work for free. If I go to a meeting with a child that thinks it is difficult and want an adult to come along – all that – that is not working for free, it doesn't feel like working for free. But if you get ordered some task and get told that it is your interest-hours – that is very common for the time being – "this or that is your interest-hours, because you have an interest in furthering whatever on the school".

What is clear in the quote is that just like Geert, Line has started counting, even though that was against her own principles. But the quote also shows clearly, that when it comes to activities that seem meaningful to her sense of responsibility, she doesn't count, and when she is by the management asked to participate in something that doesn't resonate with what she considers important, she has the sense of working for free, and therefore she wants "hours". What she gets, when she gets hours, is neither more time in her weeks or her life, nor a higher salary. What she gets is the possibility to at one point say "no – sorry, I can't take on any further responsibilities – I have no more available hours". Insisting on "getting hours" was in a sense the countermove, which was possible before the new law was introduced. If the management asked teachers to spend time on something they found irrelevant, they could ask for hours, and since many teachers had the experience that managers and politicians constituted an endless source of time-consuming initiatives, this move enabled them to say at some point "sorry, I have no more available hours", and gave them a possibility to say no.

Who stole the time?

When the new law on working time for teachers was installed, time was no longer calculated in estimated "norms", allowing teachers to redistribute afterwards their actual time use, according to their own ideas of relevance and connections to children's learning. Instead "outer limits" of working time became the formal system, and what teachers "sold" for their salary was no longer their responsibilities, but their working time, during which they were supposed to be at the disposal of the school managers. Teachers were now expected to be present at the schools during their full working time, receiving instructions from the managers about what to do during that time.

The logic in this understanding can be found by studying a number of reports published by the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education and the association of municipalities in 2006-7. Under titles like "Report on public school teachers' working time - Room for managing, flexibility and use of resources" or "Report on public teachers' working time - Barriers for management and prioritization", they unfold the problems with the model existing prior to the reform, and argue that precisely because teachers' time had for years been "locked into boxes of time" (norms) by the teachers' union, the school managers had no "room for management" and no possibility to prioritize or reallocate time resources (Finansministeriet, 2012; Kommunernes Landsforening, 2013; Udvalget om analyse af folkeskolelærernes arbejdstid, Finansministeriet, Undervisningsministeriet, & Kommunernes Landsforening, 2006, 2007). Besides, due to the economic crisis, they argued, it was necessary to establish "a closer link between wage and

productivity" for teachers as well as all other employees of the state. The wages of state employees, specifically teachers, had according to the Ministry of Finance been allowed to follow the wages in the private sector, and thus to increase without any increased productivity given in return (Finansministeriet, 2012). Thus the logic seemed to be, that while the market mechanism had in the private sector allowed wages to increase according to the rise in productivity, the situation in the public sector was different. Here the market mechanism had not had the chance to work, why wages had in the past risen without any corresponding increase in productivity, with the result that teachers had over time accumulated privileges without giving anything in return. For this reason school managers needed to regain their legitimate right to decide how to spend the time of their employees - just like in any "normal" workplace (Bjerg & Vaaben, 2015). Therefore they suggested that teachers should no longer "receive" a certain number of "hours" for each given task, but should rather be at the managers' disposal for their full working time, so that managers could prioritize their time more productively by e.g. deciding that teachers should teach more rather than do other less productive things with no measurable learning outcomes.

In a Marxian sense, what was now exchanged for money, was an abstract notion of time, devoid of content, allowing managers to commodify and compress time (Adam, 2004, p. 37; Sabelis, 2002) in the sense that more (in principle endless) tasks and responsibilities could be assigned to teachers and compressed into a more and more dense working day.

But the change in ways of calculating time, did not only take place in formal laws, and did not only have expected consequences such as teachers running faster, teaching more lessons and having less time for preparation. It had profound effects on ways in which teachers and their contribution to society was seen in the public, and in the ways in which teachers were able (or unable) to identify with their role in and relation to an imagined society.

What is interesting is, that with the events occurring in relation to the reform and the introduction of the new law on working time, the teachers started viewing not only their work, but their relation to some sort of imagined society (often referred to simply as "they" or "them") in a completely different light. The relation "tipped" so to say, and became something else. Some became *"time-counters"*, or made other countermoves, such as *"working by the book"*, explaining that *"then they can get what they pay for"*. Gone was the willingness to take on extra responsibilities and tasks, which suddenly started to feel like *"working for free"*.

Some decided to quit, others stopped voting at national or municipality elections, and even others declared that they felt like "second class citizens". Something happened not only to their work load, but to their understanding of their relation to society. They thought they had been giving society exactly what they were expected to give – their responsibility - and had felt recognized and proud to do so. But suddenly their whole world had changed, and they felt somehow betrayed by "someone". The question is: who was that imagined "someone", and why was the change in ways of calculating time so fundamentally life-altering, that so many teachers decided to quit? Looking at the events as arenas for ritual expressions of and struggles about the connection between time and value might give us a clue.

Recalculating the past

Taking into consideration, that teachers (or some of them) had developed an informal system of reciprocity without keeping explicit counts, it is relevant to examine theories of such form of exchanges. Many

theorists have tried to compare informal but still reciprocal relations and exchange of favors to “gift economy” or “informal economy” pointing out the importance of *not keeping counts* (explicitly) in order to uphold the idea that gifts and favors are given in a voluntary, spontaneous and selfless way. Bourdieu has e.g. shown how “the taboo of explicitation”, such as removing price tags, appropriate time delays before returning a gift, and expressions like “*oh, you really didn’t have to*”, can be seen as actions taken in order to uphold a collective but cherished misunderstanding about what people expect from each other when giving gifts and exchanging favors (Bourdieu, 1997, pp. 178–179). Bourdieu’s emphasis on how the idea of selfless and spontaneous giving is constructed socially, refers back to the many endless discussions within economic anthropology during the 60’ies and 70’ies about whether human exchange would primarily be motivated by giving - or by getting something in return (e.g. Wilk & Cliggett, 2007, p. 15ff), but he adds an important performative aspect, showing how people can say something (e.g. you really don’t have to turn up with flowers or gifts at a dinner party), and simultaneously know tacitly that the opposite is also true (why you are supposed to bring those flowers anyway). In this way people are able to operate within a system of tacit rules of reciprocity, while simultaneously denying that such rules exist. In this way gift giving and the absence of keeping counts has in Europe become associated with love and friendship (Carrier, 1995, 1999; Giddens, 1994). Or as Maurice Godelier has put it, it has become an inverted dream about spontaneous selves relating to each other in relations unaffected by the cynicism associated with markets and with the power associated with hierarchies (Godelier, 1999, p. 208).

In this light, what happened during the negotiations of the teachers working time, the lockout and the introduction of the new law, can be seen as a violation of the taboo of explicitation, in the sense that prior to the events, there seemed to be a mutual agreement between teachers and “society” or “them” about “not keeping counts” once responsibilities were distributed through “norms”, leaving teachers themselves to find out how to carry out the work. What had been tacitly expected from them was that they did their jobs well, not how long it took them, or when they decided to work.

However, the events around the reform had not only reopened the past, but also *recalculated the past*, so that some voices in the public debate were led to conclude, that at closer inspection and in the absence of a market mechanism to regulate their work, teachers had in the past probably not delivered enough productivity in return for the many privileges they had accumulated over time (Finansministeriet, 2012). In this sense the teachers were on the background of this recalculation of the past, presented in the public debate as people who owed time or had perhaps even stolen time from society and spent it on themselves.

Changing “time” and changing the whole world

For some teachers this shift and especially the ways in which their contribution to society was questioned publicly was a disaster to their self-understanding, and they felt betrayed. Someone had been counting without saying so, and even counting in a way that valued something completely different from what the teachers themselves thought was important. For years the teachers had thought that they had given to society exactly what was tacitly expected and desired from them (their responsibility), and suddenly the way of understanding “what counted” as a contribution to society was altered retroactively, calling into question whether they had in the past worked enough hours. One teacher explained:

Well, without sounding too sentimental, I have always been very happy and proud to be a teacher, and I have felt that I did something really good. That feeling of pride and of making a difference is gone, because

we were told, that actually we made no difference, and the difference we made didn't matter. [...] The last ten years I have been saying to myself that the best thing I ever did was becoming a teacher – I have not said that much lately and I think that is awfully sad.

The teacher quoted above is an example of a teacher that has understood her work as being of value because it consisted of carrying a responsibility – not because of the amount of “hours” going into her work. With Bourdieu in mind, the taboo of explicitation had been broken, so that it had become impossible for her to understand herself as a selfless person sacrificing herself for a noble cause and being valued for it by an imagined audience. Instead she imagines another gaze upon her, one that pictures as not making any difference. As such the old - but still vital - ideas of professionals being motivated by a “callings” or vocational desires to do good, was turned on the head and inscribed in almost as old - and equally vital - understanding of professionals as being motivated by attempts to create “social closure” keeping as many privileges as possible for themselves (Evetts, 2014). From being able to understand herself as a person doing good and being valued for it by others, she sensed another gaze upon her questioning her whether what she had done in her work, was really not for the sake of the children, but for her own selfish comfort. As such the debate about teachers, their work and their time, quickly became a matter of being for or against teachers, seeing them as heroes, fighting for the children, or as idlers, relying on everyone else’s work.

But as David Graeber has suggested, getting caught in such debates about whether or not a person is motivated by self-interest or altruism – a discussion that has been ongoing for centuries, without being resolved – is absolutely fruitless (Graeber, 2001, pp. 7–8), and by the way a discussion that seems to exclusively preoccupy Westerners who have since Kierkegaard been keenly interested in exploring the “real” and “authentic” motives behind each other’s actions (Jackson, 1998, p. 12; Kierkegaard, 1986)

According to Graeber, in stead of speculating about possible motives, it would be more relevant to explore how the exchanges are performed, and the degree of openness in the reciprocity between partners. In relations characterized by relative “open reciprocity”, keeping counts (explicitly) would be sensed as wrong because the system implies a relation of permanent mutual commitment over time. In contrast a relation characterized by relatively “closed reciprocity” would be based on keeping counts (Graeber, 2001, p. 220). The interesting part is, firstly that both types of relations are reciprocal – meaning that counting or not counting goes both ways – and secondly that changing from not counting to counting, changes the nature of the relation, and the roles of people in it.

The a large number of teachers, experiencing that “their contributions to society” was now under scrutiny by some sort of “gaze”, and that “someone” had without saying so been keeping counts of their contributions by a different notion of what counted as work, shifted their own understanding of the relation accordingly. If someone was keeping counts on their time, they too would start counting. In this way the relation tipped from what Graeber would call a relation characterized by relatively open reciprocity to a relation characterized by closed reciprocity. But the shift was by many bemoaned, and many teachers talked about this sense of having lost not only a freedom but also a trust from “someone” relying on their commitment. They felt somehow betrayed, and they reacted by shifting their own participation from commitment to detachment and from not thinking about hours to keeping counts.

A teacher, who could actually see some positive things in the shift in the sense that it would probably be healthy for him to keep his work at the school, explained that he had started thinking about himself as a wage laborer. He would do as he was told, and probably that would be okay, since he had previously had difficulties limiting his work, and had checked his mail from home first thing in the morning and last thing at night and probably 20 times in between. Another teacher saw it in a similar way. She too could see some positive things in the changes. To my question about who should decide how her time should be spent, she replied:

My school manager. But there I think I am ice-cold. If my school leader says I have from this point in time to this point, then I do what I can in that period of time. And if I don't manage to finish, I will have to go to my school leader and say "I didn't manage – what do you want me to do differently?". Right now I don't think he would be competent to tell me, but you could hope he would take a course or practice on others before getting to me"

In line with many other teachers, the shift meant that they started thinking about their work in a different way. The teacher above clearly shows that she has "understood the message" and talks about her job as being available for management instructions during a certain period of abstract time. However, for her that also means, that her manager is now not only in charge of her time, but also responsible using it meaningfully – a task she doubts he would be able to carry out. To the school managers the situation was far from desirable. Even though they were the ones who should have had "room for management" out of the change, many of them found themselves in a quite different situation. *"The teachers come up and ask about all sorts of things they usually just knew: should I do this, should I do that? – Actually I don't get a chance to do my own work until the teachers have gone home at four"* one school manager complained.

Absent presences

But not all teachers were able to be "ice-cold", nor to convince themselves that outer limits to their work would enable them to keep their work at the school and confined within a certain period of time, was a good idea. Many teachers could not let go of their sense of responsibility towards the pupils, but could on the other hand not live up to this responsibility within the set working time. In this way the reform did not only affect the past by recalculating it. It also affected the present. Following the reform, teachers were supposed to teach more hours, in order to "deliver more productivity" for tax-payers money and in order to make sure that Danish pupils would learn measurably more in a shorter time. In this way their work had in a Marxian sense become "compressed" into shorter intervals of time – in order to secure that pupils would eventually learn more and faster.

But many of the teachers did not particularly agree in what counted as "productive work", nor with the idea that more teaching hours would automatically lead to more learning or better schools or faster learning for the pupils. In a survey among teachers who had stopped working in a public school between 2013 and 2016 (Vaaben, Böwadt, & Pedersen, 2016), we (my colleges Rikke Pedersen, Pia Böwadt and I) asked the teachers to explain in their own words the background and their reasons for stopping in the public school, and the answers were remarkably similar. One of the formulations occurring again and again was "I could not look into my own eyes" or "I could not see myself in the mirror", expressions pointing to the difficulties of identifying with oneself. What the teachers pointed out was that they could not live up to

their own ideas about what a good teacher was and ought to be. They felt that they were always behind schedule, always running, but still they felt they were letting down their pupils. One teacher explained:

It was impossible to do the job properly. I had to spend a lot of time doing something that was in the best case useless, and in the worst case damaging, and at the same time I could not have time to or be allowed to do what was important and necessary.

Many teachers, like the one quoted, described how they thought they spent their time at the schools on the wrong things. They could not stand being part of a school where there was no time for doing what they considered most important. They thought that they were asked to prioritize activities that were asked for by the management, but that not only their autonomy but also their professionalism and their humanity was being lost in the process. As such they ended up not “having time enough” to be present and attentive to their pupils in attempting to support them in their learning processes as well as in life more generally, because they were always meant to be elsewhere two minutes ago.

Teachers have a rich vocabulary for describing how children learn, and how they as teachers can “see” it happening, support the learning processes and determine whether what they do as teachers “works”. Both in class and outside class, the teachers continuously pay attention to the reactions of the pupils in order to find out whether they have learned what they were supposed to learn, whether a change in teaching method would be beneficial, whether something between the pupils is taking their attention away from the subject, and similar. For such reasons teachers are in their daily work to a large extent guided by the reactions they get from their pupils, and their interpretation of the relations between them (Vaaben, 2016). A teacher explained how she used a multitude of input from her pupils to determine whether they had learned what she had been trying to teach them:

“Well, during a course, I think it is a matter of sensing where they are, and you can kind of see or read them, and feel their enthusiasm. So, if I can see, that they can’t concentrate and are thinking about other things, I must adjust my teaching, because I haven’t caught them. That is during a course. And when we finish something, and they have to hand in something or show some product, I can in do a more technical evaluation and see if they have learned what they were supposed to. And the most important thing is probably whether they are able to remember it and use it in another context” (Vaaben, 2016, p. 278).

As such the teacher explains that she understands “learning” as a process that unfolds over time and across different contexts, and she is continuously and with different means and methods paying attention to the pupils in order to determine whether they have learned what she is trying to teach them. As such, she doesn’t exclusively understand learning as a product or an outcome, but just as much as a process that unfolds over time and across contexts. Other teachers explained how they could see how “learning” happened between the pupils in a class room, describing how the atmosphere changed, and how the pupils would start talking to each other and teaching each other, and many teachers emphasized that what happened socially – in the breaks, and in the lives of the pupils more broadly – was closely linked to learning. Being a teacher therefore also involved dealing with such matters – and actually as one teacher told me, those types of situations are probably the most important. “Sometimes a young person come up to you and say: Svend, I have a problem. Big Time. Can we talk?” That is where you really know you have made a difference (Vaaben, 2016, p. 275). In such ways (and many others) the teachers explain how making sure that pupils learn, implies continuously paying attention to various forms of signs, and social processes,

and adjusting their own actions and prioritizations accordingly. In this logic “learning” is not an outcome of teaching, and not something that is automatically increased, if more time is spent teaching. Precisely the lack of time to take care of all social aspects (the relational work, as they called it), was what bothered them most in the new way of organizing time.

The inability to reach on unplanned needs expressed by the pupils, because their time was always earmarked for something else, seemed to be a huge problem for many of the teachers who had stopped in the public school and had described why in our survey. They felt frustrated that they had clear ideas about what ought to be prioritized but had no possibility of doing what they found necessary.

For such reasons many teachers dreamt of and searched for somewhere “*where there is time enough*” to be a good teacher. In many cases they attempted to find such a place outside the public school. Free time as well as free schools ironically became the symbols of the inverted dream or the safe haven from managerial commands, even though free schools have previously by some of the same people been associated with “*private schools for rich kids*” - places that they would never work in. Many teachers stopped in the public schools – not because they wanted to stop being teachers, but because they wanted to continue being teachers – somewhere with “enough time”.

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