Introduction

During the last decades, primary education in Denmark and Norway have, as in most of the western world, been restructured and deregulated. The central state is challenged from several actors and changes at global, societal and individual level. There seems to be a common understanding of the limitations of traditional forms of government and the state’s capability to govern from above (Pierre & Peters 2000, 2005). Many countries have witnessed a move from highly centralised control through legislation and funding towards a system of decentralised responsibility to local government and self-regulated schools in addition to an introduction of market mechanism in education. However, the states have not abandoned its regulation. Rather, in recent years their regulatory style has shifted into a more indirect form of governance with focus on results and output control.

At the core of these developments are the introduction of processes of transparency and accountability. Transparency and accountability aim at new and efficient forms of regulation in education on the one hand, and a quest for improving democracy through more openness in education, on the other hand. Openness in primary education and the requirements to demonstrate responsible actions to external constituencies is seen as an
efficient way for national authorities to facilitate knowledge transfer and enhance the efficiency and quality of schools. We witness a shift from input to output control by increased use of evaluation, performance measurements and accounting reports. From a democratic point of view these trends may improve public insights to mutual problems, make the schools accountable to the citizens and decision makers as well as empowering the public’s ability to form an informed opinion of the performance of schools and on this basis freely choose between different schools. However, the trends of transparency and accountability may course counterproductive effects. The focus of schools may become narrower due to the shift towards results and output. This shift may not in itself produce better results or achievements. Rather, the focus on results and output may lead to unintended consequences, invalidate conclusions on performance, and, under some circumstances, have a negative influence on performance (Andersen 2007a, Andersen & Dahler-Larsen 2007, van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002).

In this paper we explore the new forms of governance in education in order to discuss how the recent trends of accountability and transparency affect the relation between the state and the professionals in Denmark and Norway. The aim of this paper is to identify and understand the processes of institutional change in a specific policy sector, primary education. By choosing Denmark and Norway in a comparison of educational change we make use of the most similar case method. Denmark and Norway are characterised as social democratic welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990, 2002; Andersen & Helgesen 2001) with a similar political economy, i.e. the structure of interplay of government, labour, professions, employers and trade associations (see Wilensky 2002). Primary education in both Denmark and Norway are exposed to demands of transparency and accountability. The changes in governance style in the area of education in Denmark and Norway have changed and challenged the professional autonomy in the two countries. This may imply that the two countries are searching common solutions to educational problems. The professionals in both countries can be characterised as somewhat reluctant to the new evaluation criteria and the publication of performance (Calmar Andersen 2006, Helgøy 2006, Helgøy & Homme 2006 a). Even so, this does not mean that transparency and accountability reforms are formulated and implemented in a similar way or that the two countries are trying to solve similar problems. Similar policies can be used for different aims, in different ways, to different degrees and with different effects in the two countries. The two cases can inform us of the significance of existing institutions in order to understand processes of change.

From an institutional theoretical point of view we analyse how the actors’ behaviour and policy choices in education are constrained by policy legacies and the organisational and
political capacities of important education policy stakeholders (Thelen 2003). First, we present the theoretical and analytical framework. Next, we present recent educational reforms and their implementation traits in the two countries. The aim is to identify the character of changes, e.g. incremental changes or changes due to exogenous shock. The analytical focus is on how new reforms of primary education affect the authority of states and the autonomy and discretion of professionals which potentially may change the traditional collaborative relationship between the two actors. The paper argues that several nation specific contradictions, options and traditions affect the reforms and the potential of the reforms differently in the educational systems of respectively Denmark and Norway. As a result, the relationship between the state and the professional autonomy in the two countries is different.

**Theoretical perspective**

Educational change is related to social, political and economic conditions framed by the past (see Andersen 2007, Helgøy 2006). The challenge is to explore how the processes of change interrelate. Educational changes in the two countries are not easily to capture nor explain. The reason for this is that the relation between the state and the professionals gradually evolve and change. There is an inclination in the literature to ignore or understate the extent of incremental change or “to code all observed changes as minor adaptive adjustments to altered circumstances in the service of continuous reproduction of existing systems” (Streeck & Thelen 2005, 1). Still, formal political institutions as a product of design and redesign can bring about far-reaching change as a result of small, incremental seemingly insignificant adjustment (Pierson 2004). More often than suggested, changes are a product of small incremental steps with transformative results, rather than “big changes in response to big shocks” (Streeck & Thelen 2005, 9).

Although there is a lack of analyses of educational change from an institutionalists’ point of view, some analyses of educational change in Denmark and Norway show how the ability to steer the direction of educational change depends on either incorporating support from new actors or by redirecting the institution to a new set of goals. Formal institutions will not only reflect their original institutional design, nor will they only reflect the current distribution of power. Once the balance of power changes, political openings may potentially occur and providing the possibility of certain policy problems and solutions becoming more central (Thelen 2003, 217). Institutions rest on an ideational and material foundation that can be affected by and changed as a result of political openings. Actors act on the basis of such
openings. Actors adjust to existing systems and their inherent logic, but the actions of actors do not necessarily push the development in a certain direction (Thelen 2000, 106).

By processes of layering new institutions are added to the existing ones (Helgøy & Homme 2006, Andersen 2007), e.g. when a decentralised and market oriented regulatory style is layered on top of or next to a rule-based regulatory style or the new output-based regulatory style. The results of the change may respectively reproduce, break with or combine several developed paths of reform policy and education policy (Andersen 2007). Thus, educational changes occur in interaction between interest-driven forces and institutional frameworks, and between internal dynamics and external events. This dynamic perspective on institutional change is elaborated by Streeck & Thelen (2005) into more sophisticated categories of modes of change which we draw on in our analysis. The concept of institution is understood as “collectively enforced expectations with respect to the behaviour of specific categories of actors or to the performance of certain activities” and typically “involve mutually related rights and obligations for actors… and thereby organising behaviour into predictable and reliable patterns” (Streeck & Thelen 2005, 9). The concept of institutional regimes refer to a set of rules stipulating expected behaviour and “ruling out” behaviour deemed to be undesirable in order to direct attention to the important sources of institutional change (Streeck & Thelen 2005). In this setting rule makers and rule takers continuously interact in order to make new interpretations, suggestions, rejections or adoptions. As institutions are recreated by actors with different interests, power and abilities, the results are contingent and unpredictable.

Change is suggested to happen in different ways. Institutional change through displacement is characterised by subordinate institutions slowly displacing dominant institution due to processes of institutional incoherence opening space for deviant behaviour. New ‘logics’ of activation are cultivated within the established institution, latent institutional resources are being reactivated or foreign practices are assimilated. Layering is the second mode of gradual transformation and denotes the partial renegotiation of some aspects of a particular set of institutions while leaving other aspects in peace (Thelen 2003, 225). Layering is characterised by adding new elements to existing institutions by for example fast growth of new institutions on the edges of old ones, new layers eats into old core, siphons off support for old layer or new compromises with old ones turning into defeat of the old. A third mode of change is drift defined as a slippage in institutional practice due to neglecting active institutional maintenance in response to external change. Thus, institutions change because of neglecting adaptations or by leaving rules unchanged. Conversion by redeployment of old
institutions to new purposes is a fourth type of change. The redirection occurs due to lack of foresight, ambiguity because of institutional compromises, reinterpretations from below or changing contextual conditions. The last form of gradual transformation denotes a gradual breakdown or *exhaustion*. The normal working of an institution undermines its external pre-conditions or its cost. As a result, the relations of benefit change and the institution collapse.

In the following we present the most central processes of recent change in primary education in Denmark and Norway. The processes of change will be characterised by applying the different types of gradual transformation presented above. Relying on Streeck & Thelen (2005), a vital question in our analysis of educational change is what characterises as change and what the consequences of the processes of change are. It remains an open question if and how the new processes of governance in primary education affect the relationship between the state and the professionals. The focal point is if and how the power relation between the state and the professionals has changed with respect to influence on and control of primary education.

**Denmark**

Reforms of transparency, openness, accountability, national target setting and evaluation have been implemented in Denmark the past five years. An overview of the most important changes the past two decades will create a reference for understanding the nature and significance of the recent changes.

*Decentralisation and the “municipalisation” of the teacher profession*  
With its 132 year, the Danish Union of Teachers is the eldest association organising employed persons. As part of the Scandinavian collaborative model, the Danish Union of Teachers has through this period represented the Danish teachers’ interest in contract negotiations and by seeking influence on the agenda of education and school policy. However, the collaborative model within the school area has undergone substantial changes the past decades. In 1972 an amalgamation reform of local government created a new actor within the school policy area, that is, the association of local governments, Local Government Denmark (LGDK). Public schools are owned and managed by local government and the amalgamation reform formalised this. However, as the state in the 1970s left unchanged the national regulation of the schools as well as its position in the contract negotiations with the union of the teachers, LGDK did not obtain much influence on the school area (Due & Madsen 1989, 9). The local level has always played a significant part of public schools and the development of Danish
public schools can be seen as a historical tension between the central and local level. As a consequence, the teachers tended to be seen as a representative of communitarian values, not primarily as a person representing a body of knowledge (Andersen, Dahler-Larsen & Pedersen, 2007). The tension between the central and local level illustrates how current implications of and conflicts over policy problems and their solutions are embedded in institutions (see Thelen 1999, 382).

During the 1980s a general transition from national direct regulation towards framework-based decentralisation took place. In this transition local governments were granted more influence and responsibility on the school area (Andersen, 2000). From the late 1980s and the early 1990s the financial steering of the schools was decentralised to the local governments, the principals of schools were delegated more managerial competence and the position of the users was strengthened through a (somewhat restricted) free choice of schools and the introduction of school boards in which parent representatives as opposed to earlier held the majority. The formalisation of the principal’s right to manage and distribute work assignments and of the parents’ influence on the school resulted in a weakening of the discretion of the teacher profession, at least formally. The formalised structure of teacher representation at school as well as municipal level was demolished. Within national minimum requirements local governments were delegated the authority to specify e.g. the schedule of subjects and the competence of the principal and the school boards. In 1992 the teachers’ union finally had to accept that teachers became employees of the municipality. Until this point the teachers had been employed by the state and the union had maintained its position in collective bargaining during the 1980s. As a result, LGDK now became the central bargaining party in the contract negotiations with the teachers’ union. The municipalities have gained substantial influence on the wages and working conditions of teachers. The teachers’ union was forced to organise itself not only at national level but also at local level and, as a consequence, the risk of losing its unifying power of the profession as a whole.

The Danish Union of Teachers has traditionally had a substantial influence not only on issues regarding the wages and working conditions but also on the political agenda of school policy. Its labour union density is close to 100% (Andersen 2000). The discretion and autonomy of the teachers are to a large extent maintained by the teachers’ union. However, recently there are signs of the union having a more difficult time gaining influence on the national political agenda of school policy. In general, interest organisations in Denmark are now consulted at a later stage with regard to draft legislation. Prior, interest organisations were involved in the formulation of draft legislation, now they are consulted after the draft
has been drawn up (Christiansen & Nørgaard 2003, 186-7). Changes in the political climate have also affected the influence of the teacher profession on national regulation. Changing Ministers of Education have been more or less willing to involve the Danish Union of Teachers. The decentralisation strategy of the then Liberal Minister of Education in the late 1980s was a deliberate confrontation with the discretion of the teachers. The union was invited to take part in negotiations on a new school statute. However, when the union realised they were unable to change the draft legislation, they left the negotiations in 1989 (Due & Madsen 1989, 217).

At the same time, LGDK in earnest came forward as participant in the decision making on school policy and could be seen as a competitor to the teachers’ union with regard to influencing the national decision making arena. During the 1990s two Social-Liberal Ministers of Education were more inclined to involve the Danish Teachers Union and LGDK. Mutual projects between the three parties with the purpose of developing the teacher profession were initiated. The purpose was a professionalisation of the teachers. At the same time, the discretion of the teacher profession came under pressure from very detailed rules on working conditions as well as a low performance or achievement of Danish students in a number of international comparisons during the 1990s at least when tested at an early form level. The detailed working conditions were abandoned in 1999 and agreements on working conditions were now subject to being locally decided (Terkelsen 2006, 15). On the one hand, this weakened the unifying power of the teachers’ union. On the other hand, the discretion of the individual teacher may have been strengthened.

The strategy or lack of strategy towards external pressures from the teachers’ union may at first be seen as drift. The teachers’ union did not at first respond to the external pressures and lost some of its influence on both the working conditions of teachers and on the agenda of primary education. However, the union as an institution did not break down and still enjoys large support from the teachers at large but it had convert its strategies to some extent and adjust to the influence of new actors, e.g. LGDK. The process also illustrates that politics matter. Changing political coalitions affects the discretion of the teachers’ profession and its possibility to seek influence on primary education policy.

Market-based reforms: Free choice

Free choice between public schools has since the beginning of the 1990s been part of the educational governance meaning that the schools in principle are granted autonomy to organise their ‘product’ in order to attract students. However, as opposed to Norway free
choice between public and private schools in Denmark has a very long tradition. Throughout the history of compulsory education, Danish parents have had the opportunity to choose between public and private schools. Often private schools confess to specific values or ideas, e.g. religious values or a certain pedagogical philosophy. 13% of Danish pupils attend private schools. The private schools receive approximately 75% public subsidy and parents pay the remaining 25% for their children’s attendance in private schools. Many of the performance-based rules mentioned below also apply to private schools if they receive public subsidy. Thus, the public subsidy ensures the state the right to regulate private schools as well even though this regulation is not as detailed as the regulation of public schools.

In principle the teachers as a profession are accustomed with competition between schools, or at least competition between public and private schools. It has resulted in two separated professions of which the teachers of respectively public and private schools are organised in separate unions. Teachers employed at some of the private schools are also trained at private colleges. When competition between public schools was introduced in 1992, competition was not a new idea. However, the fact that public schools had to compete was a new trait. This would threaten the unifying power of the profession of teachers employed at public schools. However, rules on the free choice between public schools in fact restricted the possibility for parents to choose freely. It was only possible for parents to choose public schools in their municipality of residence and the principal of a public school within the municipality of residence but outside the schools district of residence could reject to enrol the student based on problems of capacity or pedagogical reasons. The free choice of public schools did not have an impact on the discretion of the teacher’s profession.

In 2005 the free choice between public schools was expanded. Now it is possible for parents to choose a school located in a different municipality. And the principal of the receiving school can only turn down a student due to problems of capacity in the sense that enrolling the students would exceed the maximum class size set by the Ministry of Education. It has been up to the municipalities to specify the rules in detail as well as the financial implications of free school choice for the schools, e.g. how large sum of money that follows the student. The increased competition between public schools may on one hand make it more difficult for the teachers to unite as a collective profession which may explain the opposition of the teachers’ union of the expanded free choice. On the other hand, when the state regulates through free choice it grants the individual school the autonomy to organise its own ‘product’. However, the municipal level may modify or increase this autonomy. LGDK in principle
favours free choice as an idea but was reluctant of the expanded fee choice due to difficulties in planning and optimising the utilization of the capacity of the schools in the municipality.

Compared to the long tradition of free choice between public and private schools the introduction of free choice between public schools may be seen as a gradual change layering a new element to existing schools. However, potentially the expanded free choice between public schools may signify a displacement in which teachers and other actors begin to act according to new logics. It remains to be seen what the effect of the expanded free choice will be. It may also be that existing institutions will resist the impact of the reform due to e.g. lack of use of the expanded free choice among Danish parents. However, so far, the expanded free choice has put pressure on e.g. schools with a high number of bi-lingual students. The ‘Danish’ parents and well-integrated parents of a different ethnic origin than Danish have moved their children to schools with a lower share of bi-lingual students.

From input control to output evaluation: National Target Setting, testing and evaluation

The poor or mediocre performance of Danish students pointed out from the mid 1990s and in OECD’s Pisa investigations from 2001 set with a new Conservative-Liberal Government the stage for school policy in the new millennium. The government did not find the results satisfactory in light of Denmark being one of the countries spending most resources per students. The first initiative of the new government in 2001 was to introduce draft legislation on Transparency and Openness in Education. The bill was passed and requires average grades of all final exams at each school to be made available to the public on the Internet. Second, the Act ‘forces’ the schools to create and publish a value statement and pedagogical philosophy. This is in line with the historical tradition of Danish school according to which schools legitimize themselves with reference to particular values, not particular outcomes (Andersen, Dahler-Larsen & Pedersen, 2007). Finally, with some exceptions, conducted evaluations of the quality of teaching are to be published on the Internet as well. Due to the Act and the use of the Internet as a source for publishing this information, the schools are compelled to provide a homepage. In July 2005, a revision of the Act was put into effect (Act no. 332, 2005). Information on completion rate of students, drop-out rate and rate on transition to further education or occupation is to be published on the Internet as well.

The officially stated purpose of the Act on Transparency and Openness is that the publishing of the above-mentioned information will provide schools with the opportunity to learn from and inspire each other through the spread of ‘good examples’. Secondly, information about performance shall induce teachers and parents to work together to achieve
better results. Thirdly, the awareness of good performance will be strengthened through competition among schools. Finally, the Danish citizens shall be provided with information on performance in order to make a qualified choice between different schools (The Danish Minister of Education 2002). The teachers’ union opposed the publishing of grades based on the view that grades are a unilateral way of assessing the quality of Danish schools. Furthermore, they resisted the possibility of ranking schools based on the published grades. The Ministry of Education do not provide ranks. However, some news papers do. The reform on transparency and openness signifies a change in which new elements are layered changing some parts of the institutions, while reproducing other parts of the institution. The reform consists of a mix of different logics. The value statement and the discretion granted with respect to the content of the statement may reproduce the discretion of the teachers’ profession. However, the publishing of the statement and the publishing of average grades and evaluations are layered as new elements both in relation to the teachers’ profession as well as the tradition of educational governance.

In the 2000s the viewpoints of teachers have had difficulties in gaining access to the national decision making agenda. In order to preserve the discretion of the teachers, the Danish Union of Teachers found a new partner of alliance in LGDK that sought to preserve the municipal influence on school policy. Despite this alliance new school statutes were decided on in 2002 and 2006. A more detailed target setting at the national level have been formalised as part of the new statutes. The Minister of Education now sets the purpose of the teaching with regard to the level of knowledge and the skills to be acquired in obligatory subjects. The minister also sets targets for the level of knowledge and skill at each form level of the obligatory subjects. The targets denote the national standard of acquired knowledge and skills at a certain form level and the final exams. The Ministry of Education publishes guiding curriculum and scheduling in order to support the teachers in attaining the targets. The fact that the national targets are attached to obligatory tests and requirements of specific methods for evaluating the students illustrates the emergence of a new regulatory output-based regime.

As part of evaluating the performance of Danish schools mandatory national tests is required at various form levels and various subjects from 2007. The test results are not to be published, but are to be used for pedagogical planning, school improvements, and better school management. The students and their parents are required to be informed of the result of the test. This deviates from the existing reform on transparency and openness according to

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1 As in Norway a private consultant firm has been involved in the development of the mandatory tests, see below. This is an example of new actors entering the field of primary education.
which average grades are to be published as well as to the Norwegian reform on publishing test results, see below. The Danish teacher profession does not oppose testing as such but opposes mandatory tests as they by the profession are seen as a sign of central regulation which consequently may weaken the responsibility and commitment of the individual teacher.\textsuperscript{2} Furthermore, teachers are from 2006 obliged to continuingly produce reports on the progress of each and every student and share the report with students and parents. The reports are to function as a formative evaluation of the students and are required to specify priority areas of the progress of students based on e.g. test results. The teachers have opposed, and at some schools the teachers have denied to produce, the reports. The opposition do not rest on a professional point of view but from a point of view of working conditions since it is claimed by the teachers that they are not granted (enough) working hours to produce the reports.

Finally, the national authorities also place requirements on the local authorities to produce quality reports of and action plans for evaluation and quality development of the schools. The reports and action plans are required to contain an evaluation of the knowledge and skill level of the schools in the municipalities, e.g. average grades and test results, the conditions under which the municipality runs its schools, e.g. the economic frame or number of students per teacher, and pedagogical processes at the schools, e.g. requirements on the evaluation of students and the parents-teacher collaboration. This places a double requirement on the teachers with regard to processes as well as output from national as well as local authorities. The above-mentioned reforms of mandatory tests and reports of quality and students reproduce the tension in education governance between the central and local level. The changes may signify a displacement of the institutionalisation of the discretion of the local level (the municipalities as well as the teachers) due to the introduction of a new centralised output-based regulation. But they may also signify a drift due to lack of the local level responding to external pressures such a poor performance of students.

A forerunner to the above-mentioned national initiatives on evaluating the process and results of primary education is The Danish Evaluation Institute. It was founded in 1999 based on similar reasons as the more recent reforms, that is, in response to the unsatisfactory results of the international performance measurements (Dahler-Larsen, 2004, 65). The institute is an independent institution under the field of responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The Institute may initiate evaluation on their own initiative or the Ministry of Education or municipalities may commission the Institute to certain evaluation tasks. The schools and

\textsuperscript{2}This issue is an example where the Danish Union of Teachers and LGDK found common ground as both oppose to central regulation.
consequently the teachers are required to cooperate with the Institute. Self-evaluation is an element of most evaluations conducted by the Institute. On one hand, the teachers are requested to supply certain information and as such their discretion can be minimized. On the other hand, the self-evaluation may grant the teachers an influence on the evaluation in question and thus, increase their discretion. The above-mentioned reforms on openness, transparency, mandatory national tests, evaluation and quality assurance appears to be loosely coupled to the evaluation institute. Two loosely coupled systems of assessing the quality of Danish education seem to have been established (Andersen, 2007).

Norway
In Norway, the introduction of transparency and accountability reforms has been implemented reluctantly during the past ten to fifteen years. In order to discuss the character and effect of the changes in the following we give an overview on the most significant steps taken the last two decades.

The breakdown of the established collaborative system
In line with the characteristics of Scandinavia as a corporatist democracy emphasising consensus-building, tripartite participation and pragmatism the teacher unions and professionals had for a long period several channels to influence and participate in policy making. During the 1990s, several processes forced the teachers’ union and the teaching profession to step back. An extensive reorganisation of the central education administration took place. In 1992 several relatively independent and professionally dominated state councils were laid down and the Ministry of Education took control of several of their tasks. Other tasks were taken over by a new administrative coordination body, the forerunner of the 2004 Directorate for Education. From conceiving the teachers’ union as a presupposition for formulation and implementation of educational reforms, the professional expertise was gradually degraded and assessed by policy makers as a threat limiting education policy making and implementation. In the name of democratisation, teachers interest now has to be harmonised towards the interest of the community as such (Grove & Michelsen 2005).

3 Since 1892 and the establishment of the first teachers’ union, several unions representing different categories of teachers have been established. During the last decades there have been two important amalgamations; in 1992 several smaller organisations constituted “Lærerforbundet” which coexisted together with the “Norsk Lærerlag” until 2002 when the two main organisations went together in “Udanningsforbundet” which is the main teacher’s union today.

4 From 1991/92 ”Grunnskolerådet”, ”Rådet for vidergående opplæring”, ”Voksenopplæringsrådet”, ”Brevskolerådet” and ”Samordningsnemda” laid down.
kind of change fits with the displacement mode of change as new models emerge and replace previously taken-for-granted organisational forms and practises. Moreover, the change represents a shift in the balance of power between the interests in education. The previous collaborative system which turned into a system dominated by the professionals’ interests was slowly questioned and criticised as overrunning political democratic control over the field (OECD 1989, Statskonsult 1989). Further, although the former collaborative system represented a kind of integration between political and professionals interests it was not a coherent system. The professional dominated system co-existed with the political-hierarchical system of policy-making. Hence, the reorganisation is to be seen as a rediscovery of the democratic-political model. The recent reforms in Denmark may signify a similar rediscovery. While professional and political interest for a long period was compatible, from the beginning of the 1990’s they were considered as conflicting and competing logics of action. Due to a combination of exogenous pressure and critics, highly vulnerable tasks and decisions was moved from the periphery of the policy making system to its ministerial centre.

In this situation, the opposition from the teachers’ union did not gain support and legitimacy. On the contrary, the opposition of the teachers’ union towards national education reforms might paradoxically have worked as a strengthening factor in the legitimacy of the reforms. The union’s strategy was to fight for the tradition of individual autonomy in the teaching and the classroom. The central authorities’ strategy was to intensify the steering and control. This conflict seemed to accelerate through a dualism of which stronger teacher oppositions led to stronger demands for state control. The stronger the control, the stronger the teachers defended status quo which in turn legitimated state regulation and control (Deichmann-Sørensen et al 1997). When the 2001 Centre – Right coalition came into power the polarisation of politics and professions was even strengthen. As will be demonstrated in the following the government brought in a more confrontational style by introducing control and letting the local government take over the employer responsibility for teachers. Later we turn to the question of how teachers might have found new arenas to re-gain influence and power in education.

Decentralisation of responsibilities in education

Another important step of educational reforms was the decentralisation of tasks and responsibilities to local authorities, as well as to school managers. Following the 1992 Local Government Act, local authorities and school leaders were given greater responsibility for
providing education and assuring its quality. Increased autonomy at school level has since encompassed the budgeting, recruitment, and organisation of education and professional development. The division of responsibilities between local authorities and schools is to be decided at the municipal level. The most radical change was the 2003 decision to move the negotiations from the state to the municipalities. This has strengthened the municipalities’ position due to the transferred responsibility for allocating educational resources and negotiating wages and working time conditions. From 2004 the municipalities have had full responsibility for employment in their schools (Ministry of Education and Research 2003). Met by huge scepticism the Act changed and limited teachers’ negotiating rights. The questions of minimum wages (based on qualifications) and working conditions are still negotiated at the national level (Seip 2005). However, to some extent principals have the right to use wages as a tool for recruitment and reward. This represents one of a few (moderate) incentives introduced in primary education. Another incentive is financial rewards brought about based on the performance of schools measured according to centrally determined benchmarks. The bonus scheme is supposed to stimulate pedagogical development and strengthen individual schools’ sense of responsibility. However, this incentive tool is limited and currently is of minor importance. Per capita funding has also been introduced in several municipalities. Different from Denmark, open enrolment is still in its initial phase and competition between schools to attract pupils is all but absent.

Since the 1990s both municipalities and schools are given the freedom to choose how to organise education service. For instance, municipalities are no longer obliged to employ an educational administrative leader and the local democratic influence is reduced due to the 1992 Local Government Act. The trend has been to reduce the local education authorities to a minimum which in turn have dismantled the strong sector organisation as well as the significance of the pedagogical knowledge at local level. The traditional detailed input regulation through national instructions and standards are replaced with frames and output control. Important here is the revision of the Educational Act from 2005 which took away the national regulation of class sizes and number of students pupils per teacher. The local level has been given even more freedom to organise teaching.

The changes towards a more decentralised system are to be classified as a gradual transformation. Although the 2003 decision on moving the full employment for teachers to the municipalities and changing the negotiation rights apparently was a result of a sudden and radical change, it was not a surprising decision. According to key informants, the decentralisation had for a long time been a strong struggle of both the Ministry and the
Association of Local and Regional Authorities (Research interviews 2007). The decision was just waiting for a Government willing to take the political costs of confronting the interests of the professionals. The process of change draws on characteristics of at least two different modes of transformation; displacement and layering. The decentralised primary education shows a “slowly rising salience” of local authorities. At the same time, the changes represent a return of the local responsibility in education established a century ago. In this way, the process of changes denotes a rediscovery and activation of latent institutional resources. Institutions are changed by displacement. Still, the changes also have elements from the layering mode of change. Although some of the state’s responsibilities are defected others are strongly remained at the central level. Decentralisation of responsibility can thus be seen as new elements layered on existing state dominated institutions.

*From input control to output evaluation*

Since the Second World War primary education has been based on a decisive curriculum and regulatory legislation, comprehensiveness and a national standardised teacher training. The international trend of steering by frames and output evaluation has, despite the policy intentions, not yet attained fully significance in Norwegian primary education. Several attempts have been made to establish a stringent national system of evaluating quality of education. The suggestions have been redefined and limited to school based evaluations not intended to inform the central political-administration level (Helgøy 2006). In this way the teachers preserved their autonomy. Thus, the national intention to improve the knowledge base in educational policy was not yet to be implemented. However, the suggestion of a national evaluation system to improve education quality was raised again in 2003 (Møller et al 2006). The committee “Kvalitetsutvalget” was settled with the mandate to report on and to suggest improvements in order to strengthen education quality. According to the committee the lack of assessment and educational development systems was one main factor limiting the quality in primary education (NOU 2002:10, NOU 2003:16, Report to the Storting 30: 2003-2004). The following suggestion to establish a national system for quality assessment and quality improvement was raised and applauded in the parliament. The intention of utilising the information was essential in the decision of establishing a national evaluation system. Hence, the need to develop evidence-based instruments of information in order to increase the knowledge transfer to central and local authorities as well as to the schools was re-suggested.
In 2004, the Centre-Right coalition government introduced compulsory national testing at three stages in primary and lower secondary school, at stages 4, 7 and 10, with test results published online at the website “Skoleporten” (The School gate) (www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no). The School gate presents data on resources, learning environment and learning results, including results from the national tests. The intention is that students’ results will improve as an effect of the dialogue between the local and central levels on quality based on the data provided by the School gate. The measures are considered as both a steering tool for central authorities and as a teaching tool in order to improve each school’s quality of teaching. In 2005, the “Red-Green” coalition continued and modified these policies. It was decided to revise the national test in order to increase the teachers’ pedagogic benefits and possibility for schools to learn from the tests’ results. The question of publishing was also politically discussed. Despite the governments’ statement not to produce league-tables, it is still easy for newspapers to present such tables based on the data accessible on the Ministry’s website.

The opposition, defeat or moderation of repeatedly suggestions of national models of evaluation, quality assessments and measuring suggest a process of change characterised by gradual transformation through layering. The process of change took place over a long period as the institution apparently remained unchangeable. Instead of transforming the existing institution, new elements were gradually added to the existing institution. The lack of support from the teachers moderated the aspects of control and transparency in the reforms. For instance, Management by Objectives and Results became enemy number one by the teachers’ unions (Grove & Michelsen 2006). Teachers worried that this particular the model would challenge their professional discretion and authority. As a result, the national evaluation system was moderated and ended up as an internal tool for schools to pedagogically develop their own teaching (Helgøy 2006). There were lock-in effects at play through the strong traditions of input control and trust assigned to the teachers in implementing national policy. Lock-in effect “does not preclude change altogether provided reformers learn how to work around those elements of an institution that have become unchangeable” (Streeck & Thelen 2005, 23). The politically costs of dismantling this system resulted in an attempt of teachers trying to preserve the existing system. However, the most recent decisions of reforming Norwegian primary education represent a faster growth of new institutions attached to the old non-evaluative and non-transparent institution. The gradual successive rounds of suggestions during the 1990s have paved the way for making reforms of evaluation and publishing results possible.
Moreover, increased legitimacy of openness and publishing results was pushed forward by increased external pressure from international actors as well as private agencies in education. The decreasing level of Norwegian student performance as identified by OECD’s PISA tests has as in Denmark made the educational authorities aware of, among others, that the results does not reflect the extent of resources spent. Even though Danish students had a lower performance compared to Norway. The position of international or national private organisations as an important source of input to the national decision making arena for national policy makers has been strengthened. In addition, it has become increasingly common for municipalities to perform consumer evaluations every year. The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) has established a website (http://www.bedrekommune.no) offering municipalities a tool to make a net based survey of quality in different areas of services including primary education. On the website, municipalities have the possibilities to compare and benchmark the results, between municipalities and between the different locally performed services.

The trend to involve private agencies in evaluations is increasingly emerging in Norway. Several private agencies carry out assignments for The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, Local governments and schools. Thus, private agencies are producers of information for use in policy making at different levels and also in developing the day to day activities and organisation of schools. These are examples of how new layers are created and added to the public models of evaluations. In order to increase their saleability the agencies self presentation emphasise their value of improving school practicing. For instance, the Learning Lab gives the impression of impacting the culture and behaviour of organisations, including schools. The growing “market” of private agencies does not directly undermine existing institutions. However, they provoke counter mobilisation by the professional defenders of jurisdiction in the key area of defining evaluation criteria of quality in education. This trend has raised an intense debate in Norway due to the knowledge base, legitimacy and lack of accountability the agencies represent compared to the public democratic responsibilities in education.

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5 The LEARNING Lab presents itself as a agency that “produces questionnaires and interviews, collects data, carries out the analysis, produces reports, presents the results and follows up - always in close cooperation with the organisation. Most importantly, we may push for and give advice when the aim is to establish dialogue, release knowledge, strengthen the culture and improve each individual employee’s working day” (www.laeringslaben.no)
Changes restricting the professionals’ autonomy in Danish and Norwegian primary education?

The political climate and external shocks due to the results of the two countries in the IEA- and Pisa-reports provided openings for transforming primary education into a transparent and output-based system. Even so, the political climate and the external shocks due to a poorer performance compared to Norway, appears to have provided more pressure for changes in Denmark. Both countries are characterised by a mix of different governing styles, some signifying a break with existing institutions, others reproducing existing institutions. The changes are to be characterised as both continuity and change. In this process, the relation between national authorities, independent organisations, local governments, schools, teachers and parents have changed. But how can we know if the changes are no more than establishing of a new, none-coercive institution still open to internal “under surface” conflicts and struggle? In what way has the processes of change established a different relationship between the state and the professionals?

In both countries the reforms points to complex processes balancing between the central and decentralised level, between standardised and more autonomous styles of governance, and between the mixed purposes of evaluation such as both control and accountability on one hand, and organizational processes of learning on the other hand. However, important historical differences between the two countries impact the possibilities for change. Denmark has traditionally had a more decentralised and fragmented system of compulsory education compared to Norway. Although the local level in Norway was granted responsibility for compulsory education after the Second World War, Norwegian compulsory education has been characterised by a stronger unity, comprehensiveness and centralisation compared to Denmark. As the two countries have distinctive characteristics, similar reforms signify different effects. In the following comparison the two most important dimensions of change are outlined, that is decentralisation and the intensified output regulation.

Decentralisation and the discretion of the teacher profession

Many of the recent Danish and Norwegian reforms are part of international management trends that do not only apply to primary education. The same or similar reforms apply to education policy in general or the overall public sector resulting in reduction or simplification of the regulatory style of the state and a break with the distinct historical regulatory style in different policy sectors. Historically, variation in governing and management styles between
policy sectors are shared characteristics of all the Nordic countries (Lægreid and Pedersen 1999). This is also the case of the education sector. For a long period in Danish education policy, each sector within education and their associated institutions, e.g. primary schools, preserved a distinct form of governing and management (Christensen, 2000, 203). The national regulation of each area followed different patterns that varied according to the degree of decentralisation, the degree of local, regional and national control and the tradition for involving the users of the institutions of the particular sector (Christensen, 2000, 199, 202-5). In Norway the compulsory education since the Second World War has been institutionalised as an independent sector with tight connections between professional actors at the school level, at the municipal and regional level and at the central administrative level (Farsund 1997, Telhaug 1998). In both countries, the teachers’ profession of primary education was typically granted a large degree of discretion and autonomy. Thus, primary education constitutes in both countries a distinct historical legacy to which a specific set of sector interests are connected.

As a result, the decentralisation of primary education in respectively Denmark and Norway has been implemented with different strength and consequences. The local authorities and the schools in Norway have been given employer responsibility and autonomy to decide how to achieve the national standards in education. This represents an important change per se. Still, the municipalities are obliged to supervise the implementation of national targets in the schools. In addition the municipalities are supervised by the regional state. The continuity in Norway is represented through the prolonged idea of national central governance in education, but with different policy means. The idea of comprehensiveness and equity in education is still infiltrated in primary education although the intention of local transformation and variation is increasingly significant.

Part of the change in regulatory style in Denmark was the increased decentralisation in the 1980s and 1990s. It happened prior to the Norwegian decentralisation and appears to have been more radical when related to the competence delegated to local authorities, principals and parents as users. In this process the teachers’ profession was weakened due to a strengthen position of exactly these actors. But the teachers’ profession also preserved a substantial degree of discretion when it comes to teaching practices. The Danish reforms in this period primarily aimed at the organisational structure of schools and local educational authorities. As in Norway, some institutions that so far secured the influence and autonomy of the teachers at national and especially local level were abolished in this period. However, the teachers’ autonomy with regard to the process and result of the core service of schools, that is,
teaching, remained unchanged, even though teachers in many schools by the end of this period were beginning to be organised in teaching teams. No national reform introduced teaching team structure to schools, but was decided either by the local school authorities or the schools.

As opposed to this, the introduction of teaching teams in Norway was a deliberate state policy. As part of the Reform -97 and the new and mandatory curriculum, the Norwegian policy to increase collaboration at school level through teaching teams seems to work as intended. During the 1990s the collective level in Norwegian schools have been strengthen. An interview inquiry from 2005-2006 revealed that Norwegian teachers more commonly collaborated on teaching in teams than their Swedish colleagues (Helgøy & Homme 2007). A majority of Norwegian schools plan and implement most of the teaching through collaboration in team, and this collaboration is increasing the latest years (Dahl 2004). Møller et al (2006) draw the same conclusion in a representative survey among Norwegian school, especially underlining the collaborative trend in lower secondary schools. The collaborative trend is even strengthened by the 2006 curriculum “Kunnskapsløftet”. In this sense, the Norwegian national authorities in this period seems to have impacted more directly the core of primary education where as the Danish national authorities primarily regulated the organisational structure of primary education.

The controversies of transparency and out-put control
The recently introduction of output-based regulation and quality assessment of primary education has been a major formal change in Danish and Norwegian education. One of the most controversial policies lately has, as mentioned, been the introduction of national tests. The reforms of Norwegian primary education represent a gradual transformation towards a more transparent and result-oriented system. The 2006 Curriculum “Kunnskapsløftet” represented a further step towards national target setting and output control. As in Denmark the overall targets in education is formulated at national level but are followed by dictated levels of skills to be attained at the different stages of compulsory education. National tests are supposed to control to what extent the prescribed levels of skills are attained. Especially in Norway there has been huge scepticism towards national testing. The most used argument against the tests is the negative effects of publishing the tests’ results. A survey showed that almost every Norwegian teacher and principal strongly oppose publishing test results (Dahl et al 2004).
Considering the content of the test, the teachers do believe that the tests’ results reflect the students’ knowledge. It is obvious, though, that the teachers do not find that the tests provide new information which they can apply in their teaching practice. For the Norwegian teachers the process of improving the quality of teaching is to a very little degree influenced by test results. Schools have not established common routines for using test information. Further, teachers find the implementation of the tests time demanding and at the expense of other valuable tasks. Hence, the national requirements of tests regulate the teaching but do not necessarily improve teaching which may not correspond to the centrally prescribed intentions. Norwegian teachers use the information provided by the tests selectively and for own purposes. To some degree the central authorities responded to the professionals critics. The Red-Green coalition government from 2005 continued the line of the policies of the Centre-Right coalition but the national tests are currently being modified in order to improve the internal and educational relevance. As in the Danish system of testing, the aim is to reshape the tests’ information as a tool in teaching and to develop schools as learning organisations. However, the scepticism in Denmark has not been as marked. The difference between the two countries is that test results in Norway are published; they are not published in Denmark. At the time of writing, the first tests are being conducted in Danish primary education. Hence, the effects of the Danish tests are not yet known.

There are some indicators of increasingly and somehow alternative evaluation activities that may signify the impact of the result orientation. The Norwegian schools are using different internal and school based systems, indicating a variation of the use and utilization of evaluation in schools. A survey found that 98 % of the principals and 67 % of the municipalities evaluate the quality of their school or schools, and those evaluations are mainly carried out by internal actors of the schools. Thus, the tradition of internal evaluation is strong (Dahl et al 2004). The trend to involve private agencies in schools has been met by a debate on “who is really steering the school”. The debate may have been more intense in Norway, cf. e.g. the loosely coupled Danish Evaluation Institute. In the Norwegian debate the teachers’ union have been supported by the pedagogic professionals and academics in their huge scepticism towards agencies of this kind. Criticism towards evaluation was raised as a main topic at the yearly Teachers union’s delegate meeting in 2006 when the unions’ leader urged the delegates to oppose “the measuring school”. She argued against the technocratic, instrumentalist view set forth by politicians and bureaucrats which she sees as a threat against the teacher profession. So far, Norwegian schools seem to avoid transforming into such a instrumentalist path. When it comes to the learning results of students the conversation with
students and individual conferences with parents are assumed as the most important by the principals (Møller et al. 2006). These internal instruments are assessed as more important for the results achieved than national tests and exams. The informal and internal systems of evaluation are still dominating evaluative practices of Norwegian schools. Moreover, exploring how the national systems of evaluating quality have changed the teaching activities of schools point to unclear results and effect. Even though, the principals see the advantage of the systems it is difficult to accordingly observe changes in the results of primary education. The use of the information on the website is moderate and 50% of the principals find the statistics difficult to interpret (Møller et al. ibid). This indicates that although the historical traditions on central authorities strongly regulation of education output control and result evaluations are not easily implemented as intended. There is room for adjustment and professional autonomy at school and teacher level.

The Danish decentralised primary education system that developed during the 1990s has also become more supervised by the national authorities through more specific target setting, the use of tests and other mechanisms of evaluating performance. However, the output-based regulatory style is by far only emphasising national surveillance of lower levels. The national authorities also wish to attempt to spark more complex organizational processes encouraging the schools and local authorities to create a local evaluation culture. The national regulation is a mix between more detailed centralised regulation and granting autonomy of the local level and teachers at the same time. Minimum standards, The Danish Evaluation Institute, the Act on transparency and openness, national tests, student reports and quality reports all imply some form of central surveillance and standardisation of evaluation. But they also leave room for autonomy of the schools and the teachers.

The local education authorities in Denmark have not picked up on the detailed evaluative practice of the national authorities. A survey conducted of the evaluative strategy of local education authorities in November 2006 shows in 58% of the municipalities the schools organise their evaluations individually. Only 23% of the local education authorities have developed standardised system for evaluating their schools. Even so, it is the impression of respectively 64% and 57% of the local education authorities that evaluation has strengthen the academic work and the quality assessment of schools suggesting that the output-based regulation have an impact. At the same time, the mix in governing instrument between detailed specification and allowing room for discretion of the teachers as well as local government may question the impact of the output-based reforms in Denmark. The historical emphasis of public schools on locality and community may have made it difficult in a
unilateral way to introduce national systems for measurement, standards, comparison and testing. The national target setting combined with the mandatory test aim at regulating the core service of the schools and may in effect converse the content of the core service due to changing contextual conditions. However, the national authorities may force the teachers to process mandatory test but they cannot force the individual teacher to make the results of the test part of the teacher’s teaching practice. The national authorities may force the teachers to produce student reports and action plans but they cannot be sure that the teachers apply them in their teaching practice. This may suggest that most of the Danish reforms are layered on top of pre-existing institution changing parts of the institutions while leaving others in peace. Their impact also relates to the ability of the teachers’ profession to maintain their institutional identity and values in response to external pressures. The Danish local education authorities access the teachers to be less positive towards evaluation compared to the principal of schools, cf. above-mentioned survey.

Another reform in this period in Denmark was the ‘marketisation’ of primary education. Calmar Andersen (2007) shows that competition between public and private schools have no effect on the result of final exams of public schools. Public schools entering in competition with private schools have in contrast higher expenditure per student and thus lower efficiency. The reason suggested is that the competition with private schools makes it more difficult for local authorities to plan and optimise class size. No investigations have been made on the internal marketisation between public schools. But similar problems may be expected to occur. This type of reform is absence in Norway. Opposed to Denmark, Norway does not have a tradition of free choice between public and private schools nor is the internal competition between public schools well developed.

The comparison shows that the teachers’ profession in both countries has not accepted the intensified output-based regulation without protests. Many of the reforms are of a very recent nature and the outcome and effect on the teachers’ profession are not yet known. The historical legacy of the Danish education sector respecting the autonomy of distinct areas including the autonomy of teachers in primary education may have affected the reforms implemented. For a long period the Norwegian teachers managed to affect educational reforms and resist output control. The national tests and the publication of test and average exams results implemented by the Centre-Right coalition illustrate that politics matter, as it represents a shift to a more confrontational style of policy making. However, the teacher
profession is not totally left out as their opposition turned the Red-Green coalition government to reconsider the content and use of the tests.

The impacts of the reforms on the teachers’ discretion dependent on the power balance between the national and local level. The development during the 1980s and 1990s shows that it is not likely that the teachers’ profession at the moment will be able to counterbalance the detailed regulation of the state. The external pressures have resulted in reluctance from at least some national decision makers to allow the teachers’ profession significant influence on the national agenda of primary education. In Denmark, the teachers’ profession may to some extent be able to counterbalance the detailed regulation if it is able to form an alliance with the local authorities. The problem with this alliance is that it is one of employee and employer which traditionally is a conflicting relationship. LGDK has brought the matter on teachers denying producing students’ reports before the labour court. This does not make the alliance between LGDK and the teachers a realistic one. Paradoxically the local authorities that provide most discretion with regard to working conditions of Danish teachers also in average achieve the best results at final exams (Bøgh Andersen 2005, 99-101).

In the processes of change we have recognised professional opposition which in some cases and primarily in Norway has managed to moderate or redirect the reforms. However, what seems clear is that the conditions for professional-political collaboration and direct participation in decision making for professionals have been limited during the last two decades in both countries. Due to a stronger division of tasks and responsibilities between the national and the local level a more unanticipated implementation of primary education policy can be expected. For instance, 60% of Danish public schools did not publish the requested information a year after the Act on Transparency and Openness was put into effect (Undervisningsministeriet 2004). There is reason to expect “hidden” conflicts and struggle appearing at the surface at the local level and in school, dependent on how controversial governments policies are. However, the nature of conflicts and struggles as well as what is by the profession perceived as controversial policy is different in the two countries as well as staggered in time. For instance, reforms of transparency appeared at different time in the two countries and differ in what is published; average grades as in Denmark or both test results and average exams grades as in Norway. It has been a deliberate feature of the introduction of national tests in Denmark that their results should not be published. As a consequence, the opposition from Danish teachers on this reform has not been as marked in Denmark as in Norway.
Thus, there are changes through a gradual transformation going on in Norwegian primary education affecting the relation between the state and the professionals. Teachers are still characterised by a collective identity manage to influence essential decisions, for example moderating performance pay (Helgoy and Homme 2007). The Danish Union of Teachers may appear to have a stronger position even though weakened in recent years compared to its Norwegian sister organisation. However, the autonomy of the Norwegian teacher profession may appear to be stronger based on the more slow and gradual process of change at least until recent years in Norway.

**Conclusion**

In both Denmark and Norway professionals’ struggle for protecting jurisdiction is to some extent moved from the central collaborative arena to the pressure group arena and to the practise arena in school. The integration between the state and the professionals is weakened. Instead of an integrated system of politicians and professionals developing educational reforms with a high degree of legitimacy in education, the decision making is characterised as a system more open to conflict, tensions and local variation. However, here the two countries differ as a consequence of their historical traditions. In Denmark there appears to be less room for local variation compared to the situation in the 1990s, while in Norway there appears to be more room for local variation than was the case a decade ago. This means decentralisation is a continuation of a historical legacy in Denmark it was partly a break with the centralistic tradition in Norway.

The new regulatory style does not only signify a change for the subjects of regulation, that is, the teachers and local authorities, but also for the regulatory authority, that is the national authorities. Whether their own response to the change in regulatory style shows displacement, layering, drift, conversion or exhaustion may be dependent on a number of factors as e.g. the degree of conflict on the new regulatory style, political coalitions or the strength of old regulatory institutions. Thus, the impact of the reforms depends not only on the teachers’ profession and the local authorities but also on the governing capacity and ability of the national authorities. E.g. the Danish national authorities have set the agenda on national target setting and increased focus of output and have as such increased its grip on the process and result of primary education. But it is questionable as to whether the national authorities have the governing capacity to monitor in detail as to whether primary education fulfils national targets, the publishing of the requested information etc. (see also Pierre & Peters 2000). Furthermore, the change in regulatory style of the national authorities is complicated
by the fact that local education authorities act as the controlling authorities with regard to inspecting that schools meet the demands of the abovementioned reforms. Although the Norwegian state traditionally have demonstrated capacity in governing education through detailed input regulations the national authorities still lack the ability to capture how teachers are implementing the policy in their teaching practises. The new strategy in accordance with the Danish, as well as a wider international trend, on national target setting and output control is part of a strategy to increase the governing capacity. The recent centralisation represents a stronger break with historical legacy in Denmark than in Norway. Even so, the reforms are not gaining support among the professionals neither in Norway nor Denmark. The specific governing instruments misfits with the traditional governing styles and seems to have considerable, but different, impact on the disintegrated relationship between the professionals and the state in the two countries.

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