

# **The Media as Apparatus in the Becoming of Education Policy: Education Media Discourse During Two Electoral Periods**

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## **Abstract**

*Understanding the media as co-producer of education policy is at the centre of this study. The media's strong focus on education crisis in recent decades serves as a background. The aim is to investigate education discourses that are dominantly actualised in media texts during electoral periods, and to analyse how they construct education and subjectify teachers. A further aim is to be responsive to discourses that are alternative to those dominating. Theories with reference to Foucault, Deleuze and New Media Theory are used. Two text bodies from a Swedish newspaper in the electoral years of 1998 and 2014 are analysed. The findings indicate a changed media apparatus in 2014 due to digitalisation, a dichotomisation of education that increases over time, the construction of an educational crisis evident in 1998 and despotically set in 2014, where teachers, who are positioned as heroes in 1998, are blamed and held accountable in 2014. There are some scarce and murmurs of alternative discourses in the hyper-textual media apparatus of 2014 that bring hope of a different educational policy debate to come.*

**Keywords:** *Education Policy; Media Discourse; Foucault; Deleuze; New Media Theory; Sweden*

## **Introduction**

This study investigates the workings of education discourse in the media in relation to education policy. Thus, it aims at a deeper understanding of the media as co-producing education policy. The focus is on dominant education discourses that are actualised in the media during electoral periods. Of special interest are the ways in which the discourses partake in the production of epistemological, taken for granted, conceptualisations of education which subsequently, if accepted as true by teachers, work to subjectify teachers. A further aim is to be responsive to discourses that are alternative to those dominating.

Schooling and teachers are regularly covered and discussed in different media. The coverage and the debate have become more extensive in recent decades, and education is repeatedly reported on as being in deficit and deep crisis (Cohen, 2011; Thomas, 2011; Mockler, 2014; Ulmer, 2014). These reports bring forth negative images of schooling that echoes in policy debate in other arenas as well.

Sweden has long been regarded as a strong welfare state with an educational system where equality has been one of the main goals. Since the 1990s, though, the system has changed, and freedom of choice and competition has replaced compensation for class differences (Reimers, 2014). Additionally, Sweden has recently been heavily criticised by the OECD after reports of rapidly declining results among Swedish students in international tests (OECD 2014). During the Swedish electoral year of 2014, education was generally reported in the media to be in deep crisis, and at the same time, according to media surveys, education surfaced as a very important political issue for the electorate (Dagbladet, 2014). This makes the case of Sweden interesting to study as an example of how media discourse on education co-produces education policy.

In recent years, research has highlighted the relationships between education politics/policy and the media and thereby drawn attention to the mediated context and to mediatisation (Rawolle, 2010). This research indicates that the media is deeply involved in political processes at all levels, due to how the media constructs and frames the issues raised. This is a crucial point, given that it exposes the important role played by the media in participatory societies. Researchers have highlighted the ways in which policy issues, like education, are shaped and constructed in the media and how they are embedded in people's everyday conversations, becoming part of the public debate, hence affecting policymakers' decisions at various levels (Gerstl-Pepin, 2007; Piazza, 2014).

How political issues, such as education, are discursively constructed in the media is thereby a matter of great political and social importance, since these constructions and images are vividly alive in the public sphere, in everyday life, in policy formation and in the subjectification of teachers (Pettigrew and MacLure, 1997; Gewirtz, Dickson and Power, 2004; Rawolle, 2010). In view of this, we urgently need to know more about how the media works as a force within a social discursive process where policy, schooling and teachers both are constructing and being constructed.

In an earlier study (Wiklund, 2006), I analysed media discourse on education in Swedish print media during the 1990s. I found a strong increase of educational coverage as well as a more dichotomised education policy debate during electoral years. This indicates that education media discourse during electoral periods may be specifically interesting to study. In addition, Reimers' research (2014) reveals that although educational reforms in Sweden reiterate a neoliberal educational discourse, this discourse is not as hegemonic as expected. She finds counter-hegemonies, indicating that a study of Swedish media discourse should be responsive to alternative discourses.

In this study, concepts from Foucault, Deleuze and New Media Theory are used to analyse empirical texts. The aim is to examine how the media discourse on education during electoral periods co-produces education policy. This theoretical framework opens up possibilities of understanding this production of policy both in terms of constants/order/regulation and in terms of variation/creation/disruption (c.f. Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 124). The disruptive aspect is important for the ambition to find actualisations of counter-hegemonies; discourses that are alternative to the dominant ones (cf. Ulmer, 2014; Reimers 2014).

Two empirical examples are analysed. These examples consist of education debate from a major national Swedish newspaper from the two electoral years of 1998 and 2014.

### **Education Policy, Schools and Teachers in Constant Becoming**

The urgency of studying media discourse as part of the education policy producing process is pointed at in this study with reference to findings from research dealing with the struggles involved in education policy formation. This research shows the ways in which different social actors and forces are engaged in those struggles as well as how to understand the consequences of the struggles.

### **Policy in constant becoming**

One important motivation for the study of media discourse as co-producing education policy rests on the assumption that policy is never constant, but always under construction. In drawing attention to this, Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012, pp. 3-4) suggest an understanding of policy in terms of material

and enactment, rather than implementation: “Policy is not ‘done’ at one point in time [...] it is always a process of ‘becoming’”.

To help develop the understanding of policy as becoming, the researchers within the field of education policy and reform have turned to concepts and ideas drawn from Foucault and Deleuze. Maguire (2014), for example, argues that education policy works by producing sets of ideas, or versions of ‘truth’. She points to the ways in which these sets of ideas affect the production of policy texts and how they work on subjectivities as forms of Foucauldian governmentality. Thompson and Cook (2015) turn to Deleuze and Guattari in order to understand how policy topology and discursive topology are used to legitimise certain truths. They have also used Deleuze’s philosophy of time to make sense of the paradox that significant policy change at times fails to produce any differences in school practice (2014). These studies serve to motivate further studies of the complexity of policy formation using similar approaches. The empirical study of examples of media discourse during election periods as producing specific understandings of education is here argued for as a promising way to do develop this field of research.

### **Constructions of Educational Crisis and Deficit**

Researchers in the field of education policy analysis (c.f. Cohen, 2011; Thomas, 2011; Slater 2014) have highlighted constructions of crisis and deficit as legitimating grounds for neoliberal reform. Such constructions are, by those studies, presented as inherent in neoliberal logic and capitalism. Discourses of deficit and crisis have been shown to evoke a general taken for granted assumption that education is in a state of emergency, and thereby created a situation where neoliberal reforms ‘appear’ to be necessary.

In contrast, a nostalgic image of a ‘golden era’ has been proposed (Gutierrez, et. al., 2002) as part of a backlash pedagogical trend. Hattam, Prosser and Brady (2009) indicate the creation of a debate climate that condemns and ridicules progressive pedagogy in favour of ‘traditional’ teaching methods. They report that this climate is created by the use of strategies, such as direct attack, rejection of the socio-historical context, as well as the use of certain order-words.

A crisis construction within education discourse where the media attacks education has earlier been described by Carr and Hartnett (1996) from a British perspective, and by Berliner and Biddle (1995) from a Northern American one and appears to remain a force to be reckoned with. Slater (2015), for example, reports how the neoliberal enclosure of education has been facilitated by an increasingly diverse array of crises, both ‘manufactured’ and ‘naturally occurring’. He argues that processes of “‘recovery’” are imposed in cases of such crises and argues for the need for scholars to further investigate the discursive and ideological work on subjectivity in the aftermath of crises. Slater (2015) suggests affective politics of refusal and counter-storytelling as modes of resistance to this imposed loop of crisis and recovery.

### **The Inter-Discursivity of Media and Policy**

To emphasise the importance of including the media in studies investigating and theorising education policy enactment is an objective of this study. Studies of the inter-discursivity of media and policy texts have contributed to an understanding of the media as deeply involved in the construction of political emergency by the use of discourses of deficit and crisis (Thomas, 2011) and the construction of “‘the social fact of failure’” (Cohen, 2011, p. 112).

Hattam, Prosser and Brady (2009) highlight policy mediatisation as an important contemporary aspect of the question of political will in education issues. They refer to the way that voices reinforce each other in order to establish a concept of education that is credible, true and valid. Franklin (1999; 2004) shows how the media construction of emergency has become a necessary aspect of political reform, and how the British Labour Government systematically sought to formulate education policy proposals so that they had a strong impact in the media by means of so-called “sound bites”. Lingard and Rawolle (2004) similarly show how policy issues are packaged in short, catchy formulations, while Anderson (2007) points to the media’s impact on education policy language and framing in terms of constructing ‘the political spectacle of education’. Results from this field of research underline the urgency of studying the workings of media discourse on education policy.

### **The Media Discourse and the Positioning of Teachers**

Media discourse is also reported to work on teachers’ professional identities. Therefore, the relationship between the media, policy and the positioning of teachers is a focus of this study. This relationship has been explored by clarifying how mainstream education news can be understood as a key site for the negotiation of teachers’ professional identity (Hansen 2009; Cohen, 2011). Thompson and Cook (2015) explain how education policy-making has affected the problem of teacher accountability, which has become the underpinning problem to solve in education policymaking. They claim Deleuze’s theorising of the control society as relevant to understand the systems of de-professionalisation that transfers authority from the professional teacher to things like standardised tests. They also show how the teacher, as problem discourse, operates within global policy convergence. Mockler (2014) argues that the problem of accountability, which is embedded in the construction of an

educational crisis of quality, undermines public trust in the teaching profession and makes educational improvement difficult.

The localised stories and counter-narratives told by teachers themselves may, according to Ulmer (2014) serve to contrast with the discourse of professional inadequacy and to deconstruct and disassemble the metanarrative of ineffective teaching. From a Swedish context, Säfström (2014) speaks up for teachers, and teaching, in a situation where the media, public and political discourse insist on a dominant ideology of teaching resting on a construction of crisis and proposals of remedy in terms of discipline and order. He describes teachers' frustrations at constantly being portrayed as incompetent and, at the same time, as accountable for saving education and society from chaos and crisis. In contrast to this, he proposes a story about the passion of teaching bringing ambiguity, contingency and change into the classroom.

The positioning of teachers in public and media discourse have also been studied by looking at the ways in which teacher education is attacked and/or considered to be in constant need of reform. Maguire (2014) points to the fact that teacher education has always been demonised and suggests that one reason for this could be that teacher education is relatively new and has a weak scientific ground. She makes use of Foucault to discuss how the demonisation of teacher education is based on discourses of derision, which society accepts as true. Violent attacks on teacher education, by constructing it as a failure that focuses on the wrong things, such as inequality issues rather than brain functions, are also described by other researchers, in Sweden as well as in other countries (Hattam, Prosser and Brady, 2009; Englund, 2012).

## **Studying the Media as Apparatus**

The study of policy implications of media discourse raises questions about theoretical understandings of the relationship between the media and policy/politics. Media theory has different approaches to offer here. In early studies, effect theories were common in the field, but, as the idea of the passive consumer, on which the media was supposed to have effects, changed in favour of ideas of a more active user, audience centred receptions theories became considered as more useful (c.f. Williams, 2003).

Media reception analysis theories are concerned with mass communication in terms of the social production of meaning and claim to address both discursive and social aspects: “there can be no ‘effect’ without ‘meaning’” (Jensen, 1991, p. 135). The media-political context relationship has also been studied in more specific terms, for example, the media as agenda setters (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) or reality constructors by means of framing (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). But, as McLuhan (1994) and other media-ecology theories have argued, the media is in many ways better understood as an integral part of everyday life than as something separate that has effects, sets the agenda or frames it. This is why mediatization (c.f. Rawolle, 2011) has proved such a fruitful concept.

Another problem with many media theories, is their strong emphasis on representational issues, such as “meaning” and “interpretation”. In this aspect, they are at odds with the questions asked in this study. In order to understand discourse as process, transformation and event (Leschke and Friesen, 2013), and as something on the outside of the representational (Foucault 1977; Parikka 2012), one needs more open ways of conceptualising the relationship between media and policy/politics.

To question the idea of representation as the basis of empiricism is part of the understanding of discourse as materiality and matter, as having agency (c.f. MacLure, 2013). In Deleuze and Guattari's conception, a text is an assemblage, a machine that produces. It is not a transmitter of information by representation: "An assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 24). Of interest here is the ways in which semiotic, material and social flows, that is, discourse, objects, humans and others, are involved in processes of 'becoming', such as the becoming of policy, education, teachers and the media.

This 'materialist turn' has influenced media theories in different ways. According to New Media Theory for example, a given medium constitutes a Foucauldian apparatus (Horn, 2008; Parikka, 2012). Foucault (1977; 194) writes about an apparatus that manifests power/knowledge by "heterogeneous ensembles". Thus, the concept functions in Foucault's analyses, allowing him to bind together different elements and show how the historical formations resulting from their interplay produce power/knowledge.

Deleuze describes the apparatus in terms of a collective assemblage of selections, orderings, and connections producing different intensities (Deleuze and Parnet, 2006). According to this, the media maybe understood as a technological apparatus with multiple capabilities "to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure the gestures, opinions or discourses of living beings" (Agamben, 2009, p. 14). Studying the media as apparatus means to consider media texts, and the multitude of semiotic, material and social connections that are made by them, in terms of productive machines, with an interest in what they produce.

In this paper, the idea of the media as apparatus is understood as adding to media discourse analysis theories, for example to critical discourse analysis, by challenging the dichotomy of symbolic/semiotic versus material/empirical. This approach serves to avoid the traps of representation, where forces are named and categorised before they transact, that is, before they even become forces. My hope is that this approach will make possible a more open understanding of the forces operating on the processes of the becoming of education policy.

Examining the media discourse of education policy means dealing with taken for granted assumptions and normalisations of what education is all about. Deleuze and Guattari (1983) describe such ideas about “what must be” as ideas ordered by “signifier systems”. According to them, discourse is constituted by the combined effect of an endless mass of non-agent social forces that form into despotic systems. These despotic “signifier systems” often result in ordering and “boxing up difference” into one specific way of understanding something. Thereby they also use other ways of understanding the same thing (Kaustuv, 2003, p. 12). One example of such an ordering is the reliance on dichotomies. Serre (1995, p. 81) explains why dichotomies are impossible: “An idea opposed to another idea is always the same, albeit affected by the negative sign”. The two sides in a dichotomy rely on each other; one of them is not possible without the other.

In Deleuze’s theories, signs arise whenever we encounter difference or distinctions and we map our reality by means of them. He uses the concept of “dominant signification” to describe a function whereby the chaotic mass of the endless difference of existence is formed into “molar formations”, by the molar line of power. Through the (discursive) repetition of thoughts/beliefs and power relations, boundaries are drawn, and groups of signs become isolated and unified. This “molarising effect” places signs in categories. The categories tend

to reify into taken for granted events, objects and subjectivities, that is, into “sameness” (Deleuze, 1990; Kaustuv, 2003). However, Deleuze’s theories of the sign also give hope, since the hierarchic signification process can be reverted to release multitudes of difference from the dominant regimes of sameness. Then the immanent non-hierarchic structure, modelled by the rhizomes opposed to the more hierarchic tree structure (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), comes to show. Guattari (1984) proposes the undoing of dominant models (such as capitalism or neoliberalism), by releasing the multitude of difference inherent in their signification, as a possibility for micro-political resistance. When dominant media discourse constructs education as in a permanent state of crisis, being responsive to different significations is in this study considered as opening up for such resistance.

According to Deleuze, all statements arise from the “multiplicious murmurs of pass-words” that are temporarily suppressed for the illusion of a molar, dominant, clear speech. Thus, he understands language in terms of utter heterogeneity (or difference) that is morphed into distinctness (sameness) by “order-words”. Language, at a given time, is the set of “order-words”, shaping meaning by means of dominant signification. The subjection of any subjects, in our case of teachers, depend on a dominant order of subjectification, which works in ways similar to the order of signification. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). However, as stated above: There are always “pass-words” beneath “order-words” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), and thereby the possibility of resistance.

In Deleuze and Guattari’s writings these signification and subjectification processes are presented on an ontological plane, whereas my interest is more focused on the practical implications on the relationship between discourse and policy (c.f. MacLure, 2013). In this paper, I experiment by using concepts from

Deleuze and Guattari in an empirical analysis (c.f. Kaustuv, 2003). I argue that I can find support for this usage in their writings, for example when they write about issues relevant for media discourse: “The order-word itself is the redundancy of the act and the statement. Newspapers, news, proceed by redundancy, in that they tell us what we ‘must’ think, retain, expect” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 92).

The aim of this study is to examine how the media discourse on education during electoral periods co-produces education policy. For the paper, the dominant signification systems that affect education policy are understood as constituting important conditions for education and teachers, while the media as apparatus is considered to contribute to these dominant signification systems.

In the analysis, multiple readings of the articles were conducted, in which the concepts proposed in the presented methodological framework were applied. The concept of “order-words” was used to help identify the regulating words around which arguments and positions were structured in the articles. Thus, it was possible to discern the “molarising effect” of the “order-words”, according to which things were ordered and regulated into taken for granted understandings.

It further helped to discern how the use of language operated in the articles in terms of “dominant signification”. More specifically, this means that it helped discern how differences were “boxed up” and how specific understandings of education and its mission, as well as specific subjectification of teachers were reified and how, thereby, other understandings were excluded. The concept of “multiplicious murmurs” was used to help me to be responsive to alternative discourses.

Working with the understanding of “the material as force”, means that data cannot be seen as an indifferent mass waiting to be analysed, instead data is seen as something that has a way of making itself intelligible to us (MacLure, 2013, p. 660).

In the analysis of what was included in, and thereby constituting the media apparatus, connections made in the texts to other texts, humans and objects were followed. Here choices had to be made, as it proved impossible to follow every connection. Thus, the researcher becomes an intrinsic part of the connecting forces and the apparatus being studied (c.f. Mazzei and McCoy, 2010), which highlights the issue of what the researcher connects to the apparatus. I am aware that, by analysing texts in this manner, I become a part of the studied ‘machine’. It proved hard to experiment, to map and to resist ‘tracing’, that is falling into the safety of the meaning and the already familiar knowing, which in this context means, fall into familiar ways of reading media discourse on education (c.f. Mazzei and McCoy, 2010).

### **Media Discourse on Education in Two Swedish Election Periods**

In the following, the media coverage of, and debate about education, during the two Swedish electoral periods of 1998 and 2014 are analysed.

The research questions asked are:

1. How is the media as an apparatus constituted?
2. Which discourses are dominantly actualised?
3. What conditions of possibility for education are thereby evoked?
4. Which teacher matter is invited/how are teachers subjectified?
5. Are alternative discourses actualised?

The Swedish daily national liberal newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* serves as the point of entry since it has been identified as a central traditional (as compared to new) media in the Swedish policy debate (Petersson and Carlberg, 1990). The articles analysed are from editorial and comment pages of the newspaper, which can be expected to be debate- and policy related. The articles that were chosen responded to the search phrases skol\*, lärar\*, utbildning\* (school\*, teacher\*, education\*) in the search database *Mediearkivet Retriever*.

Around 150 articles from 1998 year were read and 52 were identified as dealing with issues of relevance and therefore used in the study. Excluded were, for example articles dealing exclusively with higher education, the preschool, education outside school and education in other countries. For the sake of transparency, the articles are frequently cited in the presentation. A code is used to indicate the place and date of publication of the article cited. DN stands for the newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*. The letters E and C stands for Editorial and Comment page. This is followed by the publication date in the 'year - month - date' order.

In the 2014 part of the study, the material analysed consists of editorial and comment articles and examples of hyper-textually linked texts. The search resulted in 98 hits, of which 48 were found relevant for the analysis. It proved impossible to follow the articles in more than a few of their many directions. By 2014, there was a complementing digital edition of the newspaper, and the paper therefor include comment fields as well as links to blogs or other texts that share or respond to the articles. In turn, those blogs or texts link further to other texts. This linking evoked new ethical considerations. The analysis followed some of the flows connected to material, such as UR (Educational Media), official debate forums or hash-tagged comments. In accordance with net-based ethical considerations, hash tagging to ongoing public discussions or

tweets is regarded as a declaration of intent to participate and, therefore, as grounds to consider them possible to use in research without obtaining the consent of the commentators (c.f. Rivers and Lewis, 2014). Connections into blogs, presented as teacher blogs, rather than blogs by teachers, were followed, but not connections into personal Facebook pages or blogs that were presented as personal rather than professional.

In total 100 articles were included in the analysis. Based on this limited empirical material, the analysis must be understood as a qualitative exemplification of case character. Therefore the results are of heuristic interest as proposed patterns to be compared with results from similar studies.

### **The 1998 Election Year**

In Sweden, general elections are held every four years. Some seven million people are entitled to vote and thereby influence which political party that will represent them in the Swedish Parliament. Elections for seats on county councils and town councils are held at the same time. Before the 1998 election, Sweden was governed by a Social Democratic minority government, which continued to govern after the election. In the run up to the election in 1998, *Dagens Nyheter* proposed education as the most important political issue. The newspaper clearly positioned itself as an important participant in the education policy debate by publishing a series of articles about education and proposing a specific educational policy approach that was well in line with its political position as liberal.

### **Media Apparatus Constitution**

An all media search for school\* in the media archives (Svensk mediedatabas) from 1998 resulted in 807 hits, many of which are doubles. These include press, television and radio news stories, talk shows, documentaries, educational

television programmes as well as drama and fiction films. A reading of the themes of the television texts shows signs of deficit rhetoric and paradise lost: “The land we dreamt of”; “School at the perpetual bottom”. Although the late 1990s saw the beginning of blogs, no blogs claiming to deal with education from this time were mentioned in the articles.

Connecting into the *Dagens Nyheter* media apparatus by intertextual linkage are news articles from other newspapers and other media texts. Organisational policy texts are often included, and, therefore, objects such as political parties, ministries, municipalities and similar institutions, as well as human individuals. Texts from interest organisations are also often included (mainly teacher unions and some NGOs) and with them individuals representing the organisations. There is the materiality of printed text and of pictures.

Despite all the connecting texts, humans and objects, it is possible to imagine this media apparatus as a separate assemblage; a ‘communicating thing’ that is relatively clear-cut, even though it is reaching out and connecting to other texts, humans and objects. It has a clear and surprisingly univocal enunciation; that of politicians, organisation leaders and political journalists. Voices from spaces outside this sphere are rarely heard. There is little or no difference between the editorial pages, where traditionally the political view of the paper is clearly visible, and the comment pages, where debate and difference in voices may be expected.

### Educational Mission Evoked

When reading the texts and connecting them to the understanding of a situation of a school in crisis, four “order-words” emerge as especially significant: *knowledge-requirements; result; order; and quality.*

That it is difficult to recruit teachers and school leaders is both a sign that something is not right in the school as part of the crisis. DNL980918

The school's most serious failure is that many are forced to leave it without certified knowledge. DND980324

One of the main problems is that far too many young people leave primary school at age 16 with poor basic skills. A large proportion ends the ninth grade with failing grades in the school's core subjects [...]. The second major challenge in our school concerns teacher supply. [...] Thirdly, there are in many places pure order problems [...] Fourth, school is in an acute identity crisis... DND981104

The solution to the problems of education is proposed in terms of the “order-words” *freedom (of schools); individualisation; and more independent schools<sup>i</sup>*. Boundaries are drawn which connect *freedom* to individual goods rather than to collective goods and turn citizenship into something that can be achieved and measured. Very little room is left for understanding education as a site for democratic citizenship or any other alternative way of conceptualising it.

The way out of the crisis is likely, through a free and more decentralised school that can meet the individual's wishes on their own terms. Freer public schools and more independent schools are needed more and more in the future knowledge society. DNL980317

The road to educational policy success goes through free schools in both the private and public sector. The state's role is mainly to set out the basic requirements of what a citizenship school must achieve and check and compare the quality. DNL980320

Better school management and clearer measurement of results will, in association with parents' right of choice, put greater pressure on each school to deal with its problems and develop its potential. DNL980414

The scapegoats of crisis and failure are clearly demarcated. Normalising boundaries are drawn which serve to make some educational issues, and some possible ways of understanding the mission of education, strange or unimportant:

The crisis in schools is no coincidence. The mainly social democratic school policies introduced in this country since the late 60's, radicalisation is in many ways the reason behind the problems we are now experiencing. DND981104

Educational politicians and school bureaucrats have been using never-ending word flows to deal with issues of lesser importance for school results while devoting limited interest to the factors deciding educational success. And they have over the years developed a special language whose strangeness is exceeded only by its lack of content. DNL980128

Unfortunately, there is much truth in the observation that education over the past decades has become a playground for all sorts of ideological experiments [...] egalitarian aspirations [...] has degenerated into a disdain for facts and knowledge. Respect for others' opinions has been confused with value neutrality as if anything is acceptable. Performance has been confused with elitism. The realisation that knowledge gives the weak real strength has periodically been lost. DNL980129

Here, 'crisis' is beginning to work in terms of a mould. Stories of decline and problems fit into molar formations in signifier systems that box up difference into dichotomies and put education in an either-or situation. One part of the dichotomy is excluded by "order-words" such as, *progressivism; sloppiness; utopianism*. The other part of the dichotomy is normalised by "order-words" such as, *knowledge; quality; realism*. The mission evoked is largely remedial. This remedy is a paradox in that it entails both a fast forward button, which urges education to encompass values of a future, global, entrepreneurial

knowledge society, and a rewind button, which urges education to go back to a paradise of order and tradition that has been long lost.

The connected voices from other spheres, other texts, organisations or people largely reflect and mould into the set signifier system.

### Teacher Positioning

Just as in the case of the educational crisis, the debate about the problematic status of the teacher profession gets stronger as the election approaches.

Boundaries are drawn, which create an appearance of failing teachers, a failing government and failing municipalities. By the use of “order-words”, such as *incapacity* and *disdain of teacher professionalism*, this is all outlined as a social democratic welfare political failure.

It is certainly good if “society” prioritises teachers. It would be even better if the state and the municipalities did so, and thus broke the longstanding trend of the gradual devaluation of teachers’ status, salary and working conditions due to the politics of the Social Democrats. DNL980104

The Minister of Education claims that teachers are the school’s most important resource. In practice, she has shown this in a strange way, secondary schools introduce boards with a student majority to lead the school. This can be regarded as the modern socialisation of a workplace and encourages teachers to makes the students decide on their own training. DNL980805

[...] Without respect for teachers’ professionalism and willingness to take responsibility, it will be impossible to attract the people who are best equipped to become good teachers. DNL981103

The declining status of the teaching profession is connected to a knowledge contempt among those subjectified as political opponents, the ‘fuzzy or woolly’

educators. These opponents are constructed as regarding knowledge as unimportant and teachers, as the bearers and deliverers of knowledge, are thereby positioned as similarly unimportant to them. Connected to this is a strong force of ‘not ducking the debate’, indicating that ‘some’ do duck it:

Some believe that the roles of teachers will diminish in the future. [...] We would go as far as to say: “Teachers are the school”. It is therefore a crucial issue for Sweden to raise the status of the teaching profession. [...]. The Liberal Party presents today [...] a comprehensive programme to strengthen teachers. Some of the proposals will be seen as highly controversial, but we do not duck the debate. DND980124

Plans to introduce so called ‘overall’ teachers are connected to the dichotomisation, positioning and opposing of the ‘others’, that is, those who de-prioritise knowledge as the ultimate goal of education.

There are ambitious plans in the Ministry of Education’s Social Democratic leadership to introduce “overall teachers”, i.e. Years 1-9 teachers, in the Swedish compulsory school. In our opinion, this would be another step towards eroding the school’s learning objectives by a too shallow teaching of the subject. This would further lower the status of the teaching profession by weakening the sense of professionalism in the teaching profession, thereby making it even more difficult to recruit new teachers. DND980805

*Teachers’ competence* is another “order-word”. Although teachers are constructed as competent, institutional shortcomings, such as lack of training opportunities and lack of clear knowledge, requirements in school policy imply that their competence may be threatened:

The teaching profession has lost its status because teachers have an increasingly difficult environment to pass on their knowledge in. Status is not just about salary, but also about competence. Teachers have the skill, but do they get a fair chance to show it? DND980831

The good teacher, as the bearer and transmitter of specific knowledge and as the mediator of a tradition heritage is in this way positioned as threatened. *Learning objectives; subject knowledge; and specific competencies* of teacher categories are “order-words” that serve to subjectify the Good teacher.

The specific subject knowledge of a good teacher is positioned in opposition to the looming educational policy design of the bad overall teacher as the ‘other’. The subject teacher is also positioned in opposition to the preschool teacher who is constructed as a teacher tailored to a particular context, but not as a bearer of any specific subject knowledge. The subject teacher construction draws boundaries that produce the good teacher as knowledge bearing and knowledge providing. *Subject knowledge* is reified and becomes the “order-word” around which the quality of education and school revolves.

Thus, the embodiment entails teacher matter in terms of the ‘good teacher’ and the ‘other teacher’. The ‘good teacher’ is a subject teacher with genuine knowledge about the given subject, and who is enthusiastic about the subject matter, is orderly, sets clear demands on students, has clear ethical (traditional) values, is trustworthy, takes responsibility for quality and results, and has common sense. The ‘other teacher’ is made out of the opposite materials: that teacher is woolly, fearful of norms, relativistic, interested in theme work and social relations, disorderly and thoroughly ‘un-teacherly’.

The (good) teacher is a professional and is not blamed for the moulded crisis of education. Instead, the teacher is a hero, or heroine, struggling to distribute knowledge against all odds. Teacher education is scapegoated, as is left-wing education policy, politics from the proceeding 25 years and educational science. Oddly enough, the teacher seems largely left out of this equation. The paradox of neoliberal fast forward and neoconservative slow rewind puts the teacher in the difficult position of constantly being pushed in different directions.

### **The 2014 Election Year**

Prior to the election in 2014, a centre-right coalition government had governed Sweden. After the election, a red-green coalition minority government formed, consisting of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party.

### **Media Apparatus Constitution**

A search for school\* in the media archives (Svensk mediedatabas) in the time frame of January 2013 to November 2014, results in 2469 hits, many of which are duplicates. A reading of the thematic of these broadcasts shows clear signs of crisis construction: ‘The world’s best shit school’, ‘Chaos-class’. According to the blog-portal (Bloggportalen.se 2014-12-03) 5869 blogs are categorised as *Education*, 750 of these are listed as debate posts and 706 are listed as either being about teachers or being authored by teachers. These are some aspects of the embedding media context of Sweden in 2014.

There are strong inter-textual and hyper-textual linkages and leakages in and out of the newspaper, some inter-textual linking to news articles from *Dagens Nyheter* and other newspapers, and some inter-textual linking to other televised or broadcasted media texts, blogs, forums and video blogs. There is a strong inter-textual linkage with organised political texts (from ministries and municipalities) and a strong linkage with texts from interest organisations

(mainly teacher unions, some NGOs and others). This means that a network of other materialities, objects, organisations and individuals are connected. An example of this is a comment article, about grades in 4<sup>th</sup> grade (DNC140324) that is followed in a digitally published comment and on a blog with an embedded YouTube video, which is showing a clip of a stand-up comedian who is ironically joking about grading the nappy usage competence of preschool children.

This media as apparatus cannot be imagined as a unified “communicating subject/object” separated from the social. The hyper-textual and multimodal nature of its materiality constitutes an apparatus that is open-ended and ubiquitous in nature. Its voice is in some sense multi-vocal; it is that of politicians, leaders, political journalists, teachers, pupils, students and others.

### Educational Mission Evoked

The acute and utter crisis is more or less despotically set in the signifier system at work, and it is evident that the PISA test, and its results, is provided as a strong solution with a remedial mission, which revolve around the “order-words” *basic core factual knowledge deliverance*.

In the discussion about school there is strong agreement about one important thing - Swedish pupils’ basic skills need to be improved. Significantly improved.

DNC140425

Swedish schools are facing a major challenge. We must reverse the declining results. [...]In recent years, the school has been redesigned by a series of new school reforms. Pupils’ learning of subject knowledge has once again become the most important goal. DNC140104

... a decline of the kind that hit Sweden is an unmistakable crisis symptom.

DNL140115

The policy moulding power of international tests, such as PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS, accentuates the “order-words” of *international comparisons*, from which the despotic signifying system of declining knowledge and crisis is nurtured. Normalising boundaries are drawn, making education results into numbers against which nations compete.

Knowledge results are falling faster than in any other country in the OECD. Swedish children now receive an education inferior to the majority of children in Europe [...]Smaller classes, earlier efforts, more skilled and better teachers will be the foundation of the Sweden we want to build. DNC140902

The situation for schools and teachers is acute. Sweden cannot settle for a school that is among the worse in the OECD. DNC140909

The blame game is confusing. There are echoes of the same forces that were at work in 1998, the responsibility of policy reforms of previous governments lingers, and teacher education remains in flux. However, strong forces work to construct a dichotomy of education as either a business to be run by the state to secure equivalence, as was the case in Sweden before 1991 OR to accept the decentralised Swedish education system implemented in 1991. The economic gain of independent schools is also a force to be reckoned with. Stories of independent schools which are owned by international private equity firms, such as JB Education, that are going bankrupt are also added to the mix: “Today’s system is a waste of tax money” (DNC140909) and “Left party politicians [...] were almost moved to tears” when presenting their manifesto in opposition to gains in the welfare sector (DNL141007).

The capitalisation of education is an example of an issue with far more force in connecting blogs and comments in comparison with the articles as such. For example, the article “Municipal Veto of independent Schools will Increase the

Gaps'' (DNC141007) has 26 comments and is linked to nine blogs, some of which are further linked to tweets and other blogs. Reading the comments shows that the moulds, "order-words" and dichotomies, which are at work at the 'centre' of the apparatus are active as forces 'in the margins' as well. A few of the texts in the margins appear to be negative to the dominant discourse but may be understood as "affected by the negative sign" (Serre, 1995, p. 81) by accepting the dichotomy but opting for the other side of it. However, the voices and the messages are not very clear or united, and it proved to be a struggle to hear all of them and the counter-stories they might be telling.

### Teacher Positioning

By connecting to (popular presentations of) international research on teacher performativity, such as that of Hattie (2008) in *Visible Learning*, the analysed texts position teachers as being the core of schooling. Here, the "order-word" *teacher skill* is at work. Teachers' skills and leadership abilities are questioned by the functions of the produced crisis.

Research shows that what plays the greatest role in student performance is the availability of a skilled teacher. The teacher crisis is a truly difficult challenge for Sweden. DNC140828

The catch is the need for good access to skilled teachers. DNL140911

The combination of insecure teachers, unruly students and parents who do not care ... may very well be the most important explanation for the Swedish school failure. DNL140509

The force of international tests and OECD follow up evaluations of the Swedish teachers, results in some teachers being positioned as specifically accountable for the declining results of Swedish students.

Students need teachers who master the basic of mathematics and who are constantly paying attention to whether students have understood and where their difficulties lie. DNL140411

[...] One wonders how it is possible for a student to spend years and years in school without teachers reacting to the student lack of basic maths skills. DNC140410

But most alarming [...] is that teachers actually do not know what to do, what to teach and how to explain so that students understand. DNL141203

Teacher education is still under attack. Suggested remedies include systems of control, such as control of which individuals that are to be accepted into teacher education. Connections are established with media stories about how students with very low grades have been admitted to teacher education: “More applicants to Paradise Hotel than to teacher education” (*Nyheter24.se*15/9/14); “Almost anyone can become a teacher” (Örstadius, 2013).

The requirements for admission to teacher education need to be tightened. DNC140104

The Swedish teachers’ weakened position is related to that it [...] has become so disconnected from the university field. The education parts of teacher training act as its own parish and has little contact with the academic world at large. [...] To reconnect to the university field is of course not the whole solution. School teachers must also be allowed to cultivate their professional expertise. DNC140522

Other systems of control connect to recent Swedish policy reforms. One such reform is the 2011 teacher certification reform, which from July 2015 requires all teachers to have a teacher certification in order to teach, assess and grade. Another is the recent introduction of ‘first teachers’; excellence career possibilities for teachers (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2014).

The requirement for teacher certification makes visible the problems and may eventually lead to higher wages and to teaching positions becoming more attractive. Similarly, various initiatives to rapidly educate subject knowledgeable individuals in education have some effect. DNC140105

The government has already introduced a system of excellence teachers in schools. Talented educators who are also involved in teaching methods and colleagues' betterment can [...] get SEK 5000 extra a month. DNL140706

The 'good teacher' is positioned as an *accountable* teacher with a clear outside authoritative mission to show and deliver *quality* and *results* ("order-words") as well as righting what has gone wrong.

The best - often the only - way to tighten up is to focus on results and let weak such have consequences. DNC140508

Accountability rather than responsibility subjectifies the teacher as someone who is not fully trustworthy, but as someone in need of control. Reforms introducing such control subjectify the teacher as unskilled, incompetent or insecure, and in need of reshaping. To these reforms connect the echoes of media texts ridiculing the teacher and introducing the "super educator", as in the televised educational reality 'teacher make-over' series *Klass 8a* (Strix Television, 2007; 2011).

In the analysed texts some examples of responses from teacher voices, principals or others, to the discourse set by *Dagens Nyheter* are found in blogs (<http://www.jlsu.se/det-ar-inte-lararnas-fel/>), as well as in a podcast and Facebook group named *Its the Fault of the Teachers*. Here some murmurs of alternative discourses, which do not fully accept the set dichotomy, can be heard.

## Conclusions

As earlier stated, the limited empirical material underlying this study means that it constitutes a qualitative exemplification of case character and that its heuristic interest consists of proposed patterns to be compared to results from similar studies. But, which are those patterns and what kind of comparisons can be made?

The interest in studying the constant becoming of policy as material and enactment which this study shares with Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012), among others, has here been connected to the media as apparatus and to the forces of signification at work there. The stronger versions of the dominant discourses in 2014, in comparison to 1998, indicate how the sets of ideas, which produce and legitimise certain taken for granted truths about education and teachers, as stated by Thompson and Cook (2015), are moulding into set signifier systems.

The lack of murmurs, of other voices and alternatives, such as teacher voices, may be read as an indication that strong forces work to produce educational subjectivities akin to those introduced by Maguire (2014), hence strengthening her results regarding the way policy discourse works towards governmentality. However, the openness to the material force, and to the ways matter and bodies are incorporated into the process, also gives room for other subjectivities (c.f. Ulmer, 2014). While the findings of this study do seem to present a situation where discourse is “being done to” subjects, it is important to remember that the unfolding of the world, according to Deleuze, includes bodies, matter and language nonhierarchically (c.f. MacLure, 2014); multiplicity and pass-words are only temporarily suppressed.

In the analysis, the strong forces of crisis and deficit, also illustrated by many researchers (c.f. Cohen, 2011; Thomas 2011; Slater 2015), are clearly shown,

as are also the ways that work towards a taken for granted situation that supports neoliberal and neoconservative policy reforms. Both the contempt of progressivism and the longing back to a lost nostalgic past are visible in the analysis. Thus, the case for the inter-discursive connections between the media and education policy may be strengthened through this study. Again, though, there are instances presented where multiplicity breaks through.

The media constitution changes in between the two studied electoral periods. The media apparatus is quite different in 2014 compared to that of 1998. Digitalisation has made possible other and an increased number of connections into the media apparatus by creating opportunities to link to comment fields, blogs and even further. Thus, digitalisation may open up for a future with multitude, difference and more voices, as put forth by Ulmer (2014). However, it proved a struggle to hear such murmurs of multiplicity and otherness. Again, the operating forces of the signifier systems, “order-words” and moulds appeared despotic. A somewhat disappointing result, one may add.

This lack of otherness may be partly due to my analysis falling into ‘tracing’ familiar ways to read and analyse educational media discourse, as warned by Mazzei and McCoy (2010). Some murmurs of otherness may be discerned though, as exemplified by the connection of a stand-up-comedian video joking about nappy competence evaluation in preschool, blogs and Facebook groups, adding thus an ironic twist to the discussion. The multimedia connections of different modalities into the policy construction process, or machine, and what they bring require a deeper study.

In the readings, the conditions of possibility for education are shown to be heavily impaired by strong forces and structured dichotomies. In 1998, the strong dichotomy of ‘knowledge school’ and ‘woolly school’ is at work, and in

2014 the force of international tests dichotomises education into an either-or-situation of success or failure. The assumption of one way of ordering, of two, and only two possible education policy positions in the media discourse on education is rarely challenged. In the editorial media texts, and the forum discussions and blogs connected to them, education policy is constructed as though it was about ‘cheering on’ one or the other team in an ongoing game or battle. This gives credibility to one line of argument or logic by giving the impression that the alternative is mutually exclusive. Other options are thereby constructed as impossible to achieve. As forces working on the becoming of education policy, these dichotomies give little room for alternative discourse or change.

Contrary to 1998, where ‘the good teacher’ was subjectified as a hard-working hero, in 2014, the individual teacher is, by large, subjectified as accountable for the declining student result levels which are shown in national and international tests and decreasing grades. The performativity and teacher-as-problem discourse, as well as the international teacher bashing tendencies now seem to operate on the Swedish teacher as well. These ‘anti-teacher tendencies’ could, hopefully, lead to educators’ reacting and revolting to relocate difference and present their professional counter-stories. There are some signs of such resistance in teacher blogs and comments referred to in the study, but the cries are not loud.

The dominant signifier systems boxing up of educational mission and teacher subjectivities seem to produce a policy enactment situation that is locked into specific and limited ways of understanding, and hence reforming, or dreaming education. In accordance with the proposals by Slater (2015), Ulmer (2014) and Säfström (2014), this study posits a case for education policy researchers and stakeholders of education to work towards more resistance, difference,

ambiguity, contingency and change to the education policy processes. This may be accomplished by turning the signifier system backwards, that is, to release inherent multitudes by making other connections to the education machine. In other words, agents must connect different policy stories, other experiences of education, other truths and teacher subjectivities, as well as different modalities to enrich and diversify the conditions of possibility for education.

Despite an oversaturated media situation where content is abundant, while attention is scarce (Goodman, 2004), the polymorph digitalised media apparatus, with its rhizomatic hypertexts, is here argued to constitute a possibility. Some earlier limitations, such as that of editors as gatekeepers, have been removed, or at least no longer fully affect the apparatus' potential connections. Thus, a media as apparatus may be connected, which makes possible the becoming of an educational policy that is other and different.

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<sup>1</sup>Independent schools were introduced in Sweden in 1992. They are run by other providers than the municipalities but are free of charge, funded by the state and follow the same curriculum as schools run by the municipalities.

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