

## Evidence-Based Practice and Power Struggles Over Pedagogic Practices in “High-” and “Low-Stakes Accountability” Contexts

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### Abstract

The Norwegian Knowledge Promotion Reform has followed international trends by combining centralised control over results with increasing autonomy in the curriculum and choice of methods. Local and professional autonomy is challenged through the combination of result-based and evidence-based accountability. However, whether the stakes related to results are “high” or “low” could impact the role of “evidence-based practices” in schools. This paper investigates how evidence-based practices have formed part of the power struggles in the forming of pedagogic practice in a high- versus low-stakes accountability context in Norway. In the two municipalities, evidence-based practices have been used to legitimise and exercise authority, increase external control and create hierarchies between different stakeholders. The influence of teachers and parents has been limited, as has been the possibility to adapt the teaching to students’ diverse needs. However, local gatekeepers have been important for relieving external pressure, and for ensuring local and professional autonomy.

## Keywords

Evidence-based practice, high- and low-stakes accountability, Bernstein, Norway, the Norwegian capital Oslo, rural municipality, autonomy

## High- and low-stakes accountability, evidence-based practice and power struggles

The role of research in pedagogic practice has been given greater emphasis through the introduction of “evidence-based practice” or “what works” (henceforth: EBP). This specific knowledge form is often actualised in relation to policies combining increased autonomy in the choice of methods with centralised control in the form of result-based accountability. This combination of decentralised and centralised control makes the formation of a pedagogic discourse an important site of ideological struggle between the state-selected agents and ministries, on the one side, and educators in schools and colleges on the other (cf. Bernstein, 2000). However, the role of EBP in the forming of local pedagogic practices may be difficult to foresee as it can be influenced by local differences in the accountability system. This paper aims to investigate the role of EBP in two Norwegian municipalities that put different emphasis on results in their management of schools.

Internationally, a neoliberal discourse emphasising competition and marketisation to improve quality and efficiency in educational outcomes is dominating (Ball, 2003). In this, New Public Management (NPM) has been a key mechanism in political reforms in public sectors, introducing a new mode of power. Central characteristics of NPM are the combination of output control measured by quantitative performance indicators, incentives for performance, introduction of quasi-markets and competition between agencies (Clarke & Newman, 1997). The forms of control combine centralised control over results, with decentralised control through providing autonomy in professional work:

The logic of managerialism is that managers are accountable for what they deliver, but not for how they deliver it. It is results, not methods, that count, and to achieve good results managers must have the maximum room for manoeuvre in the decision making process. (Clarke & Newman, 1997, p. 64)

However, the degree to which external result expectations impact the forming of pedagogic practices in schools could depend on whether the stakes related to the results are experienced as high or low. The accountability system can be described as “high-stakes” when the results, reported to the public, are used to make important decisions that affect pupils, teachers, schools and communities in, for example, grade promotion, salaries, ranking and categorisation (Au, 2007). It has also been demonstrated that the stakes related to the public ranking of results can be especially high when school choice is part of the system (see Bjordal & Haugen, 2021; Howe et al., 2001). “Low-stakes accountability” seems to exert less pressure on teachers and gives them more autonomy, leaving teachers in control. However, it is also

found that the difference between high- and low-stakes testing on teacher autonomy may not always differ that much as “NPM- influenced governmentality works not only through technologies of domination, but also engages the self by harnessing the teachers’ sense of autonomy, transforming it into self-control” (Hangarther, 2019, p. 4; Thiel et al., 2017). This may be explained by how NPM creates a culture or system of “terror” of “performativity” through judgements, comparisons and displays (Ball, 2003).

It is argued that NPM plays a key role in replacing professional-ethical regimes in schools with entrepreneurial-competitive regimes, and by introducing a process of de-professionalisation where the approaches of accountants, lawyers and managers are made more powerful (Ball, 2017; see also Evetts, 2009). In relation to this, teachers are held accountable for using methods that have demonstrated efficiency; “evidence-based accountability”. With this in mind, “a research-based teaching profession is one that accounts for itself in terms of the details of its practice to those outside by appeal to the following of explicitly formulated procedures backed by research evidence” (Hammersley, 2007, p. 33). This way of framing “professionalism” has paved the way for stakeholders outside school that can provide “evidence-based practice” to improve the work schools do.

EBP can be related to a revival in the fortunes of positivist ideas that were influential for much of the social and educational research in the twentieth century that was based on natural-science methodological models.

[W]hat was taken from natural science was the idea that experimental method is the key to intellectual progress. [...] What was seen as important about experiments was that they involve controlling and measuring the effects of causal factors on outcomes by means of explicit, and therefore replicable, procedures. Where experimentation was not possible, positivists argued that statistical methods of controlling variables should be employed. (Hammersley, 2007, p. xi)

The appropriateness of the natural-science model came under question from the 1960s, and as it has been revived through NPM, the disputes related to which role educational research could or should play in relation to policymaking and/or practice have risen again (see for example Hammersley, 2002, 2007). Proponents of EBP argue that it is problematic that teachers only engage in research and theory to a little degree, and that there is no agreed knowledge base for teachers. EBP can thus represent a way to “professionalise” teachers’ work by reducing the gap between research, theory and practice and providing a resource for guiding professional action. In this way, “research can play a more effective role in advancing the professional quality and standing of teachers” (Hargreaves, 2007). An important critique of EBP is that it challenges professional judgement, contributes to instrumentality and fails to take complexity and context into account in the forming of educational practice. Furthermore, it is argued that EBP represents a democratic problem as it “restricts the opportunities for participation in educational decision making” (Biesta, 2007, p. 1), and contributes to de-

politicising the structural, value, and moral issues in education (Ball, 2007). However, it is found that most researchers occupy more subtle positions between these poles (Hammersley, 2007, p. x), that the various positions in the debate are difficult to grasp and that the debate is impeded by a lack of clarity and misunderstandings (Kvernbekk, 2013). This also relates to the fact that there are different ideas on how the relation between evidence/data and practice should be understood and put into play, and consequently how the evidence/data should be used (Biesta, 2007; Kvernbekk, 2013).

Summing up, the introduction of NPM in combination with EBP makes the forming of pedagogic practice a central arena for a power struggle, and it is difficult to foresee how this struggle will play out in different contexts. This relates to how both centralised and decentralised forms of control are in play (centralised control over results combined with increased professional autonomy), and how the stakes related to results may differ (high or low), as well as how different EBPs may relate differently to policy and practice. Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to investigate what role EBP is described as playing in power struggles in different contexts. The problem statement for this paper is: *How is EBP described as forming part of power struggles in setting the premises for the forming of pedagogic practices in a high-stakes versus a low-stakes accountability context?*

The problem statement will be explored in the Norwegian context.

### **The Norwegian policy context**

The Knowledge Promotion reform (Meld. St. 30., 2003–2004) followed international neoliberal trends. On the one hand decentralising control through giving the local authorities more autonomy to decide how to run schools, with local curriculum planning and quality assessments. On the other hand, centralising control through a *national quality assessment framework* including national testing in reading, mathematics and English, centrally set exams, user surveys, international assessments, state supervision and a national website where results were published (Bjordal & Haugen, 2021). National testing was described as a tool for development work that would inspire increased efforts.

Furthermore, teachers were given increased methodological freedom combined with a less detailed curriculum (Imsen & Ramberg, 2014) as a measure to improve how teaching could be adapted to the diversity in the pupil population and pupils' individual needs. At the same time, it was argued that the local leadership of schools should be stronger, and that school principals should be taking more responsibility for overseeing knowledge goals to increase "learning intensity". Lately, added-value measures based on national testing and examinations to document how much the school contributes to pupils' learning have been developed (see Steffensen et al., 2017), and it has been found that the administrative consequences and pressure on local and school stakeholders have been increasing over time (Camphuijsen et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it has been argued that the Norwegian accountability system is characterised by low-stakes accountability since it is based on a combination of professional trust

and cooperation (Hovdhaugen et al., 2017). However, depending on the local political governance, the stakes related to results may differ between municipalities (Bjordal & Haugen, 2021).

The Knowledge Promotion reform also addressed that the use of research that could provide practical solutions should be increased, and that research should be made available to schools and teachers (Meld. St. 30., 2003–2004). In the evaluation of the reform in 2015, the role of EBP has been accentuated and directly related to “teacher professionalism” in the form of “evidence-based accountability” (see above): “the teachers’ professional freedom implies a *responsibility* to carry out well-founded and research-based choices of methods and approaches in the teaching” (NOU 2015: 8, my translation). It has been concluded that in both the evaluation and the revision of the Knowledge Promotion reform that this professional freedom is based on an implicit understanding that evidence and research are developed outside the professional community (Støren, 2022, p. 54). One external agent that has contributed evidence-based practices to Nordic schools is the state-sponsored centre, “Norwegian Center for Child Behavioural Development” (NUBU), which was established during the same period as the reform was introduced. NUBU has the role of “developing, implementing, quality assuring and evaluating evidence-based practices for children and young people, families, kindergartens, and schools” (NUBU, 2022). It is found that through such stakeholders as NUBU, the use of EBP is expanding in the Nordic countries (Forskningsrådet, 2016).

Summing up, we see that for the central authorities, the emphasis on both result-based and evidence-based accountability has become stronger since the introduction of the reform.

### **Macro- and micro-relations and power struggles**

The *pedagogic device* (Bernstein, 2000) is a theory on how power works on both the macro- and micro-levels, and how the different arenas for cultural production, reproduction and transformation of culture are related. The pedagogic device regulates the communication it makes possible, and through this it acts selectively on the meaning potential. It has three interrelated rules that are not ideologically free, and thus become sites for appropriation, conflict and control: *the distributive rules*, *the recontextualising rules* and *the evaluative rules*.

The distributive rules translate sociologically into the field of production of discourse, specialised forms of knowledge, forms of consciousness and forms of practice in social groups. The function of these rules is to regulate the relationship between power, social groups, forms of consciousness and practice. As explained earlier, the centralised control over the distributive rules related to the Knowledge Promotion reform is based on a neoliberal discourse where national testing of basic skills and EBP are important ingredients. However, the decentralisation of control over how to run schools and undertake local curriculum planning gives the municipalities the opportunity to form/appropriate the distributive rules at the local level. Thus, there may be a struggle over the distributive rules between the central and local authorities, both in terms of how they emphasise results and EBP.

The *recontextualising* rules regulate the formation of the specific pedagogic discourse and are created by the recontextualising field. As with the distributive rules, the recontextualising rules are another important site where there will be a struggle between the authorities. Bernstein distinguishes between the *Official Recontextualising Field* (ORF) which is created and dominated by the state and its selected agents and ministries (for example NUBU) and the *Pedagogic Recontextualising Field* (PRF) (for example educators in schools and colleges).

If the PRF can have an effect on pedagogic discourse independently of the ORF, then there is both some autonomy *and* struggle over pedagogic discourse and its practices. But if there is only the ORF, then there is no autonomy. Today, the state is attempting to weaken the PRF through its ORF, and thus attempting to reduce the relative autonomy over the construction of pedagogic discourse and over its social contexts. (Bernstein 2000, p. 33)

NUBU represents one agent through which the state can control the construction of the pedagogic discourse in the schools across the municipalities and may thus regulate what is decentralised in relation to the forming of pedagogic practice. However, as a discourse moves from its original site, it undergoes “ideological transformation according to the play of specialised interests among the various positions in the recontextualising field” (Bernstein 2000, p. 114). This means that although an EBP is implemented, the realisation of the pedagogic practice may still take different forms.

The *evaluative rules* constitute any pedagogic practice and are found at the level of the acquirer. The key to pedagogic practice is continuous evaluation that condenses the meaning of the entire device. These rules are related to the whole purpose of the device, and thus determine what it is about, something that will have implications on the deepest cultural level (Bernstein, 2000). In this context, they refer to what counts as legitimate criteria for the acquisition. Local authorities and agents may base their evaluative rules on different criteria for what counts as legitimate acquisition of the distributive rules.

### ***Data material***

In this paper, the data material on how EBP forms part of the power struggles in setting the premises for pedagogic practice was collected in two municipalities characterised by high-versus low-stakes accountability: the capital of Norway, Oslo, and a rural municipality.

The conservative-led city government in the capital (1997–2015) implemented high-stakes accountability (cf. Au, 2007) through the combination of more standardised testing, competition between the schools, the practising of school choice, per capita funding, publication of school results and performance-related pay (for details, see Bjordal & Haugen, 2021; Haugen, 2019a, 2021). The data material was collected in two different research projects investigating the enactment of marketisation policies in the capital. One of the projects, led by Ingvil Bjordal (for details, see Bjordal, 2016; Bjordal & Haugen, 2021), examined how the marketisation

policies were experienced by school principals and teachers. Through a strategic recruitment of informants (15 school principals and 7 teachers) the voices from schools with different geographical locations and student compositions were represented. The other research project, led by Cecilie Haugen, was exploratory and focused on which challenges teachers and parents experienced that had evolved through the marketisation policies. The teachers were recruited as informants through an open invitation letter that was distributed through social media. Twelve teachers working in different primary, lower and upper secondary schools based in different geographical areas and with different student compositions showed interest in participating in the study. One teacher had five years of experience and the others had between 14 and 25 years of experience. This extensive experience gave perspectives on what had *changed* in schools through the current policies. Additionally, four representatives from the organisation “Parental Uprising in the Oslo School” against the governance system were interviewed. The aim was to gain insight into the roots of their resistance and how this was related to the governance system. The Parental Uprising had representatives from about 40 schools in the capital.

The data material was collected from 2013 to 2016. All in all, the 15 school principals and 19 teachers came from 24 different schools, representing primary, lower and upper secondary schools, and representing all the geographical school groups in the capital. The interviews were semi-structured and had in common that they focused on how marketisation and result-based management influenced schools’ and teachers’ work (for more details on the material and data collection see Bjordal, 2016; Bjordal & Haugen, 2021; Haugen, 2019a, 2021). The interviews were recorded and transcribed fully verbatim. Furthermore, documentation, such as school strategy plans, schedules and e-mail communication between the school and parents served to triangulate the claims that had been brought forward in the interviews. It should be stated that although positive voices were represented in the material, most of the informants were critical when it came to how result-based management and EBP impacted the forming of pedagogic practice. Whereas the positive voices talked about EBP improving results and as much-appreciated assistance in finding pedagogic solutions, the critical voices experienced that EBP, in combination with result-based management, was threatening professional autonomy and the possibility to adapt to the students’ diverse needs. What is interesting, however, is that regardless of the positive or critical position of the informants, a fairly similar picture emerges of how EBP formed part of the power struggles between the various stakeholders, which was the main interest in this study. The informants described the use of EBP in the schools in the capital as extensive and for many of them it represented an important issue of concern.

The other municipality was rural with about 40,000 inhabitants, and the result-based management was, compared to the capital, characterised as low-stakes accountability. The political steering committee was dominated by the political left. They had not introduced more testing, the results were not published and compared at the local level, and school choice was

not an option for parents. The use of EBP was described as very limited, as a stated priority was local development of practice through experience-based knowledge (Haugen, 2018, 2019c).

This municipality was an interesting case due to a hard and long-lasting conflict between a school and a group of parents over one of the EBP programmes provided by NUBU: PALS. PALS is originally an American programme named *SW\_PBIS (School-wide Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support)* that has been translated and adapted to the Norwegian context. PALS is implemented in about 8% of Norwegian schools (NUBU, 2023), and in many of the schools in the capital. As there were clear power struggles relating to PALS, the aim was to gain insight into how the struggle played out and what fueled it. One premise for the selection of informants was to obtain voices from both “sides”, from different positions in the hierarchy, and people who had good insight into the process of implementing and using PALS and into the reasons that fuelled the conflict. The data material, collected in 2014 and 2015, was taken from semi-structured interviews with the municipal education authority director (critical), the school principal (positive), one positive teacher, and one critical and one positive parent. A weakness in the material was that no critical teachers were represented. As the school principal was the one who sent the invitation to participate, the fact that he had a positive view of PALS could play an important role. Additionally, the PALS manual that has been authored by representatives from NUBU (see the description of PALS authored by representatives from NUBU in Arnesen et al., 2006) represented a data source for investigating how control over pedagogic practice is *intended to be formed* (see also Haugen, 2019b). This could provide a picture of how the information from the informants as to how power worked could be rooted in the programme itself or it could perhaps be explained by how it was re-contextualised at the local level. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed fully verbatim.

Earlier publications relating to the data material from the capital examine how the accountability system was recontextualised in terms of school choice (Bjordal & Haugen, 2021; Haugen, 2019a), and look into relations and communication between the different stakeholders in the school organisation (Bjordal & Haugen, 2021), knowledge and pedagogic priorities (Bjordal & Haugen, 2021; Haugen 2021) and parents’ experiences (Bjordal & Haugen, 2021). Earlier publications relating to the conflict over PALS in the rural municipality examined the autonomy from the state in the recontextualising field (Haugen, 2019c), how the conflict could be related to social class and ideology (Haugen, 2018) and how the visions for school and society in the PALS programme formed part of current governance trends (Haugen, 2019b).

In this context, as the intention was to analyse the role of EBP in a high- versus low-stakes accountability context, data that specifically referred to how EBP was described as forming part of the power struggles in setting the premises for pedagogic practice were selected. The analysis was structured according to how the struggles played out in different relations and was related to different fields as described in the pedagogic device:

1. The relation between state/municipal leadership and the schools, with special emphasis on the control over the distributive rules.
2. The relation between agents working in the school, with special emphasis on the control over the recontextualising rules.
3. The relation between school and parents, with special emphasis on the control over the evaluative rules.

## **Analysis of power relations in the forming of pedagogic practices**

### ***Power struggles over the distributive rules***

#### **The capital of Norway**

In the capital, the centrally controlled distributive rules (national testing and EBP) were highly prioritised by the local authorities. The relation between standardised testing and EBP was tightly linked, as EBP was seen as an important measure for increasing schools' and teachers' results on national testing. Weak results legitimised that the control over schools' work exercised by the Education Authority was increasing. The Education Authority then established expectations or instructed the schools to implement EBP.

I think that I'm trusted by the Education Authority because we have succeeded with the strategy we have chosen [...] But if we should then have weaker results again, then I would experience a reduction in autonomy. (School principal in the capital)

The informants explained that EBP was used extensively in schools with weak results, but also in schools with good results. This was also related to how the Education Authority acted to control the schools' pedagogic practice through the promotion of EBP, supplying courses and programmes to the schools:

I have faith in that what we develop from the bottom up works better than what comes from the top down. But there was some pretty hard pressure [...], because those who started to use [EBP] gained better results. And if you didn't get the good results and hadn't implemented it [EBP], then you could be falling behind. It was up to the school principal [...] but there was still some pressure. (School principal in the capital)

The threat of losing autonomy disciplined the school principals to prioritise what was measured on the standardised testing, thus delimiting the autonomy in local curriculum planning and methodological freedom. In this way, EBP was tightly connected to the priority of the centrally controlled distributive rules, as the results from national testing dominated what counted as legitimate evaluation rules.

### **Rural municipality**

The priority of the centrally controlled distributive rules (national testing and EBP) was weaker in the rural municipality. However, the municipal education authority's director explained that there was an ongoing struggle between the central and local authorities over which knowledge should be used to construct the "truth" about the quality of the schools, as well as their knowledge and pedagogic priorities:

I say [to the municipal board]: there are numbers and then there are narratives. And if we just count, because this is about the professional story, then you still have to tell the whole story, [...]. I think that the task of a leader is to make sure that we address both the academic and the social aspects. I won't allow myself to be pressured. If the local authority wants a school leader who only wants to teach to the test, then they are welcome to do that, but then I won't be the one leading this. And I know that the school principals think that it's good that we work together to maintain that perspective. And the teachers think that it's good, because they still experience the pressure as high enough. [...] But we have result goals and ambitions, both in terms of the exams and national testing in this municipality. And the municipal board would like to have goals and results at the school level, but the political parties don't have a majority for that. So, I won't do it. (Municipal education authority's director)

PALS was implemented in only one school in the municipality after what the municipal education authority's director experienced as hard pressure from the central authorities to participate in the programme supplied by NUBU. In this encounter with the central authorities, the municipal education authority's director explained that she has maintained the boundaries between the central authorities and the schools to ensure local autonomy in setting the premises for the forming of pedagogic practice:

[PALS] was not financed by us. We received an invitation from the state directed at all schools, and I perceived that as pressure to participate. They wanted many schools to enrol [in this programme]. For some reason there was little interest here [in this municipality]. It first of all represents a dilemma at the political level, the politicians love very quick-fix solutions, I think. [...] And I was contacted [by the central authorities] who wanted to know why only one of the schools was interested. And then I answered that I don't believe in these programmes. I think we have developed a lot of good things ourselves. [...] And generally, in terms of programmes. In this municipality we haven't participated [...] regardless of which programme we have been offered. I don't believe in quick-fix recipes because following a recipe, yeah, then you're lost as a professional. (Municipal education authority's director)

Thus, in this municipality PALS was the source of the struggle between the central and local authorities in setting the premises for the forming of pedagogic practice. The results from national testing had a weaker position as evaluation rules in this municipality, something

which may help to explain how the centrally controlled forming of pedagogic practice through EBP was also less welcomed. In this struggle over the distributive rules, the municipal education authority's director had an important role as gatekeeper, maintaining a strong boundary between the state and schools by both rejecting invitations to use EBP promoted by NUBU, as well as seeking to relieve the result pressure on schools and ensure that priority was given to what was not tested.

### ***Power struggles over the recontextualising rules***

#### **The capital of Norway**

EBP was described as forming an important part of how power was exercised at many of the schools in the capital. Informants stated that the relation between the school principals and the teachers had become more hierarchical, with the school principal interfering in and controlling pedagogic practices. The implementation of EBP was often described as a top-down process where high result expectations from the Education Authority resulted in school principals increasing their control over teachers' work. In some schools' strategy plans, teachers' methodological freedom was described as a risk when it came to reaching the result goals and where the expectation that teachers conduct similar pedagogic practices was treated as imperative for reaching these goals. Thus, high trust was given to EBP and low trust was given to teachers' competence to form pedagogic practices.

The pupils encounter the same [pedagogic practice] everywhere. We try to make common systems, so we slowly but surely walk in step and act as a community [...] There's much tighter follow-up in the classroom [...] I will follow up all Norwegian and maths classes to make sure that the [work on a specific EBP] has been done. (School principal in the capital)

We were called in to learn classroom management [...] It was based on the new, so-called evidence-based research. [...] We watched a movie about how the teachers should write the goals on the blackboard and walk around and talk with the pupils. [...] And it's clear that we're expected to follow this procedure. (Teacher in the capital)

The interference and controlling through EBP had resulted in great tensions between the school leaders and teachers, but also between teachers. Teachers with extensive experience described EBP as related to a radically different form of professionalism than what they were used to, whereas the younger teachers were described as more positive to the use of EBP. Both school principals and teachers related EBP to a professional identity conflict that had evolved through the NPM:

There has been a big and long-lasting conflict here where the teachers have fought for their own methodological freedom, but where the Oslo school, centrally and through us school leaders, has said that: "No, you have too weak results, you have to use that and that learning programme" [...] The teachers just express exhaustion in a way. This

has created a huge amount of mistrust between school leaders and teachers. (School principal in the capital)

Evidence-based, that's the opposite of how we worked in the 90s and 2000s. Then we were supposed to create projects [...], develop something new, in line with Vygotsky. Something the world hadn't seen before and inspire others. Now: goal—what works, check, check. School industry [...] It becomes a mediocre school without a soul. There are colleagues who state that: "Oh, so good! Then I don't have to do it myself". That that's now the teacher's job. To leave the job to others. [...] This is how you do it technically [...] instead of being together with the pupils trying to ignite a spark, being with them socially, opening doors for them. (Teacher in the capital)

The combination of high result expectations and EBP subordinated the teachers in a school hierarchy, where some of them experienced that having long experience and being critical was not welcomed. The pedagogic practices were described as increasingly teacher-centred and standardised, where diverse pupil needs lost priority when it came to how teaching was adapted to them.

### **Rural municipality**

The school principal at the school that chose to implement PALS explained that the programme was implemented because they were experiencing and struggling with major behavioural problems that they wanted to solve. The argument for introducing the programme was thus not directly related to results. However, as explained above, according to the municipal education authority's director, teachers experienced that the pressure related to results was high, even if the stakes related to results were lower than in the capital. The introduction of the PALS programme was described as voluntary and welcomed by most of the teachers at the school. In this way, the teachers were voluntarily relinquishing their autonomy and increasing the central authorities' control in the forming of the pedagogic practice. This was in line with the stated intentions of the programme. PALS is described as a solution to what is referred to as "the implementation problem": "[T]here's little control over how teaching is carried out in Norwegian schools," a fact that "gives much room for private practice both at the individual school and by the individual teacher" (Arnesen et al., 2006, p. 15).

One technique that was used to make teachers comply with and ensure the manifestation of PALS in the school was to create a hierarchy within the teacher collective, a "PALS team". As stated in the PALS manual (Arnesen et al., 2006, p. 84), the "PALS team" has the responsibility for leading and coordinating the implementation work and should have a leader who has "high credibility among the staff, and [...] whose views often have high impact". The role of the PALS team is described as supervising, convincing, reducing resistance, controlling and ensuring loyalty to the PALS programme among the staff. In this way, the implementation is described as a closed process where the goal is to make everyone comply with forming a similar pedagogic practice based on the premises anchored in the PALS programme.

An important part of this control also involves delegitimising and rejecting other knowledge, ensuring a uniformation of the knowledge base used to form pedagogic practices among the teachers. Different perspectives/forms of knowledge are looked upon as a threat to the efficiency of the PALS programme, and there are strict criteria for making adjustments to the PALS model in the schools: “additional components should [...] be based on a theoretical foundation that is consistent with the PALS model, and they should have had their efficiency demonstrated through controlled evaluations” (Arnesen et al., 2006, p. 188). The goal is to standardise behaviour at such a concrete level that the teachers train to have similar practices through roleplay.

The uniformation of knowledge and behaviour in the PALS programme is legitimised through the claim that teachers’ differences can create potential problems for the efficiency of the programme. If teachers demonstrate resistance, this is explained as being rooted in “traditions and habits” (not that PALS itself might be controversial). Teachers are disciplined through collective processes that “challenge the individual teacher’s view on her own teacher role,” compelling the teachers to form a teacher role that is “executed to the benefit of the whole school’s learning environment” (Arnesen et al., 2006, p. 122). The teacher explained how the PALS programme was forming the teacher collective at their school into becoming one voice:

There was 100% support for the PALS programme among the teachers [...] It was good for us teachers to be given concrete and clear instructions. We had clear ways of behaving and responding in all arenas. [...] PALS made the work very easy and concrete. This is a “we” school where we stand together as colleagues. (Teacher rural municipality)

Hence, the creation of hierarchical relations and strong control over the knowledge teachers use to form pedagogic practices is how the PALS programme is intended to work. Demonstrated efficiency (the evidence-base in PALS) forms the evaluation rules for legitimate acquisition.

### ***Power struggles between school and parents over the evaluative rules***

#### **The capital of Norway**

In the capital, parents’ experiences of EBP were important for organising the parent uprising. They explained that the high result pressure on schools and the extensive use of EBP was problematic for many pupils. Parents and many of the teachers stated that the inherent values and effects of the diverse EBP programmes could be problematic, regardless of their “efficiency”. They described that some of the EBP programmes were leading to segregating practices, placing too high pressure on children, putting too much focus on external motivation, using too hard assessment, stigmatising pupils and using public shaming, where individual pupils became responsible for collective punishment and the forming of strong hierarchical

relations between teacher/pupil/parents. Regardless of what they described as problematic values and effects, the so-called evidence base often triumphed over the local experiences, even when the EBP didn't "work":

There was a pupil who they [the school] wanted to give an ADHD diagnosis to after three weeks because he couldn't sit still. But what can you expect? An immature 6-year-old is expected to sit still for 90 minutes and take responsibility for his own learning? It's crazy! But they [the school] hold on to this practice. Because it's "research based". What this teacher actually says to me is: "There are many children in this class that [the EBP] doesn't work for". And then I say: "But then you have good reasons to change the practice!" But he responds: "No, because it's been decided by the school principal." (Parent in the capital)

The combination of high result pressure and EBP had, according to the parents, threatened the adaptation to the pupils' diverse needs. Some parents were even recommended to move their child to a private school if they were dissatisfied with EBP.

He [the teacher] recommends that we move [our child] to a different school [...] Out of the test system, then you have to go to a private school. 60–70 schools are following it [EBP that causes problems for the child]. Freedom [in terms of school choice] should not mean having to take your child out of the community [...] Our child can't continue [at this school]. (Parent in the capital)

EBP was experienced as contributing to forming the relation between school and home in a hierarchical manner, where parents experienced having a weaker voice in the collaboration between school and family. When parents expressed concerns about how the EBP programme created problems for their child, they experienced that the dialogue was shut down and their concerns delegitimised by referring to the practice being based on "evidence". The evaluation rules for pupils' acquisition formed at a decontextualised and general level (the evidence base of the programme), triumphed over individual pupils' needs, even when their problems were related to EBP itself.

### **Rural municipality**

As mentioned above, the PALS programme was the root of a conflict between the school and a group of parents in the rural municipality. These parents also experienced that the programme contributed to a clearer hierarchisation between school and home, leaving the parents with a weaker voice. Whereas the teacher stated that the PALS programme was especially positive for pupils who demonstrated a high degree of negative behaviour, the critical parents were concerned about how the PALS programme had very different and often problematic effects on the pupils, where some became almost too obedient, some experienced anxiety and others became oppositional. At the same time, the parents expressed great con-

cern regarding the values inherent in the PALS programme and how they contributed to stigmatising children, and were too teacher-centred, instrumental, and impersonal in communication:

The PALS programme doesn't focus on pupils as human beings, the focus is on making them demonstrate good behaviour. Categorising pupils according to their behaviour and using rewards and punishment to make them behave a specific way is basically treating children in the same way you train dogs. The development of the pupil as an all-round person is ignored [...] Through PALS the pupils' voices are silenced, the overall goal of the system is to have all pupils behave in the same way. It ignores the fact that disruptive behaviour can be a way of communicating that something is very wrong. You cannot create a good learning environment through standardised programmes. Instead of teaching the pupils democratic values and having them participate as real people in school life, you silence their voices. PALS builds a strong hierarchy, where the teacher is assigned the role of being the police or guardian. The rewards and punishments are the way of communicating. (Mother PALS school)

When the parents tried to discuss these issues with the teachers to influence the forming of the pedagogic practice, they experienced that the dialogue was closed through the teachers' collective loyalty to the PALS programme:

The teachers surrendered their professional judgements to the programme. Instead of giving professional reasons for their practice they responded: "Because we're a PALS school. The PALS team at the school has said so and we are loyal to the system." This made it difficult to have a dialogue and adjust the practice to the pupils' various needs. We lost our voice as parents. We were told to move to a different school if we were not happy with the way things worked. We felt unwanted and stigmatised as difficult parents. (Mother PALS school)

The rejection of and disinterest in answering the parents' concerns also resonated with what is stated in the PALS manual. Even though the explicit intention is to have adapted teaching in the programme, the adjustments are "more of the same", but with more intensity. The PALS manual states that different approaches to the upbringing of children in school and at home can be a problem. PALS builds on an extended collaboration between home and school and emphasises that the child should meet the same way of thinking and practising in both school and home so that it does not find itself in what is referred to as a "conflict of loyalty" (Arnesen et al., 2006). Parents of children demonstrating a high degree of problem behaviour are offered "parental training" as help and support in their upbringing. The parental training programme builds on many of the same principles as PALS and is also offered by NUBU. In other words, when parents described the relation between school and home as clearly hierarchical where their voices were silenced, this may be explained by the fact that ensuring the families' loyalty to the programme also forms part of the programme.

However, whereas the critical parents found the dialogue with the school difficult, they received good support when they contacted the municipal education authority's director:

At this school there was a group of teachers who were very eager to participate [in the PALS programme]. [...] The school principal can say whatever he wants, but finally I had to confront him and the group leader, saying that: "You have implemented a programme that is supposed to work so well in leading pupils, but all it does is create resistance among the parents!" So, I forced, or maybe forced is too strong a word, but I strongly recommended them to opt out of the programme. (Municipal education authority's director)

The strong support from the municipal education authority's director can relate to how she, in step with the parents, was critical of the ideological anchoring of the programme and how it conflicted with what she regarded to be legitimate evaluation rules of the school: "PALS works against the core values of Norwegian education" (Municipal education authority's director). The tensions between the different stakeholders could, in addition to what they described as problematic effects of the programme, be explained as being rooted in an ideological conflict on what they counted as legitimate evaluation rules.

### **Summary and discussion of the findings**

The informants described power struggles related to distributive rules, recontextualising rules and evaluation rules, both between the central and local authorities, and between the various stakeholders in the schools. In such a way, EBP formed part of an ideological conflict relating to both the content and form of the education, but also relating to the power different stakeholders should have in the system. The expansion of EBP was very limited in the rural municipality compared to the capital, demonstrating that political leadership was important for how both result-based and evidence-based accountability played out in the two municipalities. Thus, the local authorities could act as important gatekeepers ensuring local autonomy over the forming of pedagogic practice when the central authorities sought to control the recontextualising field. However, although the local autonomy was high in the rural municipality, it was also fragile, as the pressure on results was still experienced as high.

The analysis also demonstrated that regardless of high- or low-stakes accountability, EBP was used to exercise authority and increase control in the forming of pedagogic practices. EBP was described as contributing to internal control in the schools through creating clearer hierarchies between school principals and teachers, within the teacher community and between school and parents. Even though EBP was welcomed by teachers collectively or individually, the EBPs could be seen as contributing to replacing occupational control of the practitioner/client's work interactions and thereby "limiting the exercise of discretion and preventing the service ethic that has been so important in professional work" (Evetts, 2009, p. 23). The described identity conflict between younger and more experienced teachers in the capital and the descriptions of how EBP contributed to closed dialogues between school and parents

pointed out that hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making were promoted by EBP. What was an issue of concern in this regard was that even when the EBP was experienced as working counterproductively to the best of the students' interests or against parents' values, it was still described as triumphing over local considerations. Thus, the intention in the Knowledge Promotion reform to strengthen teachers' autonomy with the goal of improving the adapted teaching for students' diverse needs was clearly challenged by EBP in both the high- and low-stakes accountability context.

In referring to the debate on which role EBP plays or should play in the education field (cf. introduction), I would argue that an interesting question to investigate further is whether the findings on how EBP contributed to forming clearer hierarchical relations between different stakeholders and inflexible pedagogic practices, regardless of high- or low-stakes accountability, is relevant in the bigger picture. If so, from a policy perspective, the question is whether this represents a welcome development in the professional work in schools.

In relation to the political intention of making teachers' work "research-based", which *form* of research is emphasised will potentially have a major impact on what both "autonomy" (cf. Haugen & Hestbek, 2017) and "research literacy" might mean. The example from a teacher describing a teacher identity conflict in relation to the use of knowledge in the form of theoretical perspectives versus EBP, as described above, demonstrates that what counts as legitimate knowledge has deep implications for teachers' professional role and identity (cf. "intellectuals" or "technicians", Ball, 2007). I would argue that what is at stake in the struggle between research positions in the educational field is the potential for a democratic anchoring of education and the potential for professionals to take complexity into account in the forming of pedagogic practice. However, which knowledge form is considered more relevant cannot be separated from how the schools' and teachers' work is governed and controlled.

### Article history

Received: 22 Mar 2023

Accepted: 30 Nov 2023

Published: 07 Dec 2023

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