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## Certification of Teachers: Tensions in a New Signature Reform

**Abstract:** Professional certification or registration is a designation earned by an individual. It is an authorization materialized as a document bearing the signature of a person given the authority to “sign off” professionals. A signed document also signals the “professionalism” of the profession by indicating the capacities that are expected of a professional and the competencies that are required for the successful exercise of an occupation—the desirable components of professional practice. However, the implications and logics of a signing process vary according to different factors, such as status, jurisdiction and societal legitimacy. Drawing on a case from Sweden, this paper investigates and critically discusses the logics of the recent reform of certification of Swedish school teachers. Applying a theoretical distinction between the logics of professional “responsibility” and “accountability,” we indicate embedded consequences for the signing process and teacher professionalism.

**Keywords:** teacher certification, logics of responsibility versus accountability, professionalism

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Professional certification or registration is a designation earned by an individual. It is an authorization materialized as a document bearing the signature of a person given the authority to “sign off” professionals. That signature confirms that the person to whom the document is issued is formally qualified to perform a professional job. It is an acknowledgement of educational achievement, and the content of the “signed document” indicates what is seen as significant knowledge in legitimating a profession’s claim of jurisdiction and autonomy (Abbott, 1988). In this sense, the signature is important for the “professionalization” of both the individual professional and the profession, as a manifestation of the historical and social ambition of an occupational group to achieve status and a position in society. Professionalization is, in that sense, a measure of the societal strength and authority of an occupational group (Englund, 1996, p. 76).

At least as significantly, a signed document, or certificate, signals the “professionalism” (Hoyle, 1980) of the profession. It indicates the capacities that are expected of a professional and the competencies that are required for the successful

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exercise of an occupation—the desirable components of professional practice (Englund, 1996, p. 76). Embedded in this understanding of professionalism is what we may call “the moral base of professionalism” (Sockett, 1993), something of a “moral navigator” guiding professionals in their work. Such guidance is based in the responsibilities professionals are assigned when they become members of a profession regulated by a *social trustee* contract to serve individuals *and* society (Brint, 1994; Durkheim, 1957/2001; Freidson, 2001; Sullivan, 2005). Crucially here, the “owner” of the certificate has delegated to them discretionary power to decide how to meet the needs of both individuals and society, because the professional is *trusted* to be the person best qualified to make decisions in a justifiable way within his or her professional field (Molander, Grimen, & Eriksen, 2012). Ideally, the certificate is a guarantee of high-quality professional work and indicates the relationship between formal education and lifelong professional development, a part of how the profession internally and continuously works to improve its “professionalism” (Englund, 1996).

A “signed certificate,” therefore, is not only a document of importance to the individual professional, but also one that matters to all citizens, because professionals play a crucial role in and for the welfare state and for the public good. It may thus be argued that an analysis of the content of such a document, as well as of the process of “signing off” professionals, will inform us what knowledge, values and dispositions are expected of the professionals concerned—but also what professional values are at stake and what is emphasized as significant in society.

In this paper, the complexity of responsible professional *practice* will only be indicated and not discussed. The multiple implications of professional responsibility for practice, and the embedded tensions professionals must deal with, as well as the responsibilities for higher education to qualify for it, have been thoroughly discussed elsewhere (e.g. Dahlgren, Solbrekke, Karseth, & Nyström, in press; Solbrekke, 2007; Solbrekke & Heggen, 2009; Solbrekke, Heggen, & Engebretsen, 2013; Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2014; Sugrue & Solbrekke, 2011). In this paper, we focus on possible implications of a changed practice of certifying professionals and how these may introduce new logics of regulation of professional work. We will consider and investigate the recent reform of registration of Swedish school teachers and preschool teachers. While the discussion is as relevant to preschool teachers, given the limits of this paper we will concentrate here on the case of school teachers. The reform may be regarded as an example of a global “reform movement” in which policy makers engage directly with defining quality criteria for “good teaching”. It mirrors a general trend in which politicians seek to influence the practice of teaching and teacher education by prescribing learning outcomes and indicating ways of working (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2014). Thus we believe the discussion is of relevance also beyond the national Swedish context.

The reform introduced a new signing practice for admission to the teaching profession, initiated by politicians, and it had a clear ambition to improve the quality of teachers by introducing new requirements as part of the “signing off” process. With reference to the distinction between professionalization and professionalism outlined above, we will relate our analysis in particular to what we have defined as “professionalism,” as this is the dimension that captures what is required of good teaching. By investigating the intentions of and directives for the reform as they occur in authoritative documents, we will identify the logics embedded in the content of and procedures for the new signing practice. In that connection, we will critically discuss how these different logics create tensions and contradictions with regard to improving the professionalism of the teaching profession.

The paper consists of five parts. First, we contextualize the case of the Swedish teacher registration reform. Secondly, we present our analytical framework, which builds on a distinction between the logic of professional responsibility and the logic of accountability. Thirdly, we present our methodological approach, which is characterized as one of reflexive interpretation. In the fourth section, we analyze the content and form of the signature reform and demonstrate possible interpretations of the signing process with reference to the two logics. Finally, we provide

some tentative conclusions about the role of the teaching profession, represented by the teacher unions, in the development of the reform.

## The Swedish teacher registration reform

The reform of teacher registration in Sweden, which we refer to in the following as the “signature reform,” is a result of increased involvement by Swedish politicians in the teaching profession over the last 10–15 years (Fransson, 2012a, pp. 21–29). The Social Democratic government set up an inquiry in 2006 to consider whether there was a need to introduce new forms of certification of teachers. At the core of its deliberations was whether the state or the professional unions should be the final signing authority. Directly after a change of government in autumn 2006, the Non-Socialist coalition government took over and decided new terms of reference for the inquiry. The mandate was changed from an open investigation into whether there was a need for certification of teachers and where the authority to sign off new teachers should be placed, to an inquiry into how a *state-based* system of certification of teachers should be developed. This Inquiry on Teachers’ Qualifications and Authorization presented its report in 2008, entitled “Registration and stricter qualifying rules” (SOU 2008:52), which defined the direction of the subsequent political process leading to the final decision and directives on the signature reform.

The explicit purpose of the reform presented by the National Agency for Education (a central agency of the Swedish government) in 2011 was to raise the level of skills among teachers, in order to improve the quality of educational services, the results achieved, and also the status of the profession (National Agency for Education, 2011a). The new requirements for permanent employment as a teacher included both a teacher education degree and a successfully completed probationary year. The probationary year, as articulated by the National Agency for Education, was to serve two purposes: to provide the new teacher with an introduction to the profession, and to provide a basis for assessing whether or not he or she is suitable for the profession. Under the new system, school principals were given responsibility for assessing whether or not a teacher should be recommended for registration, but the assessment was to be performed and documented in accordance with regulations drawn up by the National Agency for Education. The documentation and recommendation from the principal formed the basis for the Agency’s decision on whether or not to grant the teacher registration.

A core feature of the reform was that, through the direct involvement of politicians, important means were introduced for the state to control the teaching profession and qualification for it in new ways. The power to define the new regulations embedded in this reform was now in the hands of the National Agency for Education. However, as part of the development and implementation of the reform, the teaching profession was involved as a reference group, represented by the different teacher unions and representatives of school leaders, and these representatives were invited to discuss the reform and the regulations associated with it, as underlined by Anna Ekström, director general, and Charlotte Wieslander, head of division, at the National Agency for Education (Ekström & Wieslander, 2013). Thus, it may be argued that the profession itself has also been a party to redefining its mandate and responsibilities and what its members are signed off for.

It should be noted here that, in June 2013, leading representatives of the two teacher unions, the Minister for Education (Jan Björklund, Liberal Party), and leading representatives from the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL) and the free schools, in a ten-point program for the further development of the Swedish school system, announced a forthcoming change in the way the probationary year was to be organized. The suggestion presented in a newspaper article

(Björklund, Sirén, Jansson, Knape, & Valtersson 2013) was to move the assessment of student teachers from the probationary year to the teacher education institutes and to transform the introductory year to focus upon support and development.

In a memorandum from the Ministry of Education dated 17 December 2013, a new law is proposed (intended to come into effect on 15 May 2014), which will modify the requirements for certification. If the proposed legislation is passed, completion of a probationary year will no longer be a requirement for certification, but it will remain a general requirement for new teachers graduating after 2011, if they have no similar teaching practice from before. The responsibility for following up a new teacher remains with the authority employing the teacher (in practice probably the principal). Thus, although there are indications that the provisions will be modified in the future, the probationary year will remain as an expected qualification for new teachers, and the competence requirements and process for evaluating teachers will remain more or less the same as now.

It is of course impossible to see how the new signing practices could influence teacher professionalism in the long term, and it is difficult to predict the implications of the proposed law since the final regulations have yet to be drafted. However, according to the signals in the new policy text (Ministry of Education, 2013), it may be assumed that the “competence profile” that was developed and articulated in 2011 (National Agency for Education, 2011a) will be the starting point for further negotiations. The analysis in this article will therefore be based on current practice regarding the probationary year. Our research interest is in gaining greater insight into what logics are implied in the “signature reform” and to what extent the new practice will enhance teachers’ professionalism. For our close reading and analysis of the regulation, content and procedures of the reform, we draw on a distinction between professional responsibility and accountability (Englund & Solbrekke, 2011; Solbrekke & Heggen, 2009; Solbrekke & Englund, 2011).

## Analytical framework

A core characteristic of professional work such as teaching is that the profession is entrusted with responsibility for defining the standards of good work within its professional field or jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). This trust relies on the premise of professionals being held accountable for their actions. Societies trust professions as long as citizens perceive that those who have discretionary power delegated to them are able to apply discretionary reasoning in practice, to find the best solutions *in situ* and to justify their actions (Molander et al., 2012). In this sense, “accountability” connotes “good governance,” in the sense of being responsible for delivering good and efficient services and being accountable to the public (Becher, Eraut, & Knight, 1981). In modern political discourse, “accountability” holds promises of fair and equitable governance and can be seen as a “social relationship in which an actor feels an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct to some significant other” (Bovens, 2005, p. 184). However, the development and functioning of accountability strategies deployed as part of the New Public Management seem to emphasize efficient practices, and only to a minor extent are they able to comprise the practice of a holistic and complex professional responsibility of professionalism (e.g. Green, 2011; Mausethagen, 2013). To clarify what we mean, we below dig into what we have defined as the distinction between professional responsibility and accountability and envisage the different logics embedded in the two concepts.

### ***The distinction between professional responsibility and accountability***

In the regimes of “responsibility” and “accountability” we identify different logics and implications, and we see in them certain tendencies and tensions (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011). We argue that the notion of professional *responsibility* relates to a conception of the moral and social ideas of classical professionalism (Durkheim, 1957/2001), in which the meaning of community and solidarity is related to a conception of the “public” with a sense of shared experience and a commitment to communicating the meaning of that experience with and to others (Dewey, 1927/1988). Professional *accountability*, on the other hand, as it has been elaborated in closer conjunction with the New Public Management movement, is related to ideas more closely associated with individualism, flexibility, competition and efficiency (Svensson, 2008). The two concepts therefore conventionally carry different meanings, grounded in different sets of relations, different organizational structures and different degrees of professional autonomy and space for professional judgment, with consequences for professionals’ relationships of responsibility to their respective counterparts, such as students in the case of teachers (see Solbrekke & Englund, 2011, for further elaboration).

We consider that the distinctions between “responsibility” and “accountability” help us to identify the different logics embedded in the new reform. The two concepts are also useful in understanding the current tensions between *being professionally responsible* and *being held accountable*. Within the frame of New Public Management, “being held accountable” assumes that teacher education will improve if results are monitored against politically predefined and universally applicable standards (Englund & Solbrekke, 2011; Green, 2011; Solbrekke & Englund, 2011).

However, the development and functioning of strategies deployed by the “accountability movement” seem to emphasize practices that ignore the complexity of professional responsibility. An important function of the system of accountability is to reduce the ambiguity of professional practice. According to this logic, the necessary means are to oblige professionals to adhere to, and be accountable against, prescriptive policy standards of quality and to make their judgments and work transparent to the public (Green, 2011; Hoyle & Wallace, 2009).

Below, we present the different logics of, and the distinction between, professional “responsibility” and “accountability”, summarized in a table adapted from our earlier work (Solbrekke & Englund 2011, p. 855). Although this representation gives the appearance of concepts being either/or and static, they should be understood as evolved and evolving, fluid and fluctuating in different systems of logic that are reconfigured over time.

Table 1\*

*The logics and implications of professional responsibility and accountability*

<b>Professional Responsibility</b>	<b>(Professional) Accountability</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• based in professional mandate</li> <li>• situated judgement</li> <li>• trust</li> <li>• moral rationale</li> <li>• internal evaluation</li> <li>• negotiated standards</li> <li>• implicit language</li> <li>• framed by professions</li> <li>• relative autonomy and personally inescapable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• defined by current governance</li> <li>• standardized by contract</li> <li>• control</li> <li>• economic/legal rationale</li> <li>• external auditing</li> <li>• predetermined indicators</li> <li>• transparent language</li> <li>• framed by political goals</li> <li>• compliance with employer's/politicians' decisions</li> </ul>

\* Adapted from (Solbrekke &amp; Englund 2011, p. 855).

If the proposed distinction is persuasive, professional responsibility in teaching presupposes that teachers are given the opportunity to act responsibly *for* their students, by allowing them time and space for moral action and “room” in which professional discretion may be exercised. This is a premise for professionalism. A teacher must be able to listen to and have the capacity to see the needs of his or her student—though within a broader perspective, in a balance between individual and collective needs and concerns, and between internal responsibilities and external accountability claims. Such a notion of professional responsibility relies on *mutual trust* and respect between the one who *has taken responsibility for* the other (the professional agent) and the one who *is being taken responsibility for* (the student).

“Responsibility” in this sense relies on trust in the professional agent being qualified and willing to handle dilemmas and having the freedom to deliberate on alternative courses of action (Sugrue & Solbrekke, 2011). He or she is expected to be able to justify his or her decisions in the specific setting from a professional point of view, based in science as well as experience-based knowledge, and in moral reasoning (Green, 2011). However, the actions taken cannot always be predicted and their “outcomes” are not always measurable in terms of clear and predefined descriptors or indicators. Exercising such a responsibility is linked to a profession’s autonomy, because professionals are *trusted*, yet also *committed*, to act in the interests of others, this being at the core of professional work (Solbrekke, 2007; Sullivan, 2005). “Responsibility” implies proactive action, which the professional initiates and voluntarily takes responsibility for in accordance with the commitments embedded in the purpose of his or her profession. Within this pattern, professionals are entrusted with space to use their professional discretion in deciding what is “best” for their client and for society.

“Accountability,” on the other hand, implies quite different notions. It relates to concepts like accounting, and to legal, economic and organizational actions (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Svensson & Karlsson, 2008). It is bound to a contractual obligation, and emphasizes the duty to answer for your actions to others or to so-

ciety. In such a relationship, the professional agent's actions are to be controlled by evaluating them against predefined measures. Consequently, the practices of "accountability" are oriented towards control rather than trust. "Good services" are guaranteed by means of measuring and "accounting" instruments, rather than by relying on professional discretion. In other words, "accountability" is about reactive action: reporting on actions and results. The rationale underlying accountability in this sense is that "mechanisms" are of necessity based on clear descriptors and a simplified, "transparent" language, and are easily understood by all users of professional services. This is a logic based on the belief that clear points of reference will ensure and enhance the quality of work and hence of the service to the public as customers (Green, 2011).

## Method

Two sources of data constitute the empirical element of this paper's analysis. They comprise all the texts on the signature reform accessible on the National Agency for Education's official website as well as the Ministry of Education's official website. Additionally, recent research literature on the reform (Fransson, 2012a, b) has provided us with valuable information on the background and process of the reform. Since our primary research interest is in identifying the embedded logics of the reform in the light of the two analytical concepts of "responsibility" and "accountability," we approach the texts through the lenses of those concepts. However, our analytical approach is not purely deductive. Rather, we have applied an abductive mode of inquiry (cf. Forsberg, 2000, pp. 35–41; Peirce, 1903/1990), inspired by what Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2010) describe as "reflexive interpretation" (pp. 247–257), moving between analytical concepts and the different logics emerging from the texts. In our close reading of the texts, we did not seek precise and definite meanings. Rather, we identified multiple possible meanings, and our aim is to indicate possible consequences and challenges arising from the embedded logics of the reform.

The analysis was carried out in three phases. First, we read the texts individually and discussed our initial interpretations. Then we went back to the analytical framework and a second reading of the texts. This second phase was undertaken as a joint reading, in tandem with testing how the analytical concepts of professional "responsibility" and "accountability" helped us to identify the different logics emerging from the texts on the new signing practice. Finally, and after the review process, we went thoroughly through all new policy documents available on a possible revision of the reform. This iterative process also challenged our personal interpretations and moved us towards the acceptance of possible multiple meanings. As one researcher from Sweden and one from Norway, we also benefited from an insider–outsider perspective, which in turn opened up additional interpretations.

## Analysis: Possible interpretations of the "signing off" process

What the reading of the texts has illuminated is that the intentions of and directives for the new reform, as articulated in the documents on official websites, open the door to multiple and contesting meanings of teacher professionalism. Below, we will dig into some of these intentions and directives, which offer scope for both accountability and responsibility, as elaborated above. Space allows us to provide only a glimpse of this complexity, and we will concentrate here on the elements that in our view demonstrate the tension embedded in the new practice of signing off new teachers.

### ***The logic of accountability***

One way of interpreting the signature reform is to see it as a strengthening of the accountability logic. As argued above, it originally moved the main authority to sign from a professional level, that of pre-service teacher education, to the political and bureaucratic level. The new signature practice is defined within the framework of current governance, and by predetermined indicators, which, as argued earlier, are characteristics of the accountability logic. The regulations for the new practice formulated by the National Agency for Education contain clear provisions on how the probationary year is to be planned and implemented (SKOLFS 2011:37, §1). They include descriptions of what each new teacher has to accomplish in order to be registered as a teacher. An obvious goal is to introduce new teachers to as many professional tasks as possible in the probationary year (a full year of teaching). All new teachers are to try out “different teaching methods, parent-teacher-student interviews, assessment and documentation, and in certain instances develop individual development plans, in which assessment must be included” (authors’ translation, §8). Principals are given the responsibility to comply with these predefined directions, as they must thoroughly document how the teacher has accomplished the tasks defined by the National Agency for Education; in what ways, and to what extent, the aim has been fulfilled (§11).

The process of assessment of new teachers which all principals are obliged to carry out is defined in precise detail. For example, they are instructed to follow a specific procedure: (1) Observe the teacher in action on at least three different occasions; (2) Assess the teacher’s ability to teach and evaluate the progression of his or her development; (3) Document the observations made and follow up the assessment; (4) Ensure that the mentor, who has been appointed by the principal, documents his or her observations of, and conversations with, the teacher; (5) Ensure that the teacher documents his or her work. (6) On the basis of the various documentation, and after consultation with the mentor, report on the teacher’s teaching abilities as sufficient or not sufficient (§16). This report is then, under the current procedure, to be sent to the National Agency for Education, which reaches the final decision on whether or not the teacher is to be granted registration.

What all these prescriptions make clear is that detailed directives were introduced which the principal had to comply with. In accordance with this, the principal has to respond in a reactive manner to the requirements of an external audit—a reasoning and practice typical of the accountability logic

### ***The logic of responsibility***

On the other hand, the description of competencies highlighted in the regulations may perhaps offer scope for an interpretation in line with the logic of professional responsibility—thus encouraging professionalism. They are expressed under the headings of four “communication areas” in the “competence profile” for a teacher: “The encounter with the student” (§17), “Leadership” (§18), “Cooperation” (§19) and “Responsibility for learning and professional development” (§24) (authors’ translation). In the elaboration of these dimensions, expressed in 23 sub-descriptions, we find values such as “communicate with the student about the knowledge the student will be given the opportunity to develop” (§17, 3), “involve the student in planning and develop the student’s capacity to learn, individually as well as in collaboration with others” (§17, 4) and “seek to develop a good relationship with students that is characterized by mutual respect and an attitude of trust” (§18, 4) (authors’ translation). In addition, the regulations underline the need to collaborate with other professions when necessary, requiring teachers to “respect the competence of both colleagues and other professions, their duties and responsibilities in day-to-day work...” (§19, 5, authors’ translation). Finally, the compe-



tence profile emphasizes the teacher's responsibility for continuous learning and for "judg[ing] the effectiveness of teaching strategies and adapt[ing] teaching accordingly" (§24, 2, authors' translation). Such dimensions and examples fit in well with the logic of responsibility, which emphasizes a moral and social rationale based in a professional mandate. They also indicate that professional practice is typically proactive, and that the domains of responsibility must be negotiated within the frame of the professional mandate—a responsibility that is based in the autonomy of the profession, and thus also inescapable. These areas require pedagogical insight and a moral attitude that is characteristic of the moral base of teacher professionalism (Sockett, 1993).

### *In the tension between the two logics*

What is evident from our analysis is that the signature reform can be traced to both of the logics described above. The *content* of the competence profile corresponds to a large extent to the logic of professional responsibility as embedded in professionalism, while the *process* of assessing and documenting new teachers' competencies is framed by the logic of accountability. Thus, it may be argued that those responsible for carrying out the reform are located in the field of tension between the two logics.

In the reform described, principals were given a crucial role in the process of signing off new teachers. This placed them as professional agents in a challenging tension between the two logics. On the one hand, the competence profile coheres with the social relational competence traditionally emphasized by principals as the core of the teaching profession (Fransson, 2012b). This allows principals to use their professional judgment to evaluate new teachers in the light of the moral base of professionalism (Sockett, 1993) and the responsibilities negotiated within the profession. This is a practice that is in line with the logic of professional responsibility and professionalism. On the other hand, the assessment and documentation process that principals are obliged to carry out is, in its current form, framed by the accountability logic. Through regulations developed by the National Agency for Education, principals were given detailed prescriptions regarding *what* new teachers were to be assessed on, and *how often*. The documentation described above is, in itself, a major point of conformity with reporting requirements typical of the logic of accountability (Green, 2011). Furthermore, the provisions of §13: "assess the teacher on at least three occasions," and §14: "all the points in the competence profile are to be assessed no later than the final assessment occasion" (authors' translation), demonstrate how the process is standardized and predefined by other agents (stakeholders) than the professional. Additionally, in §3 it is underlined that the principal "is not allowed to delegate responsibility for the tasks defined in these regulations to any other person" (authors' translation). Taken together, all these directives suggest practices that conflict with and challenge the logic of responsibility.

Knowing that assessment of new teachers, carried out in a professionally responsible way, is time-consuming, and that principals may have more than one new teacher on their staff at the same time, we anticipate that the space for professional judgment typical of professional responsibility may be limited within the signature reform. There is no indication in the regulations that principals are to be provided with any new resources to undertake all the assessment and documentation of new teachers' competencies. While it is impossible to predict how principals will meet these requirements, we envisage a possible scenario in which they will be seriously challenged in an already pressured work situation (Fransson, 2012b). Thus, the quantity of detailed requirements embedded in the reform may push principals into more instrumental practices, such as "ticking off" all the 23 different competencies, rather than using approaches based on their professional discretion in their evaluation of teachers.

Moreover, given that the new system required principals to report their evaluations to the National Agency for Education in a language comprehensible to both bureaucrats and politicians, there was also a risk of their describing only what was measurable and easily made explicit – and thus leaving out the more implicit and tacit knowledge and skills that cannot easily be described. There was a danger, therefore, that the reform could lead to instrumental performativity and loyalty to the accountability logic, at the expense of professionally responsible performance (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2014). Borrowing from Green (2011), we are tempted to argue that there is a risk of hitting the targets defined by the logic of accountability, but missing the point of professional responsibility and professionalism.

However, it must be recognized that, as indicated above, possible modifications have been signaled in the new legislative proposal from 17 December 2013, although as yet there has been no clarification of the role and status which the competence profile will have under the new provisions. What we do know is that the National Agency for Education is to develop new directives, which means that the state authorities still hold the crucial power to define the competence profile.

## Concluding remarks

Most political reforms around the world over the last two decades affecting public professions have been strongly influenced by the logic of accountability. Within the educational sector, there has been a considerable focus on what the new “knowledge economy” requires, and how to “measure” the “success” of schooling in helping students to develop literacy and numeracy skills, in order to climb the PISA and TIMSS ladders (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2014). Consequently, when embarking on our analysis of the signature reform, we had expected to find a competence profile with an emphasis on the subject knowledge of teachers. In a press release from the National Agency for Education (2011b), it is stressed that the competence profile is about “the ability to teach, to have subject knowledge, to practice leadership, to assess and to have knowledge about laws and rules governing schools.” It is therefore somewhat surprising that the subject knowledge element referred to in the press release is not in fact mentioned in the profile, given that no one can become a good teacher without integrating subject knowledge with didactic and relational competence. On the other hand, this may reflect an implicit assumption that the teacher’s subject knowledge has been proved by his or her pre-service teacher education, and that the didactic and relational skills highlighted in the competence profile then have to be demonstrated in the probationary year. It may also reflect a tacit agreement that even though the subject knowledge element is not made explicit it might be implied by the requirement to assess teachers on their ability to “communicate with the student about the knowledge the student will be given the opportunity to develop” (§17, 3). That the teacher’s subject knowledge is not mentioned is still an interesting observation.

As indicated above, this might be because the qualification obtained from pre-service education is seen as a certification of the teacher’s theoretical and subject-based knowledge, while novice teachers subsequently need to develop didactic and relational competencies in their probationary year—hence the strong focus on these elements in the final signing off process. Such an interpretation is also confirmed by a statement in a revised version of the regulations from 2013, underlining that “the probationary period provides opportunities for conversations and discussions on pedagogy, methods and didactics” (Ekström & Wieslander, 2013, authors’ translation).

This emphasis in the competence profile may also be seen as a result of active involvement by the teachers’ unions, highlighting didactic and relational skills—core dimensions of a teacher’s professionalism and the logic of professional re-

sponsibility, and important specifications of how teachers are to behave as professionals. The way teacher unions and school leader representatives have been involved in discussions on the signature reform has obviously given them some power to influence the development of the *content* of the “signed document.” This collaboration is perhaps a result of the fact that professions—in a Scandinavian context, through their unions—have traditionally been given the right to negotiate and influence the content of new reforms. On the other hand, it seems as if the teacher unions, as representatives for the profession, in the first instance were less involved in how the procedure in the probationary year should be carried out. The analysis reveals that the procedure for following up on new teachers in their probationary year, in its current form, relies very much on the logic of accountability—typical of political and bureaucratic governance—a logic which may counteract or at least restrict the options for professionalism. There are nevertheless indications that in hindsight of the introductory year, there have been negotiations between politicians and the profession—negotiations that will lead to a modified signature reform. This is evidenced by very fact that the probationary year is suggested to be no longer a certification requirement—although it is required for permanent positions.

To sum up, the multiple meanings implied in the new practice allow for a variety of options and, in an optimistic scenario, negotiated compromises in the tension between responsibility and accountability may be reached in a productive manner with regard to both the substance of the signed document and the process of signing off. Given that the signature reform, as recognized above, is an ongoing process, it remains to be seen what role the reform might play under the new law that is intended to take effect on 15 May 2014.

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