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New Public Management Also Came from the Left: The Case of Swedish Primary and Secondary Education

Johan Wennström

New Public Management also came from the Left: The case of Swedish primary and secondary education¹

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Abstract

New Public Management (NPM) reforms have emerged in the public administration systems of many Western countries in recent decades. The dominant view in international research on NPM is that these reforms are the product of neo-liberal ideas. In this article, I set out to nuance this view by studying the political ideas that paved the way for NPM in the Swedish school system. I analyze political books and articles on teaching and education and find that both Left and Right views on education are congruent with the central aspects of NPM as it is commonly defined and operationalized. This finding casts the ideological basis for NPM reforms in a new light, at least in the context of the Swedish school system.

Keywords: New Public Management; education; teachers; intrinsic motivation

JEL-codes: B24; H83; I20

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Introduction

Nearly twenty-five years have elapsed since Christopher Hood (1991) first introduced the term “New Public Management” (NPM) in an influential article. Basic questions about NPM that have long been regarded as closed merit reconsideration. This article makes a novel contribution to the discussion of the ideological roots of NPM, which have commonly been regarded as neo-liberal ideas. I propose that such a one-sided analysis neglects the Left’s contributions to the introduction of NPM. I will use a case study of the weakening of intrinsic motivation among teachers in Sweden to demonstrate that both the Left and the Right contributed to the conditions that led to the introduction of NPM.

The article contains six sections. In the current section, the introduction, I discuss previous research and the concept of NPM. The second section introduces the current state of the teaching profession and the impact of NPM. The third section discusses the significance of intrinsic motivation among teachers in the past. The fourth section discusses the ideas of the Left that paved the way for NPM in the school system. The fifth section briefly discusses the ideas of the Right to demonstrate their congruence with the Left’s view. Finally, the sixth section summarizes the findings and discusses the conclusions.

NPM was Hood’s umbrella term for the incorporation of norms and practices in the private sector by public agencies and service producers in the mid- to late 1970s (Barzelay, 2001; Christensen & Laegrid, 2010; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Although admittedly a “loose term” (Hood, 1991, p. 3), Hood’s definition and operationalization of NPM have become standard points of reference for international research on the introduction of market principles in government agencies and public services, e.g., schools and hospitals, in most Western countries. Hood’s seminal article establishing the term is the most widely cited article in the NPM literature (Boston, 2010).

Hood (1991, pp. 4–5; emphasis in original) suggested that NPM has seven elements:

- (1) *“Hands-on professional management”* in the public sector
- (2) *Explicit standards and measures of performance*

- (3) Greater emphasis on *output controls*, i.e., resource allocation and rewards linked to measured performance
- (4) Shift to *disaggregation* of units in the public sector
- (5) Shift to greater *competition* in the public sector
- (6) *Stress on private-sector styles of management practice*, i.e., a move away from traditional “public service ethics”
- (7) Stress on greater *discipline* and *parsimony* in resource use

The term should be understood in its broadest sense. All seven elements do not have to be fulfilled for a case to be considered NPM-inspired reform (Hood, 1995, p. 98). Instead, NPM should be viewed as a phenomenon governed by Wittgenstein’s (1953) notion of family resemblance, in which entities are connected by a series of overlapping similarities and no one feature is necessarily common to all.

Although scholars have connected NPM with a variety of theories and concepts (Stark, 2002, p. 138) and some believe that NPM does not have one single intellectual underpinning (Boston, 2010; Hood, 2001), the consensus seems to be that in political terms, NPM emerged from the neo-liberal ideology and *laissez faire* economics that came to the fore in Britain, the United States and many other countries in the 1970s and 1980s (Boston, 2010; de Vries, 2010; Greenaway, 1995; Guerrero-Orozco, 2014; Leicht, Walter, Sainsaulieu, & Davies, 2009; Lorenz, 2012; Marobela, 2008; Ranson, 2003; Rhodes, 1996; Savoie, 1994; Ventriss, 2000).

Some of the earliest scholarly articles (Aucoin, 1990; Hood, 1991) identified the school of public choice economics (Niskanen, 1971) as part of the core of NPM. Even in case studies of countries where left-wing or social democratic governments have applied NPM reforms to welfare production, scholars claim that neo-liberal ideas have been highly significant (Dale, 2001; Johnston, 2000; Lewis, 2004; Mascarenhas, 1993; Robertson & Dale, 2002). The perception, then, is that neo-liberal ideas have either strongly shaped the discussion of welfare policies through a coalition of external influencers or colonized the bureaucracy from within and made public service managers sympathizers of an NPM agenda (Hood, 1995).

Although possible, such a role of neo-liberal ideas seems unlikely. It is plausible that ideas from the Left also paved the way for NPM in public service production. This article suggests that both left and neo-liberal worldviews have ushered in NPM. This hypothesis does not merely address a gap in the existing literature. What the article is concerned with is “consensus-challenging research” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011), in which underlying assumptions in the literature about the ideological roots of NPM are disputed. The assumption that only neo-liberal ideas inspired NPM may have been productive in the past. However, rethinking the political origins of NPM is important to generate new knowledge. The empirical evidence presented in this article will hopefully lead scholars to consider the possibility that NPM came from both the left and the right of the political spectrum and to examine these diverse origins in future studies and interpretations of the impact of NPM on the producers of public services. Research in this area is highly relevant to policy because it could point to reforms that are not recognized as NPM-inspired because they were introduced by the Left.

This case study is about the teaching profession in Sweden and the erosion of its professional public service ethos. In line with Hood (1991), I argue that in the absence of traditional public service ethics, there is a need for other management principles, such as NPM. Furthermore, when both the Left and the Right joined forces in the 1960s and 1970s (and thereafter) to question and criticize the public service ethos of teachers, effectively dismantling this ethos, the way was cleared for NPM to enter the school system. As Kelman (1987, pp. 93–94) asserts: “Norms are crucial. They can also be fragile. Cynical descriptive conclusions about behavior in government threaten to undermine the norm prescribing public spirit.” By reviewing the debate (books and articles) on teaching and education during politically formative periods, I also find that both left- and right-wing ideas about these issues are congruent with Hood’s (1991) seminal definition and operationalization of NPM. Although a larger study is needed to establish causality, this article considers some crucial relationships between ideas in different political camps that influenced public policy; these relationships

suggest that such a causal connection between the ideas discussed and the rise of NPM is plausible.

Sweden offers an interesting case study because the country is one of the “high scorers” on NPM emphasis in the public sector (Hood, 1995). The school system in particular is one of the areas in which NPM-inspired rationales have been applied to the greatest extent (Kornhall, 2013).

My finding is contrary to most previous historical research on the beginning of NPM in Sweden; for example, Barzeley (2001), Green-Pedersen (2002), Rothstein (1997), and, to some extent, Ahlbäck Öberg and Widmalm (in Zaremba, 2013) claim that the Social Democrats, for both macroeconomic and strategic reasons, were forced to co-opt liberal market ideas and introduce NPM reforms into the Swedish welfare state in the mid-1980s. Related is Ryner’s (2004) claim that the Social Democrats were “neo-liberalized” in the 1980s by this hegemonic political force from the right. These arguments cannot or should not be disregarded, but is it the whole answer? One notable exception in the literature is Hasselbladh (2008), who finds it simplistic to assume that only right-wing political winds in the 1980s paved the way for NPM. I pursue a similar line of reasoning in this article and identify the left-right ideological symbiosis that originally set the stage for NPM.

The “kidnapping” of the teaching profession

In the PISA 2012 international education survey, which assesses the knowledge of fifteen-year-old students, Sweden scored below the average of the developed world in reading, mathematics and science (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2013). In the latest cycle of TIMSS—which assesses the mathematics and science knowledge of 4th and 8th grade students—even the often severely criticized American school system (Murray, 2008) fared better in mathematics at all student achievement levels than Sweden’s schools (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Arora, 2012). These results have prompted an intense debate about educational failure, and it is now fair to say that there is broad consensus that the school system is severely damaged.

Because good teachers today are widely regarded as the most important success factor of any school system (Hanushek, 1992; Rivkin, Hanushek, &

Kain, 2005)—not least from the perspective of the cognitive science of learning (Ingvar & Eldh, 2014)—many scholars and policymakers have examined the current state of the teaching profession to explain the weak performance of schools in Sweden. The profession, too, is in crisis, having lost much of its former status. Only five percent of teachers think that their profession is considered prestigious, and barely half of them would choose the same occupation again (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2014).

One significant underlying cause may be that teaching has become “proletarianized” (Bottery, 1996), in the sense that it is micromanaged and routinized. Today there is little professional autonomy in teaching, which is at odds with the traditional understanding of the profession (Helldén, 2002). Since the beginning of the 1990s, tight controls of teachers and monitoring through documentation in line with NPM have increased, mirroring similar developments in other public professions. The unions for teachers, police officers and doctors claim that their professions have been “kidnapped” by NPM models and that trust in professional responsibility has been replaced by bureaucracy, comprehensive gauging of performance and financial incentives (Jansson, Nitz, & Wedin, 2013).

In 1991, the school system was decentralized to the municipalities, which enjoy greater autonomy in Sweden than in many other countries. The government now only sets goals and objectives. The municipalities are free to decide how to achieve these goals and objectives, which exposes teachers to arbitrary decisions about the curriculum and the school organization that might weaken or limit their professional room to maneuver. In conjunction with this decentralization reform, the presence of managers in schools, i.e., principals, has increased substantially, and these managers are increasingly recruited from sectors other than education (Lewin, 2014). The school principal has since become a profession separate from teaching, which has changed the power relationship in the Swedish model of education, in which teachers used to be at the center of decision-making (Jarl, Fredriksson, & Persson, 2012).

Although teachers in Sweden used to be trusted to set their own priorities, they are now obligated to remain on school premises even when they are not

teaching. Teachers are expected to spend much of their non-teaching time documenting what they do in the classroom and the progress of individual students. This has placed limits on teachers' professional autonomy and reduced the share of work time at school spent teaching to barely a third (Lewin, 2014).

Teachers' pay was previously centrally determined based on experience and position, but another significant consequence of NPM in the school system is that pay has become individualized and based on "performance". Thus, extrinsic rewards and "carrot and stick" management now characterize teaching.

Finally, under the banner of NPM ideas, the school system has been deregulated and opened to private competition. For-profit schools funded by vouchers were first allowed in 1992, and the market has since boomed. There is evidence of grade inflation driven by the peculiar market-orientation of the new school system (Henrekson & Vlachos, 2009; OECD, 2015; Persson & Diamond, 2015) and of competition for students based on generous grading rather than high-quality education. This narrows the role of teachers to mere grade givers.

These changes did not occur overnight. I argue that another event first paved the way for these reforms in the school system. Teachers themselves changed their attitude toward their work. An interview study of teachers in Norway and Sweden found that Swedish teachers' professional identity puts less emphasis on professional autonomy, knowledge and ethics (Helgøy & Homme, 2007). Building on this result and other findings, I assert that teaching in Sweden has become less of a vocation and more of a regular job, creating a need for NPM rather than the old management principles of ethics and trust. A mark of this shift is that the two teachers' unions maintain that a high salary is what makes teachers effective (Fridolin, Jansson, & Sirén, 2014), in stark contrast to the professional ethos that previously guided Swedish teachers (M. Sjöberg, 2006a). Next, I will discuss what defines such an ethos and its significance for teachers in the past. To adequately understand what has been lost, we must first examine the professional ethos.

The professional ethos

The term “profession” is elusive, but in an early description of the characteristics of professions, Wilensky (1964) stated that the job of the professional is based on technical craftsman-like competencies, which are acquired through long training and then passed down, largely tacit knowledge, and a set of professional norms. These norms encourage, for instance, doctors or teachers to perform high-quality work and to commit themselves to “a service ideal” rather than pursuing personal or commercial gain. Thus, the marks of a profession are both exclusive technical knowledge and “adherence to the service ideal and its supporting norms of professional conduct” (Wilensky, 1964, p. 141).

Other scholars have introduced additional criteria, such as professional autonomy, sanction by society, and internal regulation and control of members (Greenwood, 1957; Strömberg, 1996; Torstendahl, 1989). However, at least in the traditional theory of professions, all these criteria rest on professional norms, ethical codes, and an emphasis on disinterestedness and selflessness—the “service ideal” that Wilensky (1964) alludes to. Interestingly, Selander (1989) notes that an English thesaurus links “profession” with taking vows in ecclesiastical terms.

Such an ethical framework creates “a sense of mission” (Wilson, 2000, p. 95) and encourages members of a profession to excel in their vocation. “Professional ethos” (Reeder, 2006) or “public service ethos” (Lawton, 2005; Macaulay & Lawton, 2006) is an umbrella term that encompasses these ethical values, standards and intrinsic motivations.

With a strong professional ethos, public servants can be trusted to perform to the best of their abilities without supervision or codified rules, in the traditional manner in which, for example, police officers, doctors and teachers have operated (Stenlås, 2009; Wilson, 2000). In other words, the autonomy of professions stems from their professional ethos. Without this ethos, other less autonomous management principles are called for, and extrinsic rewards become a more important incentive for job performance.

However, is it credible to say that Swedish teachers were guided by a professional ethos in the past that has now been largely lost? In a study of

obituaries and birthday eulogies of male teachers in the old elementary school in teachers' journals in 1930 and 1956, Sjöberg (2006a) analyzed the self-image and identity of the Swedish teaching community at the time. Vocation was an important motivating factor and was perceived as something separate and different from paid work: a representative of the teaching profession "regarded his task '*as much as a vocation as an occupation*'" (M. Sjöberg, 2006a, p. 170; emphasis in original).

Duty, fervor and self-sacrifice were other related virtues that schoolteachers emphasized among themselves. According to Sjöberg (2006a, pp. 172–173), teachers saw themselves as public servants committed to an ideal of service above self: "The task was larger and meant something more than the individual." They even dressed the part, as evident in the pictures of impeccably groomed teachers accompanying the obituaries and eulogies.

Schoolteachers were expected to display good character, honor and integrity toward others and civic engagement in churches, local cultural societies, etc. Their goal was to teach their pupils to become similarly competent individuals and to impart knowledge to new generations. Sjöberg (2006a, p. 178) notes that most teachers believed that they embodied something important, and the obituaries often painted pictures of passed-away teachers as fallen warriors.

In all likelihood, because it was these values and attitudes that earned teachers their trust and autonomy in the professional setting, the teacher training program, at least until 1968, attempted to instill this ethos in teacher candidates. This perspective is evident in a study of Sweden's teacher training system since the beginning of the 1900s (M. Sjöberg, 2006b). The state went to enormous lengths to ensure that teachers were qualified for their task. The demands on intellectual (and even physical) fitness were high. Because teachers were regarded as the new priesthood in secular society, with great normative importance in Swedish culture, only the best could join. Incidentally, the same was true in neighboring Finland at the time (and until the late 20th century), where schoolteachers were viewed as "the vanguard of the nation" (Heller Sahlgren, 2015, p. 23).

According to Sjöberg (2006b), candidates were trained in the vocation and “behavioral ethos” of teaching; thus when they were released from the training program, they shared a common spirit of serving as a resource for society. After 1968, however, the state stopped its search for the best teachers and became concerned only with eliminating the weakest candidates by assessing their grades and nothing else.

Sjöberg’s studies suggest that there was, in fact, a strong professional ethos among Swedish teachers and that it was sanctioned and encouraged by the state until it was dismantled. How and why this dismantling occurred will be discussed in the remainder of this study.

The ideas of the Left

In this section, I will explore the Left’s view on teaching and education and how it differed from most teachers’ traditional beliefs and understandings. The Left in this article comprises both Swedish persons and intellectuals and influential international thinkers, within and outside the Social Democratic Party, which, during the 20th century, governed Sweden almost continually after 1932. In line with Brodin’s study of Swedish intellectuals who rejected the hard-core Left in the 1970s and articulated a centrist position in the 1980s (Brodin, 2015), I have selected authors and works that have greatly influenced public thought and opinion. The cultural climate of 1968 and thereafter is an appropriate starting point for this part of the study because the left-wing ideas of 1968 decisively changed Swedish education policy and teachers’ working conditions (Helldén, 2002; Lindelöf, 2015).

The emergence of the 1968 movement in Sweden had a significant transformative impact on social, cultural and political life (Berntson & Nordin, 2013). According to one observer, Helldén (2002, p. 29), “a sophisticated contempt for ‘facts’” and knowledge was symptomatic of the dominant views of the period after 1968. Another important characteristic of that time was the wide-ranging spread of “critical, Marxist-influenced political thinking” that worked toward abolishing differences between social classes and groups (Östberg, 2002, p. 62). Marxism and contempt for traditional knowledge morphed into a theory holding that “true knowledge” is found only at the bottom of society—among “the exploited”, such as

children with bad grades, prostitutes and criminals (Helldén, 1982, p. 52; Lukács, 1971). From the humanistic psychology movement, the left-wing wave also adopted a romantic streak that favored the liberation of the “authentic individual” from all forms of oppression, both inner and outer, into a life of ecstasy and self-fulfillment (L. Sjöberg, 2007, p. 15). In this context, it was not surprising when intellectuals soon identified traditional teaching and education as targets for leftward political change. “School, like the inheritance of culture generally, was now perceived merely as a ‘bourgeois’ bastion, which ought to be destroyed” (Helldén, 2002, p. 26).

To criticize the institution of school was, by extension, a way for left-wing thinkers to criticize contemporary Western society and its values (Vinterhed, 1979). Many from the 1968 generation also went into teaching, with the intent of changing social relations (Broady, 1981). As a group of socialist “school workers” proposed (Socialistiska skolarbetare, 1970, p. 113), it was considered possible to “create, or at least work for a new society [through school]”. A telling summary of this discussion can be found in Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner’s book *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (Postman & Weingartner, 1969; published in Swedish in 1973; emphasis in original):

The institution we call “school” is what it is because we made it that way. If it is irrelevant, as Marshall McLuhan says; if it shields children from reality, as Norbert Wiener says, if it educates for obsolescence, as John Gardner says; if it does not develop intelligence, as Jerome Bruner says; if it is based on fear, as John Holt says; if it avoids the promotion of significant learning, as Carl Rogers says; if it induces alienation, as Paul Goodman says; if it punishes creativity and independence, as Edgar Friedenberg says; if, in short, it is not doing what needs to be done, it can be changed; it *must* be changed.

Postman and Weingartner’s book became highly influential in Sweden—according to Helldén (2002, p. 44), it was “almost a Bible” to the educational Left. I discuss the book in more detail here because it is emblematic of the Left’s view on teaching and education and demonstrates that the Left also promoted NPM-like ideas.

Postman and Weingartner believed that the traditional concept of teaching was no longer relevant in the modern age. Teachers “who think they are in the ‘transmission of our cultural heritage business’” (Postman &

Weingartner, 1969, p. 13) were considered hopelessly out of date. Instead of learning dead “knowledge” and being shaped by their teachers “to be docile functionaries in some bureaucracy” (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 67), students should be exposed to ideas relevant to the “nuclear-space-age” of the 1960s and 1970s, such as “psychology and psychedelics, anthropology and anthropomorphism, birth control and biochemistry” (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 14). If the students continued to be taught antiquated concepts, they would invariably suffer from “future shock”, a serious mental state, after leaving school.

Hence, the role of the teacher was no longer to impart knowledge but to retreat into the background and allow students to develop their own techniques of learning. The word “education”, and the idea that it represents, should be abolished in schools and replaced with “the inquiry method” (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, pp. 34–35):

The inquiry teacher is interested in students’ developing their own criteria or standards for judging the quality, precision, and relevance of ideas. He permits such development to occur by minimizing his role as arbiter of what is acceptable and what is not.

In this new school, teachers, rather than students, are supervised and regulated. Postman and Weingartner (1969, pp. 137–140) presented “a list of proposals that attempt to change radically the nature of the existing school environment”, many of which are consistent with the stick-and-carrot management of NPM and with market thinking. In particular, a proposal to base a teacher’s salary on the number of students he attracts to his classes was strongly market-oriented. “In this proposal, we are restoring the American philosophy: no clients, no money; lots of clients, lots of money” (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 139).

Other suggestions leading to reduced autonomy by Postman and Weingartner included “limit each teacher to three declarative sentences per class, and fifteen interrogatives”; “prohibit teachers from asking any questions they already know the answer to”; and “classify teachers according to their ability and make the lists public”. In an attempt at derision, the authors proposed that teachers should be required to undergo psychotherapy and to “provide some sort of evidence that he or she has had a loving

relationship with at least one other human being”. Graffiti in the school toilets should be “reproduced on large paper and be hung in the school halls”.

Postman and Weingartner also suggested that teachers should document their own psychological status, write down their reasons for giving students particular grades, and record everything that happens in the classroom. Teachers should even keep a record of every time they used certain words, such as *right* and *wrong*. These demands are congruent with the way teachers in today’s NPM-oriented schools are expected to document in detail what they do in the classroom. The ultimate goal of Postman and Weingartner’s proposals was that teachers would begin questioning themselves. The effects of teachers engaging in self-examination had been observed first hand in the authors’ pedagogical seminars (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 206):

Such self-examination can be most unsettling, as you can well imagine. English teachers have discovered that they hate Shakespeare; history teachers, that everything they know about the War of the Roses is useless; science teachers, that they really wanted to be druggists. The process, once begun, leads in many unexpected directions but most often to the question ‘Why am I a teacher, anyway?’”

The quoted paragraph sounded harsher in the Swedish edition of the book (Postman & Weingartner, 1973), in which the word “druggists”, referring to pharmacology, was mistranslated as “junkies”.

Although Postman and Weingartner’s criticisms were inevitably damaging to teachers’ public service ethos, their main focus was essentially on reforming traditional pedagogy. Two other books on teaching and education that, as I will show below, garnered considerable attention in Sweden after 1968—*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by the socialist pedagogic Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970; published in Swedish in 1972) and *Deschooling Society* by the Austrian anarchist Ivan Illich (Illich, 1971; published in Swedish in 1972)—were more clearly concerned with criticizing the teaching profession. Consistent with the left-wing ideas at the time, both of these books described teachers as a bad influence on students and as an extension of the social

oppression wielded by the bourgeois class. I discuss them here as representative of the Left's view on the motivations of teachers.

The Latin American Marxist philosopher Freire (1970) developed "liberation pedagogy" as a means to mentally free poor adult illiterates in Chile and Brazil. He criticized "the banking concept" of traditional education, which, in Freire's view, stipulates that culturally alien "knowledge" from Western colonial powers should be "fed" to students in the same way that funds are deposited in an empty bank account. This antiquated concept of education is a tool for oppression in the hands of teachers, who view their students not as contributors or participators in education but as empty vessels to be filled. Inspired by the German psychoanalyst Erich Fromm's ideas about "necrophilous characters", Freire also said that the "banking" concept of education is supported by the disturbing psychology of teachers themselves (Freire, 1970, p. 64):

The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic. Based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power.

Traditional teaching is, in Freire's terms, "the exercise of domination" and hence must be replaced with a new model of education built on creativity, reflection, and the dismantling of the hierarchy between teachers and students. Students would consequently be emancipated from their teachers' coercive power, and the teachers would be forced to re-evaluate their previous assumptions and approaches (Freire, 1970, p. 67):

The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.

Illich (1971) expressed even more radical views. Illich wanted to outright abandon the institution of school in favor of what he called "learning webs" of individuals who meet spontaneously and exchange information. According to Illich, school is not necessary because people have learned most of what they know outside of their formal education anyway. The function of school is merely to discriminate against individuals on the basis

of age and to indoctrinate them toward economic growth, increasing consumption and profit maximization. Illich (1971, p. 30) claimed that “schools create jobs for schoolteachers, no matter what their pupils learn from them”. The teacher’s principal role, Illich wrote, is that of a warden or a watchman. The teacher’s influence on his students is not only harmful to the individuals affected, making them feel worthless, but is also in conflict with the values of a liberal society (Illich, 1971, p. 31):

The safeguards of individual freedom are all cancelled in the dealings of a teacher with his pupil. When the schoolteacher fuses in his person the functions of judge, ideologue, and doctor, the fundamental style of society is perverted by the very process which should prepare for life. A teacher who combines these three powers contributes to the warping of the child...

The discussion about school in Sweden after 1968 was heavily influenced not only by Postman and Weingartner’s proposals but also by the ideas of Freire and Illich (Vinterhed, 1979). Even public officials took a strong interest in these books and found them highly relevant to Sweden’s education system. This is confirmed by a preface to the Swedish edition of *Pedagogy of the oppressed* written by Freire’s translator, Sten Rodhe, who was a university lecturer, an author of textbooks for upper secondary education, and an expert at the Swedish National Board of Education (which was abolished in 1991). In his preface, Rodhe wrote that both Freire and Illich are interesting and thought-provoking. He believed that “the Swedish education debate has reason to study them both, to be stimulated by both...” (Freire, 1972, p. 22) and that “the applicability of [Freire’s] ideas should be considered everywhere, including Sweden” (Freire, 1972, p. 25). Moreover, Rodhe was married to Birgit Rodhe, who was briefly the minister of education in the center-right government of 1978–1979 and responsible for the abandonment of the teaching of Western cultural heritage (Helldén, 2002, p. 35).

Given the influence Sten Rodhe wielded at this time, it is plausible that the works and ideas of these particular thinkers influenced public policy. In fact, several observers acknowledge this likelihood (Ekerwald, 2008; Hägg, 2005; Lindelöf, 2015). “The teachers’ authority was questioned. Student councils were created. Silence during lessons was interpreted as the teacher

oppressing the students” (Ekerwald, 2008, p. 147). “In the schools, advisers who in part resembled Mao’s Red Guards arrived. They mocked more senior teachers’ methods and demanded more chaos, play, clamor, jest” (Ekerwald, 2008, p. 147). Looking back on the 1970s, Lindelöf (2015, p. 52) writes: “New work models had been introduced on ideological grounds... [School] should no longer only be concerned with teaching and conveying traditional knowledge. From now on nothing should be ‘traditional’.”

According to Broady (1981, p. 295), Freire was an important inspiration to many from the generation of 1968 who entered teaching. In particular, Freire’s pedagogy was viewed as a way to help the “oppressed” children of the working class, who did not feel at home in school. Such thinking was in line with homegrown Marxist ideas about school mirroring Sweden’s class society.

An example is the collective volume *The school in class society* from 1969, which was widely read and discussed (Lindelöf, 2015). The authors, a group of students and academics on the left, claimed that schools and teachers reproduce the hegemonic social order and its bourgeois cultural norms, to the disadvantage of working-class children. According to one of the contributors to the volume, “teachers put their stamp on the school with bourgeois values, attitudes of contentment and middle-class language, all blurred into something called ‘manners’, which naturally favors pupils from their own social group” (Wernström, 1969, p. 83).

Some Marxist views expressed in this volume were not only derogatory to the teachers’ professional ethos but also, I would argue, similar to principles and methods of NPM. For example, because teachers were viewed as indoctrinating and hence could not be trusted, the pupils were encouraged to monitor their teachers and were specifically advised to “keep close records of classroom activities” (Sondén, 1969, p. 172). In a similar vein, the Norwegian sociologist Nils Christie (1972) also claimed that the school plays a vital role in the reproduction of class society and even suggested that schools should be decentralized to students and parents to disrupt the old hierarchical and authoritarian model of education in which teachers and administrators are at the top and pupils are at the bottom. Christie’s book,

entitled *If school did not exist*, was also important in the discussion on school reforms in Sweden (Vinterhed, 1979).

The notions of the Social Democrats on school reform were similar to those of the 1968 movement in general. The new curriculum for compulsory school enacted in 1969 stressed that traditional teacher-centered education and the imparting of knowledge was of lesser importance than stimulating the students' active role in the learning process and their emotional well-being (Swedish National Board of Education, 1969). All terms associated with the teaching of traditional knowledge, such as "culture" and "education", were removed from the curriculum by the Department of Education (Hadenius, 1990). In the view of the Social Democrats, the goal of school was not to teach basic subjects but to create harmonious students collaborating with each other. In a report to the party congress resembling a governmental document, Alva Myrdal, one of the Social Democrats' leading thinkers on education, explicitly wrote, "Individual performance in school must be given less prominence, while greater weight is placed on the child's ability to work together with others. The training of the ability to collaborate is an important foundation for the development of equality in society" (Myrdal, 1969, pp. 61–62).

With this new direction for Sweden's schools, teachers were no longer necessary in their old function as persons knowledgeable in their subject matter. Indeed, as Myrdal wrote, "The role of the teacher is undergoing a material change... The teacher's primary task will not be to act as an authority in his field, but to be an inspirer and coach to the students and gradually try to broaden their fields of interest" (Myrdal, 1969, p. 69). The curriculum stipulated that the pupils themselves—not the teacher—should take as much responsibility for their own learning as possible. According to Vinterhed (1979, p. 63), as pupils were to decide for themselves what they needed to learn, the aim during the 1970s was to create an exchangeable "comprehensive teacher", who instead of being specialized in a particular subject could work in all classes and at all grade levels.

To the extent that teachers were still expected to play a role in school, it was a far cry from the old teacher ethos described by Sjöberg (M. Sjöberg,

2006a). The curriculum placed restrictions on how teachers could perform their responsibilities; these restrictions inhibited the professional autonomy that most teachers considered one of the best aspects of their job (Sveriges Lärarförbund, 1971). Teachers were also directly instructed by Myrdal's report (Myrdal, 1969) to practice "equality ideology" and "democratic teaching methods" in the classroom and, in line with NPM principles, to carefully document the progress of individual students instead of giving grades. According to a survey about the curriculum conducted in 1970 by the teachers' union, Sveriges Lärarförbund (1971), the new demands on teachers, perhaps unsurprisingly, made many want to leave the profession.

However, the restriction of teacher autonomy is just one aspect of how the Social Democrats helped dismantle the professional ethos of teachers. In tandem with the trade union movement, the party also openly questioned the idea of vocation, personal responsibility and self-sacrifice in public sector jobs, such as nursing and teaching. A representative of the nurses' union was quoted in a newspaper in the mid-1980s as saying, "For many, the job is still a vocation. We will banish that attitude" (Eiken & Hökmark, 1986, p. 63). This statement was emblematic of the dominant attitude of the unions and social democracy in general. According to the nurses' union, the traditional view that nurses work out of a sense of duty and calling was an excuse to underpay their members (SHSTF, 1986). For them, and for the trade union movement at large, work was a means to a material end and not a source of personal fulfillment or the ability to help others (Grenholm, 1987). The teachers' union that primarily represented the category of teachers that Sjöberg (M. Sjöberg, 2006a) studied, from the old elementary school, also held a narrow view of work that focused mainly on rights and purchasing power and not on vocation (Sveriges Lärarförbund, 1981).

The imperative for public sector employees to view their jobs as a vocation was also eroded by new legislation. In 1975, the Social Democrats freed state public servants—of which teachers then were one of the largest groups—of their personal responsibility for misconduct. According to the Social Democrats, public servants should have neither special responsibilities nor special status in labor legislation but should enjoy the same rights and privileges as regular employees in the labor market, such as

the right to strike. The purpose was in all likelihood not to destroy intrinsic motivations among public servants but rather to increase identification among electoral groups in the middle class with the Social Democrats' political agenda (Bergström, 2004; Esping-Andersen, 1989). However, this legislation was a significant move toward de-professionalizing public servants, teachers among them, and ultimately weakening their public service ethos.

As I have shown, the Left pushed many overlapping ideas concerning teaching and education that plausibly undermined intrinsic motivations among teachers. First, traditional teacher-centered education was deemed anachronistic and outdated. Second, teachers were considered to have their own political agendas and self-interests that must be policed and regulated. Third, the school should have objectives other than education, thus making teachers superfluous. Fourth, public sector unions and the Social Democrats emphasized extrinsic values and rights, to the detriment of intrinsic values. The loss of the professional ethos was in itself important for clearing the way for NPM to enter the Swedish school system. However, the Left's ideas are also in harmony with NPM principles, which I elaborate on in the conclusion.

The ideas of the Right

Here, I will examine the Right's view on teaching and education. In this article, the Right consists of both international and Swedish intellectuals, within and outside the largest center-right party, the Moderate Party. During the center-right coalition government of 1991–1994, the Moderate Party was in charge of education policy and introduced free school reform, among other changes to the school system. The starting point in this part of the study will be the right-wing criticism of the public sector in many Western countries during the 1970s and 1980s.

In the United States and Britain, President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, respectively, waged a political campaign against the public sector—"the greedy and parasitic public sector", in Mrs. Thatcher's words—and sowed distrust against public servants (Coyle, 2011, p. 248). The free-market Right, here distinguished from the conservative

Right (Scruton, 1980), believed that the growth of the public sector had a malicious intent by giving the government a greater role in people's lives and effectively crowding out civil society and the market— in Sweden (Burenstam Linder, 1983/2010) and in other countries (Friedman & Friedman, 1980). Although it was a common view at the time that the public sector had become too large and wasteful (Coyle, 2011), the right-wing criticism helped to reinforce that perception. The school of public choice economics was emblematic of how the Right viewed the public sector.

Public choice, founded by James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock in an attempt to create an economic political science, holds that politicians and public servants always act out of self-interest. According to Buchanan (1975, p. 2; published in Swedish in 1988), public choice sets out to study “politics without romance” and rejects the notion that public servants are guided by a moral ethos: “The socialist mystique to the effect that the state, that politics, somehow works its way toward some transcendent ‘public good’ is with us yet, in many guises, as we must surely acknowledge.” In a preface to Tullock (1987), Buchanan explicitly wrote that public choice would undermine the public faith in the benevolence of government.

Tullock also claimed that the behavior of public servants is dominated by self-interest. In his book *The Vote Motive* (Tullock, 1976, p. 26; published in Swedish in 1982), which was translated and distributed by the influential Swedish free-market think tank Timbro, Tullock wrote: “If bureaucrats are ordinary men, they will make most of (not all) their decisions in terms of what benefits them, not society as a whole. Like other men, they will occasionally sacrifice their own well-being for the wider good, but we should expect this to be exceptional behavior.” Tullock (1976, p. 28) also listed the materialist and self-regarding values that, in his view, motivate a public servant to do his job: “his salary, his conditions of work—office furniture etc. (strictly apportioned according to rank in most bureaucracies), his power over other people, his public respect and reputation.” Although public choice essentially takes a right-wing position, Tullock's reasoning perfectly mirrors the trade unions' view that vocation and professional ethos are a faulty or antiquated motivation for work and that extrinsic rewards are most important.

In line with their self-centered interests, public servants, according to Tullock (1976), act as budget-maximizers. According to Niskanen (1971), budget-maximizing is the public sector's equivalent to the profit-maximizing of the private sector. Tullock (1976) wrote that because large budget increases are economically beneficial to public servants, they will invariably work for the growth of the public sector, limited only by their own indolence. Because public choice economics does not distinguish between producers of public services, e.g., teachers and police officers, and idle bureaucrats but "subsumes all government activity under a calculus of individual greed" (Hodgson, 2013, p. 218), all public bodies appear parasitic. Consistent with this reasoning, there must be NPM-like controls in place to monitor the activities of public servants. Among Tullock's (1976) suggestions were the introduction of competition between public sector departments and exposing the public sector to private competition. Similar to the Left's ideas, public servants need to be supervised and disciplined.

Buchanan and Tullock's theory was specifically applied to teachers in Milton and Rose Friedman's seminal book, *Free to Choose* (Friedman & Friedman, 1980; published in Swedish in 1980). I discuss this book in more detail in this section because *Free to Choose* was the Moderate Party's main source of inspiration for the 1992 free school reform, according to Odd Eiken (personal communication, January 12, 2014) and Anders Hultin (personal communication, February 11, 2014) who were state secretary and political advisor, respectively, in the Department of Education and thus were instrumental in the enactment of many school reforms. The Friedmans (Friedman & Friedman, 1980) took the public choice view. They claimed that teachers and bureaucrats had acted together to replace a well-functioning education model based on private initiative with a "socialist" public school system. For purely selfish reasons, teachers had acquired more power over education as parents and students had lost theirs. The Friedmans (Friedman & Friedman, 1980, p. 157) wrote:

In schooling, the parent and child are the consumers, the teacher and school administrator the producers. Centralization in schooling has meant larger size units, a reduction in the ability of consumers to choose, and an increase in the power of producers. [...] Their interest may be served by greater centralization and bureaucratization even if the interests of the parents are

not—indeed, one way in which those interests are served is precisely by reducing the power of parents.

To rectify this state of affairs and to restore student and parental influence over school, the Friedmans proposed a voucher system in which funding would follow the individual student to the school of his choosing. This, the Friedmans imagined in harmony with NPM principles, would create an education market in which schools compete for students and “only those schools that satisfy their customers will survive—just as only those restaurants and bars that satisfy their customers survive” (Friedman & Friedman, 1980, p. 170). Indeed, this is what happened in Sweden. Although originally envisioned as a “symbolic” reform (A. Hultin, personal communication, February 11, 2014), vouchers and free schools created an education market worth billions in profits in which schools attempt to attract students with free driver’s licenses, personal computers, and promises of good grades. In 2014, the leading company group in the school sector, Academedia, enrolled approximately 3.5 % of all pupils in primary and secondary education in one of its wholly owned but differently branded schools, inviting comparison with Procter and Gamble’s range of brands.

The Friedmans envisioned such reforms as placing controls on teachers and diminishing their authority. Re-defining the relationship between teacher and student as a relationship between producer and consumer would transfer the power over education to the pupils. This is congruent with the Left’s ideas about letting children assume responsibility for their own learning, which is at odds with the professional ethos of teachers. Another similarity between the Right and the Left is the public choice theory of motivation, which denies the existence of the professional ethos altogether.

Conclusions

Nearly twenty-five years ago, Hood (1991) identified and named an institutional arrangement, NPM, in which norms and practices of the market were incorporated into the governance of public services in most Western countries. Although there is consensus among most scholars that NPM is a dominant paradigm, the political pre-history of NPM remains largely elusive and unexplored. It is generally assumed that only neo-liberal ideas inspired

NPM. In this article, I have challenged this assumption by demonstrating the similarities between left-wing and neo-liberal views on teaching and education and the core principles of NPM, as defined and operationalized by Hood. Thus, a possible explanation for the market-orientation of the Swedish school system in recent decades is that both the Left and the Right contributed to an ideological basis for the implementation of NPM.

First, hands-on professional management and explicit standards and measures of performance, two core NPM principles, are mirrored in both the Left's and the Right's desire to control teachers and reduce their professional autonomy. In the Left's view, traditional teachers are performing the wrong type of teaching and have personal political agendas that must be curbed. Hence, it was proposed that teachers should become subordinate to their students and be denied influence over educational decisions. Both students and the teachers themselves should also closely document teachers' activities in the classroom. The Right asserted that teachers abuse their authority to the detriment of freedom of choice in education and that public servants in general have self-centered interests that must be controlled.

Second, both the Left and the Right favor control through financial incentives—another core NPM principle. The Left suggested that a teacher's salary should be based on the number of students he attracts to his classes. The Right proposed that a voucher system would force teachers to work in the interest of students and parents.

Third, both political camps renounced traditional public service ethics and the teachers' professional ethos, a criticism consistent with yet another core NPM principle. The Left described teachers' motivation as malevolent and undermined the professional identity of teachers by eroding their traditional role as persons knowledgeable about their subject matter. The Right described public servants as shirking bureaucrats who are motivated by "budget-maximizing" (Niskanen, 1971), increased powers of authority, and salary and material working conditions.

I have found ideological support for the remaining three principles that Hood associates with NPM—decentralization, greater financial discipline and parsimony, and a shift to greater competition in the public sector—only on

the right of the political spectrum, namely, in the Right's attempts to reduce the size and inefficiency of the public sector. The left-wing suggestion to decentralize the school to parents and students seems more motivated by concerns over the misuse of teachers' authority than failing efficiency or performance. Here, then, is a clear difference between the Left and the Right. However, the difference in elements between political camps is consistent with Hood's conceptual definition of NPM. The support for four of seven core NPM principles among both the Left and the Right is striking. This finding casts the ideological basis for NPM reforms in a new light, at least in the context of the Swedish school system and possibly in other countries as well. The assumption that NPM is purely a right-wing political phenomenon should be met with skepticism.

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