ABSTRACT A number of studies in the past few decades address how the governing of educational systems are changing as a result of intensified measurement and use of statistics. This article suggests that another consequence may be the construction of solutions, tools, and methods which target the problems constructed through comparable indicators and benchmarks. An increased proliferation and accessibility of models, methods, and outcomes has inspired both governments and practitioners to look beyond their national borders for solutions to specific problems or challenges. As a consequence, ideas, methods, and approaches increasingly resemble commodities in the global marketplace. The article investigates the diffusion of a method for school development, namely the model for learning environment and pedagogical analysis (the LP-model). The model was developed in Norway in 2005 and later spread to a number of schools and municipalities across the country, and subsequently to Denmark. We analyse the cross-national borrowing process by applying the framework of policy borrowing. The framework serves as a heuristic in our analysis of information from the LP-model’s websites, evaluation reports and booklets. The analysis shows that similar descriptions of problems and high policy expectations for addressing the problems constitute central preconditions for the borrowing process. We also find that claims that the model works play an important part in marketing the model. Moreover, the model was warranted by high-profile researchers in Norway and Denmark constituting powerful personal and professional networks.

Introduction

In his seminal work, Culture and Pedagogy, Robin Alexander (2001) shows how primary education has been influenced across countries. This, he argues, is not a recent effect of globalisation or an electronic phenomenon; cultural borrowing has always happened. Thus, there is nothing new about the migration of educational methods and reform ideas. However, at the turn of the millennium, the exchange of ideas intensified, and it is currently more far-reaching in terms of the distance and speed with which ideas travel (Røvik, 2007). Education and learning policy is becoming increasingly homogenous and can be characterised as an emerging global education field.
A particular European feature has been the increase in the involvement of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in education policy during the 1990s; in particular the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has evolved into an important tool for justifying change and providing support for chosen policy directions (Hopmann, 2008; Simola et al, 2011). A strong characteristic of this development is a new capacity of national systems to observe the whole field and make comparisons between data (Simola et al, 2011). The growing use of data has been criticised for encouraging a focus on the use of indicators as a new calculative rationality of modern governance (Lawn, 2011). Transparency may have the effect that what is measured is simultaneously altered, is simplified and re-arranged, and intended and unintended effects may be produced in the system. One result of this development is what Ball (2004) identifies as a political trend towards the commodification of education in which the influence of performance indicators and targets and the use of benchmarking promote a ‘reification of educational processes’. He further points out that ‘education for economic competitiveness, can transform what were social processes of teaching, learning and research into a set of standardised and measurable products’ (p. 14).

Lawn (2013, p. 110) suggests that the ‘pressure to produce, analyse and act’ on data is self-generating, in that ‘system actors become believers, self-creating hubs of data production and flow’. Coupled with expectations of transparency, accountability and performativity in public service, there seems to be increased recognition that policy and practice in education should be evidence based (e.g. OECD, 2007), rather than what has been described as ‘driven more by ideology, faddism, politics, and marketing’ (Slavin, 2008, p. 5; Wellard & Heggen, 2011). Such development potentially comes with a split between the experienced practice and opinions of teachers on the one hand, and the expectations of performance and competitiveness on the other hand, whereas the latter tends to displace the former (Ball, 2004; Antunes, 2012). However, while problems and challenges are constructed through the use of technical-political instruments providing measurement and transparency, solutions need to connect to the pedagogical landscape and realities of those ‘on the shop floor’ (Antunes, 2012, p. 460) without compromising the standards set through the production and flow of comparative data.

In the international marketplace, some tools and methods have gained popularity and been widely distributed across nations and continents, such as the Reading Recovery Program (Clay, 1993, 1997), Learning Styles (Dunn & Dunn, 1999) and Assessment for Learning (Black & Wiliam, 2010). In a recent article, Løvlie (2013) criticises what he calls a tool approach in education: a state–market coalition to promote prefabricated tools for schools and teachers, rendering professional and contextual knowledge superfluous. This resonates with the focus on learning outcomes (rather than learning and teaching) in current policy discourses (Brancaleone & O’Brien, 2011), while effectively obscuring pedagogical negotiations and argumentation, and thus also potentially unsettling power relations.

In this article, we aim to investigate how one potential ‘solution’, the model for learning environment and pedagogical analysis (the LP-model) (Nordahl, 2005) has gained legitimacy and become implemented in schools and municipalities across Norway and Denmark. While our case relates to the diffusion of one specific pedagogical approach, it is strongly intertwined with issues within the European policy agenda, notably concerns about student achievement and performance, production of test scores, and the legitimacy of policies and policy-making (Borer & Lawn, 2013). Admittedly, as we will show below, the LP-model promotes the application and development of professional and contextual knowledge. However, the problems it aims to solve are constructed within the common cognitive space that constitutes the common European education area (Borer & Lawn, 2013; Czáka et al, 2013). Also, as we will show, a central sales argument for the LP-model is evidence that it works.

The LP-model was developed in Norway by a group of Norwegian researchers, and within a short time, it spread to schools and municipalities across the country. Subsequently, it became even more widespread in Denmark. In our analysis of the proliferation of the LP-model in Norway and Denmark, we draw on Phillips and Ochs’ (2003) notion of policy borrowing. In the following section, we will outline the educational policy contexts and recent developments in Norway and Denmark, in relation to the aforementioned European policy concerns. We will then describe the LP-model, in terms of how it is presented on websites and in booklets. Next, we will explicate the framework of the analysis and outline the descriptors for the analysis and the methodological
approach. Finally, we will discuss the findings and conclude by addressing some of the concerns which emerge from the discussion.

**Recent Developments in Educational Policy in Norway and Denmark**

Both Norway and Denmark have a strong tradition of viewing educational institutions as vital to the formation of civil society. In particular, schools are seen as a stronghold for democracy and the welfare state, the purpose of schooling being grounded firmly within the broader ‘Bildung’ tradition (Møller, 2009). The comprehensive model, ‘a school for all’, has been a guiding principle, as has the strong emphasis on the roles of local and regional authorities. Since the 1990s, these principles have been under pressure. For instance, neo-liberal models have gained prominence at the national and regional levels in both countries, and notions like accountability, choice, competition and privatisation have become part of the discourse and policies related to education (Johannesson et al, 2002). Furthermore, the influence of international studies, such as PISA, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), has shifted the attention of policy-makers in both countries from the somewhat relaxed opinion that the education system, by and large, is efficient and productive, to the view that these countries are lagging behind their international competition (Hjort, 2006). There has been a major shift in political ideas from issues of equality to issues relating to excellence, accountability and choice in education since the late 1970s throughout the English-speaking world (Fowler, 2012). Below average results in comparative international surveys, such as TIMSS, PISA and PIRLS, have served as eye-openers for Norwegian and Danish policy-makers, and this has resulted in extensive and often emotionally loaded debates in the media (e.g. Elstad, 2010).

In Norway, the PISA 2003 report found that noise, disturbances and a lack of time on tasks were the main impediments to learning (Kjærnsli, 2004). The recent national reform, The Knowledge Promotion, retained the goals related to inclusion and lifelong learning in the wider sense; however, one of its major purposes was to strengthen the nation’s capacity to compete in the global marketplace, where knowledge and competence are considered the main competitive factors in the global economy, and outputs are to be measured in a national system for quality development (Aasen et al, 2012). The reform was comprehensive, encompassing, for instance, a clearer assignment of responsibilities between central and local authorities, a stronger focus on output and assessment, and a knowledge-based system to ensure that decisions are based on information and evidence. Accordingly, a quality assurance system was implemented. Moreover, since a positive learning environment is considered a precondition for students’ learning and development, a collection of programmes and models for a better school environment were offered to schools and municipalities (Nordahl et al, 2006).

In Denmark, the outcome of PISA 2003 seems to have played an important role in the construction of educational policy. In response to what was seen as below average results, the Danish government invited the OECD to make a report and to provide an analysis in 2004 (OECD, 2004). The main criticism in this report was that most feedback in Danish classrooms was provided only orally, and the teachers’ assessments were not documented. Furthermore, the OECD criticised the Danish school culture for its lack of orientation towards individual competencies and its high tolerance for students’ disruptive behaviour. In this sense, the PISA study challenged Denmark’s predominant pedagogical culture and paved the way for a turn towards an audit culture, in which national tests and the publication of results and school rankings work together to strengthen bureaucratic accountability (Hjort, 2006). In response to this criticism, in April 2006, the Danish government launched a strategy to gear Denmark for the future (Regeringen, 2006). An amendment to the Educational Act in the same year (Undervisnings ministeriet, 2006a, 2006b) reformed the primary and lower secondary school systems. One consequence of this reform is that Danish students are now continuously evaluated by national tests, conducted and administrated by the municipalities (Regeringen, 2006).

In both Denmark and Norway, the municipal councils are expected to deliver annual quality reports to describe the status of the municipal school system. The reports include the assessment of the schools’ academic levels compared to the results from the compulsory national tests, and must be discussed in the local political boards. Thus, the schools’ content and pedagogy have
increasingly become a municipal political concern, and municipalities have emerged as key actors with regard to identifying and providing quality in education.

The changes in Danish and Norwegian education policies parallel the European trends, notably the increased attention placed on measurable outcomes and evidence. Measurable outcomes have become tools for describing and comparing the quality of education (Brancaleone & O’Brien, 2011). Moreover, the outcomes agenda portrays education as a risky and uncertain area which, in turn, creates a space for educational innovation and entrepreneurship. However, there is a danger that this development may result in the commodification of education, repositioning teachers as consumers of educational services (Ball, 2004). In the next section, we will introduce our case, the LP-model, which is provided for schools and municipalities in Norway and Denmark with the promise of offering solutions to the current challenges.

**Our Case: the LP-model**

We chose the LP-model as our case study for several reasons. First, its rapid spread through Norway and into Denmark was quite remarkable. Second, the model is suitable for our research because it seems to promise solutions to the perceived challenges in education. Finally, the fact that it has become more widespread in Denmark than in its country of origin, Norway, makes it especially interesting as a case for the investigation of policy borrowing. To date, less than one-tenth of Norwegian schools (about 290 out of 3000 schools) have chosen to adopt the LP-model, whereas one-third of Danish schools (about 550 out of 1550 schools) have implemented it (Nasjonalt senter for læringsmiljø og atferdsforskning, 2013; Professionshøjskolen University College Nordjylland, 2013). In both countries, the model is financially supported by the government and appears as a commodity on the market. This makes the LP-model a vivid example of the transnational acquisition of apparently promising solutions for perceived problems in the education sector. In the following paragraphs, we will briefly describe the model.

The LP-model, developed at Lillegaarden Resource Centre, Norway, is described as a practical tool for developing and improving the school culture and learning environment (Hansen, n.d.a). According to Nordahl (2005) and Nordahl et al (2010), the LP-model can resolve teaching-related issues, such as classroom disturbances, conflicts between pupils, and bullying, and it will positively affect pupils’ academic performance, as well as reduce the need for special education.

The model builds on system theory and the assumption that any issue that arises is separate from the individual. Solutions and opportunities for development must be sought in context. Thus, the LP-model applies a holistic approach to the learning environment and its influence on social learning and academic performance. The model aims to uncover the factors that cause, influence and maintain learning-related and behavioural issues in schools (Hansen, n.d.b).

A central element of the LP-model in practice is the establishment of work groups of five to seven teachers, supported by an external supervisor from the pedagogical-psychological service of the municipality. The teacher groups identify the factors that cause, influence or maintain their pupils’ unwelcome behaviour. Subsequently, they use the results of their analysis to develop their teaching-related practice, and its outcomes are evaluated (Hansen, n.d.a, n.d.b). The model has been described as a ‘bottom-up’ model (Nordahl et al, 2010), since local problems and challenges constitute the content of the work to be undertaken, and the solutions and strategies are built upon the participants’ own analyses of the situation. However, the working process is strictly defined, and the actors in each participating school (i.e. the school leaders, all teachers and the municipality) are expected to commit to working according to the model’s principles for a minimum of two years.

**Framework for the Analysis**

In our analysis, we are inspired by Phillips and Ochs’ (2003) notion of ‘policy borrowing’. Policy borrowing deals with the transformation or transfer of a policy between countries (Ringarp & Rothland, 2010). Policy borrowing is seen as part of the general development in education policy in recent decades; it is a development that is ‘fuelled by the perceived link between investment in ET [education and training] and economic growth and success’ (Turbin, 2001, p. 96). Although the
term ‘borrowing’ has been contested, Phillips and Ochs (2003, p. 451) understand it as covering ‘the whole range of issues relating to how the foreign example is used by policy-makers at all stages of the process of initiating and implementing educational change’.

As the term itself indicates, Phillips and Ochs’ concept refers to travelling policies, not to educational methods or approaches, like the one we are investigating. More accurately, the object of this study can be characterised as a form of borrowing which occurs when certain techniques, models or methods developed and used in one country are borrowed by stakeholders in another country, with or without the direct help of national policy-makers. We consider Phillips and Ochs’ framework useful because it allows us to analyse the complex process through which educationalists are attracted to buy into, implement, develop and potentially improve borrowed methods. In what follows, we will introduce Phillips and Ochs’ four stages of policy borrowing: cross-national attraction; decision; implementation; and internalisation. In our analysis, we do not adhere strictly to the order of the stages. There might, for example, be a contrary direction, where the implementation can influence the cross-national attraction (Ochs, 2006). Thus, we instead regard Phillips and Ochs’ stages as processes that may overlap and interact throughout the borrowing trajectory (see also Table I).

**Cross-national Attraction**

Cross-national attraction constitutes the preconditions for borrowing and the motives for change (Philips, 2005). Such impulses result from various phenomena. Internal dissatisfaction builds on a general impression among actors that the system and its practices do not effectively deal with important problems. Such dissatisfaction can occur both among insiders and as a response from external forces. Cross-national attraction can also be the result of what is perceived as systemic collapse. Moreover, negative external evaluation often plays a part in creating cross-national attraction as actors search for new solutions. It may also be a result of economic or political change or of innovations within the sector (Philips, 2005).

**Decision**

At some point, actors decide to accept new ideas or to start implementing a new method. There may be several reasons underpinning a decision. This step in the framework consists of a wide variety of measures through which the government and others attempt to initiate a process of change. For instance, evidence that the method works may play an important part. Sometimes, evidence is based on research (e.g. Reading Recovery; see Clay, 1993, 1997), at other times, what is presented as evidence may be based on hearsay or on who-knows-whom. For example, the skillful promotion of a few successful cases can create an impression that the method works, or networks and webpages may serve to strengthen the confidence in the method.

**Implementation**

The processes of implementation can vary depending on the level of the education system at which the decision is made. However, whether it is based on a national or a local decision, implementation inevitably involves adaptation to the new context. Moreover, agents may work to accommodate contexts to the new method. Phillips (2005) suggests that there may be significant actors within the system who have the power to support (or resist) change. Establishing alliances with powerful people or institutions may be an advantageous strategy in the implementation process.

**Internalisation/Indigenisation**

When a new method is put into practice, this may lead to changes in the borrowing system itself, or it may affect the local practices in unforeseen ways. Moreover, when a method of working together is internalised, it may either defy or concur with established policies and practices. Thus, internalisation implies alignment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Descriptors and foci of analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cross-national</td>
<td>Preconditions for borrowing:</td>
<td>Preconditions for borrowing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attraction</td>
<td>internal dissatisfaction, systematic collapse, negative external evaluations,</td>
<td>- Dissatisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>economic or political change, innovations in knowledge that might inspire a</td>
<td>- Negative external evaluations, national or international</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>search for foreign models that can solve problems.</td>
<td>- Inadequacy of provision</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Competition</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Political imperatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Political change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision</td>
<td>Consists of a wide variety of measures through which a government and others</td>
<td>Grounding of decisions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>attempt to start the process of change.</td>
<td>- Theoretical/ideological positioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Realistic/practical measures with success elsewhere</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Promise or publicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Networks or personal knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Observation of the adaption any foreign model will be subjected to within the</td>
<td>Adaption to local context:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>context of the borrower system. Degree of adaption depends on a large number of</td>
<td>- Support (e.g. national agencies, economic factors) and resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>contextual factors.</td>
<td>Contextual characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalisation/</td>
<td>Policy becomes part of the system of education of the borrower country, and it</td>
<td>Becoming part of the system:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenisation</td>
<td>is possible to assess its effects on the pre-existing arrangements in education.</td>
<td>- Impact on borrowing system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Absorption of features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Synthesis – aligning with other initiatives or policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Evaluation – who and how – as well as results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Framework for analysis

The framework is inspired by Ochs and Phillips (2002) and Phillips and Ochs (2003) and is based on their structural typology.

The framework presented in Table I captures the characteristics of the four stages of the borrowing process. It also presents descriptors and focal points for analysis. However, the characteristics are not exhaustive. Thus, while the framework guides our analysis, the analysis needs to be open to other aspects of the borrowing process. In particular, we need to be sensitive to the fact that all aspects of educational policy and practice are embedded in their context, and the degree of contextual influence varies according to each situation. Moreover, while the flow and evolution of the process seem unidirectional, the influence may nevertheless work both ways between countries, and also connect to wider contextual concerns. Ochs and Phillips (2002) discuss five contextual forces that are considered to be important in borrowing processes: the motives behind the cross-national attraction; the catalyst to spark cross-national inquiry; interaction that affects the stage of the policy development; interaction that affects the policy development process; and interaction that affects the potential for implementation. Thus, in our analysis, we pay attention to the contexts for policy and practice in both Norway as the home country of the LP-model and Denmark as the target country, as well as the trends and issues emerging in the European context.

Method

In this article, we use a qualitative case-oriented research design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A case study is understood as an empirical study which 'investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context' (Yin, 1994, p. 13). Further, the LP-model serves as our illustrative case. Illustrative case studies are primarily descriptive accounts of real-world examples which serve the purpose of clarifying an idea or reinforcing an argument.

Yin (1994) describes various sources for data collection in case studies. In this article, documents, booklets developed for the model, webpages and research disseminated via the media.
constitute the empirical data: descriptions of the content of the LP-programme, descriptions of its theoretical framework, evaluation reports and the debate in the media. The first analytical step was to explore the intentions and content of the LP-model in order to come to grips with its theoretical assumptions and practical implications. Next, we searched for the motives for the borrowing process, exploring pedagogical, economical and relational arguments. In this phase of our analysis we reviewed policy development in the two countries, as well as within the European policy context. This set the stage for our analysis of the borrowing process based on Philips and Ochs' (2003) categories: preconditions for borrowing; grounding of decisions; adaption to local context; and becoming part of the system in the two national contexts.

A methodological challenge in studying cross-national borrowing processes is that such processes generate connections between complex social and cultural contexts (Grimen, 2004). We acknowledge the complexity of the process, and we are aware that relying on Philips and Ochs' framework to structure our investigations may render us blind to other processes. However, we found that the framework provided useful angles for our analysis, and our careful investigation of the policy context made us sensitive to additional aspects. For example, issues of power probably is important in borrowing processes; however to address this would require additional empirical work and warrants further study.

Table II provides an overview of the different types of documents we analysed in conducting this research. Our main source has been the official webpages for the LP-model in Denmark and Norway. We have chosen documents that are available online or referred to in the online texts. The evaluation reports use self-study approaches (Zeichner & Noffke, 2000), undertaken by the programme providers themselves. The articles, reports and booklets provide information about the LP-model: the pedagogical framework, the theoretical assumptions and references to additional research and pedagogical methods. In Table II, 'Information of the model' refers to how the providers market the programme on their websites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of document</th>
<th>Number of documents</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation reports</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles, reports and booklets</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information of the model</td>
<td>8 webpages</td>
<td>Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 webpages²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹The Danish webpage refers to two Norwegian evaluations.
²On the Danish webpages, you need a password to get more detailed information.

Table II. Overview of documents.

The research group consists of researchers from Norway and Denmark. This cross-national collaboration ensured up-to-date, reliable information and in-depth understanding of educational policy and practice in the two countries.

Analysis

In this section of the article, we use the four steps mentioned earlier – cross-national attraction, decision, implementation and internalisation/indigenisation – as the framework to analyse the borrowing process of the LP-model from Norway to Denmark.

Cross-national Attraction

According to Phillips and Ochs (2003), the first step of borrowing is characterised by preconditions defining the situation and leading to cross-national attraction. We have already shown how, at the turn of the millennium, education policies in Norway and Denmark aligned with international trends, reflecting concerns about efficiency and quality, and resulting in an increased focus on measurable outcomes (Moos et al, 2011; Aasen et al, 2012). The Norwegian and Danish media
played a strong role in the portrayal of school systems in crisis and in need of adequate tools for improvement. The seemingly mediocre learning outcomes in both countries were at least partly explained by the progressivism and permissiveness that was claimed to have characterised classroom practices in both countries. In Norway, this brought renewed attention to a host of programmes that had the potential to remedy the situation, and a national initiative known as Better Learning Environment 2009-2014 (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2009) was launched in 2009. A central contributor to this initiative was Professor Thomas Nordahl, who had developed and piloted the LP-model in 2005.

The situation in Denmark, according to Phillips and Ochs’ (2003) terminology, can be characterised as dissatisfaction with the education system due to negative external and international evaluations. According to the external evaluations, Denmark was underachieving in the global competition and seemed to be providing inadequate services (Hjort, 2006).

The cross-national attraction lay in the general perception of dissatisfaction, spurred by mediocre results in international comparisons, and amplified through extensive media coverage in both countries. Moreover, this dissatisfaction prompted a search for possible solutions to fix the problem, and the LP-model emerged as a promising remedy.

Decision

The second step in Phillips and Ochs’ (2003) framework is characterised by the descriptors of: theoretical/ideological positioning; realistic/practical measures with success elsewhere; promise or publicity; and networks or personal knowledge as drivers for the decision to borrow a solution to perceived problems.

As outlined above, the governing systems in both countries are decentralised in the sense that, within the wide national frameworks, municipalities are responsible for making most decisions regarding the work in schools. It is important to investigate how decisions in Danish schools and municipalities are grounded, in order to understand what fuelled the massive borrowing of the model.

Our analysis indicates that the decision to adopt the LP-model was based on claims made by the Norwegian researchers that the model worked. In an article published on the website for the Danish LP-project, the director refers to the results in Norway as follows: ‘Evaluations of the LP-model in Norway have shown that students in schools where teachers use the model do significantly better than students in schools where teachers do not use the model ... In addition, behavioural problems and disorders were reduced, as were bullying and other undesirable social behaviours’ (Hansen, n.d.b, p. 3, our translation). This is a promise that working with the model will result in increased learning outcomes as well as better learning environments. A number of evaluation reports (e.g. Nordahl, 2005; Andresen, 2009; Nordahl & Egelund, 2009; Andresen, 2010; Sunnevåg & Aasen, 2010; Aasen & Søby, 2011; Knudsmoen, 2012) have consistently shown positive results: fewer disturbances and behavioural problems, enhanced relationships between teachers and students, better cooperation between teachers, and a minor tendency for increased learning outcomes. Furthermore, according to most teachers, the model is well structured, engaging, and implementing it is ‘doable’. Therefore, the LP-model seems to be regarded as a practical tool which addresses the challenges that teachers experience in their daily work. What seems to be underexposed is the fact that, except for Nordahl’s (2005) study and few master’s theses, there has been no independent evaluation or research conducted on the model. Moreover, there is no evidence of its long-term effects.

Nordahl’s (2005) extensive report on the development and evaluation of the model includes a discussion of the model’s place within system theory, and Hansen (n.d.b, p. 2) claims that the approach of the LP-model is expedient for identifying and understanding the environmental factors that bring about, affect and sustain behavioural and learning problems in schools. Thus, the LP-model emerges as a trustworthy theoretical and ideological project.

When the LP-model was introduced in Denmark in 2007, the municipalities had just been commissioned to ensure the quality of Danish schools. It can be assumed that the LP-model was perceived as attractive, providing the municipalities with a solution to meet the needs of low-performing schools. Moreover, the prospect of being able to save money, due to the reduced need
for special education which the LP-model promised (Nordahl et al., 2010), may have influenced the decision of the municipalities and schools.

In Norway, various school development programmes exist, and, in 2006, the Directorate for Education and Training commissioned a report to evaluate these programmes (Nordahl et al., 2006). Along with nine other approaches, the LP-model was one of the recommended programmes reported to show documented results, and schools could apply for funding to implement it. In Denmark, the promotion of the LP-model worked differently. The exclusive rights to administrate, advertise and offer the LP-model in Denmark were restricted to individual actors, who cooperated with the Norwegian founder of the model, and the administration was located at one of Denmark’s university colleges. Soon, the LP-model was implemented in a number of schools (spreading from 273 schools in autumn 2008 to 497 schools in autumn 2010; see Qvortrup, 2010).

Phillips and Ochs (2003) suggest that significant actors, networks and personal knowledge can play a vital role during the decision-making phase. According to our analysis of the LP-model webpages in the two countries, key actors figure prominently across both websites, constituting a network of providers. The websites indicate that the providers in Norway and Denmark arrange conferences together regularly, and that such conferences are open to participants from both countries. This also facilitates networking among the participating schools and municipalities; however, we found no evidence of formal networks. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that networks and relationships play a part in local decision-making.

Implementation

The third step in Phillips and Ochs’ framework (2003) is adaptation to the local context. The adaptation process can be recognised by the establishment of support systems (national agencies and economic factors), but also by elements of resistance. As mentioned, the LP-model is managed by an LP-unit located at a Danish university college. The establishment of an administrative body can be seen as the first step towards adaptation to the local context. Through the LP-unit, the approach can be promoted and marketed, and provision and support become easily accessible. In addition, the administration can adjust the model and make it more sensitive to the local needs.

The Danish LP-unit offers support and training for principals, the municipalities’ external supervisors and the teachers serving as moderators in local work groups. In this way, the central actors in the projects engage in systematic personal development based on the central ideas underpinning the model. E-learning courses are offered to the participants. Two of the courses, an introductory course and a group leader course, are mandatory, and participants may pay for additional courses. As the participants in schools and municipalities are distributed geographically, using e-learning to provide these courses could be considered advantageous. The participants are advised to consolidate the projects by embedding them in municipal and local strategic plans for development. In this way, the local projects are given legitimacy through the formal governing system and can also be assumed, to some extent, to be adapted to the local contexts.

Webpages established by the providers of the LP-model can offer support in the implementation process. While the Norwegian website has an open profile, with, for example, extensive information about the LP-model, a blog, an idea bank, relevant literature and evaluation reports, the Danish site is less transparent. The description of the LP-model is limited to a few short paragraphs, and to obtain further information, it is necessary to contact the LP-unit. Furthermore, the number of reports provided is modest. The website has a page labelled ‘research’; however, to gain access, one needs a username and password. This is also the case for several other pages on the website.

There are few signs of resistance to implementation in the data we analysed. Critical voices appeared only in popular scientific journals, such as articles on Folkeskolen.dk (Lauritsen, 2009a, b, c). Looking at the networks and processes of legitimisation, it is noticeable that the Norwegian research group around Nordahl functions as more than the provider of the LP-model in Denmark. Together with colleagues from the Danish LP-unit, and on commission from the Danish Prime Minister, Nordahl’s team conducted a large study: ‘The strengths and weaknesses of the Folkeskole [the Danish municipal primary and lower secondary education system] in light of the desire to strengthen academic knowledge and to have all teenagers complete some form of upper-secondary
education’ (Nordahl et al, 2010, p. 7, our translation). The position of such significant actors can be described as very powerful.

**Internalisation/Indigenisation**

In this aspect of Phillips and Ochs’ framework (2003), policy becomes part of the education system of the borrowing country, and it is possible to assess its effects on the pre-existing arrangements in education. This feature roughly covers what is often referred to as sustainability (see, e.g. Datnow, 2005; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). We explore this aspect as the extent to which the borrowed model affects the borrowing system, how features of the model are absorbed into practice and how this practice aligns with other initiatives. Within the LP-framework, this is called institutionalisation and it refers to the processes through which the model’s principles are integrated in the normal work of the school and municipality as sustained changes in the organisations and their practices (Jahnsen & Nordahl, 2010). Thus, the model is assumed to influence the systems beyond its effects in schools, for example, via integration into municipal policy and practice.

The aforementioned programme that was launched in Norway, called Better Learning Environment 2009-2014, is not explicitly linked to the LP-model. However, the material published matches descriptions of the LP-model to a large extent; furthermore, the programme was developed by a research group headed by Thomas Nordahl, who developed the LP-model. Thus, in Norway, the ideas and methods behind the LP-model are seamlessly integrated in a broader initiative for school development without making the relationship to the model explicit.

In Denmark, there is no similar integration in national policies. However, it can be observed that several municipalities have integrated the LP-model into their website as a solution for dealing with problems in schools as well as in day-care institutions (e.g. Poulsen, 2010; Roskilde Kommune, 2010; Frederikssund Kommune, 2012).

**Summary of Findings**

The policy borrowing framework (Phillips & Ochs, 2003) accommodated a systematic analysis of the LP-model’s diffusion from Norway to Denmark. Our analysis of this case indicates that in the borrowing process, the preconditions for cross-national attraction were important: for example, general dissatisfaction based on results from international comparative studies constituted a political imperative to change. Moreover, our analysis indicates that decisions were stimulated by the strong focus on evidence that the model works, and by its marketing as a practical and comprehensive tool that would help teachers solve problems related to the learning environment, and thus pave the way for better teaching and learning, ultimately resulting in better student achievement. The expected results were warranted by high profile researchers in Norway and Denmark constituting powerful personal and professional networks. The proliferation of the model in Denmark can be attributed to the manifold attractive features that the model provided for municipalities at a time of high demand.

In the following section, we will discuss the commodification and marketisation of the LP-model in relation to general tendencies in European and international context.

**Discussion**

The analytical framework based on Phillips and Ochs (2003) helped us describe the diffusion of the LP-model from Norway to Denmark. We showed that international comparisons and a global discourse focused on measurable outputs motivated policy-makers, educational authorities and schools to seek workable methods and procedures that would remedy their perceived problems. There are at least two issues in this development that relate to commodification. First, perceptions of educational quality are produced in the form of statistics and numbers that are comparable and become driving forces in policy development (Lawn, 2013), resulting in the impoverishment of the contextual and indeterminate processes that characterise educational processes (Antunes, 2012). Social relations are transformed into things, or commodities, appreciated for their exchange value.
rather than their use value (cf. Ball, 2004). Thus, the motivation to buy into a venture like the LP-model could be that it represents an investment that will yield returns: higher ratings, high esteem and a better position to recruit students and teachers. The influence of this motivation should not be underestimated, even in countries like Denmark and Norway, where education is free and commercial interests in education have been limited thus far. One aspect of this effect, according to Ball (2000, p. 3), is that ‘judgement and comparison is a gearing of academic production to the requirements of national economic competition’.

This feeds into a second aspect of commodification. When perceptions of what constitutes good schools and good education are reconstructed within a discourse of deficiency, this also creates a market for measures, approaches and models that are promised ‘to work’; a market for the export and sale of knowledge as a commodity is established. In Denmark, the LP-model has been marketed and sold through the LP-unit in a university college. This unit also provides ‘spin off’ products in the form of pamphlets and small books.

Evidence has been exploited in the marketing of the LP-model in both Norway and Denmark. In the past decade, there has been an emergent focus on evidence in education. Cooper et al (2009) argue that research evidence ‘should lead to more informed policy, higher-quality decisions, more effective practices, and in turn, improved outcomes’ (p. 160). Meta-studies, such as Hattie’s (2009) Visible Learning study, produce evidence of what works in education. The growing interest in evidence, for example, in the form of robust meta-studies that synthesise such evidence, can bring about important contributions to the knowledge in the field. However, claims of evidence need to be critically appraised at two levels. First, there is a need to determine the quality of the research leading up to the produced evidence, by assessing its robustness and relevance (Davies, 2002, p. 109). Second, there is a need for professional judgement in the translation of evidence into action. Cooper et al (2009) use the term ‘knowledge mobilization’ to indicate that what we call evidence is the result of social processes, and that the use of evidence is also a social process. There is a danger of evidence being seen as universal facts that supply decision-makers and professionals with convincing answers and recipes about what works and that such knowledge ends up as pre-packaged solutions to be sold in a market.

Jahnsen and Nordahl (2010) sum up the evaluations of the LP-model in Norway in the period 2006-2008 and conclude that the model has effectively contributed to the teachers’ work with gathering information and conducting analyses. The on-going evaluations of development in schools using the LP-model seem to be carried out by the researchers running the programme. The evaluations have documented the participants’ learning and focus on critical factors and suggested improvements to the model. Such internal evaluations within the participating schools are relevant sources of knowledge, and important for the continued development of the model, as well as the practice. On the other hand, in the case of the LP-model, test results and evaluations have been transformed into evidence and put on the market without investigating issues of validity and reliability, serving to accommodate a discourse that is maintained and controlled through the alliances between key actors and decision-makers.

Interestingly, our analysis also shows an alliance of key actors in the two countries, who are involved in the development and marketing of the model, as well as the evaluation and research related to it. These key actors appear to have established strong relationships with the political authorities. Ochs and Phillips (2002) argue that interaction that affects the policy development process and the potential for implementation are driving forces for borrowing. It is, however, not arbitrary how and which actors gain influence within such interaction. Ydesen et al (2013) show how the new discourse in the Nordic countries that frame education in terms of statistics and numbers historically is contingent on the formation of alliances between politicians, universities and teachers’ unions. The position and influence of key actors in close interaction with policymakers could shift the power structures within the education system when there is an increased focus on outputs. This could be an interesting theme to pursue; however, the limitations of our analytical framework and the data collected in this study prevent us from drawing a conclusion on this matter.

An interesting aspect of the LP-model is that it provides a strong structure for facilitating the work while also providing possibilities for local alignment. The model is a tool for practitioners to analyse their own situations. This means that every school works differently when applying the model, without any readymade solutions. Thus, it seems highly unlikely that even two schools can
be found that define the exact same change and developmental challenges – not to mention the prevailing preconditions and internal rules and organisational culture that may influence the developmental work. The content-related flexibility and freedom of schools can be considered a productive aspect of the LP-model, because this leaves teachers relatively free in their work. In Denmark, teachers are regarded as autonomous professionals, according to their qualifications, moral integrity and confidentiality. In many ways, this understanding of teachers’ roles aligns with the requirements of the LP-model that teams of teachers frame and analyse challenges, while facilitators and group leaders regulate the process. Collective knowledge-building is understood as a precondition for the integration of evidence into practice in new settings (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Mausethagen & Granlund, 2012). Since the LP-model strongly advocates collective knowledge-building, it is well-aligned with this view of professionalism. On the other hand, due to the way it is marketed, because we detect little critique of its theoretical premises and the evidence it refers to, and because the strict process of the LP-model seems to be non-negotiable, there is a danger that it reverts to techniques that may replace professional judgement (Cooper et al, 2009).

**Conclusion**

Our ambition in this article was to explore the LP-model as an example of a model’s pathway from one country to another, in order to shed light on why and how educational approaches and methods gain legitimacy and become implemented across national contexts. Norway and Denmark are historically and culturally affiliated and geographically close, which might facilitate the transfer. In both countries the international large scale surveys of educational achievement combined with extensive media coverage have served to create a sense of crisis that may have fuelled the search for remedies that work. When similar perceptions of challenges coincide with high expectations of effectiveness in addressing the perceived problems, an environment conducive to borrowing is established. Legitimation is also important; the LP-model is developed and supported by high-profile educational researchers, is administered by research institutions, and is warranted by national agencies. The way the LP-model is marketed makes adopting it a compelling endeavour, especially based on the numerous positive evaluation reports that are available online.

In short, the travelling LP-model seems to be a success story. However, we must raise a few concerns. The first relates to the use of evaluation reports conducted by model stakeholders as evidence. In our view, evidence must be grounded in robust research. This is not to downplay the importance or value of evaluation reports. Such reports definitively constitute useful resources in school development; however, they cannot be used for marketing purposes, claiming to provide evidence. Scientific research must deal carefully with deductions of statements. We await independent research on the use of the LP-model that may produce robust knowledge about what works in creating and sustaining good learning environments. Knowledge development needs to rest on scepticism: one needs to look for evidence that both supports and contradicts or questions current knowledge or beliefs.

Second, we are concerned about the commodification of the LP-model, especially as demonstrated in Denmark. Hand-in-hand with commodification, a lack of transparency emerges, as one cannot easily sell what is available to customers for free. An educational model offered to practitioners needs to be studied critically; however, a critical inquiry may not be good for sales. It is easier to borrow (or buy into) a model that is successful.

Finally, we suggest that it is vital that policies and practices in education build on knowledge that emerges from robust research. However, it seems that technologies of measurement have become part and parcel in current descriptions of education. Such descriptions serve to create the common cognitive space that constitutes the common European education area (Borer & Lawn, 2013; Czáka et al, 2013), a space within which solutions are developed, packaged and marketed. However, this can result in ‘looking where the light is better’; of designing and marketing solutions based on measurable achievements rather than on detailed study of the contexts and complexities of the situation.
Educational Methods as Commodities

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Notes

[1] For more information, see the http://lpmodellen.wordpress.com/ (Norway) and http://www.lp-modellen.dk/ (Denmark).

References


Educational Methods as Commodities


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