What did you learn in school today?

How ideas mattered for policy changes in Danish and Swedish schools 1990-2011

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PhD Dissertation

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Translations and abbreviations

Translations

Class	Undervisningshold
Clearer objectives for primary school	Klarere mål for folkeskolen
Common goals for primary school	Fælles mål for folkeskolen
Council of representatives	Förtroenderådet
Curriculum	Läroplan, undervisninsmål
Danish Union of Teachers	Danmarks Lærerforening (DLF)
End objectives	Slutmål
Form	Klassetrin
Form 1-3	Lågstadiet
Form 4-6	Mellanstadiet
Form 7-9	Högstadiet
Grade	Karakterer, betyg
Lower secondary school examination	Realskoleeksamen
Minister of culture and schools	Kultur- och skolminister
Minister of education	Utbildningsminister, undervisninsminister
Minister of preschool and youth	Förskola- och ungdomsminister
Minister of schools	Skolminister
Municipal primary and lower secondary school	Folkeskole, grundskola
Oppositional vice mayor	Oppositionsborgarråd
Part objectives	Delmål
Primary and lower secondary school leaving examinations	Folkeskolens afgangsprøve og folkeskolens udvidede afgangsprøve
School & Society	Skole & Samfund, since 2010: Skole & forældre
Secondary school	Realskole, läroverk
Stage objectives	Trinmål
Student, pupil plans	Individuella utveclingsplan, elevplan

The Agency of Modernisation of Public Administration	Økonomistyrelsen
The council for assessment and quality development in schools (aka the school council)	Rådet for Evaluering og Kvalitetsudvikling af Folkeskolen≈skolerådet
The Danish Evaluation Centre	Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (EVA)
The lower secondary school agency	Läroverksöverstyrelsen
The Primary school Agency	Folkskoleöverstyrelsen
The School council	Grundskoleråd
The states pedagogical research center	Statens Pædagogiske Forsøgscenter
The (new) Swedish National Agency for Education	Skolverket
The (old) Swedish National Agency for Education	Skolöverstyrelsen
The Teachers' Union	Lärarförbundet
Upper secondary school	Gymnasium
Vice mayor for schools	Skolborgarråd
Youth and adult education	Folkbildning

List of Abbreviations

C   Centerpartiet (Centre Party in Sweden)

CD   Centrumdemokraterne (Centre-Democracts, Danish Centre Party)

CKF   Centrale Kundskabs og færdighedsområder (central knowledge and skill areas)

DF   Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People's Party, right-wing party in Denmark)

DLF   Danmarks Lærereforening (Danish Union of Teachers)

EL   Enhedslisten (the Red-Green Alliance, far-left party in Denmark)

EVA   Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (the Danish Evaluation Centre)

FP   Folkpartiet Liberalerna (The Liberal People's Party, liberal party in Sweden)

FrP   Fremskridtspartiet (Progress Party, populist right-wing party in Denmark)

GL   Gymnasieskolernes Lærerforening (The Danish National Union of Upper Secondary School Teachers)

KF   Det Konservative Folkeparti (Conservative People's Party in Denmark)

KD   Kristdemokraterna (the Christian Democrats in Sweden)

KrF   Kristeligt Folkeparti (Christian People's Party, Christian democratic party in Denmark)

KL   Kommunernes Landsforening (Local Government Denmark)

KoF   Bedömning av kunskaper och färdigheter (assessment of knowledge and skills)

LO   Landsorganisationen i Danmark (The Danish Confederation of Trade Unions)

          Landsorganisationen i Sverige (The Swedish Trade Union Confederation)

M   Moderaterna (The Moderate Party, conservative party in Sweden)

MI   Miljöpartiet (the Swedish Green party)

NU92   Den nationella utvärderingen (the national evaluation)

OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PISA   Programme of International Student Assessment

RF   Retsforbundet (The Danish Justice party)

RV   Det Radikale Venstre (Danish Social Liberal Party)

SAP   Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Arbetareparti
          (Swedish social democratic party)

SD   Socialdemokratiet i Danmark (Danish social democratic party)

SFI   Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Velfærd (earlier Socialforskningsinstituttet)
          (The Danish National Centre for Social Research)

SF   Socialistisk Folkeparti (Socialist People's Party, left socialist party in Denmark)

V   Venstre (Danish Liberal Party)

Acknowledgements

> What is the most resilient parasite? A bacteria? A virus? An intestinal worm? (…)
> An idea. Resilient, highly contagious. Once an idea has taken hold of the brain it's almost impossible to eradicate. An idea that is fully formed, fully understood. That sticks, right in there somewhere *[points to his head]* (Dom Cobb, a dream manipulator portrayed by Leonardo DiCaprio in the sci-fi thriller *Inception* (2010))

Few people would argue against the notion that ideas matter and influence the thinking and behavior of most people. Nevertheless as explanations of political phenomena ideas are met with considerable skepticism. With this dissertation I hope to mitigate some of this skepticism. However, that I should end up writing a PhD on ideas might have been a surprise to many – most of all to myself. During my undergraduate and graduate studies one of my main theoretical interests was Rational Choice explanations as well as quantitative methodology. That I should end up writing about education policy is perhaps less surprising. I have always found this particular area fascinating. In my upper secondary school's yearbook it was written that my future career would be Minister of Education. While this surely did not happen, these past years have given me a wonderful opportunity to be immersed in the intriguing world of school policy. The start of my more practical interest in schools was my numerous school transfers during my childhood. This gave me a world class opportunity to reflect on diverging school practices. Further, I accredit this interest from my form 9 internship in the Danish parliament. Here I was so lucky to tag along with the inspiring Anders Mølgaard Jensen (Liberal Party) (1958-2001) and watch school policy making in the work. Finally, that assessment policy became the focal point of the dissertation can be partly attributed to my father-in-law, Edvin Gustafsson. His professional indignation of the government's imposition of national tests and student plans, which he and his teacher colleagues despised, ignited my research question.

In my chequered career as a PhD student at the Department of Political Science and Government a number of people deserve a great acknowledgement for contributing to the final product. First of all, I would like to thank my advisors Christoffer Green-Pedersen and Mads Leth Jakobsen for excellent supervision. Christoffer you are frighteningly perceptive. Your hands never shake in pointing out the direction my work should take and my disser-

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much! Further, I would like to thank the many inspiring people who took time out of their busy schedules to talk to me about school reforms. In random order, I would like to thank Per Thullberg, Mikael Damberg, Ulf P. Lundgren, Lars Leijonborg, Therese Wallqvister, Christine Antorini, Bertel Haarder, Ulla Tørnæs and Carsten Hansen.

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Line Renate Hanssen Gustafsson
Aarhus, January 2012

Chapter 1:
Introduction

1.1 Empirical puzzle

During the past decades school reforms focused on improving school quality have swept the world (Ball, 1990, 1994; Carnoy & MacDonell, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994; Mehta, 2006). Various reform strategies have been introduced, including charter schools, public school choice, vouchers, and, most prominently, school assessment reforms (Mehta, 2006: 355). School assessment reform refer to legislation involving assessment of pupil or school performance, and the policy changes have concerned increased achievement testing and publication of results (Levin, 2001: 15) as well as greater accountability involving outcome-based measures for both student and school performance (Aasen, 2003: 124). These changes are argued to be especially puzzling in a Scandinavian context. The Scandinavian countries belong to an unusually radical type of comprehensive public school system, unselective and with mixed-ability classes throughout the compulsory school age (Wiborg, 2009: 4). Assessment policies were for decades placed in the doghouse robbed of legitimacy. During the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s politicians and experts alike were continually looking for an opportunity to reduce external pressure for achievement on students (Aasen, 2003: 112). Thus, over a long period countries like Sweden and Denmark reduced tests and grade awarding and tests and grades were only introduced in the highest forms in school. However, in recent years radical changes in school policies have occurred. Policies emphasizing assessment like tests and grades have gained surprising prominence and are now put on a pedestal as omnipotent solutions to problems in schools. Both Denmark and Sweden have introduced national tests, written individual student plans, reformed grade scales and set up external assessment agencies. In Denmark, school leaving exams were made mandatory and the range of subjects being tested was widened. In Sweden, the grade scale was made far more comprehensive and lower forms receive grades too. Hence, the Danish and Swedish assessment policy has significantly expanded in terms of the number of adopted policies and types of assessment policies.

At the outset the assessment policy changes appears to be intimately connected to a change of ideas about assessment. Ideas can be understood as causal beliefs which are connected to the material world via people's in-

terpretations of their surroundings, and which posit connections between things and between people and provide guides for action (Béland & Cox, 2011). Before assessment was primarily seen as related to entry and selection to further education and work (Lundahl, 2011: 11). In this regard especially the social democrats were very skeptical of the consequences of assessment (Larsson, 2001: 160). Specifically, the social democrats believed assessment to have negative consequences of competition and social reproduction (Telhaug, Oftedal, Mediås & Aasen, 2006: 254-255). Recently overall ideas about the purposes of assessment have changed quite drastically. Assessment is now seen as pedagogical tools that can help more pupils get a higher education. Further, assessment is also seen as a tool to evaluate the schools quality on a system level as well as a tool to evaluate the individual pupil (Román, 2008: 18; Aasen 2003: 133). Concurrently the social democratic parties' understanding of their interests have changed from seeing assessment in the form of grades and tests as harmful to working class children to seeing tests and grades as necessary means to lifting the performance of working class children.

1.2 The research question: How did ideas change?

However, one thing is to establish that ideas have changed; another is to explain how. This brings out this book's overall research question: *How did ideas about school assessment change?* The book will hence be a study of the *mechanisms* whereby ideas change. While something resembling a consensus has emerged around the proposition that ideas indeed *do* matter (Béland & Cox, 2011), scholars still struggle to understand exactly how ideas matter in shaping policy (Campbell, 2008; Mehta, 2006) as well as how ideas themselves change.

In the idea literature a prominent argument states that policy failure is an important spur to idea change as it prompts policy makers to learn (Checkel, 1997; Hall, 1993; McNamara, 1998; Walsh, 2000). However, in both Denmark and Sweden there is little if any evidence of parties instrumentally seeking solutions to experienced problems. Rather it will be argued to be more of a situation of some parties favoring certain solutions and seeking to persuade other parties to change their perception of the solutions. Contrary to parts of the established idea literature (Heclo, 1974; Sabatier 1993), I will argue against the tendency to attribute particular importance to the officials or experts who specialize in specific policy fields and instead emphasize the role

of political parties. Stressing learning and policy experts' neglects how new ideas come to have influence on the backdrop of policy actors struggles over ideas. Further emphasizing that political parties are pivotal is the fact that the new policies were adopted despite professional resistance from teachers and pedagogical experts (Telhaug et al, 2006). This suggests that one should look at the political level to understand where the impetus for assessment idea changes came from. In a nutshell, I will argue that parties can employ the ideational mechanisms of de-legitimization and legitimization to persuade other parties to change ideas. Hence a rephrased research question emerges: *To what extent did de-legitimization or legitimization change assessment ideas?*

1.3 The argument in brief

The book contributes to the literature on ideas by developing and testing a framework about the mechanisms whereby ideas change. Overall, this dissertation will develop a framework centered on the mechanism of persuasion. Here I lean on Mark Blyth (2007), who argues that policy change is driven mainly by a political process of persuasion, which rests on the ability of idea carriers to convince other agents that new policy ideas are in their interest. An implicit assumption is the existence of obstacles to policy change. The present framework is developed to understand how parties can perform persuasion and make partisan veto players change their ideas and policy position hence allowing policy to change. Still, to utilize persuasion as an analytical concept it needs to be clarified exactly how political parties persuade other parties to change beliefs. The development of two hypothesized versions of persuasion is one of the dissertation's main contributions.

I will argue that one of the mechanisms whereby parties can persuade opposing parties to change beliefs is to perform *de-legitimization*, which involves undermining the legitimacy of the parties' existing ideas. It is argued that establishing failure increases the chance of de-legitimizing opponent parties' existing ideas. However, de-legitimization and failure are not the same things. A frequent claim in the literature is that failure is a necessary variable for ideational change to take place: 'establishing the fact of "failure" is a prerequisite for other policy alternatives to be put forward' (Stiller, 2010: 35). Further, Stiller (2009: 171) argues that 'ideational leaders' can change policy by exposing drawbacks of the status quo by establishing policy failure and legitimizing new policy alternatives by consistently using cognitive and normative arguments about its merits. In contrast, this book argues that persuasion does not always involve a claim of failure. I hence argue that anoth-

er process whereby political parties can persuade other parties to change ideas is what I call ideational *legitimization*. Legitimization is about exhorting the legitimacy of existing ideas to persuade opposing parties to change their ideas. Whereas it appears that Stiller (2009, 2010) argues that de-legitimization is a prerequisite for legitimizing new ideas, it will be argued that legitimization can stand on its own to induce new ideas. One does not have to do away with existing ideas to have a new policy idea gain influence.

A further contribution of the dissertation is to connect the mechanisms of persuasion with the literature on parties. Hence, expectations will be formulated about the mechanisms' relation to parties' position in parliament as well as the within party dynamics in response to the mechanisms. The point of origin is that there is a division of labor between opposition and government where the opposition holds an attacking position in the public debate where it assigns responsibility for recent developments (Baldwin, 2004; Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010). The government on the other side shapes the political solutions to society's problems (Thesen, 2011: 40) and therefore has an interest in persuading the opposition to take part in policy making. Thus, it is hypothesized that de-legitimization primarily will be initiated by opposition parties. In contrast, legitimization will be initiated by the government. Further, it is argued that the two mechanisms will prompt different within party reactions in the party exposed to the mechanisms. It is expected that de-legitimization will result in change in ideas via a change in actors with different beliefs rather than by existing actors changing beliefs. For example de-legitimization can change the internal power between a party's competing ideational factions making a new group of people gain legitimacy in representing the party. Further, as de-legitimization exposes the party in the public by being blamed for its faulty beliefs it can be harder for the party to acknowledge its mistakes and change beliefs. Hence, the party leadership can decide to bring in new actors with new beliefs to make the change in beliefs seem less blatant. In contrast legitimization is less exposing as the change in ideas is framed as a natural continuation of supporting certain ideas or values. Thus, legitimization is expected to result in a change of ideas among existing actors in the opponent party. Summing up, it is hypothesized that: 1) the mechanism of *de-legitimization* will be used by the opposition, and in the event of policy failure this will lead the government to reshuffle actors and hereby adopt new ideas and 2) that the mechanism of *legitimization* will be used by the government and if existing ideas valued by the opposition are used this will lead to a change of ideas among the existing actors in the opposition.

1.4 Ideas and policy change

As should be clear the dissertation primarily seeks to understand how ideas change. The puzzling change in assessment policy was an occasion to become immersed in questions about idea change not the outcome to be explained in itself. Hence, the dissertation will not provide a causal analysis of ideas influence on policy change. However, in the analyses of the cases I will seek to assess whether ideas were related to the event of assessment policy changes as well. Still, I cannot by design determine whether ideas were the primary cause of policy change and rule out other competing explanations. This is related to that fact that there is no variation in policy output. In both countries significant changes in assessment policy took place. What I can do, however, is to carefully trace the process and by argument show that it is likely that ideas were indeed related to the change in policy. It will be argued that it is hard if not impossible to understand the policy changes in school assessment without referring to the change in ideas about assessment.

Two main competing explanations will be held up against ideas. Proponents of politics matters (Hibbs, 1987, 1992; Schmidt, 1996; Tufte, 1978) could argue that the change in assessment ideas is irrelevant for understanding the assessment policy changes in Denmark and Sweden. Instead they could argue that the majority of the changes have been adopted by right wing governments hence supporting a partisan interpretation of policy changes. However, Politics Matters fails to provide an answer for a number of reasons. The changes are not a result of a mere shift of partisan incumbency of government. In a multiparty context like the Swedish and Danish where minority governments are the rule, the assessment changes have only been possible because of the Social Democrats' unforeseen u-turn in both countries. Although a lot of the changes were adopted under right wing governments, the changes were supported by the social democratic parties. In both countries consensus is highly valued (Christiansen, 2008; Klemmensen, 2005; Lindbom, 2011: 95-96; Steinmo, 1989), school policy is characterized by broad political settlements (Lindbom, 1995: 86; Aasen, 2003: 114) and traditional partisan explanations thus fare poorly. Further, office has fluctuated between the left and right wing and has provided the right wing several opportunities to adopt assessment changes if that was what it wanted.

Another rival explanation relates to the traditional rational assumption that parties' motivation is to win elections and to do this they need votes; i.e. they are vote seeking (Downs 1957; Strøm, 1990). These theories would expect parties to behave in a manner that maximizes their electoral support.

Thus, if the change in assessment ideas and/or policies was prompted by a change in public opinion, which suddenly became favorable to a policy, the confidence in ideas as explanation is seriously weakened. In most of the cases of assessment reform there was no clear incentives for whether the social democrats should support or oppose specific assessment changes. However, even in the rare case where the incentive to support earlier grades was quite clear the social democrats were still extremely divided on the issue and factions fought to prevent the change. In general the assessment issue strongly cross-cut the social democrats and this fact impairs both Politics Matters and vote seeking explanations. If material structures – e.g. ideology or voter preferences – induce certain beliefs and policy positions this should be reflected in homogenous beliefs and policy positions in a political party. Parsons argues that: '(...) where organizations or groups are strongly divided – and if those divisions do not trace to some demonstrable pattern of different incentives and constraints within the group – we know objective signals at the level of the group are not dictating clear strategies' (Parsons, 2011: 130). Hence, finding evidence of party divisions on policy issues can strongly indicate that actor's ideas about their interest matter more than their interest per se in the specific case.

1.5 Research design and methodology

The book contributes to the literature on ideas by developing and testing a framework about parties as ideational actors and the mechanisms whereby they seek to persuade opposing parties to change ideas. Investigating this theoretical framework necessitates a close inspection of the process leading to idea change. Because of the intention to analyze the processes leading to idea change in-depth, I have selected a limited number of cases. Further, to be able to avoid that exogenous variables confound the analysis of the process whereby ideas change, it is deemed desirable to have relatively similar cases. In this regard, Denmark and Sweden constitute specifically suitable cases because of their significant similarity on a number of relevant characteristics. However, the countries diverge on school performance as school policy failure came later in Sweden than in Denmark. The fact that school performance varied between the countries constitutes another important reason for choosing the two countries. This is related to the expectation of policy failure's connection to the performance and success of the mechanism of de-legitimization. The varying degree of policy failure allows me to investigate if failure in itself leads to idea change or if the event of failure

helps the performance of de-legitimization to persuade actors to change ideas.

The book's overall research design is thus a case study of different attempts to change assessment beliefs in Denmark and Sweden. The period chosen for the investigation is about 1990 till 2011. The period is subdivided into two periods in the two countries, producing four overall cases. The reason for starting the analyses in the early 1990s is first of all that the international investigations did not yet figure in the public and political debate. The chosen cases incorporate several attempts of persuasion. The research design is designed to allow me to investigate the process whereby assessment ideas changed. The variation in the design lies in the process of idea change: was legitimization or de-legitimization attempted, did it lead to idea change and if so how?

The method chosen to investigate the framework is process tracing, which involves attempts to identify the intervening causal process between an independent variable(s) and the outcome of the dependent variable (George and Bennett 2005: 206-207). The method is applied to perform theory driven empirical analyses of complex data sources and test whether the causal mechanism assumed by the theory actually appears to be in agreement with the theoretical expectations (Collier, Brady & Seawright, 2004). Further, observable implications will be derived for each phase of the analytical model to allow me to systematically investigate whether new causal beliefs about assessment resulted either due to the mechanism of de-legitimization or legitimization. In addition to bolstering the validity of the study, the strength of the theoretical predictions is determined by distinguishing between certain and unique predictions (Van Evera, 1997).

Summing up, this book provides multiple case studies of the mechanisms whereby school assessment beliefs changed in Denmark and Sweden. The main argument is that political parties can utilize ideational mechanisms of de-legitimization and legitimization to persuade other political parties to change ideas. The successful deployment of the mechanisms is argued to be dependent on different factors and the processes whereby they come to influence ideas differ. Nonetheless both mechanisms can have independent and real consequences for idea change.

1.6 Structure of the book

The dissertation consists of 11 chapters. Chapter 2 develops a theoretical framework for studying parties as ideational actors. The chapter conceptualizes ideas and the mechanisms whereby political parties seek to persuade

opposing parties to change causal beliefs. Two mechanisms of persuasion are presented: de-legitimization and legitimization, and expectations are formulated about the process whereby persuasion takes place.

Chapter 3 conceptualizes the policy sector and policy field within the mechanisms of idea change take place: school policy and school assessment policy. In relation to the policy sector, the characteristics of the Swedish and Danish school system are discussed. Further, it is discussed what assessment policy is and a definition is provided. A typology of assessment policy is developed which outlines the different tools available to policy makers. The typology of assessment policies distinguishes between whether assessment has an internal or external use and whether the individual pupil level or the school level is assessed. Finally, the assessment policy development in recent decades is mapped for both Denmark and Sweden.

Chapter 4 conceptualizes the dependent variable of assessment beliefs. First, the causal beliefs of the parties blocking assessment reforms will be investigated: the social democratic parties in Denmark and Sweden. The second part of the chapter deals with more general perceptions of assessment and develops a typology of ideas about assessment.

Chapter 5 presents the design and methodology of the dissertation. The design is a case study of different attempts to change assessment ideas in Denmark and Sweden from 1990 to 2011. A qualitative process tracing analysis is chosen to analyze the empirical evidence and observable implications of the theoretical framework are derived. Here I will propose what we should expect to see if the dissertations independent variables – de-legitimization and legitimization – were really influencing policy makers' assessment ideas. The data sources are determined for each step of the process tracing model. Finally, the validity and generalizability of the analyses are discussed.

Chapter 6 analyzes the process whereby a new grade scale and national tests were adopted in Sweden in the early 1990s. It is analyzed whether the Social Democrats' diverging support of different assessment policies can be attributed to the varying performance of legitimization by the right wing government.

Chapter 7 demonstrates how a new, more extensive grade scale, earlier grade awarding and more and earlier national tests were adopted in Sweden in the last decade. It is analyzed whether the right wing opposition performed de-legitimization in the absence of a clear cut policy failure. Further how did the Social Democratic government react to this? Did its reaction change when a policy failure eventually did occur?

Chapter 8 investigates whether the disappointing Danish performance in IEA led the right wing opposition to de-legitimize the center-left government's problem definition. Further, if this occurred how did the government react? Were there changes in causal beliefs and eventually assessment policies?

Chapter 9 analyzes how binding national curricula, national tests, quality reports and pupil plans were adopted in Denmark in the new millennium. In 2001 a new right wing government entered office and it is analyzed how it acted in the wake of the continuing failures of the Danish school. Did it employ de-legitimization or legitimization to persuade the social democrats to engage in radical assessment reform of schools?

Chapter 10 summarizes the dissertation's empirical findings and places them in a comparative setting. The research questions will be reiterated and an overall answer will be provided. In addition, the support for the theoretical framework will be reviewed and rival explanations will be discussed before a final conclusion.

Chapter 11 presents the contributions of the dissertation. The dissertation primarily contributes to the theoretical literature on ideas, but another important contribution to the idea literature is empirical and methodological. In addition, a secondary goal has been to contribute to the emerging literature on education policy. Finally, future research directions will be indicated.

Chapter 2:
Theoretical framework

> The most important step we can take, however, is to note that it is not necessary to deny that politics involves a struggle for power and advantage in order to recognize that the movement of ideas plays a role, with some impact of its own, in the process of policymaking (Hall, 1993: 292).

Recent scholarly work has surely advanced the debate about ideas (Béland, 2005; Béland & Cox, 2011; Berman, 1998; Bhatia & Coleman, 2003; Blyth, 2002; Carstensen, 2010, 2011; Cox, 2001; Hall, 1989, 1993; Larsen & Andersen, 2009; Lindvall, 2009; Radaelli & Schmidt, 2004; Schmidt, 2002, 2008; Skogstad, 1998, 2008; Stiller, 2010; Walsh, 2000). Still, more work is needed to understand *how* ideas influence policy. In this chapter, it will be argued that to gain a better understanding of the causal relation between ideas and policy change, we need to look into how ideas change and subsequently influence policy. I will argue against the tendency in the idea literature to conceptualize idea change in a de-politicized manner and to focus on experts as suppliers of ideas. Instead I will focus on political parties and seek to develop an understanding of their role in imparting new ideas. I will introduce two distinct mechanisms, de-legitimization and legitimization, which can induce change in ideas. These mechanisms can be used by parties to persuade other parties to change ideas and hence facilitate policy change.

The chapter consists of four parts. First, I briefly review the development in the idea literature and situate my framework in the literature. I will argue that there has been insufficient attention to how ideas change and that the historical institutional approach to ideas is too instrumental and largely ignores politics and the role of political parties. Second, the premises of an ideational framework will be made more explicit and the concepts of rationality and party preferences will be discussed. Third, I will clarify what ideas are and the different analytical levels among concepts of ideas and justify the study's focus on ideas as causal beliefs and problem definitions. Fourth, the theoretical framework will be developed with focus on parties and their use of persuasion. Two ideational mechanisms of persuasion termed ideational de-legitimization and legitimization will be presented. I argue that parties, by applying the mechanisms, can persuade other parties to change their ideas and hence render policy change possible. I further develop the theory by elaborating on potential differences in the processes whereby these mechanisms result in new causal beliefs or problem definitions. By theorizing

these mechanisms and making the theory prone to causal testing, I make a significant contribution to the idea literature.

2.1 Great expectations: The (re-)emergence of ideas as explanation of political behavior

The discussion of whether ideas matter is not new, but extends back to at least Hegel, Parsons and Max Weber. Nevertheless, for years it was overshadowed by interest based approaches and more recently institutional approaches (Rueschemeyer, 2006: 231-233). However, the 90s witnessed a new interest in ideas, according to some because the new institutionalist theories could not account for change (Blyth 1997: 229; Schmidt 2008: 304). The leading approaches to institutional analysis – sociological institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism, and historical institutionalism (Hall & Taylor, 1996) – provide answers to what sustains institutions over time as well as compelling accounts of cases in which exogenous shocks or shifts prompt institutional change. Still, they lack a general model of change, particularly one that can comprehend both exogenous and endogenous sources of change (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010: 9; Hemerijck & van Kersbergen, 1999). Despite their many differences, nearly all definitions of institutions treat them as relatively enduring features of social and political life that structure behavior and that cannot be changed easily or swiftly (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010: 5). Further: '[T]he institutional perspective is considerably more instructive as an explanation of the *prospects* for policy reform than as an explanation of the specific *form* that policy change takes' (Beland & Hacker, 2004: 45). In an attempt to rectify these shortcomings, ideas came to be understood as a crucial variable in understanding the path of institutional change as well as the origin of change itself.

While the emergence of ideas might have inculcated scholars with high hopes that ideas would be regarded on par with institutional or structural explanations, these expectations have been largely unfulfilled. Since the 1990s there has been a continuing interest in exploring the role of ideas. A perfunctory review of the literature reveals a large amount of scholarly work on 'ideas about ideas' (Béland, 2009; Béland & Cox, 2011; Blyth, 1997, 2003, 2011; Braun & Busch, 1999; Carstensen, 2010, 2011; Gofas & Hay, 2010, Hay, 2011; Mehta, 2011; Parsons, 2007; Schmidt, 2008; 2011). By 'ideas about ideas', I mean pieces on the more theoretical and definitional issues of ideas and on ontology and epistemology. However, the track record of ideational explanations is mixed. It is by now well established that new ideas and policy

change are intimately connected. However, while something resembling a consensus has emerged around the proposition that ideas indeed *do* matter, scholars still struggle to understand exactly *how* ideas matter in shaping policy (Campbell, 2008; Mehta, 2006). Hence, more effort should be put into the development of explanatory frameworks prone to causal testing, providing opportunities for verification as well as falsification. The same message is expressed in a more modest critique by Parsons (2007: 95): 'Rather than deep ambiguity about ideational logic, it is confusion about how to make an ideational explanation in practice that most often troubles its proponents and opponents'.

Hence, the framework developed in this chapter seeks to contribute to such an understanding by more precisely focusing on how ideas change and influence policy. A potential benefit of focusing on how ideas change and subsequently influence policy instead of merely focusing on how ideas influence policy is related to the critique of ideas. Ideational analyses are sometimes accused of approximating tautology as describing ideas is often difficult without referring to the actions it might explain: 'we know that people adhere to a certain idea because we see them acting consistently with it, and we know that they act this way because they adhere to this idea' (Parsons, 2007: 116). By focusing on the causes of idea change we go a step back in the causal chain increasing the distance from the actual behaviour of policy change. Further, an often invoked point of criticism of ideas is that they are merely epiphenomenal of interests, i.e. they are only the result of interests with no independent impact on political behavior (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994: 191). Focusing on how ideas change allows one to analyze empirically if the change in ideas coincides with material changes in actors' environment leading their preferences to change for other reasons than ideational ones.

Further, I will seek to identify the change of ideas with specific actors. As argued by Stiller (2009: 176) a potential for understanding the cause of change may lie in focusing on the micro-level of analysis. This means to take political agency into consideration. Even if the idea literature markets itself as agency centered (Béland & Cox, 2011: 12) it seldom is (for successful exceptions see Berman 1998; Jakobsen, 2007; Larsen & Andersen, 2009; Mandelkern & Shalev, 2010; Parsons, 2003; Stiller, 2010). The critique is especially true of some of the older variants of the idea literature. A related issue concerns that the literature has been troubled by a particular de-politicized view of ideas and policy change. Hence, the focus has often been on instrumental problem solving and on actors like bureaucrats and experts. Below, I will elaborate my critique and argue for a strengthened focus on political actors.

2.1.1 Critique of a de-politicized vision of policy change

One of the most prominent approaches to understanding how ideas change originates from historical institutionalism. Learning is the classic historical institutional explanation of how ideas change. In this situation the change in beliefs is brought about by policy makers' 'puzzling'. Heclo (1974: 304f) argued that policy making is not only about conflict and power, but that politics also finds its source in uncertainty. As he famously put it: 'governments not only "power" (...); they also puzzle. Policy-making is a form of collective puzzlement on society's behalf' (1974: 305-306). This is associated with the concept of learning, which he defined as a relatively enduring alteration in behavior that results from experience. Heclo's insight was later applied by Hall, who argued that when problems occur that an existing paradigm is not able to solve, policy makers search for alternative ideas to remedy the inadequacy of the old paradigm. In Hall's optic, a policy failure is understood as the appearance of developments that are not fully comprehensible within the terms of the paradigm and hence there is a lack of instruments to deal with the failure: 'Therefore, the movement from one paradigm to another that characterizes third order change is likely to involve the accumulation of anomalies, experimentation with new forms of policy, and policy failures that precipitate a shift in the locus of authority over policy and initiate a wider contest between competing paradigms' (Hall, 1993: 280). Hall defined social learning as: 'A deliberate attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in response to past experience and new information' (Hall, 1993: 278; for other definitions of social learning see Bennet & Howlett, 1992; Sabatier, 1987; Weiss, 1977a, 1977b). At face value the concept of learning grants a rather limited role for interests. Ideas are viewed in a quite functionalist way; they provide solutions to policy problems and policy change when problems emerge that the old policy cannot solve. Hall (1993: 292) several times indicates his awareness of the political dimension of ideas, but we need an elaborate theorization.

Further, models of social learning tend to downgrade the role of politicians. This is a consequence of existing models of social learning being heavily dominated by state theorists influenced by Heclo (Hall, 1993: 277). Heclo observed that '[f]orced to choose one group among all the separate political factors as most consistently important … the bureaucracies of Britain and Sweden loom predominant in the policies studied' (Heclo, 1974: 308). The key agents who are seen to push forward the learning process are the experts in a policy field, 'either working for the state or advising it from privileged positions at the interface between the bureaucracy and the intellec-

tual enclaves of society' (Heclo, 1974: 308). Some of the same objections can be directed at Hall (1993). Although he does mention that the election of Margaret Thatcher as prime minister is a key component of the story of economic paradigm change (Hall, 1993: 284), the lack of agency is conspicuous. It appears that ideas have a life of their own and their intrinsic worth determines their dissemination. In contrast, a plausible argument could be that the British paradigm change was prompted by a convincing political discourse. Other scholars are also vulnerable to this critique. Hemerijck & Van Kersbergen (1999: 177) criticize Sabatier (1993), the father of the Advocacy Coalition Framework, for being: 'bent on 'depoliticising' the policy process. (…). Sabatier is particularly interested in policy areas that are dominated by sector-specific technical problems and the achievement of pragmatic consensus on the basis of cognitive theories provided by recognized professional experts'.[1] In general, the lack of attention to the role of political agency can be argued to be a widespread weakness of institutional theory (Ross, 2000). Policy makers' possibilities for inducing reform are often portrayed as severely constrained (Pierson, 2001; Stiller, 2009).

2.2.2 Calling attention to the politics of ideas: parties as ideational veto players

In contrast, I will attempt to develop a framework specifically directed at political parties as ideational actors. Parties should be expected to matter for a number of reasons. Overall, politicians are often key arbiters in the decision to break with the past (Hall, 2008: xiii). Ultimately, policy makers issue policy proposals and vote them through. Parties can hence produce or obstruct policy change. This type of reform obstacle is theorized by the veto player theory. According to Tsebelis (2002: 19) veto players are: 'individual or collective actors whose agreement is necessary for a change of the status quo'. Veto players can be defined as such for example by the constitution and hence be understood best as institutional veto players. In addition they can be generated by the political game constituting partisan veto players (Tsebelis, 2002: 19)'. In the existing framework parties – aka partisan veto players – occupy a central role. The present framework will seek an understanding of how parties can make opposing parties change their ideas and consequent-

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[1] Other more current examples of scholars focusing less on politicians are Genieys & Smyrl (2008). They investigate the elite of policy making 'professionals', which seems to imply highly developed state bureaucracies (2008: 21-22).

ly their policy position – that is eliminate the reform obstacle – and hence make policy change possible.

However, why should one expect that parties' ideas are more important than experts' ideas? Cox (2009: 205) argues that 'Political Parties are the most important merchants of policy ideas'. Further, policy makers have the advantage that they ultimately decide which experts they will listen to. If they have the position as minister they also have the power to appoint and dismiss leading bureaucrats. In addition, there are reasons to expect that experts' influence is limited to issues like specific policy solutions (Lindvall, 2009). Overall, in this book, the change in ideas is of interest. Focusing on parties instead of experts and bureaucrats provides a more dynamic impetus for change in ideas. Politicians are constantly faced with voter demands that they need to address if they want to be reelected, and this pressure increases the likelihood of being open to new ideas. On a more practical note, national parties represented in parliament are more visible and fewer in number than bureaucrats and experts. Focusing on them may thus make it easier to identify the impetus of change than analyzing 'faceless' bureaucrats.

Summarizing the preceding literature review, it has been argued that more work is needed to understand *how* ideas influence policy. More specifically it has been argued that to gain a better understanding of the causal relation between ideas and policy change, we need to look into how ideas change and subsequently influence policy. It was argued against the tendency in the idea literature to conceptualize idea change in a de-politicized manner and to focus on experts as suppliers of ideas. Instead I suggested focusing on political parties as ideational actors. Before developing such an analytical framework, I will first elaborate on some theoretical and conceptual issues.

2.2. Premises of an ideational explanation

To be able to apply a framework and judge its applicability in a given case the premises of the framework must be clarified. Thus, below I will discuss this ideational framework's stance on rationality and the aspect of parties' preferences, i.e., how parties are assumed to be motivated in an ideational framework.

2.2.1 An ideational take on rationality

Many ideational as well as institutional explanations diverge from structural explanations by starting from ambiguity in the objective environment. The

studies argue that the objective conditions around certain people are highly ambiguous or uncertain, such that even rational people to some degree depend on interpretative filters to organize their preferences (Parsons, 2007: 98). This amounts to claiming that people are a-rational: '(i)n a-rational ideational claims it is the actor's interpretation of the situation, not the situation itself, which ultimately indicates a way forward' (Parsons, 2007: 99). Another approach could be to assume irrationality by assuming that people are unable to hold consistent preferences, perceive external conditions accurately or match solutions instrumentally to problems and hence depend to some degree on ideas to shape their thinking and actions (Parsons, 2007: 98). The latter approach is found less tenable in an analysis of political parties. However, disagreement exists on how to conceive of the prevalence of uncertainty, and some constructivists take the entire concept of rationality on. Constructivists like Gofas and Hay (2008: 37) posit that it is natural and credible to see uncertainty as a universal condition and hence expect ideas to matter all the time (see also Wendt, 1999: 130; Blyth, 2002; 2006). Widmaier, Blyth and Seabrooke (2007: 750) argue that agents face a fundamental uncertainty in forming expectations that limit the ability of agents to form any meaningful estimate on future trends. Hence, they argue that interests are epiphenomenal of ideas. This is related to the constructivist claim that actors' conduct is not a reflection of their material interest but rather of their perception of their material interests (Hay 2004a: 209; see also Parsons 2003: 6 and Beland 2009: 702).

However, many ideational analyses – the present analysis included – remain agnostic on the hard-to-demonstrate issue of overarching rationality or irrationality while showing that the action is a- or irrational with respect to salient competing arguments (Parsons 2003: 16-17, 239; 2007: 104). Frequently, they point to salient structural or institutional conditions and hence deduce how one might expect objectively rational people to respond to them. Finally, evidence is collected and displayed to illustrate how a given action is either ambiguously related to those objective signals or contradicts them (See e.g. Bhatia & Coleman, 2003; Blyth, 2002; Larsen & Andersen, 2009; Jakobsen, 2007; 2009; Stiller, 2010). This is the approach chosen in this book too. By doing this, I take a more moderate constructivist position and do not, unlike Hay (2011) question the entire concept of self-interest nor of rationality.

2.2.2 Party preferences

An issue that is related to actors' potential rationality is preferences. As has been stressed several times, the dissertations framework will be particularly

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designed with political parties in mind. So what assumptions about parties' preferences will be made? The traditional rational assumption about parties' motivation was that parties were vote seeking. This was formulated eloquently by Downs (1957: 28): 'Parties formulate policies in order to win elections, rather than win elections in order to formulate policies'. Recently this assumption has been modified and parties are now assumed to weigh three competing goals against each other: *votes, office and policy* (Strøm, 1990). Office-seeking parties are motivated primarily by office and the personal benefits of prestige, chauffeur etc. In Downs' frame of reference office and vote-seeking behavior are not contradictions: '[Party]members are motivated by their personal desire for the income, prestige, and power which come from holding office ... Since none of the appurtenances of office can be obtained without being elected, the main goal of every party is the winning of elections. Thus, all its actions are aimed at maximizing votes' (1957: 34f). Policy-seeking parties are primarily motivated by influencing public policy. However, office is often necessary to get to influence policy. Still office is instrumental for policy-seeking parties and not the end as for office-seeking parties (Strøm, 1990: 566ff).

The ideational literature often categorizes parties under the policy-seeking party behavior (Stiller, 2010: 38-39). Applying the existing ideational framework does not mean that one has to deny the existence of office- and vote-seeking motivation altogether. Nor do I argue that parties by default are policy seeking. However, the existing framework focuses on specific situations where parties should be expected to attach special importance to policy. This is related to the argument about actors' a-rationality. Given that in the specific situation the objective conditions around certain people are highly ambiguous or uncertain making even rational people depend on ideas to organize their preferences. If the environment were channeling clear incentives to parties making them act based on vote- or office-seeking motivation, ideas will not necessarily be the proper explanation of the policy change. This book will in line with existing approaches promoted by e.g. Genieys & Smyrl (2008) and Jobert & Muller (1987) argue that ideas are essential for the struggle over legitimate authority which is centered on the creation and imposition of ideas (Genieys & Smyrl, 2008: 43). Legitimate authority[2] is understood as a generalized dynamic where actors engage in an institutionalized competition for dominance (Genieys & Smyrl, 2008: 11). If an image or an understanding makes a social condition a public policy prob-

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[2] They differentiate legitimate authority or domination from the more general notion of power by applying Max Weber's understanding of legitimate authority (Weber: 1978: 53).

lem, it is expected that governments take action to solve the problem and to do this – given the assumption of a-rationality – they need ideas.

Does the above mean that ideas are not believed and are only used strategically? Certainly not; actors depend on ideas to be able to act and attain their goals. Still, Carstensen (2011) argues against the tendency in the idea literature to assume that actors internalize ideas. As a core opponent he situates Hall (1993), who argues that paradigms are incommensurable granting paradigms monopoly over the minds of actors. The argument about not internalizing ideas does not mean that ideas are merely epiphenomenal, but rather that ideas are not ready for use as general templates: 'political actors have to employ ideas creatively and pragmatically to make them work, both in matters of intellectually grasping their world as well in the strategic endeavor to satisfy their political preferences' (Carstensen, 2011: 154-155).

2.3 Defining types of ideas

Before developing the analytical framework a conceptual issue needs to be addressed. Below, I will thus discuss what ideas are and the existence of different analytical levels of ideas. Further, the idea concepts chosen for analysis – causal beliefs and problem definitions – will be justified. After clarifying the definition of ideas, I present the dissertations analytical framework. This framework will stress political parties' role in the process and lean on the concept of persuasion in the development of mechanisms for change.

Ideas are interpretative filters meaning that they are products of cognition and connected to the material world only via our interpretations of our surroundings. Ideas help us to think about ways to address the problems and challenges we face, and can thereby cause our actions (Béland & Cox, 2011: 3). The term 'idea' here means ideas irrespective of analytical level. According to Metha (2011; see also Schmidt, 2008), there are three analytical levels of ideas: ideas as policy solutions, problem definitions and macro ideas.

First, ideas are sometimes understood as specific 'policy solutions'. When we apply this concept it is implicitly assumed that the problem as well as the objective are given and the idea provides the means to solve the problem and accomplish the objective. Second, however, objectives and problems are not pre-established (Rein and Schön, 1977), and hence ideas' role as problem definition is also important (Mehta, 2011: 32). According to Mehta (2011: 36-37), problem definition is a certain way of understanding a complex reality and the way a problem is framed affects what types of policy solutions are deemed desirable. Ideas as problem definition is a belief about

'things to be done' and ideas as policy solution is a belief about 'how' things should be done (Capano, 2003: 783). Problem definition as an analytical concept resides on the same analytical level as what Peter Hall (1993: 279) calls 'paradigms', in that they describe 'not only the goals of policy … but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing.' Similar to Mehta, I prefer to use the term problem definition: '(…) because while paradigms tend to evoke the notion of a single dominant idea that governs an area, problem definitions evoke the fluid nature of constantly competing ideas that highlight different aspects of a given situation' (Mehta, 2011: 46).

Finally, there are macro ideas which – in contrast to the more policy sector specific problem definition or policy solution – are broader ideas that cut across substantive areas. According to Mehta (2011: 37) this includes public philosophies which are ideas about how to understand the purpose of government or public policy in light of a certain set of assumptions about society and the market. A related idea is the zeitgeist, which is a set of assumptions that are widely shared and not open to criticism, at least in a particular historical moment. The zeitgeist may not be as closely related to the purpose of government as a public philosophy. Other examples of macro ideas are ideologies or world views which provide more or less total visions of the world (Berman, 1998: 20).

While the existence of these levels is not called into question, it is argued that one level is missing. In Mehta's (2011) representation policy solutions resemble what Blyth (2002) calls 'blueprints'. They are a mere means to achieve a given objective. In contrast, the objective or problem is defined by the problem definition. However, I argue that connecting the problem or objective and the policy solutions is a causal belief.

Béland & Cox (2011) argue that ideas are causal beliefs highlighting that as causal beliefs ideas posit connections between things and between people in the world (Béland & Cox, 2011: 3-4). Causal beliefs resemble Berman's (1998: 21) concept of programmatic beliefs which: 'supply, in other words, the ideational framework within which programs of actions are formulated'. Capano (2003: 783) also comes close to this concept, which he terms policy solution, the cognitive dimension of the idea; 'the series of cause-and-effect relationships by means the participants formulate their general strategy of intervention and chose individual public-policy instruments' (Capano, 2003: 783; see also Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: 10). In this book the term 'causal belief' will be applied to distinguish it from the term 'policy solution' coined by Mehta. This causal belief contains a causal interpretation of how a given policy solution contributes to solving a problem and/or attaining an objective. Hence, causal beliefs connect lower level

ideas like policy solutions and higher level ideas like problem definitions and macro ideas[3].

Table 2.1: Overview of different levels of ideas and their content

Type of idea	Macro idea	Problem definition	Causal belief	Policy solution
Definition/ content	Elite ideas – about cross sectional problems, causal beliefs or policy solutions	Elite ideas which organize the way problems are seen in a particular policy sector	Elite ideas about cause-effect-relations involving specific policy solutions	Elite ideas about a specific policy solution
Related terms	Zeitgeist, Public Philosophy (Mehta, 2011) World view, Ideology (Berman 1998) Global referential (Jobert & Mullers 1987)	Frame (Bhatia & Coleman, 2003) Policy paradigm (Hall, 1989, 1993) Le referential (Jobert & Mullers 1987)	Programmatic beliefs (Berman, 1998)	Policy position (Berman 1998) Blueprint (Blyth, 2002: 41)
Empirical examples	Socialism New Public Management Modernization Neo liberalism	Unemployment is a structural problem	Unemployment can be reduced by giving unemployed incentives to work via activation	Active labor policies: e.g. activation, shortened eligibility period for unemployment benefits

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[3] Another often invoked distinction is between normative and cognitive ideas. At a cognitive level, ideas are descriptions and theoretical analyses that specify cause and effect relationships whereas at the normative level ideas entail values and attitudes (Campbell, 1998: 384). Unlike Lindvall (2009: 705), who argues that ideas should be kept strictly apart from value-based and norms-based explanations of policy making, I problematize the possibility of completely separating normative and cognitive ideas (see also Blyth, 2002: 11; Woll, 2008). Ideas in the form of causal beliefs will often invoke both causal and normative aspects in connecting lower level ideas like policy solutions and higher level ideas like problem definitions and macro ideas. In contrast, it is relatively unproblematic to categorize problem definitions and policy solutions in this aspect. The normative dimension will be reflected in the problem definitions exposed by policy actors which: 'arises from perceived discrepancies between what is and what ought to be' (Bhatia & Coleman, 2003: 716). In contrast, ideas about specific policy solutions relate to the more cognitive aspects of ideas.

2.4 Two central idea concepts at two different stages in the policy process

In this dissertation, I will primarily focus on the two ideational concepts of *problem definition* and *causal beliefs*. Overall, the levels of ideas chosen for the analytical framework relates to different stages of the policy process. The problem definition is essential as it selects the actors who can legitimately assert their policy solutions as well as the range of possible policy solutions. However, it does not determine specific policy solutions and thus a focus on causal beliefs is needed. I will elaborate these points below.

2.4.1 Problem definition: narrowing down policy solutions

Mehta claims that it is essential to separate the battle over problem definition from the battle over policy solutions. He proposes a three-stage model of policy change: the first stage is the battle over problem definition, the second is where policy is debated and the final stage is where policy is enacted (2006: 31-33). In the battle over problem definition a wide arrays of actors try to influence the problem definition. Mehta suggests that which problem definition emerges victorious has large consequences for the next stage. First, the battle over problem definition is essential as it selects which actors legitimately can assert their solutions: 'Policy entrepreneurs who prescribe solutions that are consistent with the definition of the problem are empowered, while those outside the new mainstream are marginalized'. Second, it narrows down the range of policy solutions that can be proposed: 'The definition of the problem also restricts the range of debate, creating boundaries of the range of possibilities that are seriously considered' (Mehta, 2006: 32). Changing a problem definition can be a first step before actual policy change. However, it does not determine the policy solutions policy makers struggle over in the second stage of the policy process. Thus a change in problem definition is one step forwards towards changing policy, but still an important step is missing: the change in causal beliefs.

2.4.2 Causal beliefs: determining policy solutions

While the problem definition is central as it narrows down the possible policy solutions, it does not determine any specific policy solutions. Different actors might endorse the same problem definition but have different perceptions of how given policy solutions contribute to attain this. For example, two actors might agree that climate changes are man-made as opposed to natural, but one actor might argue for policy solutions involving massive public invest-

ment in renewable energy, the other for emission taxes on greenhouse gas emission requiring individual emitters to pay. Hence, the same problem definition cannot explain why actors prefer different policy solutions. Further, actors' endorsement of the same policy solution does not necessarily enlighten us about why they do so. An actor could favor wind mills for strategic reasons of energy security or for purely environmental reasons. Hence, it is very important to tap into actors' causal beliefs instead of only looking into policy solutions and problem definitions.

Another important reason to be very clear on the level of idea used as explanation is that it delineates what type of phenomenon one can explain (Mehta, 2011; Berman, 1998: 20-21). Central here is the distance between the idea and the phenomena one wishes to explain. On the one hand, the distance between a concept like a macro idea, e.g. globalization, and a dependent variable, e.g. financial deregulation, is quite large and hence the process might have been confounded by a number of other factors. Berman (1998: 20) points out that macro ideas like world views and ideology that supposedly explain everything of course explain nothing. On the other side, the distance between a policy solution of activation and the actual policy of activation is very short and hence the risk of tautology increases. In Berman's (1998: 21) words, policy solutions as a concept may be too narrow to be interesting. Hence, if one wants to apply ideas as a cause of policy change, a middle range concept like causal belief is found to be the most appropriate. Overall, it is expected that a party's new causal belief will cause the party to adopt a new policy position in relation to a specific policy solution.

Figure 2.1: How causal beliefs relate to policy change
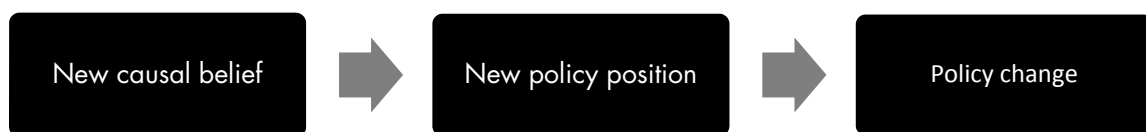
In relation to this hypothesized connection is an important premise regarding whether parties when they agree on causal beliefs have the possibility to undertake reform in accordance with these causal beliefs. In this framework it is ceteris paribus assumed that policy makers are indeed able to undertake reform. Concluding, the key analytical concepts of ideas will be causal belief and problem definition.

2.5 Persuasion: an alternative approach to explaining change in ideas and policy

In the following sections, the study's central theoretical contribution – an analytical framework – will be presented. I will utilize the concept of persuasion as an alternative understanding of how idea change can be induced. More specifically, I will introduce two distinct mechanisms of persuasion, delegitimization and legitimization, that can induce change in ideas. These mechanisms can be used by parties to persuade other parties to change beliefs and hence ultimately make policy change possible.

The logic of persuasion has been powerfully described by Blyth (2007). According to Blyth (2007) the mechanisms that resolve an economic crisis are not limited to either *puzzling*, an apolitical process of discovering workable policies, or *powering*, political struggles between self-interested actors. Rather, he argues that policy change is driven mainly by a political process of *persuasion*, which rests on the ability of idea carriers to convince other agents that a novel, even alien policy paradigm is in their interest. Mandelkern & Shalev (2010: 462) suggest that: 'persuasion represents an important departure from explaining the potency of policy ideas solely on the basis of their intrinsic properties, such as the degree to which they are familiar, parsimonious, or feasible. Instead, it brings to the fore an emphasis (…) on the agency of idea carriers as active political animals who 'establish institutional and political support for ideas to translate into political action' (Widmaier et al. 2007, 754. See also Payne 2001; Risse 2000)'. To Schmidt persuasion means 'the ability of agents with good ideas to use discourse effectively', while Blyth describes it as: 'exhortation and prodding' (Blyth, 2007: 770; Schmidt, 2009: 11)'.

In a more exhaustive definition of persuasion, Mansbridge (1994: 298) discerns between two overall strategies of influence: persuasion and traditional power exercise. Persuasion is defined in the following manner: '… A causing B to do something B would otherwise not do, through A's argument aimed at furthering B's own goals, broadly defined. Such arguments appeal to reason, emotion, and to conceptions of self that may not exist in the consciousness of the persuaded before the appeal' (1994: 309). Hence parties can use persuasion to make other parties view their interests in a new light. Even if persuasion is used strategically it only has an effect if the recipients of persuasion change their understanding of their own interests (1994: 303). An implicit assumption of persuasion is the existence of obstacles to policy change. The purpose of persuasion is ultimately to eliminate this obstacle

and induce policy change. The present framework is developed to understand how parties can perform persuasion and make partisan veto players change their ideas and policy position, hence allowing policy to change. Still, to utilize persuasion as an analytical concept it needs to be clarified exactly how political parties persuade other parties to change ideas. Below, two hypothesized versions of persuasion will be discussed.

2.6 Persuading via de-legitimization: utilizing failure

The event of policy failure was early on connected to the policy influence of new ideas (Checkel, 1997; Hall, 1993; Hemerijck & Van Kersbergen, 1999; McNamara, 1998). In Hall's optic, a policy failure is understood as the appearance of developments which are not fully comprehensible within the terms of the paradigm and hence there is a lack of instruments to deal with the failure (Hall, 1993: 280). According to Walsh (2000: 486), '(t)he position that failure is an important spur to ideational and policy innovation is almost universal' and hence 'decision makers learn, adopt, and implement new ideas when existing public policies fail to meet programmatic or political goals'. I will argue that policy failure is related to an ideational mechanism I will term de-legitimization. De-legitimization is one of the processes whereby political parties can persuade other parties to change causal beliefs or problem definitions and involves undermining the legitimacy of existing causal beliefs or problem definitions. It is argued that to effectively pursue a de-legitimization of existing ideas establishing failure is pivotal. However, it is essential to stress that failure and de-legitimization are not the same thing. De-legitimization might be performed without any evidence of failure, but the event of failure is still expected to increase the likelihood that de-legitimization results in opposing parties changing their ideas. Further, it is expected that de-legitimization based on failure will be extra powerful if the failure is related to an idea that is highly valued by the opponents. In this book, de-legitimization will be defined as *a process of undermining the legitimacy of existing ideas that underwrites policy*.

Mark Blyth convincingly argued for using ideas discursively as weapons: 'In order to replace them, agents must delegitimate such institutions by contesting the ideas that underlie them' (2002: 39). One way would be to say that these foundational policy ideas are creating problems, not solving them. Ideas can be effective weapons for transforming policies because existing policies are the result of past ideas about how things work (Blyth, 2002: 39). Other scholars have also noted ideas' role as weapons. Bhatia & Coleman's (2003) concept of transformative discourse entails de-legitimization as it is

developed by policy elites and directed at a wider range of policy actors in order to convince them of the need to work together to change the core normative and/or cognitive elements of the dominant policy frame. More specifically, what they term c*hallenging discourse* is about persuading others to think differently about policy and involves the marshalling of persuasive 'social facts' to undermine the dominant policy frame and to promote the alternative (Bhatia & Coleman, 2003: 728). Stiller (2009, 2010) makes an argument about 'ideational leaders' – as a particular kind of policy entrepreneurs – who tackle institutional obstacles by changing the preferences of actors who oppose far-reaching reforms and thereby break up institutional lock-in mechanisms (Stiller, 2009: 171). One way is by exposing drawbacks of the status quo by establishing policy failure and legitimizing new policy alternatives by consistently using cognitive and normative arguments about its merits.

Also Peter Hall (1993) touches on de-legitimization, but in his optic de-legitimization could be interpreted to occur almost automatically: 'Like scientific paradigms, a policy paradigm can be threatened by the appearance of anomalies, namely by developments that are not fully comprehensible, even as puzzles, within the terms of the paradigm' (1993: 280). If failure more or less automatically de-legitimizes ideas one should find evidence of learning. Hence, a policy failure or crisis should lead policy makers to revise their existing causal beliefs and search for new policy solutions in the absence of persuasion. This would indicate a type of idea induced policy change familiar to that suggested by historical institutionalism and not the approach of persuasion advanced here.

How can one detect the de-legitimization associated with persuasion? Entman's discussion of frames is useful in this respect: 'Frames, then, *define problems* – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; *diagnose causes*—identify the forces creating the problem; *make moral judgments*—evaluate causal agents and their effects; and *suggests remedies*—offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects' (Entman, 1993: 52). Hence, de-legitimization involves attacking other parties' ideas – that is the fallibility of the parties' perceptions about the effects of certain policies. One should see arguments about how a problem is caused by other parties' ideas which are embodied in the current policy solutions. The benefit of applying a de-legitimization strategy is that if successful it creates a policy void to be filled – preferable by one's own policy solutions. The reason parties should react to the de-legitimization of their ideas is also related to the overall support of the party. If parties' beliefs on an issue are deemed illegitimate

this will affect people's beliefs of the party's legitimacy to conduct policy on the issue and possibly also people's overall evaluation of the party.

2.7 Persuading via ideational legitimization: utilizing existing ideas

Does persuasion always have to involve claims of policy failure? It is argued that the role of failure varies according to which mechanism is at stake. But how could political parties persuade other parties to change causal beliefs in absence of a policy failure? In this regard, the framing literature could perhaps be of help. Offhand, persuasion seems to be somewhat related to framing.[4] One of the big differences from the idea literature is that framing studies overwhelmingly take interest in 'how frames in the communications of elites (e.g., politicians, media outlets, interest groups) influence citizens' frames and attitudes. This process is typically called a framing effect' (Chong & Druckman, 2006: 109). In contrast, this book's focus is on how elites try to convince other elites, that is how political parties seek to persuade other political parties. Another difference according to Chong & Druckman (2007: 115) is that persuasion analytically concerns changing the content of one's beliefs while framing changes the weight assigned to different beliefs in one's overall attitude (see also Nelson & Oxley, 1999). However, in practice the two phenomena appear similar and I will argue that they to some degree depend on the successful utilization of a common logic. Hence, Chong & Druckman (2006: 106) ask what makes a strong frame and point out that the typical political strategy is to connect a proposal to a positive idea or value that is widely available in the population. They refer to the social movement literature (e.g., Snow & Benford, 1988, 1992, Poletta & Ho 2006), which were frontrunners in exploring how groups employ frames for mobilization purposes. According to Béland (2009: 706-707), political actors can, through what he calls value amplification, rework the meaning of a well-known value or principle in order to legitimize policy change. Similarly, White & Ypi (2011: 389)

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[4] According to Entman (1993: 52): 'To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described'. Frames are also described as the 'central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning' (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989: 143)'. Similarly, '(F)raming refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue' (Chong & Druckman, 2007: 106).

discuss what they term: 'political justification' the outcome of which is dependent on 'not only by the force of reasons offered, but also by their level of correspondence with preexisting schemes of understanding'.[5]

It thus seems reasonable to think that invoking existing ideas or values in a positive way is also essential in persuading actors to change their causal beliefs or problem definitions. I argue that another process whereby political parties can persuade other parties to change ideas is what I call ideational legitimization. Ideational legitimization is defined as *a process of exhorting the legitimacy of existing ideas to legitimize a new idea.*

In Stiller's (2009, 2010) argument about ideational leadership the internal relationship between the causal mechanisms remains unclear: Can legitimization only have influence after de-legitimization has been effective? Stiller seems to argue that de-legitimization is a prerequisite for legitimizing new ideas, but I will argue that legitimization alone can induce change in ideas. Existing ideas do not have to be discarded for a new policy idea to gain influence. In contrast to what is implied by Bhatia and Coleman (2003) legitimization is not only used to defend an existing idea or justify minor adjustment to policies. For example, they define augmentative discourse (≈legitimization) as: 'developed by policy elites and directed toward a broader mass public in an attempt to defend a dominant policy frame or to justify minor adjustments to policies within that frame' (Bhatia and Coleman, 2003: 718). In their view only transformative discourses can make new ideas influence policy and they especially stress the challenging discourse in this respect. However, it is here argued that one can also influence policy by drawing on existing ideas arguing how new policies resonate with old ideas.

Summing up, legitimization is about appropriating existing ideas to legitimize new ideas. One of the benefits of this approach is that one draws on the consensus on other ideas making it harder for opponents to disagree with the new idea. Carstensen (2010: 852) argues that a result of legitimization is that the original idea can change meaning. The advantage is that this happens without alienating the original creator of the idea. Further, it is difficult for the original creator of the idea to reject the new one as it builds on their own idea. As Berman (1998: 28) observes, 'contradicting or abandoning aspects of these ideas may be regarded by the public as a loss of integrity or responsibility'.

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[5] See also Nelson, Wittmer & Shortle (2010: 13) who discuss what they term value recruitment: the harnessing of social and political values in persuasive speech.

2.7.1 Differences in effects of a change in problem definition or causal beliefs

In the above section the mechanisms of de-legitimization and legitimization were discussed on an overall level regardless of the mechanisms produced a change in causal beliefs or problem definition. However, as I already have touched upon, there are differences in the possible effects of a change in problem definition and in causal beliefs. As illustrated below, while a change in causal beliefs is likely to lead to a change in policy position and possibly result in policy change, this is not the case with a new problem definition.

Table 2.2: Comparing the effects of a change in problem definition and causal beliefs

	Problem definition	Causal beliefs
Idea change	+	+
Change in policy position	%	+
Policy change	%	+

In continuation hereof, it will be argued that the subsequent process after de-legitimization or legitimization have induced a change in problem definition or causal beliefs diverges.

Figure 2.2: The two-phased process of how de-legitimization or legitimization induces change in problem definition
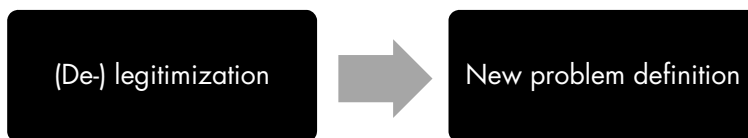
The adoption of a new problem definition in the wake of legitimization or de-legitimization is not expected to automatically result in new policy positions. In contrast, the adoption of a new causal belief is expected to lead to new policy positions and possibly policy change.

Figure 2.3: The four-phased process of how de-legitimization or legitimization induces change in causal belief and subsequently policy position and policy change

2.7.2 Are the mechanisms complementary?

Above I have sought to explicate two core mechanisms of persuasion: de-legitimization and legitimization. The discussion should have made it clear that we are dealing with two essentially disparate mechanisms. De-legitimization entails undermining the legitimacy of existing ideas while legitimization is about exhorting the legitimacy of existing ideas. Still, critics could perhaps claim that de-legitimization and legitimization are essentially part of the same ideational mechanism: first you de-legitimize existing ideas and then you legitimize your own ideas. This is only partially true. While de-legitimization to some extent involves legitimizing new ideas, it is quite possible to engage in legitimization of new policies without de-legitimizing old ideas beforehand.

The tone differs markedly between the two mechanisms too. In cases of de-legitimization there will be a distinctive negative tone, highlighting the existence of a problem caused by 'bad' ideas. In cases of legitimization the tone will be positive, highlighting the positive properties of an idea rather than the problem. Hence, the argument is that the processes are much more detached than argued by Stiller (2010). When all comes to all, the strength of these competing arguments will be tested in the empirical analyses.

2.7.3 Illustration of how persuasion matters

This section briefly illustrates the potential effect of persuasion in relation to the two types of ideas. As mentioned in section 2.4.2, the level of idea matters for the phenomena one desires to explain. I have devised a simple descriptive model distinguishing between whether parties agree and/or disagree on respectively problem definition and causal beliefs. This will illustrate the function of persuasion, which can be used to disrupt or produce a new interim 'equilibrium' by creating new ideas (causal beliefs or problem definitions).

Table 2.3: The politics of ideas

	Disagreement causal beliefs	Agreement causal beliefs
Disagreement problem definition	Struggle over problem definition	Policy change I
Agreement problem definition	Struggle over causal beliefs	Policy change II
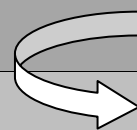
A battle over the problem definition (cell 1) is the most fundamental form of idea struggle. It occurs when parties based on conflicting ideas disagree on problem definition and hence whether an event poses a problem or not as well as disagree on a policy solution. Policy change I (cell 2) is a situation with disagreement on problem definition, but still somewhat agreement on a specific causal belief. A possible scenario could be that parties despite diverging problem definitions agree on a certain policy. For example both parties could agree that school vouchers are apt tools to increase competition between schools and hereby raise school quality. Still, the two parties could adhere to diverging problem definitions of schooling respectively equality or knowledge and skills. In a battle of causal beliefs (cell 3), policy actors agree on the problem definition and that there indeed is a problem that requires a policy response, but they still struggle over what this response should be. Finally, cell 4 depicts a consensus on problem definition and causal beliefs. One conception of this could be that of a strong unchallenged problem definition which dictates the policy solutions to be adopted. This resembles the paradigmatic policy envisaged by Hall (1989, 1993). However, it is argued that the situation is less stable and policy agreement will most likely be produced from situation to situation; sometimes based on persuasion, sometimes on other factors.

It is argued that persuasion in the form of de-legitimization or legitimization can create new ideas (problem definitions or causal beliefs) making parties agree on problem definition and/or causal beliefs. Hence, if persuasion is employed to create a new problem definition the situations in cell 1 and 2 can be changed into the situation in cell 3 where there is agreement about problem definition. For example a party can create a new problem definition by de-legitimizing the old one arguing that: 'Today's schools focus too much on social skills largely ignoring that of knowledge inducement resulting in poor pupil performance'. Further, persuasion can create a new causal belief and hence produce agreement on policy solutions shifting the situation in cell 3 to cell 4. Through legitimization parties can create a causal belief e.g. about national tests: 'National tests results help teachers support the weakest pupils and make sure that they attain enough knowledge to pursue further education. Thus tests serve to improve educational equality'.

2.8 The process whereby de-legitimization and legitimization result in new ideas

The core argument about the existence of two distinct mechanisms of persuasion, de-legitimization and legitimization, was presented above. The former discussion is clearly related to the theoretical debates in the literature and can be argued to be associated with the ideational literature's core arguments. In contrast, the following discussion draws on parliamentary and party literature. The arguments are more in the periphery of the idea literature. However, by elaborating on potential differences in the processes whereby these mechanisms result in new causal beliefs or problem definitions, it is argued that the following serves to make the theory more prone to testing besides developing the theory. Below, a table briefly summarizes the different scope conditions and characteristics of the two mechanisms of persuasion.

Table 2.4: Scope conditions and properties of ideational mechanisms of persuasion

	De-legitimization	Legitimization
Scope conditions	Policy failure	Strong existing idea
Position of performer (party A)	Opposition	Government
Position of recipient (party B)	Government	Opposition
Reaction recipient (party B)	Within party change in actors	Within party learning

It should already be clear that political parties cannot freely choose between legitimizing or de-legitimizing ideas. The reason is that certain aspects of the idea and the environment need to be considered. A precondition for using the mechanism of legitimization successfully is that there is a strong existing idea which policy makers agree is important. Further, establishing a policy failure is pivotal for de-legitimization to be able to induce new ideas. But what should the processes whereby the mechanisms change other actors' beliefs look like? Will the same type of actors perform legitimization and de-legitimization and how do parties react after being the targets of de-legitimization or legitimization? The following expectations are formulated and will be elaborated in the sections below:

> [P1$_{de\text{-}leg/opposition}$] The mechanism of *de-legitimization* will be used by the opposition, and in the event of policy failure this will lead the government to reshuffle actors and hereby adopt new ideas.

[P2$_{leg/government}$] The mechanism of *legitimization* will be used by the government and if existing ideas valued by the opposition are used this will lead to a change of ideas among the existing actors in the opposition.

I am aware that the expectations might be pushing the theory to its most stringent hereby ignoring several nuances. However, the expectations are made deterministic to allow testing of the arguments also in small N investigations. Below, the theory behind the expectations will be elaborated.

2.9 The parliamentary position of the performer of the mechanisms

Is there reason to believe that different parties will perform different types of persuasion and hence seek to change different types of parties' beliefs? One of the relevant distinctions between parties' roles relates to their place in opposition or in government because parliamentary democracy as a chain of delegation offers greater policy influence, and hence accountability, to governing parties than to opposition parties (Müller & Strøm 1999: 23; Strøm, Müller & Bergman 2003: 21). Government power is of course a double-edged sword: With the authority to influence what the state does follows responsibility (Thesen, 2011: 39-40). This means that the public, the interests groups, the media and not least the opposition are there to hold the government responsible for all kinds of policy problems; 'even if the government bears no direct responsibility for these problems, and even though many of the may not be amenable to government solutions in the first place' (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010a: 262). Hence, the opposition has 'the ability to hold the executive to account and ensure that it is required to explain and justify its actions – and inactions – before the representatives of the people' (Baldwin, 2004: 302). So one could argue that in the division of labor between opposition and government the opposition holds an attacking position in the public debate where it assigns responsibility for recent developments. The government on the other side has the position of shaping the political solutions to society's problems (Thesen, 2011: 40). With this in mind it appears reasonable to assume that de-legitimization more often will be initiated by opposition parties. However, ideational de-legitimization might also originate from the incumbent party, perhaps newly elected, trying to remove the remains of the old government's policy. Still, the former is expected to be the rule more than the exception.

It is harder to make clear-cut expectations about legitimization and which type of parties will seek to perform it, than about de-legitimization.

One could expect that the opposition could pursue legitimization as well as de-legitimization strategies. However, the relationship between opposition and government roles is not so straightforward. As mentioned the government is responsible for shaping the political solutions to society's problems, and there are several reasons a government could want to persuade the opposition to take part in policy making. It could be the need for a majority to make policy reforms, or that broad settlements are seen as desirable and appropriate (Pedersen, 2010: 56). Another reason could be sharing the blame for potentially unpopular policies. One way the government can try to make the opposition participate in policy making is to pursue the strategy of ideational legitimization.

2.10 How do parties change ideas?

Another relevant question is if the change in parties' ideas (problem definitions or causal beliefs) will take place in a similar manner in response to the two mechanisms. Does the change in ideas occur as the *existing actors* gain new ideas? Or does the change in ideas occur within the party by a *change of actors* adhering to different ideas?

2.10.1 Change of ideas by existing actors in the party

It is argued that the two mechanisms of persuasion will be perceived differently by both the party and the public. While de-legitimization can serve to powerfully set an agenda and bring attention to an issue and a party it also risks alienating the opponent. The reason is that de-legitimization is more intrusive than legitimization. It entails acknowledging publicly that one's old policy position was faulty as well as embracing a new causal belief or problem definition. This is hard to do as one could lose credibility in the eyes of the electorate. However, not changing ideas could also be hard as voters could blame the party for not taking responsibility and learning from the situation. In contrast, legitimization is less intrusive. The party does change ideas after legitimization; however, it is framed to not appear as a radical break with prior ideas but as a natural continuation of supporting certain ideas. Hence, publicly it is less costly credibility wise to change ideas based on legitimization in comparison to de-legitimization. As the change in ideas is less blatant and it hence is less costly credibility wise for an actor to change ideas in the wake of legitimization, legitimization is expected to result in change in ideas among the existing actors in the opposition party.

2.10.2 Change of ideas by change of actors in the party

De-legitimization could in principle result in a change of causal beliefs or problem definitions among the existing actors in the governing party. However, change in ideas could also be a result of a reshuffling of the existing actors in the party. In the literature parties are often assumed to be unitary actors (Laver & Schofield, 1990). Of course, parties are not unitary but complex organizations with conflicts of interests and power struggles about which interests to pursue (Katz & Mair, 1994). Hence, parties' behavior is a result of what takes place within as well as between parties (Tsebelis, 1990: 119-158; Laver & Shepsle, 1990: 490; Mitchell, 1999: 288; Laver, 2002:202; Pedersen, 2010: 14). Related to the often heroic assumption of parties as unitary actors is the fact that parties are entities composed of actors with possibly competing ideas. Hence, change in ideas can also occur within the party by a change in actors adhering to different beliefs. As Hall argues the change in paradigms will often be preceded by a change in the locus of authority (Hall, 1993: 280). Further, a party is a concept describing a group of people at different points in time. First of all, there might be different opinions in a party on various issues, and the different factions might hold power in different periods. Secondly, generational change may put new actors in power with different ideas about what is natural and desirable (Lindbom, 2011: 71). Hence, a new composition of members gives the party new beliefs. The reason that parties' change in ideas should be expected to occur through a change in actors is twofold. First, de-legitimization can shift the internal power balance in a party, suddenly making one faction's beliefs more legitimate than the opposing faction's beliefs and thus put the former faction in a position to represent the party's united stance on issues and overall change the party's beliefs. Second, as argued, changing beliefs may equal loss of credibility, especially if the same actor changes his or her position radically on an issue. It may be less blatant if a newly appointed minister or spokesperson brings in a fresh perspective – which happens to correspond to the de-legitimizing party's beliefs. In conclusion, de-legitimization by the opposition is expected to result in a change in actors in the governing party.

2.11 Summary

In the present chapter, a theoretical framework has been developed. The goal is to contribute to the existing literature on ideas by furthering the understanding of *how* ideas change and of the role of political parties in this process. The main argument is that political parties can utilize ideational me-

chanisms of de-legitimization and legitimization to persuade other political parties to change their ideas. The next two chapters will introduce the Danish and Swedish school policy sector and the policy field of assessment policy and finally the book's dependent variable of school assessment ideas. Chapter 5 introduces the book's design and methodology and discusses the best way to devise a research design suitable for testing the framework developed in this chapter. Further, a process tracing framework will be developed deriving observable implications of the theory.

Chapter 3:
The school policy sector and the field of school assessment policy

As illustrated in the introductory chapter, the study was sparked by an empirical conundrum. In recent years, radical changes in Danish and Swedish school policies have occurred. Both countries have adopted assessment policies like national tests and pupil plans, reformed grade systems and established evaluation and external audit councils. Before that, Denmark and Sweden had for a long period experienced a decrease in the number of tests and instances of grade awarding simultaneously as the time for introducing tests and grades had been pushed to the oldest forms in school. It has been argued that these changes are related to a seemingly change in assessment beliefs. This dissertation seeks to understand how the changes in beliefs have occurred. To do this we need to understand the policy field where the school political thinking and acting occurs.

This chapter will explore the context where the changes in assessment beliefs take place. First, the characteristics of the Danish and Swedish school policy sector are mapped. Here I look into the Nordic model of schooling, the decentralized school system, the characteristics of school policymaking and finally school performance. Second, I will detail the policy field of school assessment policy. This involves four steps: First, the concept of assessment will be defined and the relevant dimensions of assessment clarified. Second, assessment policies will be situated opposite other policy tools. Third, a typology of assessment tools will be developed. Finally, using this typology the assessment policy development in Denmark and Sweden will be mapped. The extent of the changes will be assessed arguing that the changes are significant for several reasons. Not only did the number of assessment policies increase but the nature of assessment policies have changed too.

3.1 Characteristics of the Danish and Swedish school policy sector

The following section investigates the institutional characteristics of the school systems in Sweden and Denmark. The main focus will be the systems of comprehensive school, decentralization, the political consensus on school policy as well as school performance.

3.1.1 The Nordic model of comprehensive schools

According to Telhaug et al. (2006: 246) it is reasonable to speak of a Nordic model in education, which includes the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Iceland, but is most representative of the three Scandinavian countries (Aasen, 2003: 109). To a large degree, the similarities originate in a political orientation, which in the latter part of the twentieth century was characterized by attempts to create social democratic welfare societies. This commitment to welfare policy was clearly reflected in the education policies of the three countries. The social democratic movement regarded education as a prerequisite for equality and equity and as an essential preparation for social inclusion and democratic participation (Aasen, 2003: 111).

According to Telhaug et al. (2006: 252) the golden age of social democracy resulted in major advances in comprehensive schools. After 1945 Sweden became the model for Norway, Denmark and Finland. In 1950, the Swedish Parliament established pilot projects on comprehensive schooling and in 1956 issued a principle statement that the pilot projects should lead to a common school for all children. Finally, in 1962 a proposition was issued about a new mandatory school (*grundskolan*) to be implemented nationwide (Larsson, 2001: 26-27). In Denmark, the comprehensive school was adopted a bit later than in Sweden and in several stages. The idea was controversial and the Conservatives as well as the teachers' associations (DLF, GL) opposed it. The Liberals in principle favored a comprehensive school but not as wholeheartedly as the Social Democrats. In 1958, a compromise was negotiated and the seven year comprehensive school introduced in Denmark. An exception was made that selection could be postponed until the end of grade seven (Wiborg, 2009: 187). Finally, in 1975 when the Social Democrats had government power, new school legislation was adopted and introduced the nine year comprehensive school (Juul, 2006; Wiborg, 2008: 59).

Another characteristic of the Scandinavian school system is that the children start school relatively late. Students of different abilities are kept together in the same classroom, and during the 1970s this also included the integration of handicapped or disabled children. The individual school and teacher experienced extensive freedom in teaching methods (Aasen, 2003: 114-115).

3.1.2 Two decentralized school systems

Today, the two school systems are quite alike although Sweden historically is considerably more centralized. The Danish Folkeskole has always been administered by local authorities. After the large municipal reform in 1970 regional management and supervision of schools changed when a number of regional school organs were shut down and their authorities transferred to municipalities (Lindbom, 1995: 116). However, it was not until the bill in 1989 that the primary school was fully transferred to municipal governance. For several years, the municipalities had been given more responsibility for and now owned the schools (Olesen, 2003: 172). Municipalities became responsible for staffing, buildings and financing (Christensen, 2000: 199). Through decentralization and increased local autonomy, decision making is now largely left to the institutions in cooperation with the local community. At the same time, the system of detailed control has been replaced by target and framework management, whereby the overall targets and requirements are defined at central level and implementation is left to the local authorities and the individual schools (Eurydice, 2004/05: 14f). The public primary schools are financed and run by the municipalities within a framework of rules and guidelines mainly from the Ministry of Education (Nannestad, 2003: 3). State contributions have been scaled down and from 1980 municipalities were in principle free to manage as they like after block grants were introduced (Lindbom, 1995: 91).

According to Lindblad, Lundahl, Lindgren & Zackari (2002: 284), Swedish education policy from the 1940s through the 1970s combined a quest for equity and centralized state governance, an approach that was strongly associated with a social democratic ideology. After this long period of stark centralization in school governance, Sweden embarked on a forceful decentralization in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was believed that resources were better used and creation of quality and equality better solved when decisions were taken at the local level (Aasen, 2003: 121). After a lot of debate and several reports, the government issued a new legislative act on the regulation of schools (prop. 1988/89: 4). The government and the parliament would have overall responsibility for guaranteeing equal education nationwide and municipalities would be responsible for organizing and executing schooling (Lindbom, 1995: 69). According to a legislative act (prop. 1990/91:18), the state would control schools through formulating national goals, but schools would have some freedom in reaching the goals (Lindbom, 1995: 71). Goal management was thus the governing logic of decentralization. In 1989, it was decided to delegate the state's employer re-

sponsibility for teachers to the municipalities (prop. 1989/90:41), and state contributions to schools were added to the general state contribution to municipalities. From 1993 the municipalities took over resource allocation to schools (prop. 1990/91:18), and as a consequence schools were given more freedom to manage resources and organize public schooling (Klitgaard, 2005: 21). Considering that the school system had been one of the most centrally regulated and controlled state apparatuses, the changes were very dramatic and visible (Kallós & Nilsson, 1995; Telhaug, 1994; Aasen, 2003: 118).

3.1.3 School policy making: Broad political support

Denmark and Sweden also share the political characteristics in the school policy area. Both are parliamentary unicameral regimes with many strong parties, and in this multiparty context minority governments are the rule rather than the exception. Hence, governments need broad settlements to make policy change possible. A related characteristic of Danish and Swedish school politics, which makes it hard to adopt radical changes, is the broad partisan support of school political legislation. In Sweden, important decisions are traditionally prepared by parliamentary committees with strong linkages to the world of academia and research that often work for years. This applied for the school policy as well. The reports were often subject to political hearings and negotiations to secure a safe parliamentary majority. The final decisions taken by Parliament were approved by all, or nearly all, political parties (Husén & Kogan, 1984; Aasen, 2003: 114). Hence, foreign researchers often describe the Swedish political culture as deliberative, rationalistic, open and consensus oriented (Lindbom, 2011: 95-96; Steinmo 1989).

In Denmark, political settlements play a central role in parliamentarism by securing that minority governments are competent to transact decision (Klemmensen, 2005; Christiansen, 2008). Political settlement partners are obliged to loyally defend the settlement but can also veto changes. Political settlements are not seen as a necessary evil but are appreciated as a positive trait of the Danish political culture and as good political craftsmanship (Pedersen 2010: 56). The Liberals, the Social Liberals and the Social Democrats have played key roles in education policy (Grønnegaard, 2000: 203) and have participated in all political settlements on schools since 1937[6] (Lindbom, 1995: 86). In addition, the political level often depended on prior

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[6] This changed in the early 2000s when the Social Liberals refused to participate in several settlements.

accommodation of organized interest such as Local Government Denmark and the Danish Union of Teachers (Grønnegaard, 2000: 203).

3.1.4 School performance

According to Telhaug et al., a pedagogic crisis at the turn of the century affected four of the Nordic countries' self-image of their school systems. International measurements carried out in a large number of countries surprisingly revealed mediocre academic achievements in the Nordic countries (Telhaug et al., 2006: 265). The studies showed a marked difference between Finland on the one hand and the other Nordic countries on the other. In an international comparison made by The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) of reading abilities in third and eighth grades, Danish third graders ranked alongside developing countries like Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago and far from the normal Nordic and European level. Eighth graders fared a little better and placed at an average level, but this was still not as expected. In the public, the results were portrayed as a scandal (Laursen, 2005: 216f). However, Sweden performed quite well and was ranked alongside Finland. Swedish eighth graders did very well too and placed close to Finnish eighth graders (Elley, 1992: 28-30).

However, from 1998 claims of failure increased in Swedish politics. In 1999, a report from The Swedish National Agency for Education is used to point to the crisis in schooling. It is argued that there are signs of serious problems as over 20 pct. leave school without a complete school leaving grade (protokoll 1999/2000:31). In PISA 2000, which caused quite a stir in many European countries including Denmark, Sweden came in ninth on reading, whereas Denmark was 16th. Sweden was tenth in science and 14th in math. The general impression was that Sweden had performed well in PISA (Skolverdenen 20/12/2011; DN 5/12/2001) as well as in other investigations (DN 21/6/2000). It was not until 2004 that a widespread consensus emerged on deteriorating results for Swedish schoolchildren. In 2004, The Swedish National Agency for Education conducted a large national evaluation of primary schools comparing results from national evaluations NU92 and NU03. It showed that knowledge of math, chemistry and reading ability has deteriorated since the mid 1990s (DN 28/10/2010). Simultaneously, the PISA investigation showed a decline in Swedish student performance from 2000 to 2003 (DN 7/12/2004). In conclusion, school policy failure came later in Sweden than in Denmark, which continued to 'underperform' through the 90s and 00s.

3.2 Assessment and evaluation policy

Above it was sought to broadly introduce the Swedish and Danish school policy sector to illuminate the context in which the process of change of assessment ideas have taken place in. In the following sections, I will seek to explore the policy field of assessment policy. While the book's dependent variable is school assessment ideas, it will be argued that assessment ideas have been intimately connected to the changes in assessment policies. Further, causal beliefs about assessment relate to certain policy tools. Thus, it serves an important purpose to map the assessment policy tools available to policy makers. The following section will define 'assessment policy'. I will discuss the most common distinction in the assessment literature between internal or formative assessment versus external or summative assessment as well as the distinction between what is assessed: the individual or the school level. Finally, I will provide an overall definition of assessment.

3.2.1 Defining assessment and evaluation policy

The education literature often distinguishes between internal and external assessment (Allerup, Jansen & Weng, 2011: 290). Internal assessment – or formative assessment – is about keeping the teachings stakeholders informed about their mutual efforts. Its function is to provide feedback to the pupil to diagnose potential difficulties and to the teacher to potentially adjust the teaching. External – or summative assessment – has the purpose of providing information to persons who are not directly involved in educational activities or institutions (Mølgaard, 2006: 373-374). Other definitions of summative assessment do not explicitly involve informing external stakeholders, but merely stress that summative assessment summarizes the pupils' knowledge level in relation to certain criteria, e.g. grade scale or a norm (Lundahl, 2011: 11). External and summative assessment is often associated with control and sanctioning, whereas internal and formative assessment is associated with development and learning (see Leahy & William, 2009; Harlen & Deakin, 2002; Allerup, Jansen & Weng, 2011). However, the distinction is somewhat artificial as both forms of assessment have inherently controlling as well as developing aspects (Mølgaard, 2006: 374). Dahler-Larsen (2006: 362) argues that internal evaluation is often presented as better than external evaluation and is conceptualized as learning oriented/trust based/democratic/good whereas external evaluation is conceptualized as control oriented/power based/ standard based / undemocratic/ evil. He (2006: 363) argued that this classification is unnecessary; external evaluation

can actually serve an important democratic function and internal evaluation could be an attempt to evade democratic assessment.

Another distinction which is not mentioned above is between what is assessed: pupil performance or school performance? Traditional discussions of assessment almost exclusively deal with assessment of the individual pupil. In a recent development, however, schools 'became the targets of various evaluations, reports, incentives, indicators, and efficiency studies' (Aasen, 2003: 133). Assessment can target schools on a system level as well as the individual pupil (Román, 2008: 18). Consequently, this distinction will be incorporated in the definition of school assessment policy.

Before presenting a definition of assessment policy a note on terminology is warranted. The concepts of assessment and evaluation are often used more or less synonymously, which is not quite right: 'In general, the assessment concept sticks close to the quantitative measuring of students' outcomes, while the evaluation concept opens up to more qualitative judgments' (Lysne, 2006: 328). In this book the term assessment is chosen as the overall concept for the policies that will be analyzed and it refers to qualitative and quantitative assessments alike. Finally, school assessment policies will be defined as *legislation relating to activities involving assessment of pupil or school performance up against one or more corresponding parameters*. Those parameters can be absolute requirements, norms, standards of excellence, objectives and aims, group average, or comparison to a student's earlier performance or individual objectives and standards (Lysne, 2006: 329).

3.2.2 What kind of policy tools are assessment policies?

Below, I will briefly explain assessment as a policy tool vis-à-vis other types of school policies. The purpose is to specify the logic by which assessment tools work in seeking to influence the policies' target groups. Vedung's policy typology is often invoked in policy studies. According to him, 'Public policy instruments are the set of techniques by which governmental authorities wield their power in attempting to ensure support and effect or prevent social change' (1998: 21). Vedung further distinguishes between policy instruments of regulation, economic means and information, which are popularly termed: the stick, the carrot, and the sermon. Regulations are rules and directives imposed by authorities and mandate behavior in accordance with the policy. Economic means involve handing out or taking away material resources in cash or kind. Information is about the transfer of knowledge,

communication of reasoned argument and persuasion (Vedung, 1998: 29-33).

According to Helgøy and Homme (2006) this typology does not capture the characteristics of assessment policies (or in their words accountability policies). Leaning on Vedung (1998) they construct two categories of tools: input regulation and accountability tools. Input regulation is a common category composed of Vedung's 'regulation' and 'economic means' as 'rules, directives and allocation of material resources through funding regulate the input in education' (Helgøy & Homme, 2006: 143). They extend the information category by including instruments used by authorities to obtain information from agencies as in most of the Western world, governments are increasing their efforts to audit, control and report in the public sector at large (Power, 1997; Hood et al., 1999). They argue that it is empirically and theoretically fruitful to include performance measuring, testing and output control in this category (Helgøy & Homme, 2006: 143).

Table 3.1: School policy tools

	Tools	Mechanism
Input regulation	Legislation, guidelines, instructions, standards, national curriculum, funding	Input control
Accountability tools	Information, training, audit, inspections, reviews, assessments, evaluation	Output control

Source: Helgøy & Homme (2006).

Overall, the two categories of policy tools depend on different approaches to influencing behavior. Input regulation seeks to control behavior directly through legislation and funding. In contrast, accountability tools work indirectly through output control in the form of evaluation and audit. This book is primarily concerned with assessment policy tools which more or less correspond to the category of accountability tools. Below, I will explain in more detail the assessment tools available to policy makers.

3.3 A typology of assessment policies

Before designing the typology of assessment policy tools, the different types of policy tools will be briefly explored. Applying the distinctions between different types of assessment a typology will be devised and the policy types will be placed into this typology. The purpose of creating this typology is to subsequently map assessment policy developments in Denmark and Sweden.

There is an abundance of assessment tools. Mølgaard (2006: 385-386) mentions several methods and tools of assessment in schools and categorizes them according to level of assessment. Tools for assessment of pupils: Diagnostic exams, tests, observation, grades, written assessment, self assessment, log book, portfolio, pupil action plans and pupil conversation. Tools for assessment of teaching: Development and year plans, stories, open/closed questionnaires, self- and mutual assessment, video recordings and pupil, group and class conversation. Tools for assessment involving parents: Questionnaires, interviews, focus group interviews, user surveys and parent-teacher meetings. Tools for teacher team assessment are conversation sheet, collegial instruction/supervision, reflective teams, team conversation and team meetings. Finally, tools for school assessments include circle conversation, walk around and pedagogical council meetings. In addition, there are other more externally oriented assessment policies such as evaluation institutes, audits, school leaving exams, quality reports and league tables etc.

If one adopts the distinction between internal and external use of assessment discussed in Section 4.1 and combines it with the distinction between whether the assessment tool is applied on the individual pupil or the school level, the following four-square model appears.

Table 3.2: School assessment policy typology

	Individual level	School level
Internal use	Diagnostic tests	Pedagogical council meetings
	Development talk	Self-assessment
	Development plan	Questionnaires, user surveys
	Portfolio, logbook	
External use	The grade system	League tables
	School leaving examinations	Control reports
	Entry interview	Audits
	Entry test	

The first square lists tools used internally to assess pupils. These tools can either be more qualitative as development conversation or more quantitative as tests. The second square lists tools used internally to assess the school level, which the school can utilize different forms of tools to assess their own performance ranging from more informal talks to systematic user surveys. The third square lists tools for external pupil assessment, such as entry tests, conversation and examinations. The last square summarizes external tools to assess the school level, e.g. league tables and audits. Still, not all instruments fall nicely into a category and e.g. the continuous assessment mark is tricky.

In the literature grades are often portrayed as an external instrument. However, they could also be internal if they are directed at the pupil, his or her parents and/or the teacher. In contrast, a school leaving examination is more easily categorized as an external tool as it is (or more precisely was) directed at potential employers or educational institutions.

3.4 Summary of school assessment changes in Denmark and Sweden

Now that a simple typology of assessment policies has been devised the development of assessment policies in Denmark and Sweden can be more systematically mapped. First, I will explore the Swedish changes and then the Danish school assessment changes. Finally, the degree of change in assessment policies will be judged.

3.5 School assessment changes in Sweden 1990-2011

In Sweden, there have been a number of changes in assessment policies, and quite a few involve the grade system. However, changes in most categories of assessment policies have occurred.

3.5.1 The grade system

As already indicated, the Swedish grade system has been subject to radical reforms. Before referring more recent changes, the historical roots will be briefly accounted for. In the 1940s, grades in primary school took over the function of a selection instrument for pupils entering the secondary school. In the 1950s, a numerical grade system with 5 steps (1-5) was adopted instead of the old system with letters (prop. 1962: 54, 293; SäU 1962:1). From the school year of 1962, the relative scale was implemented in Sweden. Parallel, the number of instances where grades were awarded fell drastically (Lgr. 62, 69 and especially Lgr. 80). With the national curriculum from 1969 (Lgr 69) grades were abolished in lower forms (form 1-3) and finally with the curriculum from 1980 (Lgr 80) grades were only awarded in forms 8 and 9.

A parliamentary decision in 1993 replaced the old relative system of grades in the primary school with an absolute system from the school year of 1995/1996. Simultaneously, it had been decided that grades should be awarded on a six step scale (A-F) and should be awarded from form 7. However, the decision was not implemented before a social democratic led

government in 1994 rejected the law and passed a new one. Grades were now awarded from form 8 and on a three step scale: Pass (*godkänd, G*), Pass with credit (*väl godkänd, VG*), Pass with special distinction (*mycket väl godkänd, MVG*) (Richardson, 2004: 232). Note that failed did not exist as a formal grade. Recently, the grade system has been fundamentally reformed. From the school year of 2011/2012 a new grading scale was introduced at all levels of compulsory and upper secondary education in Sweden. The grading scale contains six levels, with five grades (A-E) for results that are passes and one grade (F) for results that are not passes (prop. 2008/09:66). Further, grade awarding will be implemented from form 6 (prop. 2009/10:219, protokoll 2010/11:39).

3.5.2 The test system: from external to more internal tools

The Swedish test system has also been genuinely changed by the adoption of national tests. Before national tests, there were standard tests by a coincidence: in English in form 8 and in mathematics and Swedish in form 9. The purpose of the standard test was to differentiate the pupils' grades, not to assess the individual pupil's knowledge apprehension (DS 1991: 43, 134). The test results were used to adjust the grade level in local schools to the national circumstances (prop. 1986/87:100; Skolverket, 2004: 10). In the 1970s, teachers' interest in using the standard test fell (Henricson, 1987:9). Further, the curriculum program from 1980 (Lgr 80) confined the use of grades to forms 8 and 9 meaning that the standard test was only used in these forms as well and in the subjects Swedish, English and math. In 1983, diagnostic tests were developed in Swedish and math for several forms. Earlier they had only existed in Swedish for forms 4 and 7 (Lundahl, 2009: 68). In 1987, the old Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolöverstyrelsen) launched a program for national evaluation comprised of a project for assessment of knowledge and skills (KoF). A first national evaluation was tested in 1989 compromising 3000 pupils in forms 2 and 5 (KoF 89). The idea was to perform the evaluation every third year. When the old Swedish National Agency for Education was closed in 1990, the new Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) took over the much criticized project but renamed it the national evaluation (NU92) (Lundahl, 2009: 100). However, the tests were only given to a small sample of pupils and not on a regular basis.

In a proposition from 1992/1993, the Swedish government called for a national test system and in 1994 The Swedish National Agency for Education was assigned to design a national tests system (Regeringsbeslut, 1994-04-21). Initially, there were national tests in forms 5 and 9 in the subjects Swe-

dish, math and English. The purpose in 5th form level was to evaluate the pupils' knowledge development and the results would serve as basis for the schools', municipalities' and the state's evaluation of the quality of school and education, while the purpose in form 9, besides the already mentioned, was to support teachers' grading (SOU 2007: 28, 255; Skolverket, 2005: 40).While the tests for form 9 were mandatory, the tests for form 5 were voluntary. However, in 92 pct. of the Swedish municipalities have made local demand that schools are to use the tests (SOU 2007: 28, 267). In 2008, the government extended national tests to form 3 and made national tests mandatory from spring 2009 (Lundahl, 2009: 122).

3.5.3 Audit: external school oversight

Sweden has a strong tradition for external oversight of schools. In 1920, the Swedish National Agency for Education was established in a merger of the Primary School Agency and the Lower Secondary School Agency. The agency became very powerful and had central authority to regulate schools' activities. In 1990 it was proposed to dismantle the Agency for Education by June 1991 and replace it with a new civil service for the school system. The new central civil service was to have two overarching assignments: to develop and be responsible for a national assessment and follow-up of the schools' performance and activities and to propose how to develop schooling (Bet. 1990/91:UbU4). The new Swedish National Agency for Education got a clear follow-up and evaluation assignment to describe and analyze the schools' performance (U1990:5). The Agency steers, supports, follows up and evaluates the work of municipalities and schools with the purpose of improving quality and the result of activities to ensure that all pupils have access to equal education (Skolverket, 2011).

In 2002, it was decided that The National Agency for Education should expand its investigation of school quality. The Agency established school inspections which were to visit all Swedish schools over 6 years (Prop. 2002/03:1; TT 30/10/2003). Today, the school inspection has supervisory authority over pre-schools, schools and adult education. It controls whether the municipalities follow rules and regulations pertaining to schools (Skolinspektionen, 2011).

3.5.4 A new internal assessment tool: the pupil plan

In 2005, a policy change occurred as The Swedish National Agency for Education was assigned to develop a template for a development plan for all pupils (DN 30/3/2005). The purpose was to strengthen follow-up on the indi-

vidual level in Swedish schools. The plans were to be designed as an agreement between school, parents and pupils about what it would take to reach the pre-established goals (DN 30/3/2005; Bet. 2005/06:UbU14). Individual development plans were implemented from the spring of 2006 (BET 2004/2005: Ubu 9).

Table 4.3 below summarizes the changes in Swedish assessment policies. It illustrates that many changes were related to reforms in the grade system as well as assessment of pupils for internal use such as pupil development plans and national tests.

Table 3.3: Assessment policy changes in Sweden 1990-2011

	Individual level	School level
Internal use	National tests 1993, 2008 Development plan 2005	N/A
External use	Absolute grades 1993; reform grade scale 1994; new grade scale 2009 and earlier grading 2010	The National Agency for Education 1991 School inspections 2002

3.6 School assessment changes in Denmark 1990-2011

Like Sweden, Denmark has experienced a large number of changes in assessment policies.

3.6.1 The grade system

From 1805 to 1963, Danish schools used the Ørsted scale, named after the famous scientist Hans Christian Ørsted (Lysne, 2006: 333). He did not create the scale but later he attached numerical values to the scale. In 1845 the scale was revised and transformed to numbers as proposed by Ørsted in the 1830s. In 1963 a new grade scale – the 13 scale – was implemented in schools, upper secondary schools, and in 1971 in higher education (Karakterkommissionen 2004; Petersen 2006). The old 13 scale was actually a 10-point grading scale with seven grades designating a passing level (13, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7 and 6) and three grades designating a non-passing level (5, 03, and 00). Initially the scale was relative, but from 2000 primary school grades became absolute. In the school year 2006/2007, a new 7 step scale (the 12-scale) was implemented. The 7-point grading scale consists of five grades designating a passing level (12, 10, 7, 4 and 02) as well as two grades designating a non-passing level (00 and -3). The scale was developed primari-

ly to simplify the compatibility between Danish and foreign grading scales (Eurydice, 2006: 5; Ministry of Education, 2010: 5). Like Sweden, Denmark has pushed grading to the oldest forms. Grades are awarded from form 8 in the subjects that have school leaving exams after form 9 (EVA, 2002: 49)

3.6.2 School leaving exams

Contrary to Sweden, Denmark has a system of school leaving examinations. Before the comprehensive school was fully implemented in Denmark pupils could enroll in the regular primary schools through forms 8 to 10 or in lower secondary school (*realskolen*). The lower secondary school was intended for academically gifted children headed for upper secondary school. The lower secondary school was completed with the lower secondary school examination which contained a number of examinations. In 1975 the lower secondary school was abolished and the 9 year comprehensive school was introduced. Grades and exams were kept but exams were made optional, the lower secondary school leaving examination was abolished and instead primary and lower secondary school leaving examinations were introduced. The new test forms were less comprehensive than the prior examinations (Markussen, 2003; Juul, 2006; Wiborg, 2008: 59).

In 1992, attempts to reform the school leaving exams failed. However, there was a small change in exams. According to the school legislation from 1993 (Lov nr. 509), pupils in forms 9 and 10 have to complete a mandatory project assignment which is assessed with a written statement and after the pupils' own choice a grade (§13, stk. 5). In 2001 pupils' eligibility declarations for high school were abolished. From 2006, school leaving exams were made compulsory after form 9 but voluntary after the 10th. In form 9, pupils now must sit for examinations in a total of seven subjects. Five of the subjects are compulsory for all students: written and oral examinations in Danish, a written examination in mathematics and oral examinations in English and science/chemistry. Each student must additionally sit for two examinations that are drawn at random.

3.6.3 External assessment of the school level: League tables and audit

In Denmark a number of changes were adopted in relation to external assessment of schools. For example the Act on Transparency and Openness in Education (L414) was adopted in 2002. It meant that all educational institutions were to document their performance by publishing information on the internet such as their value statement, pedagogical philosophy, average

grades and evaluations of the quality of teaching (Andersen, 2009: 139). Before this act grade averages of individual education institutions were not publicly available (Andersen, 2009: 139). A year after the Act 40 pct. of the educational institutions had not published grade averages on their webpage (Ministry of Education, 2004). Almost a decade later in July 2011, the Ministry of Education produced an official league table of all schools' grade average controlled for socio-economic background (Jyllands-Posten 16/7/2011).

Other changes in the realm of external assessment of the school level include the establishment of two external assessment institutes. In 1998, a proposal for a law about the Danish Evaluation Centre (EVA) (L 81) was presented. The purpose of the proposal was first and foremost to further develop and preserve the quality of education on all levels in the educational system. The institute was to evaluate processes as well as results to be followed up by the authority responsible for the area in question. The institute would be a central information center for evaluation and quality development, inform the public of its activity and have continuous dialogue with educational stake holders (L 81). In 2006 the Council for Assessment and Quality Development in Schools was formed and replaced the existing School Council. The council is independent and was assigned to monitor, assess and counsel the Minister of Education about the quality in primary and secondary school (L 170).

The results of the national tests are not official but they form the basis of a briefing of the school management, municipal council and the Ministry of Education (L 101). In a later bill in 2006 (L170), it was decided that the results were to be given to the municipal council as a part of their supervisory commitment. The municipalities have to make yearly quality reports on the performance in the municipality's schools. If some of the schools perform poorly, the municipality has to take action. The Ministry of Education is mandated to force municipalities to take action if schools are performing poorly.

3.6.4 A surge in internal assessment tools of the pupils

Another bulk of new instruments concerns internal assessment of pupils. In the school legislation from 1993, teachers were mandated to continuously evaluate pupils' output as part of the teaching. The evaluation would form the basis of instruction of the individual pupil and of the teachers' further planning (§13, stk 2, Lov nr. 509). In 2000, the 'Clear Objectives' plan was launched to adopt legislation to make the primary school's goals more clear. The goals were further reformed when 'Common Objectives', national objectives for teaching were adopted in 2003. The difference from the existing

legislation was that until then the minister of education had determined end objectives for all primary school subjects which the municipalities were mandated to follow. Now the minister also determined binding stage objectives on certain forms. In the production of stage objectives the existing instructive part objectives will as a rule be made mandatory (L 130). National objectives are not an actual assessment tool but make assessment possible, acting as a parameter assessment can compare against.

National tests in Denmark were adopted by the parliament in 2006 (L101). The proposal contained mandatory tests in Danish with focus on reading in 2nd, 4th, 6th and 8th form; math in forms 3 and 6; English in form 7 and natural science subjects like physics/chemistry, biology and geography in 8th form. The tests are developed with reference to the subjects' stage objectives. The purpose of the tests is to create an overview of the pupils' academic skills and hereby contribute to academic progress for the individual pupil by targeting education to the pupils' needs. The national test results are not official and only reported to the public in national averages. In 2006 a provision was introduced requiring a written pupil plan for all students at all form levels. The student plans were to contain information about the results of the ongoing evaluations in all subjects and the course of action decided based on these results. The pupil plans are to be prepared at least once each school year (L 170).

Table 3.4: Assessment policy changes in Denmark 1990-2011

	Individual level	School level
Internal use	National tests 2006 Pupil plan 2006	
External use	Absolute grades 2000; new grade scale 2007 Mandatory school leaving exams 2006	Quality reports and action plans, 2006 EVA, 2001, School council 2005 League tables , 2001, 2011

3.7 Recapitulation: judging the extent of change in assessment policies

So how big are the changes listed in the above sections? Further, how can we decide whether the changes are really significant or not? One approach could be to look at the extent of the expansion in assessment policy changes: i.e. to investigate the amount of changes. One could perhaps discern between whether the policy change introduces a new instrument or merely changes the existing instruments setting (Hall, 1993: 278f). In this re-

gard the overall impression of the changes in assessment policies is that a large number of new assessment policy instruments including national tests, pupil plans, assessment agencies and new grade system have been adopted in recent decades.

Table 3.5: Overview of change in policy instruments and settings

Change in:	Denmark	Sweden
Settings	From voluntary to mandatory school leaving exams	Earlier grading, earlier national tests, from voluntary to mandatory national tests
Instruments	National tests, pupil plans, evaluation institute, council for quality and assessment, quality reports, change of referencing (from relative to absolute grading), new grade system	National tests, pupil plans, school inspections, change of referencing (from relative to absolute grading), new grade system

However, there is some discretion involved in assessing whether something is a change in setting or a change in instruments. How much can instruments's setting change before it becomes an entirely new instrument? Overall it is argued that a reform that makes national tests and school leaving examination mandatory instead of voluntary is a change in setting as the system as such does not change. Still this is open for discussion. Further, is the adoption of a new instrument always a bigger change than a change of settings? As an example the change in timing of grading in Sweden has been and still is a very big political issue. There has been large opposition to awarding grades to other than the oldest pupils. In contrast, the change in principle of referencing – which is categorized as a new instrument as it involves a whole new grade scale – has been quite uncontroversial. Still, the difficulties of assessing the degree of changes are not assessed to be too serious as the degree of a specific policy change is of less independent interest here than the overall changes in the area of assessment.

Another way to assess the extent of policy change is to focus on the specific type of policy change. In the preceding sections I developed a typology of assessment policies distinguishing between internal and external use of assessment and between whether the assessment tool is applied on the individual pupil or the school level. Traditionally, assessment policies in Denmark and Sweden have been centered on policies directed towards assessing the individual pupil to use the results externally. This could relate to selecting pupils into further education or of being a proof of qualifications to future employers (Nordenbo, 2011: 132; Lundahl, 2011: 11). However, recently the nature of assessment policies has changed. A lot of the recent policies in Denmark and Sweden do not only target the individual pupil but also

the school level and the results are used internally as well as externally (see Tables 4.3 and 4.4). This includes assessment policies such as national tests and student plans which are directed at the pupils and where the results are used internally in schools. It also includes such policies as external evaluation agencies as well as league tables which are used to assess schools results externally. Consequently, when it is claimed that Danish and Swedish assessment policy has undergone radical change this refers to the expansion in the number of assessment policies but also the increase in different types of assessment policies.

Summing up, this chapter has explored the school policy sectors in Sweden and Denmark as well as the policy field – school assessment policy - where the study of change in assessment ideas takes place in. Assessment has been defined and the assessment policies available to policy makers explored. The policies were categorized as internal or external and as targeting pupil or school level. Finally, a mapping of school assessment policy changes in Denmark and Sweden revealed significant policy changes in recent decades, such as the grade and exam systems, assessment institutes and tools like tests and development plans. The following chapter will explore the book's dependent variable school assessment beliefs.

Chapter 4:
The dependent variable:
ideas about assessment

In Chapter 1, I presented the puzzling fact that prior assessment skeptic countries like Denmark and Sweden to a large degree had adopted a range of new school assessment policies. I suggested that this radical change in assessment policies was related to changes in causal beliefs about assessment. In Chapter 2, efforts were made to theoretically grasp the mechanism whereby ideas in the form of causal beliefs or problem definitions change. I developed a theoretical framework and argued that parties via persuasion can change other parties' causal beliefs or problem definitions. The intention of persuasion is to make policy change possible as the parties would otherwise have blocked reform. This chapter has two overall purposes. First, to investigate the causal beliefs of parties that block assessment reforms, namely the social democratic parties in Denmark and Sweden, it will be explored how the social democratic skepticism towards assessment developed. The second part of the chapter deals with more general perceptions of assessment. Recently, the debate about assessment has primarily revolved around *how* rather than *whether* to assess. I will develop a typology of perceptions of the purpose of assessment and briefly explore the development in these perceptions. However, first the social democratic causal beliefs about assessment will be discussed.

4.1 Three overall strands of social democratic beliefs about education

The social democratic parties are of special interest in this book as their change of causal beliefs about assessment is what is argued to have made the school assessment reforms possible. The right wing parties have to some degree favored assessment in varying degrees all along. To understand the more recent beliefs about assessment in the social democratic parties one needs to go back in time. In the following sections, the development of the social democratic resistance to assessment will be investigated. First, I will look at the historical school political beliefs in the social democratic parties.

Gudmund Larsson (2001) has written a book about the Swedish labor movement and its school political ideas. It is not unreasonable to assume

that these ideas are valid for the Danish labor movement and parties as well. According to Larsson (2001) there were three ideational strands in social democratic thinking about education: The first was about creating opportunities for academically gifted working class children to acquire knowledge. It was a question about justice and about creating competing elites in society. To realize this, children from poor working class or peasant homes should receive financial support in upper secondary school and secondary school (Larsson, 2001: 11). Talent should be decisive for further education. Nordenbo (2011: 125) writes that in the first half of the 19th century the Nordic social democrats believed that equal education for all through equal opportunities would ensure working class children's access to higher education. There was talk about an 'intelligence reserve' or 'talent reservoir' which could benefit society as a whole. Other phrases born from this belief were: 'Rich people's stupid children'[7] and 'Grades are the poor's best friend'.[8] In this tradition grades and tests were looked upon warmly as they made it possible for children regardless of social background to proceed into further studies.

The other idea was the comprehensive school idea that all children were to receive the same common education as far up in grades as possible. This was rooted in an understanding that the existing school system primarily was for upper and middle class children (Larsson, 2001: 137). Equality of opportunity was not enough; they wanted equality of results as well. Grades were seen as evil and were believed to increase competition between pupils and were therefore detrimental to cooperative behavior. Others saw the assessment system as a hidden tool to keep the economically less well off away from the attractive positions. This was related to the view that exams on the surface appeared as means to find the best suited, but beneath the surface they helped the ruling class maintain its dominance (Nordenbo, 2011: 125).

The third idea concerned youth and adult education. The working class could and should create its own educational paths through folk schools, study circles and lecture associations (Larsson, 2001: 11). This was rooted in a belief that the working class should not fraternize with the bourgeois school and its ideas. Further they felt that the working class had an independent education understanding directed at the future and a potential new society (Larsson, 2001: 137). Hence, the working class' own educational institutions should disseminate working class culture and values. There is no clear position on assessment, which is perhaps unsurprising as grades and exams were

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[7] Denmark: 'de rige folks dumme børn'.
[8] Sweden: 'betygen är den fattiges bästa vän'.

not necessary as the adult pupils did not necessarily continue in further education.

In the following, I will investigate how skeptical causal beliefs about assessment emerged in the Swedish and Danish social democratic parties leading them to favor abolishment of assessment. Justifying this skeptical stance were primarily two causal beliefs which over time influenced their policy position: First, of the three overall strands of educational beliefs in the social democratic parties emphasized above, the comprehensive school belief became dominant both in Denmark and Sweden. The objective was to abolish grades and exams as they were seen as detrimental to educational equality. Second, proponents of progressive education saw assessment as detrimental to the child's social and personal development.

4.2 Comprehensive schooling: assessment as detrimental to equality

According to Wiborg (2009: 5) the desire to break down the class-biased school system propelled the comprehensive school movement. The school was to be a tool for equalization of social inequalities in society. The thought was that if children were not divided in courses and levels based on giftedness and their performance not assessed, they would leave school with equal opportunities (Wiborg, 2008: 58). In the innovative political program 'Arbetarrörelsens efterkrigsprogram' (SAP, 1944) the Swedish social democratic party formulated its school visions, and the program encompassed both the elite and comprehensive ideas. First and foremost it argued for a longer period of comprehensive schooling to create more equality and secure democracy. The class differences in education were perceived to threaten democracy as well as equality. The elite view was visible too, as it was argued that many pupils who lacked academic talent received a substantial education, while other much more academically gifted pupils missed opportunities to develop their talents (Larsson, 2001: 14-16). In 1968 Olof Palme, then Minister of Education, stated: 'The school is, and remains, the key to abolishing a class-based society' (Richardson, 2004: 14). It was possible to have such expectations of the comprehensive school system as it deferred the choice of educational and vocational subjects, thereby giving all pupils the opportunity to develop in accordance with their abilities and goals. In addition there was the community argument: the structure of the comprehensive school system with its undivided classes laid the foundation for a social community in which the strong aided the weak. This created expecta-

tions of a community characterized by solidarity, community spirit and coop-eration, rather than competition and a race-to-the-top mentality. In Den-mark, the call for a comprehensive school was most famously articulated by The Askov group. It was formed in 1950 by Grundtvig-minded folk school people and social reform oriented social democrats. It was not publicly visi-ble until it published the 'Askov petition' in 1954. The central message was an undivided and exam free school: 'the primary school is to be self-contained so its life and work is not disturbed by that some of the children will continue to have a further theoretical education. Hence the school – both in the city as in the country side – should be undivided and exam free until the 14th year'.[9]

The comprehensive school thought gave birth to a skeptical causal belief about assessment. The case against grades was that they were sorting and unjust. In addition, the entire concept of assessment was thought to be wrong in a new more democratic school form. The school was to induce co-operation, project and team work to replace rote learning. Hence, the Swe-dish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Swedish Social Democrats – as well as the Danish Social Democrats – have been the main drivers of an al-most grade free school, whereas the right wing wanted to maintain grades (Larsson, 2001: 160).

4.3 Progressive education: assessment as detrimental to the children's development

Another school of thought which influenced social democrats' as well as other political parties' beliefs was progressive education or reform pedagogy (Telhaug et al., 2006: 254). Progressive education is a collective name for a range of ideational currents which have been very influential from the inter-war period and onwards. Among its prominent advocates are Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Maria Montessori, John Dewey and Jean Piaget. The theory had some distinctive features: First, it had a marked view on children, their needs and their interest. The school and teaching was to place the child in the cen-ter and the point of departure for the child's development and the child's learning was to be found within the child itself (Nørgaard & Henriksen, 1988: 120). Further, childhood was stressed as an independent period of children's lives and not as preparation for adulthood (Bentzon, 1996: 13). A common goal of progressivism was to build a modern school which in opposition to the institutionalized school would define its content based on the children's

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[9] Askov petition' reproducet in Bomholt (1955:39).

needs rather than a narrow demand of qualifications from society (Nørgaard & Henriksen, 1988: 120). The problem definition of progressive education was personal development achieved through emancipation and development of the child with child centered pedagogy (Nørgaard & Henriksen, 1988: 118). As for policy solutions, personal development was to be achieved in a setting free from authorities and discipline. The process of education was valued more than the output of education and progressive pedagogy contained a critique of the school's use of external incentives such as grades and examinations, and argued for a teaching method based upon the pupil's own internal motivation. Likewise, it was warranted that ranking pupils could result in a sense of humiliation and stigma and have a negative effect on children's self-awareness and desire to learn (Telhaug et al., 2006: 254-255). Consequently, a causal belief emerged where assessment policies like tests and grades were believed to hinder the free development of children.

The implication of progressive education for the parties' position on assessment was similar to that of comprehensive education. But with progressivism the theoretical critique was elaborated and a new child oriented focus was added. The new progressive influence was also evident among the Danish social democrats. This is apparent in an analysis of the social democratic school discussion in the period 1947-1958 in the social democratic party periodical 'Verdens gang' (Jensen, 2008: 20). According to Jensen, a new wing of intellectuals seemed to appear who were inspired by new school thoughts where children's personal development was in focus. Rote learning would be replaced by a happy school attendance. It was argued that exam pressure and grades only served business interests and spoiled children's self confidence and desire to learn (Jensen, 2008: 91). The progressive influence was also reflected in the former social democratic minister of social affairs Julius Bomholt's (1953) words: 'The educative act can in general only be solved satisfactorily when the child is given peace to be a child and when life in school is accommodated to the child's possibilities and needs. It is therefore a frequent and rightly repeated demand that the primary school should be self-contained. This means that it should not be exposed to pressure from superjacent school forms. The examination pressure must be removed and freer work forms must be promoted.' Larsson (2001: 144) also argues that the main influence on the Swedish labor movement has been reform pedagogic often by opponents portrayed as hippie ('flum') pedagogy. In this program the teachers' desk came to symbolize authoritarian learning and grades were seen as a symptom of systematic oppression and injustice.

4.4 A new radical left agenda: reinforcing existing causal beliefs about assessment

While the developments in the interwar period established a social democratic skepticism towards grades, the development in the late 1960 and the 1970s strengthened it. In the latter half of the 1960s, the Nordic countries entered a new phase that some called 'new radicalism' (Telhaug et al., 2006: 256). The new radicalism perceived the social democratic society to be authoritarian and argued for the right of self-determination and individual emancipation (Telhaug et al., 2006: 258). During this period the social values of the previous era were retained and there were more explicit attempts to implement progressive, pupil-centered and activity-oriented teaching methods (Telhaug et al., 2006: 258-259; Aasen, 2003: 119). Further, these new thoughts weakened support for central state control of the school system: 'Each individual school was virtually to function as a centre for educational policy and practice, which also meant that the school would be responsible for assessing its own progress' (Telhaug et al., 2006: 259-260).

In Denmark, the social democratic skepticism towards assessment remained intact. In the 1970s, then social democratic Minister of Education Knud Heinesen's skeptical causal beliefs about assessment led him to propose that grades and exams be abolished (Heinesen, 2006: 199-200). While a full abolition did not result, the skepticism endured in the party. A later social democratic minister of education Ritt Bjerregaard argued: 'a common school should not be competitive and there should especially not be held publicly arranged competitions in which the outcome in most instances is pre-determined based on the parents' economic and cultural position' (Bjerregaard, 1979). The Danish social democrats have persistently advocated a reduction of school leaving exams and in the long term complete abolishment (Garodkin 1979: 329; 1984: 340; 1991: 384; 2003: 619) also of grades (Garodkin, 1984: 339; 1988: 360; 1999: 615; 2003: 617). During the 1970s the skeptical causal beliefs about assessment were also visible in the Swedish Social Democratic Party and informed its policy positions. In '1973 års betygsutredning' the Swedish grade system was once again discussed with the intention to reform it. The majority of the committee which was composed of social democrats found that grades should not be awarded in the primary and lower secondary school. Instead more qualitative assessment like development talks should take place (SOU 1977: 9: 220).

Below, the focus will change from specific causal beliefs about assessment to different perceptions about the purposes of assessment. A typology

on assessment purposes will be developed and the evolution herein will be mapped.

4.5 Perceptions about the purpose of assessment

In the following, I will attempt to create an overview of different perceptions about the purpose of assessment. According to Nordenbo (2011: 130-131), one can discern between four perceived functions of assessment systems: certification of qualifications (absolute criteria); selection of the best among a group (relative criteria); assisting learning and assessment of educational institutions' goal attainment. With a slight revision, a four-square table can be developed, summarizing causal beliefs about assessment. The dimensions correspond to the dimensions in the typology of assessment tools in Chapter 4: a row distinguishing between assessments conducted at the individual – pupil – level and at the school level. The columns distinguish between assessment used internally by teachers or the school or externally by the state level. However, the content differs significantly from the table in Chapter 4. The previous table concerned specific tools function whereas the current table refers to the perceived purposes of assessment. Hence, it merely relates to ideas and not specific tools.

Table 4.1: A typology of purposes of assessment tools

	Individual level	School level
Internal use	*Pedagogical tool*	*Self evaluation*
	Assessment can be used to improve pupils performance	Assessment can be used by schools to assess its own performance
External use	*Admission control*	*Quality control*
	Assessment can be used to select into further education	Assessment can be used to compare and evaluate schools performance

The first square is occupied by a category where assessment is seen as a pedagogical tool. Here the individual pupil is assessed and the results are used internally specifically to help the pupil improve. In the second square I have added a purpose of assessment not mentioned above: schools' self-evaluation. This covers a category where schools use assessment internally to assess the schools' overall performance e.g. in reaching curricula goals, etc. Third, there is the purpose of admission control where the individual pupil is assessed and the results are used externally to control admission to further education or the labor market. This square collapses the functions Nordenbo (2011) calls certification and selection. Finally, there is the purpose of quality

control. Here the school level is assessed and the results are used externally to compare different schools and evaluate e.g. their goal attainment.

4.6 Developments in overall assessment purposes

Over time, there have been different perceptions of the purpose of assessment. In the 19th century bourgeois politicians saw the assessment system as a way to break the nobility's monopoly of access to positions in the state (Nordenbo, 2011: 125). The right to function as a judge was subsequently based on knowledge of the law – not inherited rights. In the pre modern period tests established qualification and a certificate or diploma was issued as proof (Nordenbo, 2011: 132). In the modern period tests primarily served to select pupils into a limited number of attractive education positions. This argument is shared by Lundahl (2011: 11), who claims that during the 20th century assessment of pupils' knowledge has been primarily related to entry and selection to further education and work. This belief probably best explains why assessment like grades and exams were not abandoned altogether. They were seen as a necessary evil in selecting into further education (Larsson, 2001: 160).

According to Aasen (2003: 103), Scandinavia entered an era of more local-based curriculum and internal school development in the 1970s. As a result self-evaluation and internal accountability became central assessment beliefs. Later it became more common to see assessment as a tool for learning, according to Nordenbo (2011: 132) because governments changed priorities and wanted as many as possible to get an education. Tests are hence seen as a pedagogical tools which is to further the process where more pupils get a higher education. Further, in relation to the increased number of enrolled pupils costs of education increase. Hence, tests are used to assess educational quality. According to Aasen (2003: 133), as external pressure on students has relaxed it has increased on schools as they have become 'targets of various evaluations, reports, incentives, indicators, and efficiency studies'. Hence, assessment is seen as a tool to assess the schools on a system level – and not an assessment of the individual pupil (Román, 2008: 18).

Still, the purpose of assessment says nothing about which tools one should use to realize the purpose. Hence, they do not constitute causal beliefs. For example it is not given that if the purpose of assessment is perceived to be admission control, it should be achieved by a policy solution of oral conversation, an entry exam, school leaving exam or continuous assessment marks. However, causal beliefs about assessment connect the overall pur-

pose of assessment with specific policy solutions. A causal belief about assessment could be: 'grades can be used to compare and evaluate school performance' or 'quality reports can be used to compare and evaluate school performance'. Whether a specific assessment tool is perceived by a party to be a pedagogical tool or admission control can be influenced by parties performing legitimization or de-legitimization. In the following chapters, I will argue that a majority of the school assessment changes are a result of parties adopting new causal beliefs where specific policies are seen as furthering a) assessment as a pedagogical tool and b) assessment as control of schools. These causal beliefs have in some instances been induced by de-legitimization, in others by legitimization and have been connected to varying existing ideas although most prominently equality.

4.7 Conclusion

In the present chapter the dependent variable, assessment beliefs, was explored. The content of the assessment-skeptical beliefs among the social democratic parties was explored as well as more general perceptions about the purpose of assessment. Finally, a typology of assessment beliefs was developed. In the next chapter the design and method of the book will be presented. The design is a case study and the method is process tracing. Further, a framework of observable implications of the theory will be produced. This framework will guide the empirical analyses in Chapters 6-9. As a result of the observable implications it should be clearer when the empirical findings corroborate or impede the theoretical expectations.

Chapter 5:
Research design and method

This chapter presents the design and methodology of the dissertation. The main question guiding this chapter is how to empirically investigate the process whereby persuasion leads to a change in assessment beliefs. In the first part of the chapter I introduce the overall research design, a multiple case study of different attempts to change assessment beliefs in Denmark and Sweden from 1990 until 2011. The second part of the chapter presents the book's methodology. Methodologically, process tracing will be utilized to investigate the process whereby persuasion has led to idea change. Further, I will derive observable implications of the theoretical framework. What should we expect to see if the right wing was trying to persuade the social democratic parties to change causal beliefs or problem definitions? If the attempt was successful, what would this look like empirically? Based on Van Evera's (1997) advice, the observable implications are assessed according to their certainty and uniqueness. This exercise bolsters the validity of the study, as it helps in judging when a theoretical prediction is correct and when it is wrong. These observable implications will guide the analyses in the following chapters and help decide whether persuasion in the form of delegitimization or legitimization indeed resulted in new causal beliefs about assessment or new problem definitions. Finally, the questions of data sources and generalizability are addressed.

5.1 Research design: a case study

The aim of the study is to shed light on whether and how the utilization of delegitimization and legitimization have led to change in assessment beliefs, and the study is thus both theory testing and theory generating. It is theory testing as it explores how radical change in assessment beliefs among Danish and Swedish policymakers occurred. It questions historical institutionalist claims that this process takes place through learning stressing experts and bureaucrats. Rather political parties are emphasized and it is argued that change in ideas often take place on the backdrop of political struggles over ideas. The book is theory generating in its aim is to investigate how and when political parties are able to change other parties' beliefs.

Investigating this theoretical framework is argued to necessitate a close inspection of the process leading to idea change. Therefore, a case study re-

search design is deemed appropriate. According to Gerring (2007: 20) a case study can be understood as '(…) the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases'. Overall, one could argue that the empirical puzzle selected the Scandinavian countries as the units of analysis because of the surprising change in assessment policies in these countries. However, incorporating all the Scandinavian countries would be too wide-ranging a task because of the intention to analyze the processes leading to idea change in-depth. Thus, I have to select a limited number of cases. Further, to be able to avoid that a number of exogenous variables confound the analysis of the process whereby ideas changes, it is deemed desirable to have relatively similar cases. In this regard, Denmark and Sweden constitute specifically suitable cases because of their significant similarity on a number of relevant characteristics. As should be clear from chapter 3 the Danish and Swedish school systems are quite similar in regard to their systems of comprehensive school, decentralization and the political consensus on school policy. The institutional similarities between the two countries make it unlikely that differences in institutions have influenced the processes of assessment belief change. Further, as the institutions have been stable in the decades under investigation, institutions are not likely to be the causes of within case variation either.

The fact that school performance varied between the countries constitutes another important reason for choosing the two countries. This is related to the expectation of policy failures connection to the performance and success of the mechanism of de-legitimization. School policy failure came later in Sweden than in Denmark, which continued to 'underperform' through the 90s and 00s (see Appendix 1). The varying degree of policy failure allows me to investigate if failure in itself leads to idea change, or if the event of failure helps the performance of de-legitimization to persuade actors to change ideas or if de-legitimization leads to change in ideas even without a failure.

5.2 Demarcation of cases and time periods

The question of how many cases are included in this multiple case study will be clarified in this section. According to Gerring (2007: 19) a case is 'a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time'. To be denoted a case, the phenomenon needs to have identifiable boundaries and to comprise the primary object of an inference. Still, the spatial boundaries of a case are often more apparent than its temporal boundaries (Gerring 2007: 19), and some temporal boundaries

must be assumed especially when cases consist of discrete events like in the present study: idea change induced by attempts of persuasion.

Table 5.1: Four overall cases

Decade	1990s	2000s
Sweden	Case 1: 1990-1996 % Failure + Different partisan governments	Case 2: 1997-2011 %,+ Failure* + Different partisan governments
Denmark	Case 3: 1990-2001 %,+ Failure* + Different partisan governments	Case 4: 2001-2011 + Failure + Different partisan governments

* The event of failure varies within the case as failure occurred some years after the start of the period analyzed.

The period chosen for the investigation, about 1990 to 2011, is subdivided into two periods in each country, producing four overall cases. All chosen cases incorporate multiple within-case observations. The reason for starting the analyses in the early 1990s is first of all that international investigations had not yet started to figure in the public and political debate. However, within a couple of years this started to change. While Denmark was ranked poorly already in 1994, it took a decade until it happened to Sweden. Both countries had changing partisan governments in the 1990s (see Appendix 2 and 3 for overviews of Swedish and Danish governments and ministers of education). The fact that office fluctuated during the period, allows me to investigate whether de-legitimization was performed by the opposition and legitimization was performed by the government as predicted in chapter 2. The second Swedish case begins in the late 1990s when a new Social Democratic government took office and the right-wing opposition began to make claims of school failure. However, more tangible evidence of failure was still missing. In Denmark the year 2001 is chosen as a cutoff point as a new government introduced a radical agenda for reform.

Table 5.2: Overview of cases where legitimization and de-legitimization was performed

	Case 1-2 SW 1992-1994	Case 3 SW 1997-2002	Case 4 SW 1998-2008	Case 5 DK 1994-1998	Case 6 DK 2003-2006
Chapter	6	7	7	8	9
Mechanism	Legitimization	De-legitimization	De-legitimization	De-legitimization	De-legitimization
Performer	Government	Opposition	Opposition	Opposition	Government
Recipient	Opposition	Government	Government	Government	Opposition
Failure	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
New causal belief/ Problem definition	New causal belief	New problem definition	New causal belief	New problem definition	New causal belief

The book's research design is designed to allow me to investigate the process whereby assessment ideas changed. The variation of the design lies in the process of idea change: did legitimization or de-legitimization lead to idea change and if so how? Anticipating the results in chapter 6-9, the above table illustrates the variation in the processes of persuasion. Hence, the present study will incorporate several cases, that is, multiple case studies, of attempts of persuasion in Denmark and in Sweden. The analysis will primarily investigate successful attempts of idea change (table 5.2), but unsuccessful attempts will be analyzed as well thus incorporating counterfactuals. Comparing the failed attempts with the successful ones provides a source of variation to assess the ideational mechanisms (Hacker, 2001). As an example of an unsuccessful attempt the Swedish Conservatives' attempt to reform the grade scale in the early 1990s will also be analyzed ("non-case 1").

Table 5.3: Overview of cases where persuasion was not performed

	Non-case 1 SW 1992-1994	Non-case 2 DK 1992	Non-case 3 DK 2001-2002	Non-case 4 DK 2010-	Non-case 5 DK 2011
Chapter	6	8	9	9	9
Policy preference	Extend grade scale, earlier grading	Increase school leaving exams	Publicize school leaving exam result	Publicize national test results	Publicize league table of school leaving exam result
Party parliamentary position	Government	Government	Government	Government	Government
Failure	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Change in problem definition/causal belief	No	No	No	No	No

5.3 Methodology: Process tracing

The second part of the chapter will discuss the study's methodology and present the process tracing framework which will guide the empirical analyses. The book sets out to explore how persuasion influences ideas. To do this one must be able to identify how persuasion is performed and change the existing beliefs of actors which then possibly pursue new policies in line with their beliefs. This necessitates a close inspection of processes. As suggested by Berman (1998: 34), to test whether the predictions of ideational theories are consistent with the facts of a given case, researchers need to dig into the details of political decision making, making process tracing one of if not *the* most appropriate methodologies. Process tracing involves attempts to identify the intervening causal process between an independent variable(s) and the outcome of the dependent variable (George and Bennett, 2005: 206-207). The method is applied to perform theory driven empirical analyses of complex data sources and to test whether the causal mechanism assumed by the theory actually appears to be in agreement with the theoretical expectations (Collier, Brady & Seawright, 2004).

There are three variants of process tracing: theory testing process tracing, theory building process tracing, and explaining outcomes process tracing. This book utilizes a theory testing process tracing method. It will be tested whether a hypothesized causal mechanism is actually present in a case or not (Beach & Rasmussen, 2011: 2). So the theoretical focus is on contributing to the literature on ideas by enhancing the understanding of the causal mechanisms whereby ideas change. George & Bennet (2005: 207) praise the method as: 'an indispensable tool for theory testing and theory development not only because it generates numerous observations within a case, but because these observations must be linked in particular ways to constitute an explanation of the case'.

Below, a process tracing framework of observable implications of the theory will be deduced. This framework will be applied in testing the theoretical expectation in the empirical analyses in Chapters 6-9.

5.4 Process tracing framework: observable implications of the theory

A frequent claim is that ideational claims do not constitute explanations (Parsons, 2007: 105). To counter this claim, a framework which allows for testing ideational claims against competing explanations is developed. To systematically investigate whether new ideas about assessment changed due to

either the mechanism of de-legitimization or legitimization, observable implications are derived for each phase of the analytical model. To further fortify the validity of the study the strength of the theoretical predictions will be determined by distinguishing between certain and unique predictions (Van Evera, 1997). A certain prediction is one where the implication must occur if the theory is valid. Hence, the prediction is very necessary for the theory. A unique prediction implies that other known theories' predictions do not overlap. If this is found in the analysis there is strong evidence of the theory since no other theory would predict this. Ideally, predictions have both high certainty and uniqueness. However, the analytical model differs regarding to whether one is investigating de-legitimization or legitimization of causal beliefs or problem definitions. In relation to de-legitimization or legitimization of problem definitions the process is expected to be very short as illustrated below and discussed in Chapter 2.

Figure 5.1: The two-phased process of how (de-)legitimization induces change in problem definition

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┌──────────────────────┐          ┌──────────────────────┐
│  (De-) legitimization │  ───▶    │ New problem definition│
└──────────────────────┘          └──────────────────────┘
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In contrast, the process of de-legitimization or legitimization of causal beliefs is lengthier and incorporates four phases.

Figure 5.2: The four-phased process of how (de-)legitimization induces change in causal beliefs and in policy position and policy

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┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│    (De-)     │─▶ │  New causal  │─▶ │  New policy  │─▶ │ Policy change│
│legitimization│   │    belief    │   │   position   │   │              │
└──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘
```
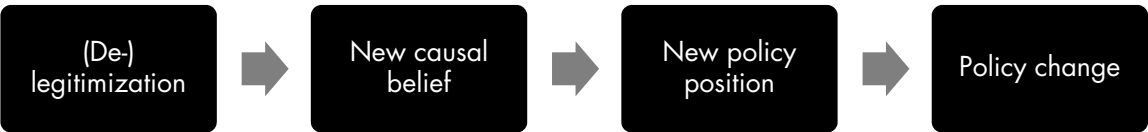
The difference naturally means that the observable implications will diverge between the two levels of ideas. The table below summarizes the different observable implications in relation to diverging mechanisms and levels of ideas.

Table 5.4: Difference in observable implications in regard to problem definition and causal beliefs

	Legitimization causal beliefs	Legitimization problem definition	De-legitimization causal beliefs	De-legitimization problem definition
Mechanism	L1-L2	L1-L2	DL1-DL3	DL1-DL3
Performer	L3	L3	DL4	DL4
Recipient	R-L3	R-L3	R-DL4	R-DL4
Actors	R-L2	R-L2	R-DL3	R-DL3
New causal belief/ problem definition	R-L1	R-L1	R-DL1	R-DL1
New policy position	PP1	%	PP1	%
Tactical change	PP2	PP2	PP2	PP2
Policy change	PC1	%	PC1	%

Below, I will derive observable implications based on the theoretical expectations. For the sake of clarity the implications will refer to both causal beliefs and problem definitions where relevant. The observable implications will be formulated to allow for assessing whether rival explanations could be relevant. For example an implication will be formulated to assess whether partisanship could be a cause of the policy changes (PC1). Further, it will also be assessed if there is evidence indicating that position change is purely tactical (PP2). Evidence of this could include a change in opinion polls unambiguously supporting the policy indicating vote considerations or pressure from a governing partner indicating office motivation to uphold government coherence.

5.4.1 Observable implication of the mechanism of de-legitimization (DL)

It is argued that one should expect to see the following, if the conservatives and/or the liberals acted to de-legitimize the existing social democratic school causal beliefs or problem definitions:

– Observation DL1: The conservatives and/or liberals uttered claims of school failure

– Observation DL2: The conservatives and/or liberals associated the unsuccessful outcome with a specific policy position or problem definition held by the social democrats.

- Observation DL3: The conservatives and/or liberals formulated an alternative problem definition or causal belief.
- Observation DL4: De-legitimization was performed by the conservatives and/or liberals when they were in opposition.

The first three predictions are very certain. If the parties did not engage in the above behavior they could not be argued to try to persuade the social democrats to change ideas. Still, in regard to observation 3 – in contrast to legitimization – parties offer causal beliefs or problem definitions less directly when performing de-legitimization. Observation 4 is not as certain as the first two observations either. Hence, the prediction about place in opposition is not necessary for the theory to be true. Further, the expected observations are not necessarily unique. Rational accounts could also expect parties to attack each other due to a vote motivation to make electoral gains. However, they would not necessarily expect them to create a new causal belief or problem definition.

5.4.2 Observable implication of immediate reaction to the mechanism of de-legitimization (R-DL)

As argued in Chapter 2, it is expected that as a reaction to de-legitimization there will be a change in actors within the party. Hence, in reaction to de-legitimization actors with different causal beliefs or problem definitions than the old actors gain access to prominent positions where they represent the social democrats' school policy position. This is due to the newfound legitimacy of their ideas in regard to the performed de-legitimization of the competing ideas.

- Observation R-DL 1: The social democrats adopted the causal belief or problem definition advocated in the de-legitimization attempt.
- Observation R-DL 2: There were internal divisions in the social democratic party in relation to problem definition or assessment causal beliefs.
- Observation R-DL 3: The change in ideas occurred through a change in central social democratic party members.
- Observation R-DL 4: The social democrats were in government when they changed ideas.

The first observation is a certain prediction as the social democrats should be expected to change their problem definition or causal beliefs about assessment in the event of de-legitimization. Further, if the de-legitimization influenced the social democrats the influence should be seen in a causal belief

or problem definition similar to what the right wing had promoted. The second prediction is less certain as beliefs do not have to diverge among actors, but if one is able to observe a conflict of beliefs in the party then it increases the probability that ideas weigh more than interests. Hence, the prediction of conflicting problem definitions or causal beliefs in parties is highly unique. Politics matters would expect the ideology to inform the beliefs and hence that beliefs were homogenous within parties. Further, rational approaches would expect material incentives to channel party members to react uniformly to this and hence express similar ideas. The prediction that the change in ideas occurred through a change in actors is medium on certainty as there is little in the existing theory which states that ideas have to change within the existing actors or by new actors coming to power. The predication about place in opposition is assessed to be low on certainty as this aspect is not theorized in the idea literature.

The uniqueness of the prediction regarding change in ideas is quite high as few alternative theories would speculate about parties changing causal beliefs or problem definition. Both politics matter and rational approaches to a higher degree address policy positions and will be discussed here. The uniqueness of the prediction about change in ideas via a change in actors is medium to high. Politics matters and rational approaches would not expect change in actors to be of significance as objective signals at the group level should be dictating clear strategies and hence produce similar beliefs within the group.

5.4.3 Observable implications of the mechanism of legitimization (L)

The following set of observable implications relates to what one should expect to see if the conservatives and/or liberals engaged in legitimization and created a new policy solution or problem definition by invoking existing ideas valued by the social democrats. Overall, in contrast to de-legitimization there should be a positive tone highlighting the positive properties of a school policy solution not pointing out problems.

− Observation L1: The conservatives and/or liberals legitimized a new assessment policy or problem definition by invoking existing ideas valued by the social democrats.
− Observation L2: The conservatives and/or liberals formulated an alternative problem definition or causal belief about assessment in the process.
− Observation L3: Legitimization was performed by the conservatives and/or liberals when they were in government.

The first two implications are rather certain. If the parties did not engage in the above behavior they could not be argued to use legitimization to try to persuade the social democrats to change ideas. The last prediction is less certain. It is not necessary for the idea theory that legitimization should be performed by governing parties. Regarding uniqueness, other theories would not expect parties to create problem definitions or causal beliefs and reach out to attain policy compromise perhaps least of all politics matters. However, rational theories could predict that parties would promote their policy solutions not necessarily to other parties but at least to the public due to vote considerations. Hence, overall the predictions are not highly unique.

5.4.4 Observable implication of immediate reaction to legitimization (RL)

The change in social democratic causal beliefs will occur among existing party actors after legitimization as argued in Chapter 2. Hence, the following should be observed if legitimization leads the social democrats to change causal beliefs or problem definitions:

– Observation RL1: The social democrats adopted the causal beliefs or problem definition advocated in the legitimization attempt.
– Observation RL2: The change in causal beliefs or problem definition took place among existing actors within the party.
– Observation RL3: The social democratic party was in opposition when it changed its ideas.

The first observation is pretty certain as the change in ideas should occur if legitimization influences the social democrats. Further, the idea adopted should relate to the one legitimized. The second and third observations are less certain as this aspect is not sufficiently theorized in the literature and the prediction is based on my own theory development. As I wrote in the section about reactions to de-legitimization, the uniqueness of the prediction regarding change in problem definition or causal beliefs about assessment is quite high as few alternative theories would speculate about parties changing ideas. Further, the aspect that the change in beliefs should take place among existing actors in opposition is not as such theorized by other theories.

5.4.5 Observable implication of change in policy position (PP)

It is argued that both de-legitimization and legitimization lead to new problem definitions or causal beliefs but only the latter is expected to also result in

new policy positions in regard to a specific assessment tool. Further, to increase the confidence that the change in position or problem definitions was prompted by a change in ideas and not in interests, there should not be evidence of purely tactical motivations. This includes a change in opinion polls unambiguously supporting the policy indicating vote considerations or pressure from a governing partner indicating office motivation to uphold government coherence. If the social democrats took a new policy position on school assessment policy, the following should be identified:

– Observation PP1: The social democrats expressed a new policy position on assessment policy.
– Observation PP2: There was no evidence that the change in position or problem definition was purely tactical.

The first prediction is highly certain because if ideas have influence, one should definitely see that parties express new policy positions. The second prediction is less certain. Ideas can still have induced a new policy position despite possible evidence that other factors could have promoted a new position. The first observation is not unique and policy positions could be expected to change for a number of not necessarily ideational reasons. However, if the second prediction is present, the uniqueness increases markedly as this rules out most rational objections. This is the case as the evidence becomes ambiguous regarding the rational benefits of taking a new position or problem definition. Further, politics matters would not expect that parties' policy position changes. If both predictions hold, one can argue that the first prediction is both highly certain and unique.

5.4.6 Observable implication of idea induced policy change (PC)

The final part of the process relates to whether the new causal belief and policy position cause the parties to adopt new assessment policies. If this is the case the following implication should be present:

– Observation PC1: The social democrats entered into school political compromise with the conservatives and liberals adopting new assessment policies.

The prediction is very certain: if ideas matter one should see policy changes as well. Further, if the social democrats are influenced by new causal beliefs they should be a part of these changes too. The prediction is moderately to highly unique. This would definitely not be predicted by politics matters and

if the predictions in the last part of the process related to policy positions hold, then rational approaches would not either.

5.5 Validity of the observable implications

The evaluation of the uniqueness and certainty of the implications are of course not absolute and may be subject to interpretation and disagreement. However, by explicitly deriving theoretical implications and scoring them based on their certainty and uniqueness the validity and replicability of the study have been strengthened. In the table below, the observable implications are categorized into four groups (see Appendix 5 for scoring sheet).

Table 5.5: Observable implications certainty and uniqueness

Uniqueness	Certainty	
	High	Low
High	PP1+PP2, PC1	PP2 (-PP1)
	R-DL1	R-DL2*
	R-L1	
Low	DL1, DL2; L1, L2, PP1 (-PP2)	DL3**, DL4, L3, R-L2**, R-DL3**, R-L3, R-DL4

* Medium certainty or uniqueness, ** Medium certainty and uniqueness.

The most desirable tests are the ones that are both highly unique and highly certain. Van Evera calls this a 'Doubly Decisive' test. Passing the test strongly corroborates an explanation; a flunk kills it (Van Evera, 1997: 32). Four of the tests are argued to constitute this type of test. For example if the social democrats adopt the causal beliefs created in the legitimization or de-legitimization, this would highly support the theory. Further, if the social democrats change policy position in line with the new causal belief in the absence of evidence of tactical motivation this is argued to be a doubly decisive test; likewise if the social democrats enter into a broad political agreement to introduce new assessment policies. However, the other types of tests are more common and although they all have weaknesses they can also support the theory in different ways.

Five of the implications are so-called 'Hoop' tests which are defined by high certainty and low uniqueness (van Evera, 1997: 31). A flunked test kills the explanation but a passed test gives it little support. In other words a passed test validates the finding but not the theoretical explanation of that finding. Hence, if the right wing criticizes the social democrats for being responsible for a policy failure this could be because they seek to persuade them to change causal beliefs, or it may want to attract attention to gain

electoral benefit. If the right wing did not engage in de-legitimization this cannot be attributed as cause of a change in causal belief and hereafter policy change. Further, if the social democrats did not express a new policy position on assessment policy this would falsify the theory. If they did, other explanations could still be the cause instead of ideas. Hence, for the theory to survive it has to pass this test, but other tests are needed to support the claims.

Only two implications constitute a 'smoking gun' test. In this case the implication is highly unique, but limited certain. This means that a passed test strongly corroborates the explanation but if it flunks this weakens it very little. If somebody is found standing over a dead body with a smoking gun this certainly supports the claim that he/she is the killer. If the person was not found by the body with a gun he/she might still be the killer. If the social democrats change policy position and there is no evidence that the change was tactical, then this strongly supports an ideational cause. However, if one finds tactical evidence the cause might still be ideational. Further, if there are conflicting beliefs in parties, this very much indicates that ideas are the cause. As argued, politics matters would expect the ideology to inform the beliefs and hence that beliefs were homogenous within parties. Further, rational approaches would expect material incentives to channel party members to react uniformly to this and hence express similar beliefs. However, if the party had homogenous beliefs this would not eradicate ideas as an explanation.

6 implications are what Van Evera terms 'straws in the wind' tests. The tests are low on certainty and uniqueness meaning that they are indecisive both ways. The tests can weigh in the total balance of evidence but are themselves indecisive. Two of these implications relate to whether the performers of de-legitimization or legitimization are in government or opposition. The implications do not directly relate to the verification or falsification of ideas' influence but could add interesting knowledge about the political circumstances in which persuasion takes place.

5.6 How can we investigate ideas?

Above an attempt was made to develop a process tracing framework which can guide the analyses. However, before venturing into analysis of changes in assessment ideas a number of other aspects need to be dealt with too. Hence, in the third part of the chapter I will discuss how ideas are best measured as well as the study's use of data sources. Despite the recent upsurge in the literature on ideas, ideational explanations have often been viewed with

suspicion. Methodologically, some regard ideas as too vague and intangible to be used in rigorous analysis in line with that of institutions and interests (Berman, 1998: 19; Parsons, 2007: 94). Hence, the discussion of how ideas can be investigated is important. It will be discussed whether to investigate causal belief or problem definition qualitatively or quantitatively. Finally, the questions of data sources and generalizability are addressed.

5.6.1 Should ideas be 'measured' quantitatively or qualitatively?

While the idea literature often applies qualitative methodology there is no preconceived truth in this choice. There certainly are exemplary ideational analyses using quantitative methodology. One approach is to operationalize ideas by associating them with individuals who assume leadership positions within a government or an agency (Eisner, 1991). Eisner (1991: 92) works with the concept of 'community of expertise', which is a set of actors within subsystems. These actors are operationalized based on their affiliation with competing schools of economics (Eisner, 1991: 107). A very similar approach is taken by Chwieroth (2007: 9), who uses the organizational background of key individuals as a proxy for the ideas instilled in them as a result of their professional training: 'The key to developing a quantitative indicator of ideas then is to identify the critical individuals that are being inculcated with the ideas of interest and which organizations are teaching them. Once the key individuals and organizations are identified, the researcher can then pro- duce scores for the cases being analyzed' (Chwieroth, 2007: 9). Other ap- proaches quantifying concepts similar to ideas are found in the agenda set- ting literature, where scholars code the frequency of a certain issue on the political agenda (see e.g. Mortensen, 2006; Green-Pedersen, 2007).

While the idea concept of problem definition probably to some degree could be scored quantitatively, the book first and foremost focuses on causal beliefs. A causal belief is a very complex character incorporating a specific policy solution as well as higher level ideas such as problem definitions and/or macro ideas. This renders it hard if not impossible to quantify causal beliefs without losing a lot of relevant information (Jakobsen 2007: 90). Fur- ther, there are available techniques to gather information about people's subjective perceptions: archival material, interviews etc., and rigorous empir- ical analysis of ideas is certainly possible. To serve as useful independent va- riables, ideas must be clearly identified and associated with specific political actors (Berman, 1998: 19). The theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 is therefore very agent centered, and using parties and often single actors

as unit of analysis allows me to investigate how ideas work their policy influence through agents.

5.7 Data selection

Selecting data for the process tracing analysis and reflecting on how credible data are obtained is very important. The process tracing literature points out that process tracing analyses use archival accounts and interview transcripts and that enormous amounts of information are required. It cautions that a study is substantially weakened if data is inaccessible on key steps of the hypothesized process (George & Bennett, 2005: 6, 223; Ulriksen, 2010: 83). While it is quite unproblematic to acquire data about the content of a policy reform it is much harder to access central actors' beliefs and interests. However, the idea literature offers little advice on which sources to consult to investigate ideas. Below, the issue of data sources will be discussed in relation to each phase of the process whereby persuasion is hypothesized to result in policy change.

5.7.1 Data on de-legitimization and legitimization (Phase 1)

The ideational mechanisms can be argued to take place in different venues (see Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Mortensen, 2006: 39). De-legitimization is an attempt to pressure a party to change ideas and will as a rule be a public event mirrored in the media. In contrast, legitimization is a more benign effort to secure cooperation and can take place a less public place and will also be less distant in time from the policy proposal. Legitimization is hence hypothesized to be primarily conducted in a policy subsystem by the internal subsystem actors, for example the minister responsible for a policy sector, parliamentary policy sector committee, parliamentary parties' policy sector spokespersons and other stakeholders routinely involved in policy making in the policy sector. The act of legitimization will often occur internally in the policy subsystem, for example at committee meetings or in preparation for legislation. As it may be difficult to access some documents from internal deliberations, one could be left with analyzing parliamentary debates about legislation.

De-legitimization is bound to be more 'public' in nature. The attack could be launched by an interpellation, resolutions or the opening address of the parliament and then brought into the media or the attack could start in the media. The macro political actors involved in de-legitimization could be the prime minister, party leaders and other prominent politicians. This does not

mean that legitimization could not be conducted by a macro political actor like the prime minister. However, the prime minister can only deal with a limited number of issues, so he only deals with very salient ones. Another variable that is relatively uncomplicated to measure is policy failure. Failure will be assessed based on official reports and investigations which also often will be referred to in the media.

Table 5.6: Comparison of policy subsystem and macro political venue

	Subsystem venue	Macro political venue
Actors	Sector minister, parliamentary committee members, interest groups, bureaucrats	Prime minister, party leaders, other top politicians
Data	Meetings in standing committees and working groups: meeting protocols, discussion papers.	Activities on the floor of the parliament – often monitored and reported by media: bills, interpellations, parliamentary resolutions and accounts by ministers
Public visibility	Low	High

Source: Mortensen (2006: 39-46).

In Chapter 2 it was argued that a party's parliamentary position can be related to the form of persuasion parties will pursue. It was hypothesized that de-legitimization would be performed by opposition parties whereas legitimization to a larger degree would be pursued by the government. To elaborate on the above discussion, the opposition's de-legitimization could be expected to be performed via interpellations and parliamentary resolutions. In contrast, the government's legitimization could be found in data like policy reports, introduction of bills etc. Common sources could be statements in the media, but as argued this should particularly pertain to de-legitimization.

5.7.2 Data on causal beliefs and problem definitions (phase 2)

Just as the parliamentary position of a party is related to persuasion, it is also related to the reaction to persuasion: that is the change in parties' ideas (causal beliefs or problem definitions). Ceteris paribus, reactions to de-legitimization should be searched for among the government parties and reactions to legitimization among opposition parties. In the table below, different types of data are related to opposition parties and government parties.

Hence, the opposition is expected to express their causal beliefs as well as problem definitions in parliamentary interpellations, resolutions and consultations. The government has other sources like the parliamentary opening address, policy reports, the response to the opposition's interpellations and

finally introduction of legislative proposals. The advantage of written documents like parliamentary debates is that they record what was said at the time and not what actors say in retrospective (Ulriksen, 2010: 84). However, there are also important common pools of sources where both actors' ideas can be expressed. Both actors publish party manifestos, hold party congresses where speeches are documented and appear frequently in the media. Written media like newspapers and periodicals will be investigated here. Newspaper articles are found via media databases such as the Danish 'Infomedia' and the Swedish 'Presstext'.[10] A benefit of media data is that they can cover the intermediate period between policy changes where parliamentary action can be expected to be less vivid. Further, biographic, historical and academic material will be used. Another variable related to change in causal beliefs and problem definitions is a potential change in actors. Intra party change in actors will be investigated via media announcements of cabinet or group reshufflings. However, within party learning is harder to investigate. It is more or less assumed if the party actors do not change, but if the same actors express new ideas it is a result of learning within the party.

Table 5.7: Incumbency and data sources

Opposition	Government
Interpellations	Opening address
Parliamentary resolutions	Governmental policy reports
Consultation	Answers to interpellation, consultation
	Introduction of bills
Common sources:	
Media	
Party manifestos	
Party congress speeches	

Source: Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010b: 11).

5.7.3 Data on policy position and policy change (Phase 3 and 4)

The event of parties expressing policy positions and partaking in policy change is expected to be quite close in timing but the data sources diverge. Parties' policy position in relation to specific policy instruments will not necessarily be mentioned in party manifestos etc., which deal with policy issues on a more abstract level. More likely sources could be policy papers, parliamen-

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[10] Presstext: http://www.presstext.se/, Infomedia: http://infomedia.dk/Produkter.aspx.

tary discussions or statements in the media. Measuring policy change and participating actors is no hard task as the information is publicly available on the parliaments' websites or in archival material.

5.7.4 Supplementary interviews

The written sources have been supplemented by personal interviews. The reason for conducting the interviews was to validate the findings of the analyses of written documents. In this regard they were used to hear the participants own accounts of why assessment reforms occurred as well as to ensure that I had not missed any significant events. Hence, it was deemed valuable to interview the persons who had been part of the processes about their perception of what had happened. The selection criterion was that they had participated in or had been very close to the reform process. However, since I am an 'outsider' to the Swedish case, I interviewed a broader group of people there to obtain more information. Further, the administrative level (The National Agency for Education) plays a larger part in school policy than equivalents in the Danish case and interviewees related to the Agency were interviewed as well as politicians.

The interviews were conducted between June and October 2011. Nine interviews were conducted. The number of interviews was not decided beforehand. It proved difficult to persuade some of the central Swedish actors, i.e. those who were ministers at the time, to participate. Still, the central themes were assessed to be sufficiently illuminated by the nine interviews.

The interviews focused on past events of school reforms. The interviews were both used as accounts of actual reform processes: 'what happened?' and as assessments of how actors perceived their interests and why (Kjeldstadli, 2011: 180). The usual disclaimers apply to critically evaluating the interviewees' statements. The hardest thing in interviewing is that interviewees may adjust past positions or attitudes to what they know today (2001: 203). The interviewees' statements are memories and there could be aspects of oblivion and false memories (Kjeldstadli, 2011: 203). However, actions were taken to avoid bias. The interviews were conducted after the document analyses, and the written documents were used to verify the interviewees' statements. Further, the reform participants' diverging memories were juxtaposed in accordance with Kjeldstadli's (2001: 188) recommendations: assess the sources' internal consistency; compare the source to other sources (interviewees) and assess if the source is in agreement with the general context and other knowledge. Instead of asking what interviewees think about something, more general questions about events were asked.

Sweden	Denmark
Ulf P. Lundgren: Professor in pedagogy Uppsala and the first head executive of The National Agency for Education 1991-1999.	Bertel Haarder: MP for the Liberals, Minister of Education 1982-1993; 2005-2010.
Lars Leijonborg: Minister of Education 2006-2007, Minister of Research, 2007-2009, Party leader, the Liberals 1997-2007, Member of education committee 1984-1991.	Ulla Tørnæs: MP for the Liberals, Minister of education 2001-2005, member of educational committee 1998-2001, political spokesperson 1998-2001.
Therese Wallqvister: political expert for primary schools and high schools for the Liberals 2010-; chief of staff for Minister of Research Leijonborg 2006-2009; acting head of secretariat for the Liberals' parliamentary secretariat with responsibility for educational questions 2000-2006; educational advisor The National Agency for Education 1995-2000.	Carsten Hansen: MP for the Social Democrats, educational spokesperson 2002-2004, member of education committee 1998-2011
Per Thullberg: Head Executive The National Agency for Education 2003-2010.	Christine Antorini: MP for the Social Democrats, educational spokesperson for SD 2005-2011, member of education committee 2005-2011; Minister of Education (children and schooling) 2011-.
Mikael Damberg: MP for the social democrats, Member of education committee 2005-, vice president and social democratic education spokesperson 2010-.	

5.8 Validity and generalizability

To conclude, I will discuss the generalizability as well the validity of the results. According to King, Keohane and Verba (1994: 46), 'Inference is the process of using the facts we know to learn about facts we do not know'. In this book, the collected evidence will be used to decide if and how persuasion served to transform actors' school assessment ideas in Denmark and Sweden. Hence, the purpose is descriptive inference. The conclusions about how new assessment beliefs came about in the Danish and Swedish cases cannot readily be generalized to other cases involving transformed school assessment beliefs. This is related to the method applied: process tracing. According to Beach & Pedersen (2010: 6), the method cannot stand alone and to generalize the findings of a single case study to the broader population of a given phenomenon, comparative and statistical methods that build upon correlation-based logics must be employed. Hence, it is not intended to generalize the specific findings to other countries.

However, the ambition is to draw some sort of causal inference about the mechanisms whereby parties can transform others parties' ideas and hence induce policy change. One of the strengths of process tracing is that it provides a strong basis for causal inference if it can establish an uninterrupted causal path linking the putative causes to the observed effects (George & Bennett, 2005: 222). Whether the theoretical indeed can be used for causal inference will be discussed in Chapter 11.

To be able to draw both descriptive and causal inferences the aspect of the analyses' internal validity is crucial. Internal validity concerns the validity of the causal analysis. Data validity concerns the validity of the data on which the descriptive inferences are based. Finally, reliability concerns the reproducibility of the analyses (Olsen, 2002: 145). The internal validity is sought strengthened by analyzing over time as well as comparing across two countries. Further, alternative explanations will be continuously assessed against the evidence during the analyses. In addition, data triangulation has been attempted by combining different data sources. This increases the reliability of the analyses as it increases the probability that other researchers would have found the same tendencies. Further, issues of data validity have been discussed in the above sections.

5.9 Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, the preliminary work has been done to enable a comprehensive analysis of the cases and to investigate how persuasion led to new beliefs about assessment in Denmark and Sweden. In Chapter 1, the empirical puzzle was presented and it was argued that a change of assessment ideas appeared to be related to the radical change in assessment policies. In Chapter 2, the theoretical framework was developed and it was argued that parties could persuade other parties to change causal beliefs by performing either de-legitimization or legitimization. If successful this could lead to policy change. In Chapter 3, the school policy sector and the policy field of school assessment policy, was discussed, and the assessment policy developments in Denmark and Sweden were mapped. In Chapter 4, the dependent variable, assessment beliefs, was explored. The content of the assessment-skeptical beliefs among the social democratic parties was explored as well as more general perceptions about the purpose of assessment. Finally, in the present chapter the study's research design – a multiple case study – was presented. Further, the chosen method was a qualitative process tracing approach. Lastly, a framework of observable implications of the theory was produced. Hence, if the right wing pursued persuasion the framework details what one should expect to see empirically. The framework will guide the empirical analyses in Chapters 6-9. As a result of the observable implications it should be clearer when the empirical findings corroborate or impede the theoretical expectations. Further, the data sources were selected and discussed as well as the study's generalizability and validity.

Chapter 6:
Sweden 1990-1995:
Sweeping decentralization,
fears of school inequality
and assessment reforms

> On a national level centrally devised tests are needed to maintain an equal education across the country and to measure quality and knowledge in the public as well as in private schools. (…). The municipalities' large autonomy in organizing and managing schools makes increased demands on central follow-up and assessment of whether schools really are providing all children a common core of fundamental knowledge and reach the national targets (Prop. 1992/1993: 220, 81-82).

In this chapter, I will analyze the process of assessment idea changes in Sweden in the period 1990-1995. In this brief period a number of assessment policies were adopted and office changed twice. Some of the policy changes had the support of the Social Democrats, others did not. I will argue that the differences in support can be attributed to the diverging utilization of the mechanism of legitimization and the subsequent difference in idea change.

The chapter consists of four parts. First, I investigate the Social Democrats' causal beliefs about assessment before the attempted legitimization and the consecutive reforms. In the wake of a rapid decentralization, parts of the party had become concerned with the consequences for school equality. In this regard some suggested that assessment of goal attainment could help the state monitor the equality of schooling. However, the exact content of such a policy was very unclear. Despite emerging consensus about the need to reform the grade system, there were conflicting causal beliefs about grades in the party. One faction believed that grades only had detrimental consequences and therefore should be abolished.

The second part deals with how the new center-right government, which took office in 1991, acted to persuade the Social Democrats to support its ambitious assessment reform agenda. The proposals for policy change included both the adoption of national tests and reform of the grade system. It will be analyzed whether the government utilized legitimization invoking existing ideas to legitimize respectively national tests as well as different poli-

cies relating to the grade system. Further, I will investigate the Social Democrats' reaction in relation to whether or not they changed causal beliefs in response to the legitimization attempt. Did they support the policies and which policy changes eventually resulted? It will be argued that legitimization was performed in relation to the policy solutions of national tests as well as in regard to reforming the grade referencing from relative to absolute. However legitimization or de-legitimization was absent in relation to promoting a reform of the grade scale and timing of grade awarding. Hence, the Social Democrats adopted new causal beliefs in regard to the former and hence supported national tests and a new absolute grade scale, but opposed the latter changes.

Third, it will be discussed whether the changes in the Social Democrats' policy position – which led them to support certain assessment changes – can be attributed to tactical motivations or other causes. Finally, it will be briefly investigated after office changed in 1994 how the new Social Democratic government acted in relation to assessment policy. Did the new government retain the assessment reform or were some policies reversed?

6.1 The Social Democratic school political agenda late 1980s-early 1990s

In the late 1980s a Social Democratic government was in office. Ingvar Carlsson was Prime Minister and until 1989 Bengt Göransson was Minister of Culture and Schools. In 1989 he became Minister of Education and Göran Persson became Minister of Schools. In regard to school policy two issues featured prominently: (1) a big debate about decentralizing the school system and (2) the purpose of grades and whether they should exist or not was still heavily politicized in the party. I will start by exploring the major issue of decentralization and what this development meant in relation to causal beliefs about assessment. I will then move on to the conflict-ridden issue of the grade system.

6.1.1 Decentralization as a powerful macro idea

In centralized Sweden, decentralization over time developed into a strong macro idea with overwhelming consensus among the establishment. To reiterate, macro ideas are elite ideas in the form of cross sectional problem definitions, causal beliefs or policy solutions. The macro idea of decentralization involved beliefs about the desirability of reforming state governance by decreasing state control of local activity and governing by goals rather than by

regulation. Throughout the 1970s, numerous reports pleaded for more decentralization but the message did not really break through (Lindbom, 1995: 64-65). In 1982, the Swedish Social Democrats regained power. They put public sector reforms on top of their agenda and launched a special 'public administration policy' (Green-Pedersen, 2002: 283). The means proposed by the Social Democrats were decentralization and a more service-oriented welfare state.

It appears that the macro idea of decentralization and the transition to management by objectives at least for a while became the school sector's problem definition cutting across potential party political differences. According to Bergström (1993: 183), the development towards decentralization was not politically controversial. In 'Education for the New Sweden?' (2002), Lindblad et al. analyze changes in governance of education. They conducted interviews with policy makers, school personnel and pupils and found that there had been a transition in the education culture in Sweden and found that the policy changes related to decentralization were conceived as inevitable: 'A striking feature of the interviews with all policy actors, also reflected in a substantial number of the school actor interviews, is the perceived unavoidability of this transformation; there seemed to be no return. Social changes and the growth of knowledge were perceived as taking place so fast and the differences at local level were so big that no central instance could or should regulate school work in any detail any more' (Lindblad et al., 2002: 299). They conclude that: 'In sum, education restructuring is part and parcel of a transition in the education culture in Sweden. We found a change in hegemony with little argument and few if any alternatives' (Lindblad et al., 2002: 301). Their findings seem to confirm that there was a strong macro idea of the necessity and desirability of decentralization.

6.1.2 Insecurity in the Social Democratic Party about decentralization's consequences for equality in schooling

However, actors in the party were more divided than what immediately could be read from the national discourse. The Ministry of Finance, manifested by its minister Kjell-Olof Feldt, had a strong desire to decentralize the school system and make schools a municipal matter (Isaksson, 2011: 17-18). The Minister of School and Culture, Bengt Göransson, was, nevertheless, against decentralization. He argued that it would threaten an equal school (Isaksson, 2011: 18). Later in 1988, Göransson presented a proposal about school governance, which would increase local freedom over schools. Shortly after he was replaced by Göran Persson, who became minister of schools

and whose main responsibility was to implement the decentralization of the school system. The reason some Social Democrats were reluctant to decentralize was that they – like Göransson – feared that this would hurt the equality of the existing school system. The party has traditionally seen education as decisive in creating an equal society: 'The Social Democratic Party strives for equality in the allocation of property, income and power but also in the supply of education and cultural assets' (SAP, 1975: 74). Equality as a value has deep roots in Swedish society. It involves beliefs about the desirability of obtaining equality between individuals in societal outcomes. However, decentralization in some aspects meant an earlier and more marked differentiation and therefore posed a perceived challenge to equality in education.

This insecurity about whether the decentralization of the school system would hurt equality gave rise to new thoughts on how to uphold equality in schooling. Some Social Democrats mentioned assessments of potential benefits in this respect. In the 'Ansvarsproposition' report (1990/91:18), the Social Democratic government expressed that it saw assessment of goal attainment as a means to secure equality: 'Everybody's entitlement to equal education is fundamental for school policy. This entails that the same goals and guidelines shall apply for all schools in the country' (1990/91: 18, 20). Further: 'A well designed evaluation can in this perspective be seen as an important tool in producing an equal standard in the nation's schools' (1990/91: 18, 103). At the 1990 party congress, the party leadership argued that assessment would take on a new role to monitor school development in a decentralized school system to ensure equality (SAP, 1990b, 14). However, what a new assessment policy would look like was very unclear.

6.1.3 But what kind of assessment?

How should assessment in a decentralized system be devised? What one knew was that it should involve goal management which implied formulating goals and assessing the attainment of these goals, but all other details were very elusive. Goal management was claimed to necessitate that the state followed up, evaluated and supervised to assess if schooling was conducted in a manner which corresponded to the increased local responsibility (prop. 1988/89:4, bet. 1988/89: UbU7). In the so-called 'Ansvarsproposition' the Social Democratic school minister Göran Persson argued that the state should formulate national goals and guidelines for the school. Curricula should provide better prerequisites for assessing the schools. The intent was that the parliament and government should receive regular reports and assessments of the state of schools. This national assessment should be syste-

matic and involve performance and costs and allow comparison between municipalities and types of schools (1990/91: 18, 101-103). Grades were mentioned as a possible performance measure if they became goal related (prop. 1990/91:18, 102). However, it was stated that: 'Even though grades are a manifestation of pupils' school performance, assessment of school activity and presentation of results in relation to school governance is a much larger concept' (in Lundahl, 2009: 98).

Further, a goal and result oriented governance of schooling was argued to necessitate a new state school administration. It was argued a new civil service for the school system should be developed. The new agency was to be responsible for a national assessment and follow-up on the schools' performance and activities (Bet.1990/91:UbU4). However, in the report on the new organization for the state school administration 'Skolverksutredningen' (U1990:5) national tests were not even mentioned as a part of the new authorities' tasks, nor was it discussed how performance was to be assessed. In the so called 'Skolprojektet', led by then School Minister Göran Person, a result measure was discussed that would feature some sort of test result. However, the report very specifically advised restraint in using tests: 'the test should have a relatively limited content and magnitude. Even this type of evaluation must be characterized by the least possible amount of information and by restraint' (DS 1991:43, 134).

Tests had an image problem as tests and grades were associated with the central control from which the different administrative reports in the 1970s wanted to distance itself. Local actors felt that tests implied increased central control (se Lundahl 2006, part 4), and tests and grades had low societal legitimacy at the time (Lundahl, 2009: 76). Further, the existing causal belief about tests was that they differentiated grades and hence upheld relative grades' function to select into further education. This belief was reflected in the existing standard tests in English in form 8 and in mathematics and Swedish in form 9. The purpose of the standard test was to differentiate the pupils' grades, not to assess the individual pupils' knowledge apprehension (DS 1991: 43, 134). The test results were used to adjust the grade level in local schools to the national circumstances and hence when grades were still relative the legitimacy of tests was related to their function in differentiating grades (prop. 1986/87:100). If grades were to become goal related this function disappeared and it was unclear what functions tests should have (Lundahl, 2009: 98).

6.2 The Social Democrats and the grade system

Another issue which had figured prominently for decades was the grade system. Below, I will investigate how a preference for a reform of the grade system had emerged and analyze the causal belief about grades among the Social Democrats. However, there were quite conflicting beliefs in the party about whether to abolish or to reform the existing grade system.

6.2.1 Perceived problems with the grade system: an emerging reform wish

Ever since the relative grade system was adopted in 1962 it had been followed by criticism. There were debates about the appropriateness of grades and the Social Democrats proposed to abolish grades in primary school and replace them with assessment based on dialogue (SOU 1977:9). Continuing through the 70s and 80s the new grade system was criticized heavily (Richardson, 2004: 228). Above all, the criticism held that a group related grade system only informed about a pupil's performance relative to other pupils and not the pupil's goal attainment and knowledge. Numerous appointed commissions debated how to reform the grade system (SOU 1977:9; DS 1990:60; Richardson, 2004: 228-231). Further, there were arguments about how grades maintained social cleavages and reproduced the existing social order (Lundahl, 2011: 14). There was an emerging consensus about the desirability of reforming the grade system from a group-related to a goal-related system, however politically it proved hard to reach consensus on specific details.

The current work on creating a new grade system started under a Social Democratic government. In 1989, a group of experts was asked to analyze the grade system's different functions and influence on teaching. The purpose was to suggest a reform of the grade system (Richardson, 2004: 231). In the fall of 1990, the question about grades flared up once again. One of the members of the school minister's group on grades – Lennart Svensson – said that they would propose to abolish grades. There was no evidence that grades motivate pupils to study (Expressen 1/9/1990). Further, he argued that they perceived grades as being unpopular and a cause of competition and stress (Expressen 29/8/1990). This was firmly refuted by School Minister Göran Persson, who outlined that both pupils and parents wanted grades. However, he wanted goal related grades to replace group related grades. The expert group had trouble producing a united proposal, but agreed to abolish the relative group related grades and replace them with written

evaluation or merely the grades 'approved' and 'well approved'.[11] The group argued that as most pupils were accepted into further education grades were less useful (Expressen 1/10/1990; Richardson, 2004: 231).

In the wake of the fiasco with the expert group and the lack of solutions, the 'betygsberedning', a parliamentary formed committee with support of grade experts, was formed in 1990 (Richardson, 2004: 231). The betygsberedning should have finished in July 1991; however writing the curricula took longer than planned. The goal was that the new parliament should make a decision on grades no later than winter 1991/1992 or spring 1992 (Expressen 18/8/1991). The conflict of causal beliefs between members of the expert group and Göran Persson described above corresponds quite well to the existing conflict in the party, which will be referred below.

6.2.2 Conflicting causal beliefs about grades in the Social Democratic Party

The grade question is a very politicized and controversial issue in the party (Román, 2008: 18). The debate at the congress in 1990 is very illustrative of the diverging causal beliefs about grades in the party. One view was that grades had worn out their purpose of selecting into further education and that the remaining effects of grades were solely negative. Hence, grades should be abolished. These beliefs are reflected in a proposal that recommended that the party work for the abolishment of grades (SAP, 1990a: Motion 670). The reason is that grades lead to competition, passivity, a static view of knowledge, tactical reading of curriculum and prevent a pedagogical development of the school. Grades are argued to especially hurt working class children. 'We can dream about a school for all as long as grades remain. We can realize such a school when grades are abolished'. Another proposal (SAP, 1990a: Motion 671) was also critical of grades. It argued that the school was still dominated by old-fashioned procurement pedagogy with roots in medieval times. This hindered the vision of school work centered on pupil initiated activities and their own questions. Grades were blamed for this as they hinder individualized teaching. Another argument was that working class children are the biggest losers and hence that grades should be abolished.

The competing view was represented by the party leadership, which conceded that in recent years, grades' role as selection tool had been toned down and that this development should continue (SAP, 1990b: 14). Today

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[11] 'väl godkänd' and 'godkänd'.

upper secondary schools have expanded making room for everybody and almost everybody gets into their first priority of high school. Based on this the party leadership urged that the congress supported a view about grades in primary and secondary school which implied that grades should function as feedback to the pupils rather than selection tool (SAP, 1990b: 14). While the current grade system had been developed to function as selection into further education, two more functions could be emphasized. First, grades should be the schools' confirmation to every pupil of how the pupil's work has been judged. This is important for study motivation and job satisfaction. Second, grades should provide information about the things the pupils have learned. This is important in documenting qualifications for further studies (SAP, 1990b: 13-14).

The party leadership proposed to reform the current grade system – not to abolish it. It wanted to reform the grade system from relative grades to goal related grades and proposed several reasons why the relative grade system should be abolished. The critique was that relative grades create competition, also internally among pupils. Further, relative grades only provide information about what a pupil knows compared to his classmates (SAP, 1990b: 13). According to Göran Persson, the debate should concern how the current grade system was faulty and that it should be replaced with something else (SAP, 1990c: 126-127). The party leadership recognized that parents and pupils were critical of the relative grade system,. However, parents and pupils are argued to be fundamentally positive towards grades in general (SAP, 1990b: 13). Persson advised the congress against taking a too critical stance on grades. He argued that grades had become a symbolic issue and that the party had been out of step with the public opinion among pupil and parents. As the Social Democrats have never had impact with the kind of grade discussion expressed in the critical propositions, he argued that they must move on in this discussion (SAP, 1990c: 126-127). The congress followed the party leadership's recommendation to vote down the proposal to abolish grades. Hence, one can argue that a new belief had taken root in the early 1990s where grades' sorting function was downplayed for the more internal side of grades where they serve to inform and motivate pupils.

6.2.3 Conclusion

Overall both the traditional causal beliefs about tests and grades were related to 'admission control'. Tests can be used to differentiate grades and hence uphold the selection function of relative grades. Relative grades can

be used to select pupils into a limited number of positions. However, these causal beliefs were about to be transformed.

In a context of increasing decentralization and fear of the consequences for school equality, there was an emerging understanding in the party that assessment of goal attainment could contribute to securing the equality of schooling. However, a specific solution to the shape of this system had not been found. Over a long period the political system had generated a perception that the grade system needed to be reformed, but a reform had not yet been adopted. A further complicating factor was that the party was divided on the grade question. Traditionally the Social Democrats had seen grades as a necessary evil to select pupils into a limited number of upper secondary education positions. However, reality had changed, making this selection close to redundant. Some Social Democrats thought that grades had no positive but a lot of bad functions, and they argued that grades should be abolished. Another faction believed that the main problem with the grade system was that it was relative and that it should be reformed into a goal related grade system. Further it was argued that grades had a positive function as feedback to pupils about their performance (≈'pedagogical tools'). Below, I will analyze how a new government entered into legitimization and transformed causal beliefs toward that of 'quality control'.

Table 6.1: Causal beliefs about assessment

	Individual level	School level
Internal use	*Pedagogical tool* Assessment can be used to improve pupils performance	*Self evaluation* Assessment can be used by schools to assess its own performance
External use	*Admission control* Assessment can be used to select into further education	*Quality control* Assessment can be used to compare and evaluate schools performance

6.3 New government with an ambitious reform agenda

In 1991, a center-right coalition government came to power. Carl Bildt (Conservative) became Prime Minister and Beatrice Ask (Conservative) was appointed Minister of Schools. In the Conservative election manifesto from 1991 it was clear that the school would become a Conservative election theme along with VAT, salaries and taxes. The government stated that it wanted the best schools in Europe and the means to that goal were earlier school start and a new grade system with more and earlier grades (Expres-

sen 25/6/1992). Below, I will analyze the new government's attempt to reform assessment policies in the form of national tests and a new grade system. However, according to Lundahl (2006) issues of grades, class room assessment, national tests, evaluation and follow-up are in Sweden, unlike in many other countries, discussed as unrelated phenomena. In other countries they are treated as aspects of the same thing: assessment in education. Hence, even though all the changes were incorporated in the same 'reform package' I will analyze the attempts to induce change separately to allow independent analyses of the mechanisms of persuasion.

6.4 The emergence of national tests on the reform agenda

That national tests should become an instrument of decentralization was not evident in the early 1990s. Tests were related to a causal belief about 'admission control' and their value was differentiating grades to sort pupils into upper secondary school. However, as argued above, a new causal belief was emerging which saw assessment as a tool to evaluate school performance. Still, the policy solution of national tests had to be connected to the new causal belief about assessments purpose.

The first steps toward adopting national test began in 1991, when the Social Democratic government appointed a committee to redraft the national curricula. Later that year when the general election put a new government in office, the members of the National Curriculum Committee were dismissed, new members appointed, and new directives written. The committee was directed to propose syllabi for the different school subjects, permitting a goal related grade system to be used, and to recommend quality-improving measures (Aasen, 2003: 129). The directives to the new curriculum committee mentioned assessment of educational targets and the government demanded that educational targets were defined to allow for assessment of goal attainment (Dir 1991:117). In 1992 the government gave a first assignment to The Swedish National Agency for Education to investigate the question about national tests in relation to curriculum plans and a new grade system. The Agency was asked to make sure that the design of the test did not limit the freedom to locally plan content and methods of education (Regeringsbeslut 1992-06-18). There was still a perception that national tests could interfere with the visions about decentralization and increased local freedom for teachers in deciding content and methods (Lundahl, 2009: 97). The representation of national tests and their relationship with decentraliza-

tion changed shortly after when the government in a proposition (prop. 1992/1993: 220), called for a national test system. According to The Swedish National Agency for Education, the government's motivation for adopting the tests was to be seen in connection to the general changes in the school system at that time; more precisely the transition from rule based to target based management and the new division of responsibility between the state and the municipalities (Skolverket, 2004: 9). Below I will argue that the government sought to persuade the Social Democrats to change causal beliefs and hence support national tests by applying the mechanism of legitimization.

6.4.1 The government's legitimization of national tests

Refreshing the theoretical chapter, ideational legitimization was defined as a process of exhorting the legitimacy of existing ideas to legitimize a new policy solution. According to the observable implications of the theory, if legitimization took place we should find that existing ideas valued by the party were invoked. Reading the first call for national tests (prop 1992/1993: 220) it is obvious how the macro idea of decentralization and the value of equality were used to legitimize national tests (L1). First of all, the overwhelming consensus of the desirability of decentralization and goal management was used to make a case for the necessity of tests. Second, drawing on the deep rooted value of equality in education, the Conservative government succeeded in legitimizing national tests as a necessary solution to implementing goal management and maintaining equality in education in a decentralized school system. Equality is a core value in the Swedish society, also in education – and especially in the party. However, important Social Democratic actors saw decentralization as a potential threat to this normative value. National tests could hence be proposed as a possible policy solution which could counter possible inequality in education by informing policy makers of whether schools really are providing all children with a common core of fundamental knowledge and reach national targets. By building upon the consensus of the need for goal management and representing equality in schooling as necessitating control of results in the form of national tests, national tests were effectively legitimized.

The bourgeois government argued that as the municipalities' large autonomy in managing schools increased, this demanded central follow-up, evaluation of whether schools really were providing all children with a common core of fundamental knowledge and reached national targets (prop 1992/1993: 220). Further, there was a need for a national test system

locally. New developments of timetables and course plans increase the need to locally check that the education is on the right track and satisfies national goals. The schools and the teachers can also compare their pupils' educational performance to the expected normal average result to be able to support pupils who need it. Here they create a new causal belief where national tests are important in upholding equal education nationwide and to assess quality and knowledge in public as well as private schools (L2). The final observable implication was that the legitimization was performed by the right wing when it was in government (L3) and this can be confirmed. Hence, I argue that this is a clear example of ideational legitimization. Existing ideas of decentralization and equality are used to legitimize a new policy solution: national tests.

6.4.2 The Social Democratic response to the proposed tests: adopting a new causal belief

But how did the Social Democrats react to the attempt to legitimize national tests? Initially, the proposition was treated in a committee, which agreed with the government's motive for adopting national tests (Bet. 1993/94:UbU1). Thus, in striking difference to the Danish case, the Swedish Social Democrats did not combat the policy of national tests. Quite to the contrary, they accepted the government proposal on national tests. They repeated the government's discourse to legitimize national tests and argued that a test system was needed to uphold equality in education across the country and to have a quality control which ensured that Swedish school performance could be compared to other countries (Motion 1993/94:Ub1; also Motion 1992/93: Ub482). This corroborates the observable implication that legitimization should lead to a change of causal beliefs (R-L1). Further, as there had not been any changes in actors it appears that the change took place among the existing actors (R-L2) and when the Social Democrats were in opposition (R-L3).

Figure 6.1: The four-phased process of how legitimization induces policy change

Hence, a new belief emerged where national tests a) served to assess knowledge apprehension – and not to differentiate grades – and in doing this b) national tests serve to uphold equal education across the country by allow-

ing for evaluations of whether schools really are providing all children with a common core of fundamental knowledge and reach national targets. With the new belief about national tests as a filter it became in the Social Democrats 'interest' to support the policy of national tests. Alternatively, it would be a concession that they did not support educational equality and decentralization. The reason is argued to be ideational legitimization. Rather than de-legitimizing existing ideas in order to have new policy solutions adopted, existing ideas are used as resources in legitimizing new ideas. There was a focus on solution more than on pointing to a problem.

The Social Democrats' policy position on national tests will be analyzed in section 6.7 along with their reaction in policy positions on grades. First it will be analyzed how the government acted to reform the grade system. It will be argued that legitimization was performed in relation to the specific policy solution of reforming the grade referencing from relative to absolute grading. However legitimization or de-legitimization was absent in relation to promoting a reform of the grade scale and timing of grade awarding. Hence the Social Democrats only changed causal beliefs on the former policy position.

6.5 An attempt to reform the grade scale

At the very start of the period in office the new school minister Beatrice Ask revealed that she wanted to change the grade system: She stated that this would entail a goal related grade scale as well as a scale with more steps and earlier assessment of pupils (Expressen 5/12/1991). She gave the 'betygsberedning' new instructions in late November 1991 to look into the possibility of grades from form 1, more grade steps, grades in conduct as well as goal related grades (Expressen, 29/11/1991).

In the final report, the Betygsberedning proposed a six step grade scale and grades from form level 7. Betygsberedningen's proposal was very much criticized for the criteria proposed for the different grade steps which e.g. The National Agency for Education argued to be unclear and contradictory (DN 9/1/1993) The employer organization in Sweden, SAF, and the Teachers' Union also criticized the proposal (DN 13/1/1993). In February 1993, Prime Minister Carl Bildt stated that the betygsudredningen's proposal would be changed. However, school minister Ask denied that there would be a new unraveling of the grade question and argued that the government had enough information to produce a legislative proposal (DN 17/2/1993).

The Conservatives had to tread cautiously to reform the grade system. So how did the Conservative government go about creating consensus about

adopting a new policy on goal related grades? Below, it will be argued that the government pursued a strategy of legitimization in its advocacy for a goal related grade system. However, legitimization was not utilized in advocating why the grade system should be more elaborate and why grades should be awarded earlier.

6.5.1 Creating agreement on grading principle: legitimization of goal related grades

So if the government indeed was pursuing legitimization of a new grade scale we should be able to see how they invoke existing ideas or values. And as a matter of fact, the government legitimized the introduction of goal related grades by revoking macro ideas and values like equality and decentralization (L1). The value of equality was evident in referring to the need for equal and just selection into further education. The macro idea of decentralization and goal management was used in a similar manner as in the legitimization of national tests. The government argued that the school system needed goal related grades to make a national comparison of school standard. Another necessary observable implication is that one should be able to observe that the government created a new causal belief when revoking these existing ideas to legitimize a new policy solution (L2). Overall, grades are argued to constitute proof of accomplished education and attained knowledge but they are also used to select into further education (prop. 1992/93:220, 75). In the effort to legitimize the change to a goal related grade system especially two arguments take center stage. As grades are still to function as a tool of selection into certain lines of further education, the right to just and equal treatment emphasizes the need for a national grade system with national and identical grade steps. Further, comparable grades are necessary to compare the standard of knowledge between schools. This comparison should be conducted at the end of the school attendance as well as the end of the fifth school year (prop. 1992/93:220, 76). Consequently, it is argued that two causal beliefs are created to substitute the old which was about how relative grades can be used to select pupils into further education. The new causal beliefs are a) absolute grades can be used to select pupils into further education in a more just way and b) absolute grades can be used to assess school performance and are hence important in upholding equal education nationwide. The above is argued to constitute a legitimization strategy. There were no signs of an attempt to de-legitimize exiting ideas by claiming how they cause problems. Rather new policy solutions were le-

gitimized as being in accordance with values and ideas like equality and decentralization.

These characteristics of a legitimization strategy were, however, absent in relation to the part of the proposal about earlier grades and written assessment and extensions of the grade scale. The lack of cause-effect arguments for grade reform and a more extensive scale is conspicuous. A few arguments are found about written assessments of pupils from form 5 – and possibly form 1. Here the Conservative belief that grades can improve performance through information was evident (protokoll 1993/94: 43). Further, the government argued that pupils should be graded before the last year of school (prop. 1992/93:220, 76-77). However, this does not amount to de-legitimization or legitimization. This was merely an uttering of one's beliefs. There is no sign of persuasion in the form of legitimization – invoking consensual macro ideas or values – or de-legitimizing-arguing how existing beliefs about grades create problems.

6.6 The Social Democratic reaction: diverging ideas about the purpose of grades

But how did the Social Democrats react to the legitimization of the new grade principles? If legitimization can be argued to have had an effect, they should have adopted the causal beliefs promoted in the legitimization attempt (R-L1). The common core of the parties' beliefs is that grades should regulate admission to further education. The right-wing government had created a new belief – shared by the Social Democrats – about goal related grades being a more just and equal way of sorting pupils into further education. However, important differences made it hard to reach agreement on the other issues regarding time for awarding grades and width of scale. Below, I will illustrate the difference.

For the Conservatives grades had more positive functions than simply selecting pupils into further education. Grades express respect for pupils' work effort, give them goals to work toward and give pupils, parents and others accurate information and provide teachers and schools with a measure of the output of their work. Therefore, they argued, grades should be awarded frequently and as early as the first stage of school (Moderaterna, 1984). In 1988, the Conservatives added that the grade should state what the pupils know and should be awarded after every grade in the middle stage of school and after every semester in the highest grades of school (Moderaterna, 1988). The Conservatives and Liberals believed that grades could im-

prove performance, apparently via information to parents and pupils. In the debate about the reform, they explicitly argued that the written information from form level 5 would give pupils and parents important information about how the pupils were performing in school (protokoll 1993/94: 43). Here it was evident that the Conservatives – in contrast to the Social Democrats – believed that grades can improve performance and that this is related to their function in informing parents about performance.

Table 6.2: An overview of Swedish causal beliefs about assessment

	Old causal belief	New causal belief	Conflicting causal beliefs
Tests	Standard tests can be used to differentiate grades and hence uphold relative grades' function of selection (≈Admission control)	National tests can be used to assess school performance and are hence important in upholding equal education nationwide (≈Quality control)	
Grade referencing	Relative grades can be used to select pupils into further education (≈Admission control)	*Grade referencing (relative/absolute)* Absolute grades can be used to select pupils into further education in a more just way (≈Admission control)	*Overall function of grades:* Conservatives: Grades can be used to improve performance by informing pupils and parents (≈Pedagogical tool)
		Absolute grades can be used to assess school performance and are hence important in upholding equal education nationwide (≈Quality control)	Social Democrats: Grades only function to select into further education and have detrimental consequences (≈Admission control)

As argued in Section 6.2.2 there were conflicting views in the Social Democratic Party about the nature of grades. At the congress in 1990 the causal belief that won was the one promoted by the party leadership, especially by then school minister Göran Persson. This belief did not diverge all that much from that of the Conservatives. However, when the Social Democrats returned to opposition former Minister of Education Lena Hjelm-Wallén became educational spokesperson. She seemed quite a bit more skeptical of grades than Persson had been. Lena Hjelm-Wallén stated that she preferred a school without grades, however this was not a priority right now as a broad and lasting agreement was the best thing for the school (protokoll 1993/94: 43). Her beliefs can be described as classic Social Democratic: grades are a necessary – but undesirable – tool to regulate admission from school into fur-

ther education. If possible, they preferred a school without grades. In contrast to the Conservatives, the Social Democrats thought that oral conversation constituted better information about school progress than grades (Expressen 15/12/1993).

The table illustrates the configuration of old and new causal beliefs. It includes the conflicting causal beliefs about whether grades have other functions than selecting into further education. The following section will show that the different causal beliefs had consequences for the Social Democrats' position on the specific policy proposals.

6.7 The parties' policy positions

The government's original proposal contained national tests in forms 5 and 9, grades from form 9, mandatory written assessment from form level 5, 6 grade steps (A-F) and a reform of the grade principle from group related to goal and knowledge related. Assessment of the pupils' knowledge was to have the curriculum goals as target.

Table 6.3: Content of the government's proposal and the committees' proposal

	The government	The majority – committee	The Social Democrats
National tests	National tests form 5 and 9	National tests form 5 and 9	National tests form 5 and 9
Start time of grading	Form 9	Form 7	Form 8
Grade principle	Absolute – (goal and knowledge related opposed to group related)	Absolute – (goal and knowledge related opposed to group related)	Absolute – (goal and knowledge related opposed to group related)
Scale	6-steps (A-F)	6-steps (A-F)	4 steps
Written information	Mandatory from form 5	Mandatory from form 5, possible from form 1 (grade-like) if parents want	Possible if requested, but individually arranged
Oral assessment	%	Development conversation	Development conversation

The proposal was treated by a parliamentary committee, which made important revisions (1993/94: UbU1). The committee agreed with the introduction of goal related grades, however it proposed introduction of grades from form 7. In addition to the mandatory written assessment from form 5, they proposed the possibility of grade-like assessment from form 1 if parents desired it. The beginning of the mandatory written assessment coincides with the first national tests in form 5 where it was to be assessed whether or not pupils live up to the knowledge goals of the grade. They also proposed to

extend the 'quarterly conversation' into a development conversation, which should include school work progress and problems (1993/94:UbU1)

In line with the Social Democrats' causal beliefs it was possible to accept both national tests and a reform of the grade scale from relative to absolute, especially as it was seen to ensure equality and being in agreement with a more just and equal selection form (PP1). However, earlier grades, a more extensive scale and earlier written – grade-like – assessments were deemed highly inappropriate. According to the Social Democrats' causal beliefs about grades as a selection tool which only regulates admission, grades are only necessary in higher grade levels. They will hence automatically oppose earlier grades as well as grade-like assessment from a young age. Thus, the Social Democrats rejected mandatory written assessment from form 5 and preferred nationally regulated grades from form 8. In agreement with the committee, the Social Democrats proposed an alternative form of assessment: the development conversation. Written information would also be an option, but this would be up to the teacher, pupils and parents to arrange. Crucial for the Social Democrats was that the information should not approach a grade-like form. Grades look back in time while the development conversation points forward and grades force school practice towards what is measurable. Further, a related implication is the width of the scale. If grades are only to select into further education, you only need a crude scale involving few steps. A more extensive scale only serves to differentiate pupils, unnecessarily creating inequality. In this light it is to be expected that the Social Democrats oppose the policies and reverse them at first chance. Hence, they suggested fewer grade steps and a scale that does not include grades indicating unsatisfactory performance (protokoll 1993/94: 43). However, the committee proposal was adopted as policy, including the changes the Social Democrats agreed to but also those they opposed (PC1) (protokoll 1993/94: 43). Thus, the expected process associated with legitimization seems to be confirmed.

Figure 6.2: The four-phased process of how legitimization induces policy change
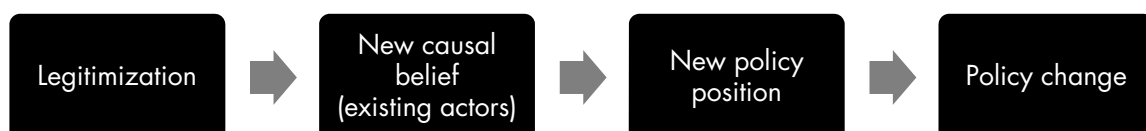
6.8 Can alternative explanations account for the change in policy position?

Above it has been established that the Social Democrats expressed new policy positions on national tests and grades. While it has been argued that this was related to the government's use of legitimization, it needs to be established that other causes were not involved. Hence it should be rendered probable that the position change was not purely tactical (PP2).

One could speculate that the Social Democrats changed policy positions merely because of a change in public opinion; that because a majority supported national tests and absolute grades, they felt forced to comply. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to find data for specific measures like national tests and absolute grades. However, in the early 1990s, school issues did not figure very high on the agenda. The number of people considering it to be an important issue was relatively stable and hence fluctuation in saliency cannot be the cause of the Social Democrats' change in opinion.

Figure 6.3: Pct. of people who mention the school as an important societal issue 1987-1994
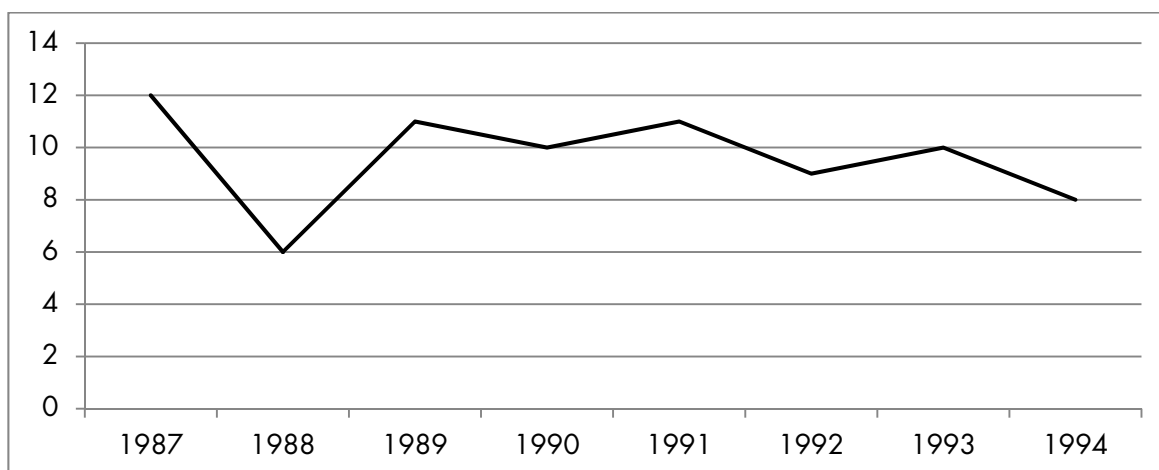
The results are from the SOM investigation 1987-2008 (Hedberg, 2009).

Still, it seems like there was a general hunch in the party and the media that the electorate was more positive towards tests and grades than the party had been (Expressen 20/10/1990). Göran Persson also referred to the public support of grades in his refusal to abolish them: 'There is no reason to abolish grades. Both parents and pupils wants them to remain' (Expressen 1/9/1990, see also the SAP 1990 congress). Still, the conflictual views in the party underscore that there was no clear perception of how to best maximize the Social Democrats' interests. Some argued that grades were against the ideological interest of equal education and some that grades were unpopular among the electorate; others argued that pupils and parents wanted grades

and that grades have other positive effects. Hence, it can hardly be argued that unambiguous structures were channeling the Social Democratic policy position. Further, if the electorate's opinions were prompting the Social Democrats to act it is still hard to understand their differentiated response to the issue: one should expect a more general positive attitude towards grades. As this discrepancy between the voters and the party has endured for a long time, it is hard to imagine why the Social Democrats should suddenly change their mind on some assessment issues in lack of a sudden surge in saliency (SAP, 1990c: 126-127). Hence, it would not be reasonable to claim that tactical motivations caused the change in policy position (PP2).

However, which other alternative explanations could one imagine were causing the change in causal beliefs as well as in policy? In the literature it is often claimed that ideas change as a result of policy failure. In the current case, one cannot argue that the Social Democrats changed their beliefs due to policy failure or changed policy because of a failure. On the contrary, at the time the Swedish school performed quite well. The IEA investigation of pupils' reading skills from 1992 gave a very positive picture of the Swedish schools as did OECD's Education at a glance report around 1990 (Román, 2008: 37). So there was no consensus of a Swedish school failure or evidence of the Social Democrats re-evaluating their beliefs in response to this.

A more cogent argument could be that the Social Democrats had already changed causal beliefs about assessment and would have adopted the changes themselves even in the absence of ideational legitimization. In the case of national tests, the party had gradually become more positive towards assessing goal attainment. An interviewee stated that the National Agency for Education had advocated these tests (Lundgren, 2011), but the party had not yet agreed on national tests as a potential tool in assessing the school level. It is therefore not likely that the Social Democrats would have suggested national tests in the absence of the Conservative legitimization of national tests. Despite emerging consensus on absolute grades, it proved hard to agree on the specific changes reflected in the numerous reports and committees and the lack of political compromises. Moreover, there were strong claims in the party to abolish grades. Finally, the Social Democrats had been in office for the preceding 10 years; if they wanted national tests or absolute grades they had had their chance.

6.9 Conclusion: assessing the expectations

In this section, I will evaluate whether the overall expectation regarding legitimization can be confirmed. To reiterate it stated that the mechanism of le-

gitimization will be performed by the government and if existing ideas valued by the opposition are used this will lead to a change of causal beliefs among the existing actors in the opposition [P2$_{leg/government}$].

In both cases of legitimization of respectively national tests and goal related grades it appears that the government invoked existing ideas and values, specifically the value of equality and the macro idea of decentralization. The act formulated new causal beliefs, and legitimization was performed by the government as expected. Hence the observable implications for the performance of legitimization are argued to have been corroborated (L1-L3).

The Social Democrats appear to have adopted the causal beliefs formulated in the two legitimization attempts (R-L1), and this change appears to have taken place among the existing actors at the time and this happened in opposition (R-L2; R-L3). It has been argued that this change in causal beliefs explains that the Social Democrats supported the policy changes of national tests and absolute grades but condoned others such as earlier grading and a new scale. In section 6.8 it was argued that there was no evidence, offhand, that the change in positions was tactically motivated. A policy reform was adopted (PC1), but the Social Democrats only supported the parts that had been subject to legitimization.

Hence, the case is argued to corroborate the theoretical expectation. However, one of the shortcomings of the analysis is that the time frame is relatively short from the period within which the legitimization is performed, the change in causal beliefs happens and to the change in policy position occurs resulting in assessment reform. Ideally this period had been more extensive to allow for a more in-depth analysis.

6.10 Change in office – retracting the grade expansion

In October 1994, government power changed again and a new Social Democratic government took office. Ingvar Carlsson once again became Prime Minister and Ylva Johansson became Minister of Schools. Whereas the Social Democrats supported the prior government's adoption of national tests and goal related grades, they strongly opposed the government's concurrent proposal on reform of grades. The newly elected Social Democratic government reversed the Conservative government's policies on grades (prop. 1994/95:85). It kept the new principle of goal related grades as opposed to group related grading, but changed the start of grading from form level 7 to 8 and the scale in six steps from A-F into three steps of only 'pass'

grades: 'Accepted', 'Well Accepted' and 'Very Well Accepted'.[12] They found it inappropriate for schools to pass out grades like: 'not approved', 'insufficient', etc. The mandatory school's most important function was that all pupils by the end of form level 9 can leave school with knowledge in all subjects which lives up to an approved level (1993/94:Ub1). According to the new Social Democratic school minister, Ylva Johansson, grades are proof of knowledge apprehension and a tool of selection into further education but did not constitute good information to parents. Parents should primarily be informed through the developmental talk, and the written information from form 5 was abolished (DN 29/10/1994). Similar to goal related grades, national tests were retained (Prop. 1994/1995: 85, 7). National tests would be held in the subjects Swedish, English and math, but they would only be mandatory in form 9 and hence voluntary in form 5 (DN 29/10/1994).

6.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the assessment policy changes in the period 1989-1995. The explanation emphasized that the government used legitimization to persuade the Social Democrats to change causal beliefs and subsequently support new assessment policies. In the first part of the chapter, the Social Democrats causal beliefs – before the right wing's legitimization – were investigated. In the period up to the assessment reform the Social Democratic Party was in government. In relation to schools, the period was characterized by an overwhelming focus on decentralization. Whereas this emerged as a strong macro idea, there was concern in the party about its consequences for equality in schooling. Goal management came to be seen as a potential solution making monitoring of school equality possible. The specific policy content was unclear, however. Further, there was an emerging understanding of the necessity to reform the grade system, but there were conflicting causal beliefs about grades in the party. Some only saw grades as a tool to sort pupils into further education. However, as upper secondary education was available to almost everybody there was no need for grades anymore and grades should be abolished. Others saw grades as having additional important functions e.g. in relation to information and emphasized reform of the grade system.

The second part dealt with how the new center-right government, which took office in 1991, acted to persuade the Social Democrats to support its ambitious assessment reform agenda. The proposals for policy change in-

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[12] 'Godkänd', 'väl godkänd' and 'Mycket väl godkänd'.

cluded both the adoption of national tests and reform of the grade system. It was argued that legitimization was performed in relation to the policy solutions of national tests as well as in regard to reforming the grade referencing from relative to absolute. However legitimization or de-legitimization was absent in relation to promoting a reform of the grade scale and timing of grade awarding. The Social Democrats adopted new causal beliefs in regard to the former and supported national tests and a new absolute grade scale, but opposed the latter changes. Specifically they adopted causal beliefs that national tests could be used to assess school performance and hence uphold equal education nationwide. Regarding absolute grades they came to believe that this was a more just way to select pupils into upper secondary schools and further education. The result was an assessment policy reform where the Social Democrats only supported the parts that had been subject to legitimization.

Third, there was no evidence that the Social Democrats' change in policy position on national tests and absolute grades was tactical. The number of people considering it to be an important issue was relatively stable and fluctuation in saliency therefore could not be the cause. Whether supporting grades or abolishing grades was in the Social Democrats' interest was widely debated in the party. There was no agreement regarding what would be in the interest of the party ideologically and in terms of vote seeking. On the whole, the most difficult argument to evade is that the Social Democrats might have changed causal beliefs even in the absence of legitimization and hence eventually would have adopted the policies themselves. Since this is a counterfactual argument, it is hard to fully dismiss, but I still argue that the causal chain I have proposed is more likely.

Finally, it was investigated how the new Social Democratic government that took office in 1994 acted in relation to assessment policy. Although the right-wing government had adopted new national tests, a new method of reference as well as a new scale and reformed the time for grade awarding, the new government only kept the two first mentioned policies when it took office. The reason was argued to be that the right-wing government only applied legitimization in the former two cases and hereby created two new causal beliefs about the desirability of national tests and absolute grading, but failed to do this in regard to a more comprehensive scale and earlier grade awarding.

Overall, the chapter has contributed to the idea literature by showing how ideas can change in the absence of policy failure. Further, it has corroborated the theoretical expectation of how a process of legitimization would take place. A strength of the analysis is that it did not only look at successful

attempts to secure agreement; it investigated why the Social Democrats supported certain aspects of a reform but not others. It was rendered probable that the diverging responses can be attributed to whether legitimization had been performed or not.

Chapter 7:
Sweden 1996-2011:
Naming and blaming, a subsequent
failure and radical changes of
assessment policies

> It is the working class children who are the real losers in a school without demands (Jan Björklund (Liberal Party) quoted in DN 15/6/2007)

In this chapter, I will investigate the assessment idea changes in Sweden in the period 1997-2011. In this period the grade system was reformed and more national tests introduced. I will argue that the policy changes were rendered possible by the Social Democrats' change of causal beliefs prompted by the right wing's utilization of a de-legitimization strategy. The de-legitimization took place while the Social Democrats were in government and the right wing in opposition.

The chapter consists of 4 parts. First, from 1997 the Liberal Party's new leadership entered a tireless de-legitimization of the existing problem definition. It was argued that schools had betrayed inducing knowledge and instead focused on the school's social role. I will investigate how the Social Democrats reacted to the de-legitimization.

Second, I will analyze the de-legitimization of the Social Democrats' causal beliefs about assessment. Although the de-legitimization of the problem definition and the causal beliefs to some degree took place simultaneously I will separate the analysis of the de-legitimization of the problem definition from the de-legitimization of the causal beliefs about assessment. In between the de-legitimization of the causal beliefs and the change in causal beliefs investigations showing disappointing performance of Swedish pupils surfaced. Still, although the party leadership changed causal beliefs, the party's support base blocked policy changes.

Third, by 2006 the Social Democrats were in opposition again. It will be analyzed whether this new role in parliament gave the party leeway to change policy position. Finally, before the conclusion, I will discuss whether the party's change in policy position can be argued to be tactically motivated. Was there evidence that vote seeking was a primary motivation?

7.1 New kids on the school political block: Björklund and Leijonborg

As shown in the preceding chapter, the Social Democrats had regained office by 1994. Ylva Johansson (Social Democrat) was Minister of Schools and was responsible for reversing some of the reforms of the grade system. Still, the Conservatives and the Liberals had not abandoned their wish to adopt earlier grades and a more extensive grade scale. The school issue did not figure too prominently on the policy agenda, but this soon changed even in the absence of an acknowledged school failure.

The Liberal People's Party played a central role in putting focus on the school issue and especially two actors were prominent. In 1997, a new leadership took over. Lars Leijonborg became chairman of the party and Jan Björklund second deputy chairman. Björklund was member of the Stockholm City Council, where he served on the board of education. Between 1994 and 1998 he was oppositional vice mayor in Stockholm and between 1998 and 2002 he served as vice mayor for schools. Leijonborg was a long time member of parliament. In a debate article in *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) on 29 May 1997, the two launched the Liberal Party school agenda as it was expressed in the draft of the Liberals' party manifesto (Folkpartiet Liberalerna, 1997). The message was very clear: The quality in the Swedish school is far too low and the Social Democrats are to blame.

7.2 De-legitimizing the existing problem definition: Naming the school failure and blaming the Social Democrats

It will be argued that the Liberals' two front men embarked on a de-legitimization of the schools' existing problem definition. Hence, one should see a claim of failure for which the Social Democrats are attributed guilt and the opposition – the Liberal Party – should present its own alternative problem definition.

First of all, Leijonborg and Björklund argued that there was a case of school failure consisting of an insufficient standard of knowledge. Leijonborg and Björklund presented the claim of the decreasing quality of schools as a fact that could not be ignored by the current and prior Social Democratic school ministers. They referred to studies that said that 20 pct. of 16 year olds could not read and understand a simple text and had trouble writing coherent opinions and that up to 25 pct. of pupils from vocational schools would

not get approved grades in mother tongue. The problematic state of affairs was, according to Leijonborg and Björklund, caused by a devaluation of knowledge: 'Our conclusion based on these and similar reports is clear: the quality in the Swedish school is far too low' (DN, 29/5/1997). Hence, the observable implication of failure can be confirmed (DL1). Further, they did not hesitate to blame the Social Democrats (DL2). The failure is argued to be caused by a faulty school policy which for decades de-emphasized education, knowledge and the teachers' role. They claimed that the Social Democrats had a misguided and simplified view on equality, seeing knowledge and equality as somewhat conflictual and sacrificing knowledge to attain more equality: 'Whilst prior generations of school politicians saw knowledge as a means to attain increased equality, the Social Democrats have perceived a conflict between these goals and have been willing to sacrifice or at least relax the knowledge goal. With these beliefs assessment becomes an evil as it reveals that some children learn more than others and that some need more time than others. The most inflamed debate in the 1970s was about the abolishment of one of the most important tools for assessment: the grade system and the central standard tests. The result was too often a school without demands. It is incomprehensible for us how the Swedish Social Democrats could perceive a school without demands as a school that furthered equality. We believe the exact opposite' (DN, 29/5/1997). To symbolize all that is wrong with the – Social Democratic – school, Leijonborg & Björklund (2002: 13-14) re-introduced the concept of 'flumskola' which in lack of better terms will be translated to 'hippie school' characterized by: a relativization of the knowledge concept; downplaying the teacher's role; accentuating the school's social role over its knowledge conveying role; suspicion of assessment and downplaying the need of order and peace to work.

The above was contrasted with their own visions of the school. Regarding the solutions, Leijonborg and Björklund emphasized strengthening basic skills (reading, writing and math), increasing the time in school (more hours of teaching) and more national tests and earlier grades (form 5). According to Wiklund (2006: 177) there was a social construction of two diametrically opposed school ideals: the other school – the hippie school which the Liberals de-legitimized and the good school which is the one the Liberals want to introduce. The other school was presented as a 'feel good school', which acted on a misinterpreted wish to create well-being, did not dare place demands on the pupils or admit that there were actual differences in the pupils' qualifications and motivation which require individualized teaching. Hence, the school needed to return to its primary goal: inducement of knowledge (Wiklund, 2006: 171).

Table 7.1: Construed school dichotomy

The good school	The other school
Knowledge focused	Floor circle pedagogy
Upbringing and traditional values	Value relativism and lack of norms
Basic skills	Knowledge relativism
Freedom of choice and individualization	Standardization and alignment
Clear demands on pupils	Unclearness and demandlessnes

Inspired by Wiklund (2006: 177).

These claims of school failure and the Social Democratic responsibility for it were repeated endlessly and the school became *a* if not *the* major theme of the parliamentary election in 1998 (Wiklund, 2006: 119). Björklund and Leijonborg insisted on the Social Democratic responsibility by arguing that the Social Democratic school policy since the 1960s had been too unclear about what the school's main task was. Instead of maintaining the school's knowledge imparting role, less relevant goals had been introduced (DN 24/1/1998). However important the school's goal of developing pupils it should never be defined as contradicting the school's assignment of installing knowledge and skills in children (DN 22/12/1999). Further, Björklund explicitly argued that the school crisis was no coincidence and was a result of the Social Democratic policy which had been practiced since the late 60s' radicalization (DN 4/11/1998). I take the above as evidence of an attempted de-legitimization of the Social Democratic school problem definition. Further, the evidence supports the observable implications: the Liberals uttered numerous claims of school failure (DL1); this failure was attributed to the Social Democrats' school beliefs which devalued knowledge (DL2). Further, they pointed towards their own solutions, but overall they emphasized the problem definition more than solutions. They encouraged more focus on the school's knowledge imparting function instead of the social aspects (DL3). Finally, the de-legitimization was performed by the Liberals when they were in opposition (DL4).

But how did the Social Democrats react to the de-legitimization of their problem definition? Did they acknowledge the existence of school failure and did they make policy changes?

7.3 Social democratic resistance of claims of the crisis of the school: School Minister Wärnersson

After the Social Democrats won the election in 1998, Prime Minister Göran Persson chose to replace Ylva Johansson[13] with Ingegerd Wärnersson: '... a wise school leader and teacher who had attained political trust in parliament' (Persson, 2007: 210). During her reign as minister the debate about the school crisis raged on and there was no consensus on whether school failure was real or not. The right wing attacks on the Social Democratic school policy continued and in the late 1990s, a report from the Swedish National Agency for Education was used to point to the crisis in schooling. Anders Sjölund (Conservative) (protokoll 1999/2000:31) argued that the report showed the appalling state of the Swedish school and argued that it had become more of a social troubleshooter than a school for knowledge. He was backed by the former Minister of Education Beatrice Ask, who argued that the signs of serious problems in the schools had recently increased as over 20 pct. left school without a complete school leaving grade. The Social Democratic Minister of Schools, Ingegerd Wärnersson, acknowledged that there were some problems. However, she wanted to draw attention to international studies in which Sweden did quite well compared to other countries. Sweden was a frontrunner in reading comprehension, IT and inclusion of children with disabilities. She mentioned interest from USA and UNESCO and that a coming OECD report on pre-schools gave Sweden considerable recognition. An international comparison made by IEA of reading abilities in third and eighth grades also showed that Sweden performed quite well (Elley, 1992: 28-30). Further, Wärnersson argued that the problem was not new, but had only recently become visible because of new investigations, surveys etc. Hence, whether or not there was a school crisis and what the potential causes were was disputed at the time.

Likewise School Minister Wärnersson clearly exposed a progressive problem definition where social issues weighed as much or more than knowledge and skills. She argued that most of all the school was for everyone; a cohesive preschool, school and upper secondary school characterized by a common comprehensive and societal view (Protokoll 1999/2000:28). The pupil should be at the center and all pupils should be assessed based on their needs. She was attacked for having proposed a new school subject in

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[13] Ylva Johansson resigned as School Minister after her relationship with minister of finance Erik Åsbrink became public. Couples could not be part of the government (Persson, 2007: 207-208).

social competency. However, she denied this but stated that the school's core values should permeate the school's entire work (protokoll 1999/2000: 31). In the School Minister's opinion there was too much focus on basic skills, which crowded out the work with core values (protokoll 1999/2000: 31). Hence, under Wärnersson as School Minister, the Social Democrats had not abandoned their existing problem definition emphasizing schooling as a matter of social and democratic development.

7.4 Intra party change in the Social Democratic Party: School Minister Östros

After the election in 2002, where the Social Democrats once again clung on to the power, Ingegerd Wärnersson was fired as minister of schools and re-placed with the existing Minister of Education Thomas Östros which came to hold both positions as Minister of Education and as Minister of Schools. Prime Minister Persson recollects that the right wing attacked Wärnersson personal-ly – she was literally bullied. She expressed willingness to continue but Pers-son judged that her possibilities to attain results as a minister were poor. Ac-cording to Ljunghill & Svenssen (2006: 12) she was sacrificed at the altar of indulgence when right wing attacks and newspaper editorials gave Persson cold feet. She came to represent what was polemically termed the Swedish hippie school. Östros seemed to represent a new school political stance. He clearly stated that the Swedish school should be a knowledge school where pupils' development towards reaching the national goals was most impor-tant (DN 12/6/2002). Hence with Östros as new Minister of Schools a new knowledge focused problem definition seemed to have been institutiona-lized. The change was facilitated through a change in actors corroborating the theoretical expectation (R-DL1, R-DL3). There appeared to be a division in beliefs within the party manifested by the two ministers Östros and Wärnersson (R-DL2). With Östros as School Minister the Social Democratic party seemed to embrace the problem definition of knowledge as the fore-most task for the Swedish school. He argued that the school's biggest chal-lenge was to develop the school to give all pupils the necessary knowledge (Östros, 2003: 92). He also argued that prior school ideas went too far and hence broke with progressive ideas. It was necessary to change the school away from the authoritarian school, but in the eagerness to foster free and independent individuals and not to infringe on curiosity and creativity we forgot to communicate the basic message that learning demands effort, concentration and patience (Östros, 2003: 97).

Under Östros a few assessment policies were adopted. The Swedish National Agency for Education was reorganized, quality development became a separate division and the agency primarily worked with scrutinizing the school. In 2002 it was decided that the Swedish National Agency for Education should develop a school inspection unit (Prop. 2002/03:1). This fits well with the Social Democratic belief that assessment should be used to evaluate the school level. Östros brought in Per Thullberg as new director general for the Swedish National Agency for Education. According to Thullberg Östros wanted a person from a different tradition than the common pedagogical one and a person who shared his view on knowledge. 'He once said that he had a traditional knowledge concept and I did not think about what he actually meant until I started the job. The Agency's standard response to investigations of pupils' knowledge etc. was that the interpretation of the results depended on how you defined knowledge. Östros had grown tired of this knee-jerk reaction every time a report showed problems with reading or math skills' (Thullberg, 2011). It appears that the minister wanted to make sure that the powerful bureaucracy was headed by a person with similar beliefs as himself. This is interpreted to imply that in this case an impetus for change was given by the political level.

7.5 Conclusion: Change in problem definition

The change in Social Democratic beliefs regarding the school's problem definition overall seems to have been caused by the de-legitimization of existing ideas conducted by especially the Liberal Party. The Liberals and the Conservatives uttered numerous claims of school failure (DL1); the failure was attributed to the Social Democrats' school policy solutions which devalued knowledge (DL2). Further, an alternative problem definition centered on knowledge was formulated (DL3) and the de-legitimization was performed by the opposition (DL4). Regarding the reaction, the change in Social Democratic problem definition was not instantaneous. Former School Minister Wärnersson seemed insusceptible to the right wing de-legitimization. The change in Social Democratic beliefs followed a change in the central position of school minister (R-DL3). The new minister Östros clearly had different school beliefs than his predecessor and this indicates ideational divisions within the party (R-DL2). Further, the new minister's school beliefs seemed very much associated to the right wing's beliefs which fuelled the de-legitimization (R-DL1). This strengthens my beliefs that the change in problem definition was caused by an interaction of de-legitimization and an intra party change in actors.

| De-legitimization | → | New actor | → | New problem definition |
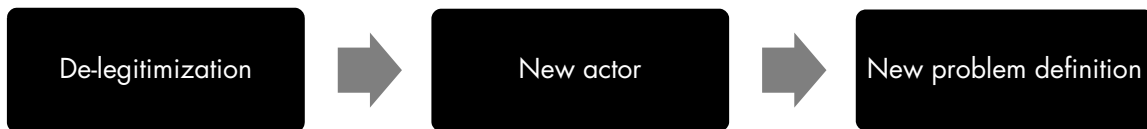
7.6 Attempts to de-legitimize existing causal beliefs about assessment

Still, the Social Democrats' acknowledgement of the knowledge part of schooling did not instantaneously lead to new causal beliefs about assessment or new policy solutions about assessment. Instead a protracted process was initiated which eventually resulted in new causal beliefs and new policy solutions regarding assessment. This process occurred simultaneously with the struggle over the problem definition but will be analyzed separately for analytical purposes.

One way to make the Social Democrats change their causal beliefs about assessment would be to embark on de-legitimization. It will be argued that the behavior of the opposition corresponds to the observable implications of an attempted de-legitimization. Ljunghill and Svensson (2006: 22) claim that there has been an effective de-legitimization of the Swedish school system. It had been asserted that Swedish schools fail to discover the many pupils with flawed knowledge and skills. And as the teachers do not know, the parents do not either. It is not discovered until form level 8 when children are graded but then it is too late to do anything. According to this logic it becomes a natural solution to have more and earlier tests as well as earlier grading. This was clear in Beatrice Ask's (Conservative) rhetoric when she argued that the Swedish National Agency for Education's report showed that a lot of schools lack information about their pupils' progress and performance (protokoll 1999/2000:31). Hence, there was a claim about failure as also voiced in relation to the lack of information about pupils progress (DL1). Ask (Conservative) said that one can rightfully question grades; however, they force teachers and schools to continuously measure performance. This was a good thing and it should happen before form 8. She added, while de-legitimizing Social Democratic resistance to test and grades: It is of special importance to have different sorts of assessment of in relation to the pupils who lag behind (protokoll 1999/2000:31). Hence, the right wing formulated an alternative causal belief about the beneficial functions of assessment in supporting the weakest pupils (DL3). She argued that the Social Democrats have been detrimental in this respect by abolishing mandatory national tests

in form 5: only 65 pct. of municipalities see them through (protokoll 1999/2000:31). Hence, blame was attributed to the Social Democrats (DL2).

The legitimacy of existing beliefs about assessment was undermined by de-legitimizing them as detrimental to the value of equality and the problem definition of knowledge as it failed to educate the weakest pupils. The political de-legitimization was followed up by the media who asked polemically: Why have the Social Democrats surrendered their traditions of education and the belief that knowledge is a way to a better life? Who loses most on a school without norms and requirements? It is the working class children, those with the poorest chances from the beginning the Social Democrats let down (DN 12/6/2002).

Hence, in the same manner as the right wing de-legitimized the existing problem definition, it specifically attempted to de-legitimize the Social Democrats' policy solution – the lack of grades and tests – and undermine the causal beliefs supporting it. But how did the Social Democrats react to this attempted de-legitimization of their opposition to policy solutions like grades and tests? On the one hand, the Social Democrats should be expected to react as the de-legitimization especially played on the value of equality. On the other hand, there was still no hard proof of policy failure in the form of international investigations showing poor results compared to neighboring countries etc.

Minister Wärnersson did not accept the claim that one of the problems was lack of reports and national tests. The problem was that teachers do not know how to handle children with problems and hence more money should be given to teacher education and further training. She claimed that the Conservatives did not offer solutions but only argued for early grades and tests. She thought that nursery school (general school for 4 and 5 year olds) was the most important focus area. Hence, the Social Democratic causal belief was still intact under Wärnersson's reign and the party still did not see grades and tests as a pedagogical tool suitable to help pupils.

7.7 Västeråskongressen 2001 – the vision of a grade free school and alternative assessment forms

Perhaps surprisingly the initial reaction did not involve any approximation of the right wing's causal beliefs about assessment. Rather, when Wärnersson was Minister of Schools, the party seemed oriented towards its traditional causal beliefs about assessment. This can be illustrated by the debate at a

party congress. In 2000, the party formed a group to develop a new school policy, and at the 2001 Västerås congress its proposal was presented. The causal beliefs about assessment presented here were archetypical Social Democratic, emphasizing how grades and tests did not help weak pupils and only served as a tool of selection for further studies: 'It is well known that grades in all forms are experienced as stimulating for the successful pupil whilst others can have their self-confidence seriously damaged. Pupils who despite ambitious efforts do not reach the grade level they had hoped for can completely lose their desire for further learning. It is hence important that children are not exposed early in life to grades which can result in unease and stress. But grades are still an important tool of selection into further studies. The balancing made by the parliament is that grades are to be awarded from the fall semester in form 8 so that pupils can experience grading a couple of times before they receive their final grade' (SAP, 2001a: 14). As an alternative, they accentuated the development conversation, which in their opinion gives pupils and parents a more complete, forward-looking and nuanced picture of school progress than grades (SAP, 2001a: 14).

During the congress, several proposals argued for the abolishment of grades and emphasized the negative consequences of grades: they ruin pupils' self-confidence (SAP, 2001c: Motions 441; 443, 444), they distort the teaching (SAP, 2001c: motion 443). Further, it was argued that grades' importance for intake to upper secondary school was decreasing and therefore should be abolished (SAP, 2001c: Motions 442; 445; 446). As a result several of the proposals recommended looking into the replacement of grades with alternative forms of assessment (SAP, 2001c: Motion 443) like portfolio (SAP, 2001c: Motion 444), individual development conversations and individual development plans (SAP, 2001c: Motion 446). Alternative assessment forms which were forward and not backward looking were deemed necessary to assess the pupils' more versatile performance.

Further, it was clear that the Liberals – and especially Björklund – were not judged positively. They were seen to have an old-fashioned view of human nature: 'A view that mainly has proponents in right wing parties states that there should be more tests, control and grades even in lower forms. The pupils appear primarily as objects of adult control and administration' (SAP, 2001c: Motion 443, 125). Further: 'Björklund is a good example of a new sort of school debater who all willingly debate grades and knowledge in schools without knowing anything about measurement methods and learning. Without the competency (or will?) to take in the results of modern research about learning and assessment they advocate theories originating from Taylorism's

methods in the belief that tests and frequent measurement promote teaching and learning processes' (SAP, 2001c: Motion 444, 127).

The party leadership acknowledged the critique: 'The party leadership shares the proposers' perception that a discussion about grades as a sorting instrument for upper secondary school intake is needed (…). The party leadership sees before it a development where all pupils have their own individual development plan containing information about their development. This development plan together with oral information like the development conversation can in the long run replace the current grade system. In this way the contact between the school, pupil and parents is developed simultaneously as the pupil gets a certificate of how he or she is performing in relation to formulated goals. Development conversation, plan of action and individual development plans are forward-looking and give the pupil possibility for influence. We Social Democrats must always confront the forces which one-sidedly think that more tests and grades create quality in the school' (SAP, 2001d: 49-50). The result was that the congress voted for an appendix to a proposal, which stated that: 'The development conversation, action plan and individual development plans are forward-looking and give the pupil possibility for influence. Further, as first choices for upper secondary schools are meet this means that the primary school grades as a selection tool in the longer term are outplayed' (SAP 2001d: 204). The media interpreted this to mean that the Social Democrats had adopted a resolution that the primary school should be free from grades (DN 28/5/2002).

The contrast to the congress 10 years earlier is striking. In 1990 the majority's causal belief was that the grade system had other important functions than merely sorting pupils and that a grade system reform should correct its deficiencies – not abolish it. In 2001, it is stated that the grade system has worn out its purpose and should be replaced by another form of assessment. One could speculate whether the Social Democrats' reaction was a backlash as the initial reaction was to oppose grades even more than before. It could appear as if the Social Democratic disdain of especially Björklund and his policy proposals, which they found reactionary, made them enter a defensive position. Hence, a new casual belief was taking root in the party; however this changed when Björklund entered the stage.

7.8 The development plan – a political fiasco

These more assessment skeptical causal beliefs were voiced when Ingegerd Wärnersson was Minister of Schools. However, even though the new Minister of Education Östros emerged as an actor with different school ideas than

other Social Democrats he did not seem to want to challenge the faction of his party that wanted an entirely grade free school. Östros believed that the school should not rely too much on grades and that early grades were not appropriate. Further, he argued that grades reward those who already are able, but give no guidance to those who do not succeed. Although he resisted changing causal beliefs about assessment, Östros acknowledged that parents wanted earlier grades. However, he claimed that the overwhelming majority of parents wanting earlier grades than today indicate a need for earlier communication about how pupils are doing in school.[14] Hence, avoiding grades at early grade levels required alternative ways to give parents and pupils information about school performance (Östros, 2003: 99).

The result of trying to accommodate the pressure for increased assessment was the birth of the individual development plan which had been discussed at the 2001 congress. He suggested strengthening the development conversation and giving every pupil the right to a development plan. Hence schools should have a clearer responsibility to inform parents and pupils about the pupils' school progress. The development plan should include agreement between parents, pupil and teachers about the effort the pupil needed to reach his or her goals. However, Östros (2003: 100) emphasized that the documentation of the output of the development conversation must not be grade like but just a plan for further development and learning (DN 28/10/2002). By 2005, new School Minister Ibrahim Baylan gave The Swedish National Agency for Education the assignment to develop a template for the plan for all pupils (DN 30/3/2005). The purpose was to strengthen the follow-up on the individual level in the Swedish school. Individual development plans were implemented from the spring of 2006 (BET 2004/2005: Ubu 9).

Former Prime Minister Göran Persson said that the development plan was intended to be forward-looking in contrast to grades and would help pupils improve instead of stigmatize them. However, the Social Democrats found the thought good but almost impossible to communicate politically as parents did not get it at all (Persson, 2007: 431-432). Hence, the Social Democratic innovation 'the development plan' did not end the debate about assessment. Factions in the party fought about more and earlier assessment and the right wing attacks continued. However, the Social Democrats still

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[14] According to Östros, a SIFO poll showed that 87 pct. think that grades should be awarded earlier than at present. Only 3 pct. prefer a school without grades (Östros, 2003: 99).

had not adopted the causal beliefs advocated in the de-legitimization attempt.

7.9 Increasing pressure to change beliefs: Declining performance

A number of events increased the pressure on the Social Democratic government to change its causal beliefs about assessment. First of all two independent investigations showed deteriorating results for Swedish pupils' school performance. As argued in Chapter 2, failure and de-legitimization are not the same thing. However, policy failure markedly increases the likeliness that de-legitimization should lead to a change of causal belief in the opponent party. The Swedish National Agency for Education made a large national evaluation of primary schools in 2004. It showed that pupils' reading ability and knowledge of math and chemistry had deteriorated over the last decade. Minister of Education Östros responded that he was not surprised and that this was a direct result of the 90s cutbacks on education where the teacher/pupil ratio worsened and the number of pupils per class increased (DN 28/10/2004). The right wing parties clearly disagreed with this interpretation. They refused to accept this explanation and emphasized that the austerity was a product of a failed Social Democratic school ideology that had focused on everything but knowledge (DN 28/10/2004). Further, not long after the Agency's disappointing report another event increased the pressure on the new school minister. The PISA investigation showed deterioration in Swedish pupils' results from 2000 to 2003 (svt.se 6/12/2004). In the meantime, Prime Minister Persson had reshuffled his cabinet and appointed a number of new ministers. Östros became Minister of Industry, Ibrahim Baylan replaced him as Minister of Schools and Leif Pagrotsky became Minister of Education (DN 22/10/2004,). The new School Minister Baylan expressed concerns about the results (DN 7/12/2004).

After these disappointing performances the Swedish National Agency for Education started to consider how it might counter the undesirable development in pupils' skills and knowledge. The motivation came from acknowledging that the evidence pointed at a radical deterioration of knowledge. It seemed as if the reforms from 1994 had not had any effects and that schools were not taking assessment and quality development seriously. The Agency prepared a written document to the government about the schools' performance and what the Agency thought should be done. This document came to the political level's attention. However, the Ministry of Education told the

Agency not to release the plan as a separate document but as part of the regular yearly recommendations. In the meantime the document was leaked to the media by unknown Agency sources (Thullberg, 2011). The content of the action plan was the following: the Swedish National Agency for Education recommended developing knowledge goals from form 2 (at the time they began from form 5) and that parents receive clear information about their child's academic level already in form 5. At the time it was forbidden to give grade-like assessments. Further, they proposed handing out grades in form 7 (grades were awarded from form 8) (DN 11/5/2005). Minister of Schools Baylan responded that he did not in principle oppose earlier grades although he did not believe they would make a revolutionary difference. He believed that the school should have peace to work and that more changes would take up too much energy right now (DN 11/5/2005).

7.10 The party leadership's new causal beliefs and the rejection by the congress

Shortly after the events discussed above, it appeared as if the party leadership started to reconsider some of the causal beliefs about assessment. During the party congress in 2005, the leadership expressed what appeared as new causal beliefs about national tests. Party leader Göran Persson argued that the state of knowledge in Swedish schools was insufficient. One should have higher expectations of pupils and set clear goals for them. School Minister Baylan proposed national tests from form 3 to help those with the poorest basis. The test would help teachers and parents find out how pupils were doing and based on this diagnose and counter the problems. This was clearly a new causal belief among the Social Democrats: assessments like national tests were no longer only seen as a way to assess the school level but as a pedagogical tool which can help the individual pupil (R-DL1). However, disagreements between different school policy factions surfaced at the congress. The first faction was constituted most prominently by the Prime Minister and the School Minister, who wanted a new Social Democratic school stance. They started to warm up to more assessment of pupils. The other faction was the majority of the party's backbenchers who still vehemently opposed assessing pupils.

Below, I will analyze the beliefs of the factions. The following quote from School Minister Baylan illustrates the new causal belief about tests as a pedagogical tool: 'In the work to give all pupils opportunity to reach the knowledge goals the goals need to be clearer and the assessment of the pupils'

knowledge development needs to be strengthened. No pupil should go through school without flaws being detected and corrected early. In a school system that pushes the problem in front of it, the pupils become the biggest losers (…). We Social Democrats will never accept such a development. Already from next year pupils will get an individual development plan from grade one and mandatory quality reports which assess activities and results for all schools and all municipalities will be implemented. Next step is to adopt recurring assessment of pupils' knowledge through national tests from form 3. With forward-looking individual development plans, quality reports and national tests, pupils, parents, teachers and school managers have the necessary tools to strengthen pupils' knowledge development in the lower grades' (SAP, 2005b: 92).

National tests in form 3 were very controversial (see SAP, 2005b). The core of the opposing arguments is partially captured by the following quotations: 'In the 1960s there were national tests already in form 3. They were removed after teachers and researchers protested loudly against the tests. The argument was that they knock out pupils who for different reasons have a hard time in school. Now the party leadership wants to reestablish national tests from form 3. How progressive is this? (SAP, 2005b: 97-98 (Christina Mattisson)). Further, '(W)e in Göteborg feel that national tests are a very blunt tool which will not give us any knowledge we don't already have. It is a simple but bad solution to a complex problem. All teachers know which pupils have a hard time in school (SAP, 2005b: 111 (Robert Hammarstrand)). Baylan replied: 'I am hearing the argument that we want to relaunch the 1960s national tests. But this is not what we are talking about, party comrades! We are talking about national tests to make flaws visible and provide help and support at an early stage. This is about the working class children – they are the ones who go through school without attaining the necessary knowledge and tools to make their own decisions. It is tragic (SAP, 2005b: 110).

The controversy between proponents and opponents of tests revolved around those who see national tests as a pedagogical tool which allows teachers to discover difficulties and direct help. Others see tests as a tool that creates stress and do not provide any knowledge we didn't have before and hence does not help forward but only punishes or rewards backward in time. Eventually the congress decided with 176 votes against 157 (7 delegates refrained from voting) to support Christina Mattisson's proposal (SAP, 2005b: 143) to delete a section which stated: 'We will introduce recurrent national tests from grade 3 to improve support to all pupils as well as the national equality' (SAP, 2005b: 140). Hence, the school minister lost and could not get a mandate to work for earlier tests. The above shows how divided the Social

Democrats were on assessment. Still, they agreed on the purpose: to support and help pupils forward-looking, but they disagreed on tools. Some felt that development talks and plans are sufficient and others favored more concrete tools like tests. The division corroborates the observable implication of the theory (R-DL2). Further, the large disagreement within the Swedish Social Democratic Party seems to generally strengthen the argument that ideas have been a cause of differing policy positions. If there was a strong objective material reality or ideology then the party would agree more on how to interpret its interests instead of relying on ideas on how to understand a Social Democratic stance on assessment policy.

While the party leadership had adopted a new causal belief connecting tests and the purpose of being a pedagogical tool, this connection had not been made with grades. The party leadership was still weary of early grades: 'Children with difficulties do not need earlier grades. They need more teachers. They need better support to reach the goals' (SAP, 2005b: 91 (Ibrahim Baylan)). The Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter made a poll in December 2005 asking pupils about their attitudes on grades. A majority wanted earlier grades. Confronted with this, minister Baylan responded that he believed there could be a great danger if grades are awarded earlier. How can one explain a seven year old that the grade he receives is not about him as a person but about something else? Hence early grades could do a lot more damage than good (DN 21/12/2005). He also refused to implement more steps in the grade scale. In response to the criticisms of the grade system the leadership argued that grades have more functions than merely selecting pupils for higher studies. Grades inform pupils about their knowledge levels as well as their chances of succeeding in further studies as grades are a good predictor of qualifications to complete an education (SAP, 2005a: 33).

The response to the Social Democratic rejection of earlier national tests was immediate. Dagens Nyheter claimed that the congress' opposition to earlier tests was ideologically odd. Primarily working class children are affected by not getting support in time and therefore risk being marginalized. Now parents and pupils are left with the often vague development talks and henceforth even individual development plans (DN 2/11/2005). In the school debate in November 2005 the opposition called the result of the government school policy a 'hippie school' and demanded to be told how pupils' results are to be improved (DN 10/11/2005).

7.11 Conclusion: new causal beliefs

The Social Democratic leadership's change of causal beliefs about assessment was epoch-making. For the first time the party leadership expressed a causal belief where national tests were seen as a pedagogical tool that could help the individual pupil improve his or her performance. It is worth noting that when national tests were first adopted their purpose was formulated in relation to quality controls of schools – to ensure the equality of schooling. How did this change in causal beliefs come about?

The Liberals started their de-legitimization of the Social Democrats' causal belief about assessment already in 1997. This defined the agenda and established a powerful discourse which involved the Social Democrats' faulty assessment policies as part of the cause of school failure. However, it took almost 8 years for the party leadership to radically revise its beliefs about assessment. There are several reasons for this lagged response. First of all, it was not established until 2004 that Swedish pupils performed worse than expected. Two investigations shortly after each other established the picture of a school failure. This hence supports that failure is a crucial condition for de-legitimization to succeed. As the discourse already had been established and failure became a 'fact', it was very hard for the Social Democrats not to change beliefs about assessment.

Second, there are reasons related to the properties of the mechanism of de-legitimization itself. While de-legitimization serves to powerfully set an agenda and bring attention to an issue and a party, it also risks alienating the opponent. De-legitimization entails acknowledging publicly that one's old ideas were faulty as well as embracing a new idea. This is hard to do as one could lose credibility in the eyes of the electorate. Hence, the strategy of de-legitimization might have made the Social Democrats reluctant to change causal beliefs after being alienated by the right wing rhetoric. Further, there was a more agent specific cause related to one of the performers of the de-legitimization: Björklund. Björklund as a person infuriated many Social Democrats. As an officer who demanded more discipline and rote learning he became a symbol of something the party had moved away from very long ago (Thullberg, interview 2011). According to Social Democratic MP Mikael Damberg there are those on the left wing who feel that the most important issue in Swedish school politics is to be against Jan Björklund. Damberg disagrees with them but argues that Björklund's debate technique and discourse make it hard to find common ground (Damberg, interview 2011). Hence, the act of de-legitimization itself but also the person behind the de-legitimization might have made it harder for the Social Democrats to change causal be-

liefs. Hence, when the Swedish National Agency of Education proposed to revise assessment policies the party was more inclined to listen.

Third, the Social Democrats changed the internal composition. New school politicians who had a different stance than the old actors entered the stage (R-DL3). It is not clear if Minister of Schools Baylan had these new causal beliefs about tests before he entered office or if he changed beliefs in regard to the policy failure. However, as showed above, the rank and file resisted the new causal belief and the ensuing policies. Below, the more recent development will be analyzed.

7.12 Social Democratic election defeat and a new right wing alliance

In spite of the party leadership's adoption of a new causal belief, resistance from the party prevented it from acting on it. However, shortly after the party lost the election and returned to opposition. The actors changed and a struggle for participation in assessment reforms began.

Before the 2006 election, the Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Center Party and Christian Democrats formed an alliance and presented a joint election manifesto. The center-right alliance won the election in October and gained a seven-seat majority in the Swedish Parliament the Riksdag (Riksdagen, 2011). The Conservative Party leader Fredrik Reinfeldt became Prime Minister, Lars Leijonborg (Liberal Party) Minister of Education and Jan Björklund (Liberal Party) Minister of Schools.

In the aftermath of the election the Social Democrats' handling of the school issue was mentioned as one of the reasons for the election defeat. Former Prime Minister Persson argued that the Social Democrats had trouble reaching out in the school issue. The right wing parties had created a picture of the Social Democrats being against knowledge and order. When the congress voted down the party leadership's proposal on earlier national tests the consequences were devastating. This decision was used against the Social Democrats during the election campaign to argue that they were against knowledge in schools (Persson, 2007: 432-433). Another problem according to Persson was that the party never succeeded in proposing a new school law. There had been a number of assessment policy initiatives under the Social Democratic government (e.g. (U2005/8381/G) (dir. 2006:19)). However the issue of a new school law had been unraveled for seven years and during 2005 School Minister Baylan had intense negotiations with the Green Party's representative in the parliament's education

committee. After months of discussions Baylan acknowledged that there would not be an agreement (Persson, 2007: 432-433). Persson ended his discussion of the party's unsuccessful school politics by stating: We need a restart for the Social Democratic school policy (Persson, 2007: 432-433). Below I will analyze what the election defeat meant for the party's assessment policy position. In addition the election defeat implied a reshuffling of positions.

7.13 Mona Sahlin's arm-twisting of the Social Democratic assessment skeptics

After the electoral defeat Mona Sahlin was elected leader of the Social Democrats. Her statement that the school policy was one of the reasons the party was defeated in the election was in line with the party's analysis of the defeat (DN 5/11/2007). She acknowledged that the Social Democrats had very low credibility regarding school issues and came to represent a school without demands and without clear knowledge (DN 20/5/2008). Based on the conclusion about the need to revise school policy, Mona Sahlin established a working group with Social Democratic politicians and influential people from LO in June 2007. This group was to develop a debating point which could lay the ground for the party's new school policy (DN 12/7/2007). When the group presented its proposals, among them to accept national tests from form 3 and implement grades before form level 8, it caused quite a stir. However, there was great opposition in the party to changing its school policy. Mona Sahlin had planned a quick decision on the new policy position. She wanted to take the air out of the bourgeois balloon by showing that the parties' policies did not really differ that much. Hence, the invitation to the Social Democratic Futuredays with 700 participants said that the party's highest organ between the congresses Council of representatives was to decide on a new school political platform. However, the party leadership (composed of parliamentary members as well as a number of local politicians) stopped her plans. After intense discussions the party leadership decided that the debate was to continue until the party congress in 2009 and hence there would be no decision in the Council of representatives. After all, Mona Sahlin's mandate to create change was not that large in the party (Aftonbladet 5/11/2007).

However, this did not stop her from pushing the issue. She actually put all of her authority into getting a mandate to negotiate with the government about earlier grades and national tests in form 3. And she got it. She made it

into a vote of confidence about her position as party leader. In her introduction to the Council of representatives meeting she gambled her entire authority as party leader: 'As party leader I always have the party mandate' and hence challenged the Council of representatives delegates. 'I want a clear assignment with a statement' and dictated the wording: 'grades earlier than today' and 'national tests every third year'. The political signal was very clear for the party members and no one challenged Sahlin after that (DN 11/11/2007; Expressen 11/11/2007). With the new – albeit limited – mandate the Social Democrats had initiated a change in policy position accepting earlier grades and national tests (PP1). Soon the change in policy position became full fledged.

7.14 Change in policy positions and policy: embracing tests and grades

The Social Democratic change in causal beliefs about assessment – where tests and to some degree grades were seen to be able to improve pupils' performance – had already sparked a number of initiatives under the party's period in government. For example the Swedish National Agency of Education was assigned to develop the national tests and in 2005 told to intensify the development of diagnostic tests for the lower grades (U2005/8381/G). In February 2006, the Social Democratic government summoned an investigator to examine primary schools' goal and evaluation system (dir. 2006:19). The result was SOU 2007:27, which among other things proposed national tests in form levels 3, 6 and 9. When it was presented a right wing government had taken office (DN 7/10/2006). Based on the report's call for goals and evaluation a new examination of the grading scale was launched (DS 2008:13). In 2007, the new right wing government announced that it would work for new assessment legislation involving: A six graded scale (A-F), grades from form 6, national tests from form 3 and grade-like assessment from form 1. While the Social Democrats expressed readiness to accept the government's wishes on the first three counts, they fiercely opposed the last proposal: 'It's just awful to hand out grades to seven year olds', said Marie Granlund, Social Democratic vice spokesperson in the parliament's education committee (DN 29/12/ 2007).

7.14.1 New grade scale

The first legislative package to be deliberated among the parties was about the grade scale and grade-like assessment. In reality, not much separated

the Social Democrats and the right wing on school policy in 2008. Regarding the grade scale the difference was negligible. The government and the Social Democrats agreed on 5 steps, but the government only wanted written criteria for the 3 steps, and the Social Democrats wanted criteria for all 5. The Social Democrats were also willing to accept written assessments, but the assessment from form 1 must not be 'gradelike' (DN 7/6/2008). During the negotiations, the Social Democrats expressed willingness to compromise. They proposed a ten year school policy truce to give the school peace to work. However, Liberal Education Minister Jan Björklund did not seem very interested in cooperating with the Social Democrats. He explicitly refused to change the proposal and made little room for compromise and a broad agreement (DN 29/12/2007). Björklund wanted a grade-like assessment from form 1 as rejected by the Social Democrats. Further, he was only willing to discuss the new 6 step grade scale (A-F). However, also here he declared that he was not willing to make any large changes (DN 4/6/2008). The Social Democrats suspected that Education Minister Björklund never wanted a broad compromise as he wanted to keep the school issue conflictual until the next election' (DN 7/6/2008). This probably reflects that the government had majority and was capable of producing policy results on its own. Hence, it might have an interest in keeping the issue conflictual and continuing to de-legitimize the Social Democrats' school position. In the end, there was no broad agreement. In February 2009 the parliament decided on a new letter grade scale from A-F (prop. 2008/09:66). Still, the Social Democrats expressed support of the legislation and declared that they would not abort the legislation should they regain office (DN 7/6/2008; Motion 2008/09:Ub9).

7.14.2 Earlier tests and grades

Shortly after the parties discussed new school curriculum and more and earlier tests. The government had proposed lifting the ban against knowledge standards before form 5 and introducing national test for form 3. In 2006 the National Agency for Education was assigned to propose a design of national tests in Swedish and math for form level 3 (U2006/8951/S). Marie Granlund and other Social Democrats wanted to assess pupils' knowledge development in a systematic way and felt that the government's proposal about national tests could be the tool that was needed (2008/09:UbU9, 26 see also protokoll 2008/09: 82). They also argued that systematic knowledge assessment should take place every semester from form 1. They were positive towards national tests in form 3, 6 and 9 and saw them as a good national assessment of pupils' knowledge, schools' performance and as a basis for

distributing resources between schools and classes (Motion 2008/09:Ub17). A month after the agreement on the grade scale, the parliament decided on a new school curriculum and national tests based on the government's proposition (prop. 2008/09:87, bet. 2008/09:UbU9, rskr. 2008/09:189). The national tests for form 3 were planned to start from spring 2009 and the goals they are to be tested in will be implemented from fall 2008. There will be tests in maths, Swedish and Swedish as second language (Lundahl, 2009: 122).

In the intervening period before the next proposal about the time for awarding grades, the 2010 parliamentary election kept the center-right alliance in government, but it no longer had a majority in the Chamber (Riksdagen, 2011). In late 2010, there were apparently successful attempts to secure agreement on the time for implementing grades (DN 26/11/2010). In the debates between the parties, the Social Democrats clearly expressed the new causal beliefs about tests and grades, i.e., that tests are appropriate means to assess pupils' knowledge apprehension and support pupils in need of help: 'If the school is to function as a tool for increased equality then we have to focus on early efforts and systematic follow-up to develop flaws in knowledge in time. That is why specific and measureable knowledge targets throughout the school and clear and concrete national instruments for assessment are important. Without follow-up and assessment of the pupils' knowledge it becomes significantly harder to establish the right effort. Hence, national tests are important and should be used as one of more tools to follow-up early on the knowledge goals. Grades should be seen as a receipt of attained knowledge and should be used as a tool of selection for further studies' (Protokoll 2010/11: 38, Anf. 143 Mikael Damberg). These words could just as well have been uttered by a Conservative or Liberal partisan. The government and the Social Democrats agreed on most matters but the government wanted grades from form 6 and the Social Democrats from form 7 (2010/11:UbU3; Expressen 28/11/2010). The proposal was adopted, resulting in grades from form 6 (prop. 2009/10:219, protokoll 2010/11:39). By 2010 a number of assessment policy changes had been adopted by the new government together with the Social Democrats (PC1).

Figure 7.1: The four-phased process of how de-legitimization induces policy change

De-legitimization → New causal belief (new actors) → New policy position → Policy change

7.15 Was the change in policy position tactical?

Above it has been argued how persuasion caused the Social Democrats' problem definition and causal beliefs to change and made assessment policy change possible. However, alternative claims need to be assessed. Below, it will be discussed whether the change in the Social Democrats' policy positions were tactically motivated, making the change in ideas epiphenomenal.

First, I will explore the development in the public agenda by examining the media's attention to the school. According to Jensen (2011: 150-151) one can roughly explore the public agenda by investigating the number of newspaper articles. Only a few Swedish newspapers have electronic articles in the database beginning from the 90s, so I have selected two national newspapers: Dagens Nyheter (DN) and Expressen. According to Wiklund (2006: 119) claims about a schooling crisis drastically increased from 1997 as reflected in the number of articles referring to the words 'crisis' and 'school'. There is a dramatic increase in the number of articles beginning 1997 and culminating in 2000.

Figure 7.2: Number of articles referring to crisis and school 1990-2006
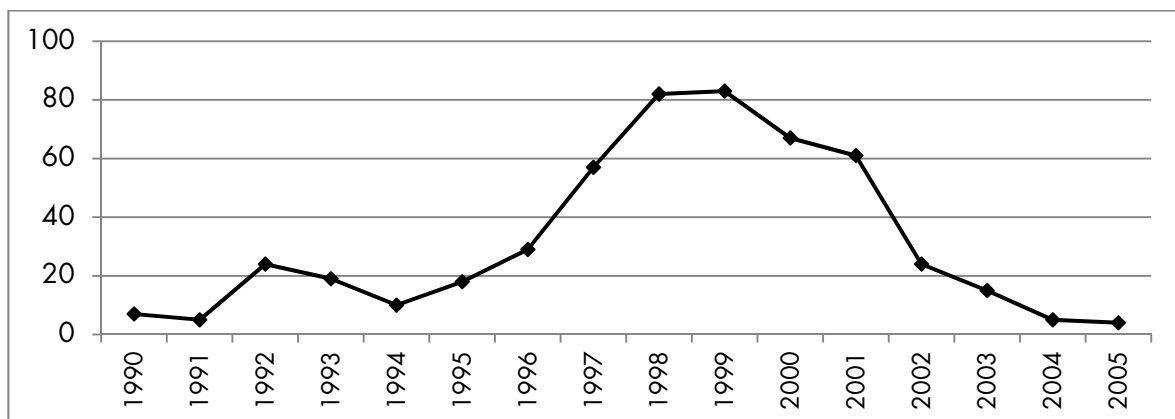
N: 510.
Source: Expressen and Dagens Nyheter via Presstext. Using this media database I have made search queries for every year from 1990 until today. I have searched for articles mentioning 'crisis' and 'schools' (kris* and skol*) with the topic word education (utbildning).

After this the attention drops significantly. In 2005 when there was a 'real' school failure and the Social Democratic leadership started to change causal beliefs, attention was virtually non-existing and the year after there were no articles. I also looked into the number of school articles referring to the school and core skills like reading and math. The purpose was to control for the fact that crisis is a more value laden word and could be used discursively without utilizing a specific failure of pupils' performance. However, the picture is the same. There is a peak around 1999 after which attention declines and by

2007 there were no articles. It is surprising that the actual failure did not result in more media attention.

Figure 7.3: Number of articles referring to 'core skills' and 'school' 1990-2006
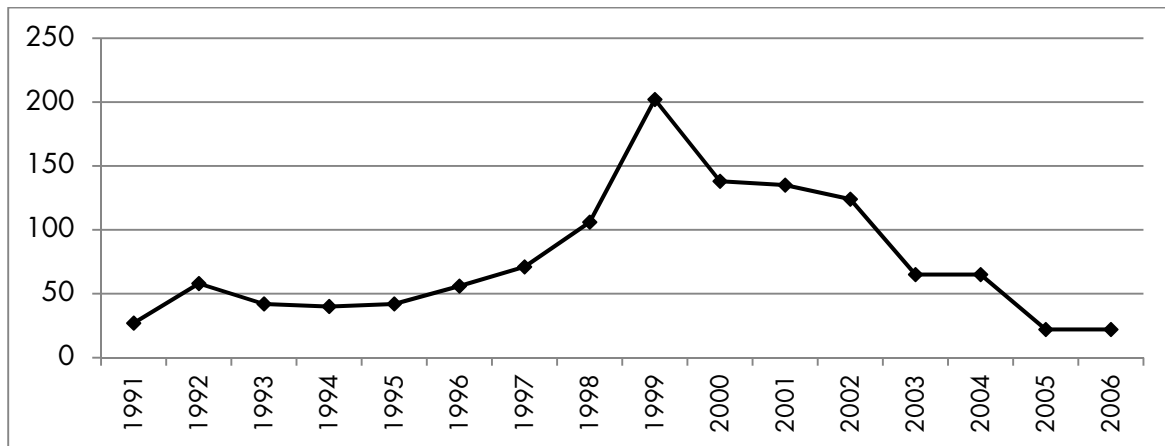
N: 1215.
Source: Expressen and Dagens Nyheter via Presstext. I have performed search queries for each year with words referring to 'reading' or 'math' ('räkna' OR 'läsa') with the topic word 'education' (utbildning).

I also sought a proxy of the saliency of the issue for the electorates. Like the media attention, there is a drastic increase from 1997-1998 in the number of people who mention the school as an important societal issue.[15] From 1995 to 1997, the number of people mentioning schooling tripled (from 7 pct. to 22 pct.), and in only one year from 1996 to 1997 it doubled (from 10 pct. to 22 pct.). In the years between 1999 and 2001 the saliency of the issue peeks with 35-37 pct. mentioning the issue.

Overall, the de-legitimization offensive initiated by the Liberal Party in 1997 seems to have been reflected in the media attention to the subject as well as in the public opinion as a large group of people start to see school questions as an important societal issue. Hence, it was natural that the Social Democrats did something to create attention to itself in regard to the school issue. Still, the above indications of the school issue saliency do not specifically imply that the party should change problem definition to one focused on knowledge.

Further, it is a bit puzzling that the party changed causal beliefs when it did in light of the declining electoral and media saliency of the school issue. There could have been polls suggesting that the policies were popular among voters and hence that the party should support earlier national tests

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[15] Respondents are asked to mention up to three important issues among a range of issues.

and/or earlier grades, but I have not found any polls particularly surveying the electorate's opinion about national tests. However, as far as introducing earlier grades, the evidence is quite clear: the voters wanted earlier grades

Figure 7.4: Pct. of people who mention the school as an important societal issue 1987-2008
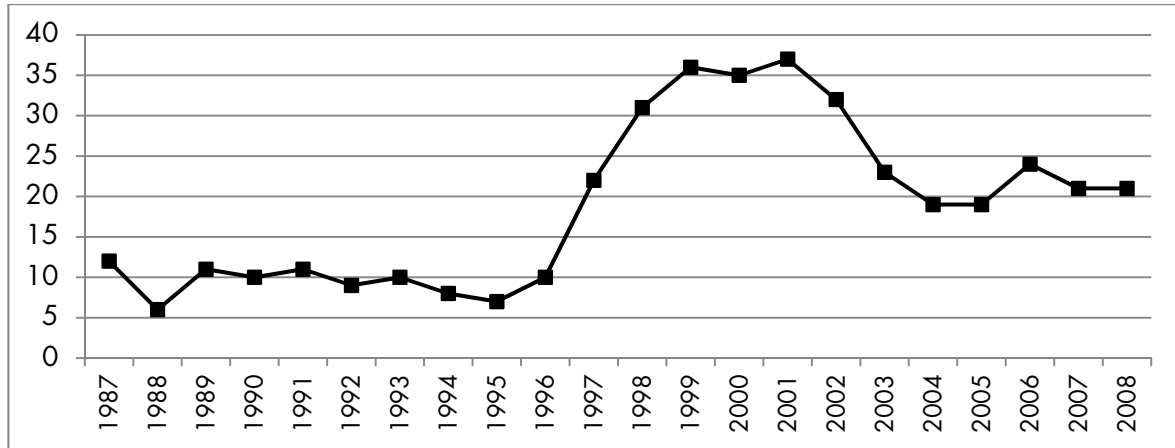
Source: The results are from the SOM investigation 1987-2008. Hedberg (2009).

In 2002 and 2006 over 60 pct. indicate that they think a proposal to introduce earlier grades (than form 8) is a very good or fairly good proposal. In contrast 29 pct. think it is a fairly or very bad proposal. In this light it is quite puzzling that the Social Democrats did not change policy position before they did (the leadership started to change in 2005 and the mandate came some years later). If the electoral incentive was so clear why was the party so divided? The perception that people demanded grades was mentioned by Göran Persson in 1990 but in 2001 the party still decided to work for their abolition. In 2005 the party congress voted against extending national tests to form 3. Hence, it appears more likely that the root of disagreement is differing causal beliefs as the incentives regarding voters were pretty clear (at any rate regarding grades). Also worth noting is how lengthy the process from the initial de-legitimization to the actual change in policy position was. If electoral incentives were the cause, the change should have occurred if not instantly then far faster than in the present case. The reason for the prolonged response is argued to be related to the deeply rooted ideational resistance within the party to testing and grading younger pupils. Hence, I conclude that there is no strong evidence that the change in the party's policy position should be tactical (PP2).

Table 7.2: Attitudes towards introducing earlier grades for pupils

	2002	2006
Very good proposal	30	31
Fairly good proposal	32	32
Neither good nor bad	9	8
Fairly bad	14	14
Very bad	15	15
Don't know/no answer	3	2
N	100 (2021)	100 (875)

Source: Oscarsson & Holmberg (2008): 373. Question: What is your view on the proposal to introduce reports with grades for school pupils at an earlier age than today?

7.16 Conclusion

In this chapter two separate processes of de-legitimization were analyzed (see Table 7.3). First, it was illustrated how the Liberal Party from 1997 started to de-legitimize the existing problem definition. The initial reaction by School Minister Wärnersson was to deny this failure. However, in 2002 her replacement, Östros, clearly embraced the problem definition of knowledge promoted by the right wing. However, it is clear that the new problem definition did not dictate new policies. This was a separate process. Still, it is hard to imagine the change in policies without a preceding change in problem definition. The new problem definition gave a new opportunity to frame solutions as solving certain problems rather than others. If knowledge was not conceived to be the school's primary object new policies of earlier tests and grades would probably not have been adopted. It is hard to imagine that parties could argue for the appropriateness of earlier testing and grading in a context where the school's most important task is to develop the pupils personally and their democratic participation.

Second, the Liberals and Conservatives simultaneously sought to de-legitimize the government's causal beliefs of assessment to have earlier grades and tests adopted. However, it took a while before the Social Democrats started to change causal beliefs about assessment. First, two investigations which showed that Swedish pupils' performance had deteriorated emerged. Second, Baylan became new school minister and seemed more ready than Östros to counter the assessment skeptics. Hence, the party leadership adopted the causal belief promoted by the right wing that earlier national tests could detect pupils' difficulties earlier and support their learning better. Overall, the theoretical expectation which stated that the me-

chanism of *de-legitimization* will be performed by the opposition and – in the event of policy failure – this will lead the government to reshuffle actors and hereby adopt new causal beliefs [$P1_{de\text{-}leg\,/opposition}$] seems to have been confirmed.

Table 7.3: Overview of the process

Mechanism	Focusing events	Reaction	Problem definition/ Causal beliefs	Policy position	Policy
1) De-legitimization of problem definition (1997-)	%	Change in actors: Östros (2002)	New problem definition: knowledge	%	%
2) De-legitimization of resistance against assessment (1997-)	%	Learning (Östros) (2003)	(%) new causal belief about tests, grades	New policy solution: development plan	Policy change (2005): development plan
	National Agency report; PISA 2003	New actor Baylan (2004); learning Baylan, Persson (2005)	New causal belief: tests as a pedagogical tool	New policy solution: national tests from form 3	% policy change
	Lost election (2006)	Change in actors: Sahlin (2006), Granlund (2007), Damberg (2010)	New causal belief: tests and grades as a pedagogical tool	New policy solutions: grades from form 7, national tests form 3	Policy change (2008, 2010): new grade scale, earlier grades and national tests

However, the rank and file opposed the change in policy position and voted down the proposal to introduce national tests from form 3. Hence, the final change in policy position and the policy change came when the party was in opposition. The demotion into opposition also involved new actors like the new party leader Sahlin. In 2007 she appointed a new educational spokesperson, Granlund, who was replaced by Damberg in 2010. The actors shared the causal belief adopted by the old leadership. However, the policy solutions born of their causal belief were more far reaching and eventually became policy with the support of the Social Democrats. A new and more extensive grade scale and earlier national tests were adopted and it was decided that grades would be awarded earlier.

Further, it has been argued that the change in policy position was ideational more than tactical. At the time the change in policy position took place, the media attention was virtually non-existing after a surge of atten-

tion in the late 1990s. Nor did the electorate rate the issue as very important. Hence, the low saliency of the issue in 2005 makes it unlikely that electoral concerns were a prime motivator. Still, a majority of voters supported the proposal to introduce grades earlier than form 8. However, this was not a new development and hence cannot explain why the Social Democrats had gone from declaring to work for the abrogation of grades and tests in the early 2000s to supporting earlier grades and tests by the late 2000s.

What is noteworthy in comparison to the last chapter is that the process was very lengthy. The temporal distance between de-legitimization and change in causal belief and policy change was very large. Further, while the de-legitimization of the problem definition led the party to change its problem definition, the de-legitimization of causal beliefs only had an effect after a policy failure occurred. This suggests that de-legitimization of at least causal beliefs is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the opponent's causal beliefs to change. The event of a policy failure needs to be present too. In contrast changing a problem definition is less costly as it can be purely rhetorical while causal beliefs implicate specific policy solutions and hence invoke expectations about a policy change.

Chapter 8:
Denmark 1990-2001:
A shocking school failure and
a new focus on school quality

> The primary school has three articles of faith: First, the Danish school is per definition the best in the world. Second, there is no way to measure this. Third, nobody can say anything about the school except those who have spent most of their life in it (Haarder, 1994: 113)

This chapter will analyze the process whereby school assessment ideas changed in Denmark in the period 1990-2001. The chapter consists of 4 parts: First, I will establish the dominant causal belief about assessment as point of origin before claims of policy failure were made. To put it briefly the causal belief revolved around replacing external assessment tools with internal assessment tools. Even though a right wing government with competing causal beliefs was in office, the dominant causal belief about assessment was defined by the center right because the government's parliamentary support party shared beliefs with the left wing opposition, together composing a majority.

In the second part of the chapter, I will analyze how the right wing – now in opposition – de-legitimized the existing problem definition in the wake of a disappointing international investigation of pupils' readings skills. Further, the government's reaction to the de-legitimization will be analyzed: Did it adopt the new problem definition?

In the third part of the chapter, I will explore the causes of two assessment policy changes: the adoption of a national evaluation center and national curricula goals. Were these assessment policy changes associated with new causal beliefs about assessment? As argued in Chapter 2 a number of different policies could result from the same problem definition. Therefore, I cannot make specific predictions about how a new problem definition results in certain policy positions. I therefore merely explore whether policy changes were associated with new causal beliefs diverging from the old causal belief about assessment from the early 1990s.

In the fourth and final part before the conclusion, I will assess whether the change in problem definition as well as policy was tactically motivated. I will evaluate if there is evidence that the changes in ideas were epiphenomenal

and related to structural incentives. If such evidence is absent, I will argue that the changes were primarily ideationally motivated.

8.1 1990-1994: A dominant causal belief about internal assessments superiority

In the following sections, the dominant causal belief about assessment – before claims of policy failure – will be established. In the start of the 1990s, a right wing government composed of the Conservatives and the Liberals had reigned for a decade. Since its start in 1982, the government had been headed by the Conservative Prime Minister Poul Schlüter and the Liberal Bertel Haarder was Minister of Education. Born of the Danish folk school movement with Grundtvig as a clear role model Haarder emphasized national culture, self determination and local autonomy. He firmly believed in decentralization and that quality would develop if the users – parents – and not only the producers – the teachers – had influence on the schools. In 1989, Haarder reformed the school boards radically increasing the scope of parents' influence (Lindbom, 1995: 113-116). As indicated by the introductory quote, he clearly opposed progressivism and the dominant position of the pedagogical profession. While assessment causal beliefs were not very politicized by the right wing in the 1980s and 1990s, Haarder clearly disapproved of the dominant reluctance to measure pupils' and teachers' performance (Haarder, 1994: 114).

8.1.1 Left wing calls to replace grades and exams with internal assessment

Parliamentarily the government was in a difficult situation because its support party the Social Liberals agreed with the opposition in a lot of matters including assessment. In the early 1990s, a slim parliamentary majority personified by the Social Liberal party leader Marianne Jelved, Hanne Thanning Jakobsen from the Socialist People's Party and the Social Democrats' Helle Degn declared that they wanted grades abolished and replaced by other assessment forms. Thanning argued that pupils, teachers and parents should continuously evaluate the individual pupil's development – personally and in relation to the class. Oral information and internal tests should be enough to find out which youth education to pursue after primary school (Berlingske Tidende 22/4/1991a). Marianne Jelved called for alternative assessment forms making continuous assessment possible (Berlingske Tidende, 22/4/1991c). The Social Democrats proposed that the teacher should assess

knowledge as well as social activities and that assessment could be communicated in the form of a conversation (Berlingske Tidende 16/4/1992). The opposition's beliefs were shared by the State's Pedagogical Research Center, which recommended that new school legislation abolish tests and grades as they benefited none and hurt the weakest pupils (Politiken 16/8/1992b). The vice president of the Danish Union of Teachers argued that the time was not ripe for a total abolishment of grades and tests since the majority of the public wants them. He still argued that a broader continuous assessment of pupils' performance should be a natural part of schooling. That is what in school circles is termed internal assessment (Politiken 2/9/1992). Hence, it appeared that there was a popular causal belief that assessment should be internal and include schools' own practice or pupils' performance understood broader than merely skills and knowledge.

Still, the parliamentary majority had Minister of Education Haarder against it as he strictly disapproved of reducing the existing grade and exam system and refused to support the majority's proposal. Further, he argued that the opposition was out of step with public opinion (Berlingske Tidende 22/4/1991b). He polemically argued: 'The Social Democrats should ask their real 'working class voters' instead of the theoreticians who dominate the party. Then the party would realize that the government's school beliefs are very close to what the regular Danish wage earner wishes for his children' (B.T. 5/3/1992). Although abolition of grades and tests in primary school had been a bee in the Social Democrats' bonnet for several decades, the public never jumped on the bandwagon. In 1978, 61 pct. wanted to maintain exams and grades, in 1989 the number was 69 pct. and in 1991 85 pct. favored keeping exams and grades (Politiken 16/8/1992a). Considering the public opinion it is quite puzzling that the opposition parties tried to politicize the issues. However, the reason for the intense debate about grades could be that entrance into high school was no longer a question about grades but about the schools' assessment of the pupils' eligibility (Politiken 16/8/1992a). Hence, a belief that assessment equals external control for entry into further education had been made somewhat redundant. However, Social Democrat Helle Degn declared that she did not want to abolish exams and grades using only a narrow parliamentary majority (Berlingske Tidende 22/4/1991b) and the proposal fell. Other assessment related policies were adopted in the following years.

8.1.2 Assessment policy changes: 2 proposals and 1 law

This section will summarize the fates of two packages of school policy proposals. The first by the right wing government failed to become policy, while the second by the new center-left government was adopted. It is claimed that the first reform package failed because of its irreconcilability with causal beliefs about assessment as internal assessment. In contrast the other reform package was nicely in continuation of the dominant causal belief about assessment.

In 1992, the bourgeois government issued a new school legislative proposal (L 239, 1992) involving potential assessment policy changes of grading and school leaving exams. There were proposals to divide teaching, allowing pupils to chose between teaching targets on two levels (§ 9).[16] Further, four levels of school leaving exams were proposed corresponding to the level of teaching (basic/advanced) and form (9th/10th) the pupil attended (§ 14). Finally, schools should have the possibility to give grades in all subjects in 8th-10th form and not only the subjects pupils can take final exams in. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Social Democrats disagreed with the proposed reform of examinations. They argued that assessment should be for internal use, be included as a natural part of the teaching and be used to assess pupils' broader skills like imagination, creativity, overview and cooperation' (L 239, (Forchhammer)). The current system of examination was described as old-fashioned (L 239, (Degn)). The Liberals agreed with the desirability of more frequent internal assessment, but argued that this did not rule out keeping school leaving exams. Grades and exams were argued to be positive as they inform about whether pupils have learnt what they ought (L 239, (Haarder)). However, Haarder did not succeed in adopting a new school law before the right wing government resigned because of The Tamil Case in January 1993.

A new government headed by the Social Democrats entered office together with the Center Democrats and the Social Liberals. The Social Democrat Poul Nyrup Rasmussen became Prime Minister and the Social Liberal Ole Vig Jensen became Minister of Education. The newly elected center-left government issued a reformulated proposal of the old government's proposal (L 270, 1993) which was adopted by a large majority (Lov nr. 509, 1993). The clauses about increasing the levels of school leaving exams and widening the possibility of grade awarding were removed. Instead a new project

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[16] In the subjects of math, English and German on 8th-10th grade and in physics/chemistry on 9th and 10th grade.

report was introduced (§13, stk. 5) as well as a concept of differentiated teaching (§18). The new government introduced voluntary curriculum goals (CKF) (§10). This was the first time the Ministry of Education centrally developed guidelines for teaching content (Ritzaus Bureau 13/6/1994). Finally continuous assessment (§13, stk 2) was mandated. As part of the teaching, pupils' output should continuously be assessed. The evaluation would form the basis of instruction of the individual pupil and of the teaching's further planning. There was still a parliamentary majority for abolishing grades and exams, but it was not utilized. The new Education Minister Ole Vig Jensen admitted that he wanted to abolish grades, but that the continuous assessment of pupils could be a start in this direction and perhaps replace the existing forms of grades (Politiken 27/8/1993). The Liberals supported the law and were very happy that tests and grades were fully preserved (1. Beh. L 207 (Mølgaard)). The Conservatives expressed satisfaction that the Social Democrats did not follow their desire to abolish grades and exams but opposed the law and voted against it (1. Beh. L 207 (Møller)).

8.1.3 Conclusion

In the early 1990s, the dominant causal belief about assessment was about transforming external assessment tools into internal assessment tools. Even though the right wing had the power of office and supported external assessment, the opposition together with the government's parliamentary support party shared the former causal assessment beliefs and could block an extension of school leaving exams and grade awarding. When office changed the new center-left government could conduct an assessment policy directed at furthering the transition towards more internal tools like self assessment. However, despite their preferences they did not abolish grades and exams altogether.

The Liberals agreed that assessment could and should be used internally, but they seemed to also believe that assessment served an external purpose in informing stakeholders about schools' performance. Further, the parties disagreed about tools. The Liberals – and the Conservatives – were happy with the existing tools of grades and exams. The Social Democrats and the rest of the left wing found them inappropriate and proposed other tools to assess pupils' broader skills. Hence, at this time there was clearly a shared causal belief in the center-left wing that assessment should be used internally to assess either pupils or schools.

8.2 School policy failure 1994: The ugly duckling …

> I remember it like it was yesterday. It was simply the most powerful blow to the Danish school's self image ever (Bertel Haarder about the result of IEA investigation (Haarder, 2011)

When Bertel Haarder started as a minister in 1982 he was told by the primary school directorate that Denmark had the best schools in the world and that this had been documented by OECD. However, Bertel Haarder suspected that things were worse than they appeared. In 1984 he appointed a new permanent secretary, Inge Thygesen, who agreed with him that it was important to find out how Danish pupils were performing. A couple of years later she found a program by The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) – a confederation of independent national pedagogical research institutions. The specific IEA investigation concerned pupils' reading abilities. After conferring with Bertel Haarder she enrolled Denmark in the investigation (Haarder, 2011). It took some years for the investigation to finish and when the results became publicly known office had changed. In 1994 a report named 'The ugly duckling and the swans?' (Mejding, 1994) from The Danish Pedagogical Institute was published. The report referred the results of IEA's international comparison of reading abilities in third and eighth form. Danish third form pupils were ranked alongside developing countries like Venezuela and Trinidad-Tobago and far from the normal Nordic and European level. Pupils from form level eight fared a little better and were placed at an average level, but this was still not as expected. In the public, the results were portrayed as a scandal (Laursen, 2005: 216f; Norrild, 2004).

8.2.1 Right wing de-legitimization of the schools' problem definition

As argued in Chapter 2, a policy failure like the one mentioned above can be related to new ideas and policy change through the mechanism of de-legitimization. De-legitimization was defined as a process of undermining the legitimacy of existing causal beliefs that underwrite a policy. If the right wing opposition used the opportunity to try to change the government's beliefs and subsequently policy, we should be able to see a number of implications. First of all that they utter claims of school failure (DL1). Accordingly, not long after the shock of the poor performance of Danish pupils came to the public's and the policy makers' attention, an interpellation problematized the

state of affairs in primary schools (F10, 1994). The interpellation was put forward by the Liberals (Mølgaard) and the Conservatives (Dahlgaard). The Liberals diplomatically conceded that it had been positive to place characteristics like independence, creativity and participation as the center of the schools everyday life. Still, the Liberals argued that the strengths should not evolve into a pretext for inaction and maintained that inducement of knowledge had been seriously neglected, necessitating a stronger focus (F10, 1994, Mølgaard).

Further, the right wing should associate the failure with a specific policy position held by the Social Democrats (DL2). However, while the Liberal Party was quick to interpret the investigation as a failure, it was reluctant to specifically attribute the failure to the government. This is quite understandable as the Liberal Party had occupied the Ministry of Education for the last ten years (1982-1993), and it had supported every single piece of school legislation since the inter-war period.[17] In contrast to the Liberals, the Conservatives were much more free to attack the government. The Conservatives had not had the position of minister of education since 1950 and had voted against the last primary school legislation. The Conservative school spokesperson Frank Dahlgaard[18] to a large degree used his freedom to attack the government (Weekendavisen 1/11/1996).

A further implication of the theory is that the right wing should formulate an alternative problem definition (DL3). The Liberals argued that the reason for the school failure was exaggerated focus on personal and social development instead of core knowledge and skills. Schools should focus more on academic knowledge and less on other goals. To some degree the Liberals linked the problem definition with causal beliefs as they stressed that the investigation emphasized the need for tests and grades as a tool for pupils and parents in evaluating the yield of schooling as well as valuable information about pupils' attainment level in the transition to further education and jobs

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[17] An article reminds us that today's demise in the school should also be attributed to the right wing's management from 1982-1993, the right wing has a joint responsibility (Weekendavisen 1/11/1996).

[18] Dahlgaard was elected to parliament in September 1994 and was very new in national politics. He was appointed as the party's school spokesperson and became known for his polemic criticism of the school. During the conservative congress in late 1996 a number of conservatives criticized his approach and demanded that he was replaced as spokesperson. However, the party leader Hans Engell refused the critics and Dahlgaard was reelected (Weekendavisen 1/11/1996).

(F10, 1994, Mølgaard). Overall, however, the discourse first and foremost constituted a de-legitimization of a problem definition more concerned with the social and personal aspects than with the academic aspect related to knowledge and skills. The Liberals and Conservatives instead promoted a competing problem definition of knowledge and skills. Lastly according to the observable implications, de-legitimization should be performed by the right wing when it was in opposition (DL4). This implication is evidently confirmed.

8.2.2 Initial left wing reaction to de-legitimization: reluctance to acknowledge failure

Whereas all the observable implications in Chapter 5 relate to the right wing attempt to change the Social Democrats' ideas as the Social Democrats were identified as the partisan veto players, in the present chapter the Social Democrats participate in a government coalition with the Social Liberals. Further, the fact that the Social Liberals had the position of minister of education complicates an analysis of Social Democratic school ideas. This makes it necessary to analyze the Social Liberals' beliefs as if they were the same as the Social Democrats' unless something indicates a discrepancy.

What was the government's immediate reaction to the de-legitimization of the existing problem definition? Well, its reactions illustrated that it adhered to an alternative problem definition. The Social Democrats questioned focusing only on what was measurable and warned against attaching too much weight to 'random studies'. They disputed the problem definition by arguing that acquisition of knowledge and skills is just one part of the purpose of schooling; working methods, modes of expression and interpersonal skills are others. They admitted that the results are not good, but found that the investigation was too narrow to be really interesting. They pointed out that the survey only evaluated one of the school's many objectives: the students' ability to reproduce knowledge and skills, but not the pupils' acquisition of the basic social values of Nordic democracy (Telhaug, 2006: 265; see also Norild 2004; Laursen, 2005). The Social Democrats mentioned another international study which showed that young 15-19 year old Danes were at the top regarding inclination and ability to discuss social conditions and political questions. Regarding the investigation in readings skills, the Social democrats (F10, 1994, Baadsgaard) conceded that pupils on form level 3 performed less satisfactorily, and in the same breath argued that when pupils reached form 7 or 8 they in no way remained behind other countries stu-

dents. However, the government argued that the school, to a large extent, did live up to its purpose (F10, 1994, Vig Jensen).

So the immediate result of the de-legitimization was merely status quo. The obvious question is: Why didn't they change problem definition in the presence of a policy failure and an attempt at de-legitimization? Perhaps because the failure relates to knowledge and skills – an aspect that was not particularly valued by the governing parties at the time. Rather it is merely one of the purposes of the school and other purposes according to them weigh equally high or higher such as personal development and social skills. Had the failure related to other aspects of schooling or had the right wing connected the failure to some idea or value highly valued by the Social Democrats then the de-legitimization should have better chances of leading to a change in problem definition or causal belief. As an example one could hypothesize a different outcome if the failure related to pupils' well-being or interpersonal skills. Another scenario could be if the right wing had connected the failure in school performance to adverse effects for school equality. However, the theory has not stated that the change in ideas after de-legitimization should occur immediately. Therefore, the remainder of the chapter will analyze whether the problem definition changed afterwards either in response to the preceding de-legitimization or to new events.

8.2.3 A new focus on quality

Shortly after the de-legitimization attempt an apparent reorientation towards educational quality occurred. In the wake of the big debate about the disappointing school results the government launched a quality development project. The ministry of education sent two assignments into public procurement: one about identifying the Danish public's expectations to the school, the other about developing a system to monitor whether the school system lived up to the expectations and the central regulations (Berlingske Tidende 15/7/1996). The minister emphasized that he did not want to adopt new national rules that demanded schools' compliance. Rather, the class, the schools, and the entire school system were to think about quality development by deciding on a goal for one year at a time together with pupils and parents. When the year had passed they would ask themselves and each other: was the goal reached, was it the right goal, which goal should we decide on next? Further the system should allow the minister to monitor the school development. He emphasized that quality was different from and more than just grades. Quality was also well-being, creativity and cooperation with parents (Berlingske Tidende 15/7/1996). The minister of education

clearly did not want to control schools externally and argued that all quality development in the Danish school should happen in cooperation with the individual school and on the school's terms (Aktuelt 17/9/1996). Hence, the proposal could be seen in continuation of the existing causal belief about assessment tools as preferably internal and involving self assessment.

Even though the minister clearly expressed that the assessment should primarily be an internal tool and that he did not want to control schools externally, the teachers and their organization were quite concerned. At a conference arranged by the Danish Union of Teachers about quality and development in schools the teachers expressed agreement about developing the schools but demanded that they be involved in the decision about what to evaluate and how (Ritzaus Bureau 19/8/1996). Shortly after the congress, an extraordinary congress was held with assessment as the big topic (Ritzaus Bureau 2/10/1996). Politically, the other parties supported the quality development project. According to the Conservative Frank Dahlgaard the initiatives showed that the minister had taken the critique of the school seriously. The Social Democratic Hans Peter Baadsgaard warned against turning quality into a question merely about skills as personal development, initiative and desire to learn also to a large degree influence school quality (Ritzaus Bureau 29/11/1996).

8.2.4 Continuing de-legitimization and the affirmation of school failure

Simultaneous with the government's modest attempts to approach the problems in the schools, the right wing continued its de-legitimization. The Liberals started to make more coherent arguments about failure, coupling the lack of knowledge with progressive ideas. Earlier it was unfashionable to learn and instead pupils had been taught to 'learn to learn'. This pedagogy had clearly failed, the argument went (DL1). The Liberals argued that they wanted to recreate a knowledge focused school even if it went against the dominant pedagogical beliefs. The biggest challenge was to strengthen the academic part of schooling (DL3) (Venstre, 1996: 3). The de-legitimization of a problem definition centered on personal development continued while the new problem definition emphasizing the academic part of schooling was promoted.

If the government had hoped that IEA's result would be an isolated incident, it did so in vain. A number of international investigations that revealed mediocre results or worse were grist for the right wing's mill. In 1997, a report from Trends in International Mathematical and Science Study (TIMSS) ap-

peared. The results had been gathered in 1995 and the report contained results for 41 countries. Denmark took a mediocre place in math (no. 27) together with the USA and way below average in science (no. 34). Only the Wallonian part of Belgium, Iran, Cyprus, Kuwait, Colombia and South Africa fared worse. Another interesting finding also emphasized in the public was the high Danish spending on education. The results seemed to indicate that public expenses on schools were weakly related to school performance. This was illustrated by the fact that a number of Eastern European countries fared better than the Scandinavian countries, which spent a lot more on education (Weekendavisen 11/4/1997). Norway, Sweden and Denmark were top performers in relation to spending on education with respectively 5.26 pct., 4.92 pct. and 4.80 pct. of GDP (Mullis et al, 1996: 15). The issue of educational spending was brought up by a number of OECD investigations as well (e.g. Education at a glance, OECD Economic Surveys Denmark). The message that caught on in the media was that '(…) Denmark is the OECD country that spends the most money on educating its inhabitants compared to the country's GDP, when student grants are included. At the same time the country performs at average or worse in international investigations of pupils' skills' (Politiken 10/6/1997).

8.2.5 Embracing the problem definition of knowledge: Denmark as a pioneer country

The government leadership soon made it clear that school performance was a top priority. Hence, it will be argued that the reaction to the subsequent delegitimization of the lack of focus on knowledge led the government to adopt a new problem definition. In 1997, the government launched a project: 'Denmark as a pioneer country'. The purpose was to map where the country was doing well and where to put in more effort. The report, launched at a conference in April 1997, contained 300 pages of statistical information comparing Denmark to other countries on a number of parameters to assess the quality and degree of welfare (Weekendavisen 18/4/1997). The government clearly showcased a new problem definition centered on knowledge as well as efficiency (R-DL1). It argued that Danish pupils did poorer in reading, math and science than comparable countries (Politiken 17/4/1997a) and criticized that too few Danish pupils got an education beyond primary school compared to other countries in this respect. In addition, resources must be used more efficiently as the Danish school was the most expensive but did not deliver the results to justify the expenses (Politiken 13/4/1997). The new goal was ambitious: The Danish education system was

to be among the top 5-10 in the world regarding quality and efficiency (Information 10/12/1997). The Minister of Economic Affairs, Social Liberal leader Marianne Jelved, declared that she would not give a penny more to schools: 'If I were president of Local Government Denmark (which has the negotiation right with teachers) I would undertake the responsibility to negotiate with the teachers to use the resources more effectively in relation to the individual pupil'. Prime Minister Nyrup and Minister of Finance Mogens Lykketoft said that children's learning should start in kindergarten and Lykketoft asked why children should not start earlier in school (Weekendavisen 18/4/1997). The government project showed that education was firmly placed on the macro political agenda (Aktuelt 22/4/1997).

8.2.6 Tensions in the government coalition caused by diverging problem definitions

One of the observable implications associated with de-legitimization was internal division in parties. Unfortunately, as the Social Liberals had the position of minister of education the Social Democratic positions on this issue are hard to illuminate. Still, what does become visible is the internal division in the government coalition as the Social Democrats and Social Liberals manifested by the minister of education became increasingly estranged on education issues. One could argue that this to some degree corresponds to conflicts in a party (R-DL 2). At least the office seeking motivation does not appear strong enough to make the parties tone down differences.

The Minister of Education Ole Vig Jensen was quite unhappy, to say the least, with his colleagues' assessment of 'Denmark as a pioneer country'. He sarcastically replied to their critique: 'I think their statements are borderline. But I have taken notice of what has been said and it appears that we should reconsider moving the school from the municipal to the state level' (Aktuelt 18/4/1997). Conservative Frank Dahlgaard was not slow to interpret the government's statements as signaling that the government had flunked Ole Vig Jensen as minister: 'the myth of Denmark having one of the world's best schools is dead. Ole Vig has been given a failing mark for the schools results' (Politiken 17/4/1997b).

Simultaneously with the government's ostensible approach to putting knowledge first, the minister of education cast doubt on the sincerity of the new problem definition. In a debate article he argued that pupils today were not worse than older generations – the difference was that they were not measured before. Further, there was a danger that misinterpreted powerlessness demanded some form of symbolic action, for example one-sided

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teaching, rote learning and tons of tests. That could ruin both the reading and spelling initiatives he had launched, but also the most unique and important aspect of schooling: self development. He still saw personal development as the most important side of schooling and therefore did not think much of the investigations. Further, he argued that he still thought that the Danish school was one of the best in the world – at least the best for Denmark (Jyllands-Posten 7/6/1997). Shortly before this, Ole Vig Jensen had fired the ministry's permanent secretary Inge Thygesen. She had been hand-picked by the former minister Bertel Haarder from the Ministry of Finance. Sources claimed that she was let go because their chemistry did not match and their school beliefs conflicted (Fagbladet Folkeskolen 16/1/1997; Baunsbak-Jensen, 2003: 242). This underscores how political actors ultimately decide the way forward and determine who they will take advice from.

8.3 1998: An election and a struggle over the position as minister of education

As indicated in the preceding section tension was emerging on the school issue between the government and the minister of education. In the late 1990s, the tension between the Social Democrats and the Social Liberals increased. The minister, Ole Vig Jensen, had issued several laws and development works, but the results were few and dissatisfaction increased. A number of parties in parliament – including the Social Democrats – wanted him to pressure the schools to improve their performance. Ole Vig Jensen responded that he would do just that by soon issuing proposals about external assessment of schools and curricula goals for different grades. Still, he was believed to have been most effective in pursuing his own Social Liberal educational beliefs without letting the Social Democrats have their way with more central control and quality control (Politiken 3/3/1998).

Several months of internal conflict about education policy escalated in late February 1998. In an interview, the Social Democrats' school spokesperson Anne-Marie Meldgaard said straight out that the Social Democrats should go for the position as minister of education after an election. The Social Democrats accused the Social Liberals of not thinking enough about qualifying people for real jobs. The Social Liberals on the other hand accused the Social Democrats of being too old-fashioned and taking the trade unions too much into consideration when formulating education policy (Weekendavisen 13/2/1998). In the media, it was argued that Social Democrats and Social Liberals disagree more on education policy than Social Democrats

and Liberals. The Social Liberals have roots in the folk high schools and have a large focus on personal development and free choice in education. This is far away from the Social Democrats, who want education to lead to real jobs on the labor market (Berlingske Tidende 25/2/1998). In response to the Social Democratic claim, the Social Liberals declared that they would fight to keep the position as minister of education. They saw it as their birthright as they have always had the post when the two parties were in government together (Information 17/3/1998).

After the election, the post of education minister constituted a big problem. Ole Vig Jensen was not elected to parliament and was discarded as minister. According to sources both the Social Democrats and the Social Liberals wanted the position and it constituted a serious bone of contention in the negotiations between the Social Democrats' leader Poul Nyrup Rasmussen and the Social Liberal leader Marianne Jelved (Politiken 17/3/1998). In the end another Social Liberal succeeded Ole Vig Jensen. In late March when the cabinet was formed Margrethe Vestager became Minister of Education. She was not part of parliament but had been chairwoman of the Social Liberals and was head of secretariat in the Agency of Modernization of Public Administration when she was appointed.

8.3.1 A new minister: institutionalizing the change of problem definition

The government top had forcefully signaled the change in problem definition already before the election in 1998. Still, the government's new ideas could be misunderstood as the minister of education sent mixed signals. It will be argued in the following sections that in forming the government and replacing a hesitant Ole Vig Jensen with Margrethe Vestager the change in ideas had been institutionalized. That a change in ideas in response to delegitimization could occur through a change in central actors is in line with the observable implications of the theory (R-DL 3). Further, the parties were in government when the change in problem definition occurred (R-DL 4).

While the tension between the Social Democrats and the Social Liberals seemed to fade away, internal tension among the Social Liberals seemed to flare. The former minister of education Ole Vig Jensen had been very much criticized by the Social Democrats for not taking the labor market's need into consideration, but the new Social Liberal minister was criticized for taking the economy and labor market too much into consideration. In June 1998, a report initiated under the last minister landed on the new minister's table. The report *Quality in the education system* (The Ministry of Finance, 1998) was

prepared by a committee of bureaucrats from the Ministry of Finance and secondarily the Ministry of Education (The Ministry of Finance, 1998: 9-12). The purpose of the publication was to expose the quality of the education system – primarily in relation to the effects on the economy (The Ministry of Finance, 1998: 10). It was argued that since Danish spending on education was huge, contract management should be employed, where quality is to be achieved by setting measurable goals, such as dropout rates, enrolment levels, grades etc. (The Ministry of Finance, 1998: 149). The objective of the education system is to deliver an output to the surrounding world in the form of highly qualified pupils and students. The ideal school then becomes able through its production to contribute to society the greatest increase in economic resources. There is a clear problem definition about the essentialness of the acquisition of skills demanded by the labor market which will result in increased prosperity and welfare. According to the report, the lack of clear goals for primary school subjects and teaching may mean that too many pupils do not attain sufficient general and academic skills (Thejsen, 2006: 69). With this report Margrethe Vestager promised to tighten some things up in the education system. She still expressed great trust in the decentralized school system, but argued that one cannot have a decentralized school without anything central (Information 26/6/1998).

The report and the minister's response caused criticism from her own party for giving the economy and labor market too much consideration. She was accused of conducting education policy as if she belonged to the Ministry of Finance. 'Quality in the Education System' was claimed to be the most socio-economic product ever made in the education area. However, the minister argued that one cannot ignore the economic dimension in education (Information 26/9/1998). In November 1998, Vestager was criticized at the executive committee meeting (hovedbestyrelsesmøde) when several speakers were applauded for statements like: 'the economy has taken over education policy' (Jyllands-Posten 21/11/1998). Margrethe Vestager dismissed the critique and argued that her policies were unequivocally in continuation of Ole Vig Jensens policies (Jyllands-Posten 21/11/1998). Vestager was also accused of not conducting education policy in a traditional Social Liberal way, but of steering policy towards more state control, which was very unpopular among Social Liberals. Further, they claimed that she was more concerned with economic than pedagogic concerns: 'It is a Social Liberal mantra that education first and foremost is about developing the individuals' personality. But Margrethe Vestager has primarily been loyal to the government's objective that education to a larger degree should be adjusted to the businesses needs' (Politiken 14/3/ 1999b). The critique illustrates the diverg-

ing beliefs in the Social Liberal Party (R-DL 2) and may imply that the source of conflict was ideational more than structural. If material incentives were the source of a problem definition the incentive should relate equally to party members in the Social Liberal Party and make them express similar ideas.

8.3.2 Conclusion

Concluding on whether de-legitimization led to new beliefs, the answer must be affirmative. Regarding whether de-legitimization took place, all four observable implications were confirmed (DL1-DL4). Claims of failure were uttered. Whereas the Liberals were hesitant to unequivocally blame the government, the Conservatives did so. Further an alternative problem definition focused on knowledge and skills was formulated.
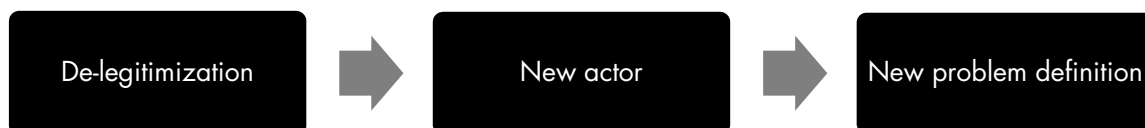
The government eventually changed its problem definition after continuing attempts at de-legitimization and new policy failures (R-DL1, R-DL4). The analysis indicated internal division in the government coalition as well in the Social Liberals regarding which problem definition to adhere to (R-DL2). In addition, one can argue that the change in problem definition was institutionalized by replacing a reluctant minister of education with a new minister who did adhere to the new problem definition of knowledge (R-DL3).

8.4 New policy positions on assessment policy

The third part of the chapter analyzes changes in assessment policy. Whereas a change in causal beliefs has been theorized to lead to new policy positions, no such claim has been made about changes in problem definition. This is because problem definitions could be related to numerous policy positions. As the de-legitimization attempt analyzed in the previous sections merely involved the problem definition of knowledge and not specific causal beliefs, the government had large discretion in what policy tools to select. Still it appears that the new problem definition had some influence in reorienting the government's policy position. Below, I will analyze whether the changes in assessment policy were related to new causal beliefs about assessment.

Already in relation to the project 'Denmark as a pioneer country' the government had signaled a change in assessment policy position (PP1). The publication states that the public can expect a systematic, regular and national evaluation by independent authorities and that the results will be publicly available. Further: 'The purpose of evaluation is that users and consumers of the educational institutions can assess the quality of the individual institutions' (Berlingske Tidende 23/11/1997). The new minister Margrethe Vestager implemented the changes in assessment policies which the government had signaled in their policy positions in the last period of office: In late 1998 a new center for evaluation was established, and in 2001 the minister adopted new curriculum goals.[19]

8.4.1 A national center for evaluation and curriculum goals

In late 1998, Margrethe Vestager followed up on what the prior minister had suggested: establishing a national center for evaluation (Jyllands-Posten 4/11/1998a) and presented a proposal for a law about The National Center for Evaluation (EVA) (L 81, 1998). The center was to assess the primary school as well as day care centers through upper secondary schools, vocational colleges to universities and adult education. The proposal stated that evaluations were to be public. However Vestager emphasized that there would not be league tables (Jyllands-Posten 4/11/ 1998b). The purpose of the center was first and foremost to contribute to further development and preservation of the quality of education on all levels in the education system. The center was to make evaluations lengthwise and crosswise in the education system; assess processes as well as results and make assessments building on self evaluation. The evaluations should be followed up by the authority responsible for the area in question (L 81, 1998).

Other assessment related changes would follow. In November 2000, the Conservative leader Bendt Bendtsen launched an attack on the municipal school. He felt that the decentralization had gone too far and that the state should take more responsibility for schools. He hence proposed a national curriculum. The minister replied that she was also ready to help the municipalities formulate clearer goals for the schools although not as centralizing as

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[19] Further, in the fall of 1997, the government entered an agreement with the Danish Union of Teachers and Local Government Denmark about an 8 point program 'Primary School 2000' with the purpose of strengthening and making visible the quality development in primary school. The intention behind the program is among others to strengthen core knowledge and skill areas. IT, reading, school buildings, involvement of parents, school start (Berlingske Tidende 5/5/2001)

suggested by the Conservatives. The proposal illustrated the divergences between the Liberals and the Conservatives. The Liberals' political spokesperson was skeptical and said that they wanted to keep the municipal school. In early December, Vestager launched a plan to adopt legislation to make the primary schools' goals more clear: 'Clearer objectives for primary school'. As a further innovation, the curriculum must incorporate a section about soft competences and well-being in schools (Berlingske Tidende 3/12/ 2000). Policy wise the result was that the school got instructive intermediate objectives for selected form levels in addition to the existing end objectives for different school subjects.

8.4.2 Continuity and change in causal beliefs about assessments

Were the changes in policy a result of new causal beliefs about assessment? As argued it is generally not expected that de-legitimization of a problem definition should cause specific policy changes. However, a general expectation of the idea literature is that policy changes will be related to people's new interpretative filters as they help actors think about ways to address the problems and challenges they face, and can thereby cause actors' actions (Béland & Cox 2011: 3). Hence, I will analyze whether the government exposed new causal beliefs about assessment and argue that in the wake of adopting the policy changes mentioned above there is both continuity and change in existing causal beliefs of assessment.

8.4.3 EVA: internal as well as external assessment

Was the policy introducing the evaluation center (EVA) related to new causal beliefs about assessment? In general this is a bit hard to judge since the minister was still quite new. Vestager argued that it was fundamental to have an evaluation center to overlook the entire education system. This would introduce a duality: the education institutions have the overall responsibility, but now someone from the outside can help assess whether the institutions are reaching their goals (Politiken 14/3/1999a). Whereas the prior minister of education Ole Vig Jensen until then had emphasized that all evaluation would be internal within schools, it appears that his beliefs started to change too. He acknowledged that sometimes it is necessary to get people from the outside to point out the weak spots (Berlingske Tidende 23/11/1997). Here it seems that the current belief about assessment as self assessment was supplemented by a larger focus on the external use of assessment. Still, Margrethe Vestager also seemed to discursively promote a self assessment belief: 'evaluation – in the Danish model – is an excellent development process for the primary school. The Danish model implies that evaluation first and foremost is a tool

to assess one self and one's own practice. Self evaluation is the only sure method to change processes. Externally imposed, evaluations are less suitable for inducing changes' (Weekendavisen 1/10/1999). The Social Democrats who supported the proposal saw the evaluation center as positive in terms of developing the more qualitative aspects of education (BEH1, L 81, 1998 (Hœkkerup)). The chair of the parliament's education committee, Social Democrat Hans Peter Baadsgaard, had earlier endorsed the idea: 'it is essential that the national institute of evaluation combines the individual institutions' self evaluation with the development of standards that enable us to compare crosswise' (Jyllands-Posten 12/6/1998).

The Liberals and the Conservatives were overall positive and pointed out that they had suggested such a center years back (Jyllands-Posten 12/6/1998; B 81, 1998). They had also suggested more precise definitions of educational goals.[20] However, the right wing criticized that EVA's board of directors would only be recruited from the education system. They would have liked to see representatives from the business sector, students and international organizations like the OECD. Furthermore, they criticized that the ban on making grade averages public, which had been adopted by the parliament some years ago, was stated in the law about EVA (BEH1, L 81, 1998 (Mølgaard). This entailed that evaluation reports, which by law are public, cannot contain information about an institution's grade average (BEH1, L 81, 1998 (Mikkelsen)). The response to the last charge from the acting Education minister Marianne Jelved[21] was: 'Is it really the intention that Grundtvig's native country shall have an institute of evaluation with a goal to rank institutions opposite each other? (BEH1, L 81, 1998 (Jelved)). Very disparate beliefs thus remained among the government and opposition parties on types of policy instruments for internal or external assessment of schools. The opposi-

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[20] The government had then conceded that it had decided to establish one or more independent institutions of evaluation and that it would work toward more precise definitions of educational goals. However, the governing parties – the Social Liberals and the Social Democrats – criticized the proposal – and hence the Liberals – for being very centralistic. Further, the Socialist People's Party asked the Liberal Party if it did not – as a liberal party – fear the risk of centralization inherent in policies of control and measurement and that the means towards quality will oppose everything they have worked for (B 81, 1998 (Frandsen))? The Liberals (B81, 1998 (Mølgaard)) replied that in the choice between an alarmingly weakened academic level or the utilization of centralizing instruments, it preferred a high level of academic standards. Hence, the once de-centralist party had embraced tests as a tool to restore knowledge and skills.

[21] Margrethe Vestager was on maternity leave.

tion would like to see quantitative tools as grade averages (e.g. league tables) whereas the opposition harshly opposed this.

8.4.4 Curriculum goals: pedagogical tool and self assessment

In Vestager's discussion of the desirability of clear objectives for schooling, two causal beliefs about assessment were explicit: a belief about assessment as a pedagogical tool and the predominant belief of schools' self assessment. Regarding assessment as a pedagogical tool this is revealed when she talks about clearer goals as improving the dialogue between school and parents. The objectives could improve the parents' possibility to support their children where improvement is needed and strengthen the school-parent cooperation (Berlingske Tidende 3/12/2000). Further, she talked about the benefit of teachers receiving more knowledge about which pupils need extra support and who needs extra challenges. Clearer objectives would also increase the likeliness that teachers to a higher degree will use their freedom to choose the teaching methods that fit the pupils best, and it will give the teachers as well as the schools a tool for self assessment (Berlingske Tidende 3/12/2000; Nyhedsmagasinet Danske kommuner 11/1/2001).

Politically, the minister received broad support for the proposal (Politiken 7/12/2000). The Social Democrats education political spokesperson, Hans Peter Baadsgaard, emphasized that the proposal was directed towards both knowledge and skills as well as personal development and creativity etc.: 'We don't want a swot-school that is solely concerned with measurable skills' (Berlingske Tidende 7/12/2000). The Liberal Party also supported the proposal, but felt that it should have been more ambitious. It would have preferred national tests adopted in for example form 1, 3, 6 and 8 in Danish and math: 'It is typically Danish to talk about goals but nobody wants to talk about how to assess whether the goals are reached' (Anders Mølgaard). Some organizations warned that the curriculum objectives could be the first step towards a more test-oriented school. Interest organizations were divided on the proposal. The teachers' union liked the idea but found the guidelines too broad and vague. Local Government Denmark was quite positive, but warned that it would lead to a more test oriented school where schools continuously test goal attainment (Politiken 2/3/2001). Others were afraid that this opened up for the introduction of more tests. Solvig Gaarsmand, vice president of School & Society, stated that it might not be Margrethe Vestager's goal, but she feared that other parties would later adopt more tests to attain the goals (Berlingske Tidende 4/12/2000). According to Carsten Hansen (S) the adoption of these goals for schooling was a turning point policy wise.

He did not feel that there was such a large gap between adopting goals for teaching which schools are to attain and adopting tests to assess if pupils indeed are reaching these goals (Hansen, 2011).

8.4.5 Conclusion

It appears that the change in assessment policy was somewhat related to new causal beliefs about assessment (PP1, PC1). Overall, the causal beliefs associated with the policy changes were to a large degree in continuation of the existing beliefs. Hence assessment was believed to be primarily an internal tool with emphasis on self assessment. Still new causal beliefs also emerged that external assessment could supplement self assessment and national goals could function as pedagogical tools. These reformulated causal beliefs facilitated policy changes like the National Center for Evaluation and curricula goals.

Causal beliefs	→	New policy position	→	Policy change

Finally, at the time there were still large discrepancies between the government and opposition parties about which tools could be used to achieve certain purposes of assessment. The government still fiercely opposed that more quantitative assessment tools like league tables or national tests could be used as pedagogical tools, for self assessment or anything else. In Chapter 9 I will analyze how the right wing pursued de-legitimization of existing causal beliefs involving specific policy tools and hereby made radical change possible.

8.5 Ideational or tactical changes in problem definition and policy positions

It appears reasonable to conclude that the government adopted a new problem definition in reaction to the right wing's de-legitimization. Further, it has been argued that the change in assessment policy is related to new causal beliefs about assessment. Having established these changes a relevant critical question emerges: Are these changes really ideational or merely epiphenomenal to interest? Is there an absence of evidence that the new problem definition as well as policy change were purely tactical? This ques-

tion will be briefly explored by looking at media attention as well as public opinion.

8.5.1 Public agenda and opinions

One way to assess the development in the public agenda is to examine the media's attention to the school. Below, Figure 8.1 displays an index of articles in two national newspapers: Politiken and Jyllands-Posten. Jyllands-Posten is normally perceived to be center-right, whereas Politiken is considered to be center-left, so political biased should be limited when the two newspapers' coverage is combined (Jensen, 2011: 150-151). The articles were indexed based on whether they discuss the Danish elementary school and contain either of the words 'reading' or 'math'.

Figure 8.1: Index of articles on reading or math in the Danish primary school, 1991-2005
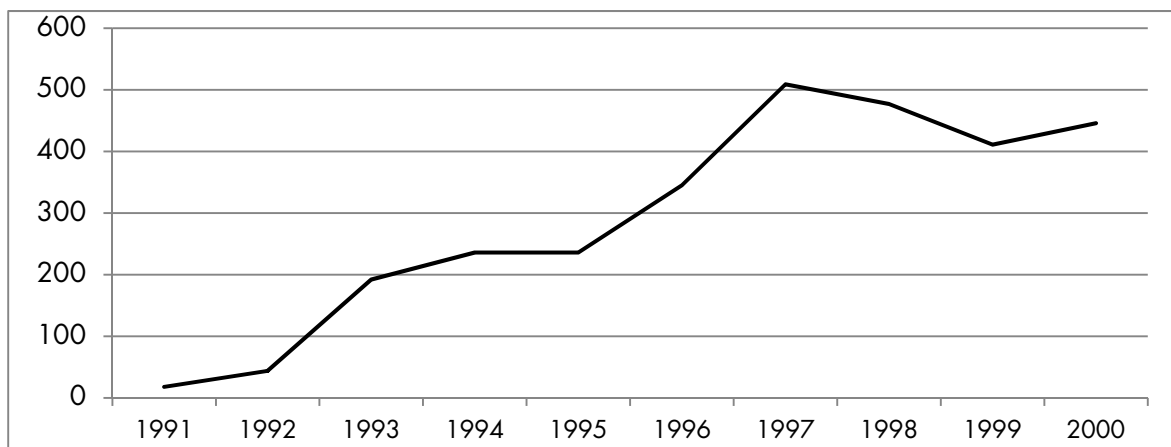
Note: N=2914. Only articles with more than 500 words included. Search command in Danish were 'folkeskole*' and 'læsning' or 'matematik'. Source: Politiken and Jyllands-Posten via Infomedia.

The figure shows a radical increase in articles around the time of the public awareness of the IEA results. Attention remains high throughout the 1990s with a peak around 1997, after which the attention drops a bit. Hence, the policy area received a lot of attention and even if this faded out it remained at a higher level than before the 'shock'. Then, how did the public react to the event argued to constitute a policy failure? Did its reaction pressure a response from the government? Although the survey data on relevant items are limited, some evidence is available.

First, in 1994 a survey[22] asked people about their opinion on the recent critique of the schools.[23] The questions referred to the critique of especially

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[22] Danish Election Survey 1994, Variables and Coding for SPSS datafile DENM94OP.SYS. Survey conducted in two rounds

children's ability to read and whether respondents thought that this critique was justified? 17.9 pct. answered yes meaning that the critique was indeed justified. However, a majority (55.6 pct.) felt that the critique was not justified. The rest of the respondents split equally between 'Maybe' (13.5 pct.) and 'Don't know' (13.1 pct.). Hence, a majority disagreed with the criticism while less than a fifth agreed. Still, a quarter of the respondents were in doubt about what to think. In 1998 another poll asked a related question. The majority still found that the public schools were performing satisfactorily. However voters' attitudes had become somewhat more polarized: two almost equal factions felt that schools were doing excellent or well (48.7 pct.) or not well or poorly (43.8 pct.).

Table 8.1: Do primary schools function well?

Answers	Percent (n)
Excellent	6.0
Good	42.7
Not good	37.7
Bad	6.1
Don't know	7.4
Total	100 (2021)

Question: I would like to hear your opinion about how well the public service functions in a number of areas (item v95: public schools), Codebook for the 1998 Danish Election Survey.

Another question relating to the government's incentives surveys voters' perceptions of which government would be best at securing good primary schools. The difference is insignificant as 27 pct. answer that a right wing government would be best and 26 pct. answer that a Social Democratic government would be best. However, 47 pct. respond that there is no difference or they don't know. Exploring the data in detail reveals that a quite large portion of voters do not think that there is a difference: 37.2 pct. (Danish Election Survey 1998, item v63).

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[23] Item V88: The quality of primary school education has been criticized, especially the children's ability to read. Do you think the criticism is justified? (Yes, No, Maybe, Don't know).

Table 8.2: Voters' evaluation of government competence to ensure good education in primary schools (1998)

Who's best at ensuring …	Right wing government best	No difference, don't know	Social democratic government best	Majority indicating right wing best
Good education in primary schools?	27	47	26	+1

Andersen & Borre (2003: 165).

So what can we conclude about whether the government's change in problem definition was sparked by tactical reasons? Over time the issue seems to have received less attention after the first shock in the wake of IEA. Further, while more people seem to have become concerned about schools, a majority is still satisfied. Finally, the public is equally split between whether a Social Democratic or a right wing government would ensure a good primary school. However, the largest share of voters does not think there is a difference. This leads me to conclude that although it cannot be completely dismissed, it does not appear that there was unambiguous pressure on the Social Democratic led government to change problem definition and/or policy solutions. As far as whether the change in policy positions was tactical, it appears very unclear precisely what policy positions they should take to cater to voters. There are no specific polls that I know of that ask respondents if they prefer a national center for evaluation or curricula goals. It is difficult to think of arguments about how these policies should cater to the parties' constituencies in any particular way.

Another aspect of whether the change in problem definition is epiphenomenal or ideational relates to within party conflict. As shown there was significant disagreement in the government coalition about whether lack of knowledge was a problem or not and whether it should be regarded on par with personal development. Later, the disagreement became visible in the Social Liberals when the party's support base claimed that the minister of education was paying too much attention to knowledge and efficiency. These conflicts between similarly positioned actors accentuate that ideational factors could be the root of their positions. Had they valued certain polls equally and interpreted their policy guidance unambiguously they should have come to the same conclusions and acted similarly. Summing up, it is concluded that the evidence did not indicate purely tactical changes (PP2).

8.5.2 Conclusion

In the first part of the chapter the dominant causal belief about assessment in the early 1990s was identified. This causal belief was about transforming external assessment tools into internal assessment tools. Even though the right wing had the power of office and wished to extend external assessment, the opposition and the government's parliamentary support party shared the former assessment beliefs and hence could block extending school leaving exams and grade awarding. When office changed the new center-left government could conduct an assessment policy directed at furthering the transition towards more internal tools like self assessment.

On the backdrop of the disappointing performance in IEA in 1994, the right wing initiated a de-legitimization of the existing problem definition. It argued that the bad performance was related to the over-emphasis in school policy on personal development rather than knowledge and skills. Hence, a new problem definition of knowledge was promoted. The initial reaction of the center-left government to the claim of failure was denial, but a larger policy focus on the quality of education was quickly established which became more or less synonymous with knowledge. From 1997 the government clearly embraced a new knowledge centered problem definition of schooling. This confirms the observable implication of adopting the beliefs advocated in the de-legitimization attempt. However, Social Liberal Minister of Education Ole Vig Jensen raised doubts about the government's sincerity by making ambivalent statements. Dissatisfaction with Ole Vig Jensen's in some people's opinion too slow pace in pushing schools to raise performance grew. A struggle started when the Social Democrats wanted the position of minister of education. They lost the internal struggle and the Social Liberal Margrethe Vestager took over the ministry. However, she clearly sympathized with the government's new problem definition and revealed that her beliefs differed significantly from Ole Vig Jensen's. The observable implication stating that change in ideas based on de-legitimization takes place through the change in actors can be partially confirmed.

Unlike if I had analyzed a case of new causal beliefs I cannot make specific predictions about how a new problem definition results in certain policy positions. The relation between causal beliefs and policy change has been analyzed separately from the de-legitimization of the problem definition. Hence, it was merely explored whether assessment policy changes were associated with new causal beliefs about assessment. The causal beliefs about assessment associated with the policy changes of EVA and curriculum goals were to a large degree in continuation of the existing beliefs. Assessment

was believed to be primarily an internal tool with emphasis on self assessment. Still new causal beliefs also emerged where external assessment was believed to supplement self assessment and in addition national goals were believed to function as pedagogical tools. Hence, these causal beliefs paved the way for the policy reforms.

Finally the chapter's fourth part investigated whether idea and policy changes could be epiphenomenal, that is, caused by changes in actors' structural incentives. Overall, it was assessed that the evidence was meager and that the changes most likely could be argued to be ideationally motivated. In conclusion, an important function of the chapter has been to identify that de-legitimization of the existing problem definition in the wake of a policy failure led to a new problem definition focused on knowledge. While a problem definition does not dictate specific policies, it is essential as it selects which actors legitimately can assert their solutions and hence narrows down the possible policy solutions that can be proposed. Hence, we should expect that this new problem definition will have consequences for the events to be analyzed in the following chapter.

Chapter 9:
Denmark 2001-2011: Change in office, continuing failure and numerous assessment policy changes

> It is like learning of academic skills has been de-emphasized in favor of sitting in a circle on the floor and asking: 'What do *you* think?'(Anders Fogh Rasmussen, opening of the Folketing, October 2003).

This chapter will analyze the process of school assessment idea changes in Denmark from 2001-2011, a period with large changes such as the adoption of national tests, student plans and mandatory school leaving exams. Preceding the changes were yet another policy failure and a new right wing government with an ambitious school reform agenda.

The chapter consists of three parts. The first part analyzes two different assessment policy changes, which are claimed to reflect the influence of two diverging causal beliefs that to varying degrees appealed to the Social Democrats.

In the second part, I will analyze whether attempted de-legitimization led the Social Democrats to change causal beliefs and consequently support a policy introducing national testing of pupils, which they had fiercely opposed earlier.

Third, I will investigate the reasons for the inability to reach a new school settlement arguing that this is due to the government's and the Social Democrats' diverging causal beliefs about test results' applicability in assessing school quality. Further, I will briefly discuss whether the new center-left government is likely to pursue a new school assessment agenda.

9.1 A new government takes office with the intention to reform schools

In early March 2001 came a reminder that the school still had problems. After the disappointing school results in the 1990s, the Department of Education in 1997 decided that Denmark should participate in the OECD-program (Norrild, 2004). The investigation was carried out in 2000, 32 countries participated, and the main focus was reading skills but also with elements of math and science. Danish pupils' reading abilities corresponded to the inter-

national average. As seen before Denmark ranked after Finland, Sweden and Iceland, but was fairly equal with Norway. The results were caused by a large amount of poor readers and very few excellent readers. Almost a fifth of Danish 15 year olds would have trouble applying reading in their further education and future work.

In late 2001, the Liberals and the Conservatives took power. The Liberal Party's leader Anders Fogh Rasmussen became Prime Minister and Ulla Tørnœs, also Liberal, became Minister of Education. The new government bill stated that education was one of the most important parameters in securing the country's competitiveness and that the quality and academic level in primary schools must be raised (The Ministry of State, 2001). Below, I will analyze the process whereby the new government adopted two school policies.

9.2 The Act on Transparency and Openness in Education

The first case of policy change – where it became clear that the government and opposition had conflicting causal beliefs – was sparked by an Ombudsman decision. The old center-left government had opposed publishing grade averages and hence prohibited this act. However, in 2001 newspapers published grade rankings as the Ombudsman had declared it was illegal to keep grades secret. They should instead be included by the right of access to documents in the public administration (Vejle Amts Folkeblad 5/12/2001). The new government proposed to mandate schools to make grade averages public as well as other information like supply of subjects, core values and internal evaluation results, but the opposition disagreed (Fyens Stiftstidende 6/12/2001). In the discussion of the proposal the government revealed that it had a causal belief that information about grades could serve as an external tool of quality control letting parents and the state assess performance. This corresponds well with the causal beliefs they had expressed earlier (BEH1 L81, 1998). As should be clear from the previous chapter this causal belief was very far from the opposition's causal belief as it to a large degree preferred internal assessment tools. Below, the parties' causal beliefs about making grades public will be explored.

The government's argument for the legislation was to secure high quality education. The act was argued to contribute to this by giving pupils and parents information on which to base their school choice, give the educational institutions the possibility to compare and learn from each other and finally prompt competition between institutions to produce the best quality educa-

tion (BEH1 L 175, 2002 (Lillelund Bech)). Hence, they adhered to the assessment belief of 'quality control' where assessment – in the present case grades – can be used to compare and evaluate schools' performance. The left wing problematized the government's view on assessment which it felt was about attaching more weight to tests and grades (BEH1 L 175, 2002 (Frandsen)). The Christian Democrats argued that grades are not the same as evaluation, which they think is about supporting the individual child. Grades do not do this and are only a snapshot of a here and now standpoint. An evaluation is broader and goes deeper than a grade, they argued (BEH1 L 175, 2002 (Kornbek)). The Liberals' Gitte Lillelund Bech agreed that grades are narrower than evaluation, but that they are an interesting snapshot which measures the degree of goal attainment when the pupil leaves form level 9. If a school continuously produces low grade averages one can use grades to consider the reasons. The Social Democrats critiqued the government for wanting to standardize schools by measuring and assessing schools. They feared that making grades public would put too much focus on grades and exams. The Social Democrats didn't believe that pupils would improve, but that grades merely would become a central tool when parents select their children's schools. Schools and educational institutions *cannot* be compared based on grades (BEH1 L 175, 2002 (Adelskov)).

The law was submitted in March 2002 and enacted by late May 2002. It was supported by the government and the Danish People's Party while the other parties opposed it. The Danish Union of Teachers represented by vice president Stig Andersen strongly opposed it too as he thought placing schools on league tables was of absolutely no value (Jyllands-Posten 7/8/ 2002). The government's new policy represented a departure from the Danish tradition for assessment. For example, although EVA represented an innovation it had no controlling power. The center was merely quality developing and should by no means rank educational institutions. The new policy broke with this tradition and seemed to represent a radical change in attitudes towards the purpose of assessment (Information 3/9/2002).

Parallel to these events in April 2002, the government proposed a legislative act abolishing the municipalities' obligation to offer native language education. The other parties did not support this and to fulfill the government's desire, they had to make a settlement only with the Danish People's Party. This was perceived to be a historical breach of settlement by the Social Democrats, the Socialist People's Party and the Social Liberals. To prepare the ground for a new settlement on primary schools the government proposed '10 steps towards a better primary school' (F 41, 2002 (Tørnæs)). The discussion paper included, among other things, proposals to introduce

more Danish and math classes in form levels 1-3 and binding descriptions of the content of preschool class. Hence, the government wanted to summon the parties behind the primary school settlement to negotiate.

9.3 Binding curricula goals – dividing coalition partners and creating a new causal belief

In the beginning of the governing period it proved hard for the government to attain a broad settlement on the new school legislation. The following sections will illustrate the internal conflict in the government coalition about the policy of curricula goals. In the end, a causal belief that curricula goals could serve as a pedagogical tool to strengthen the teaching united the parties. However, whereas the Social Democrats adhered to this belief and consequently supported the new policy, the Social Liberals opposed the belief as well as the policy.

9.3.1 Conflict in the government based on different beliefs about decentralization

There were internal struggles in the government between the Liberal Party, which was significantly more pro decentralization, and its coalition partner, the Conservatives, who preferred more state interference. This is rooted in the parties' ideological traditions: the Liberals have a traditional preference for local self-governance which collides with the Conservatives' desire for a strong state. Further, the Liberal Party has a long tradition for broad school settlements, whereas the Conservatives have stood outside agreements. Hence, it was also by Conservative demand that binding curricula were mentioned in the government bill. Minister of Education Ulla Tørnæs was reluctant (Weekendavisen 8/11/2002). She felt that binding curricula would interfere with the teachers' freedom of method (Ritzaus Bureau 6/11/2002) and tried to shirk from the government bill. In April 2002, when Tørnæs proposed the points for negotiations, she proposed giving the municipalities 'freer boundaries in planning the teaching'. This made the Conservatives furious. They felt that they had a popular issue on their hand and the school was chosen as an issue where the Conservatives would step out of the Liberals' shadow. After intense pressure from the Conservatives, Tørnæs had to present a proposal in September 2002 that would 'make elements of the curricula binding for the municipal council'. However, the opposition refused to support this. In October the text was edited to 'common goals will be de-

fined for each subject on all grades'. Still, the broad settlement seemed hard to attain.

While Anders Fogh Rasmussen had found it 'of independent value' to maintain the tradition for broad settlements, the Conservatives did not see a narrow settlement with only the Danish People's Party as a problem. The prospect of the issue evolving into a crisis between the governing parties made the party leaders Anders Fogh Rasmussen (Liberal Party) and Bendt Bendtsen (Conservatives) enter a compromise. The latest proposal was softened to lure the opposition into a settlement. However, if it still refused, the government would not hesitate to make a settlement with the Danish People's Party (Weekendavisen 8/11/2002; Reuters Finans 6/11/2002). The government then presented a revised proposal containing binding common goals in selected grades and goals to strive towards in the other grades – in all subjects (Ritzaus Bureau 6/11/2002).

9.3.2 A uniting causal belief about goals as pedagogical tools

The threat to make a settlement without the old settlement partners proved very effective – at any rate in relation to the Social Democrats. The Social Democrats had no doubt that the government would enter into agreement solely with The Danish People's Party if the Social Democrats had not yielded (Hansen, 2011). Further, paving the way for a settlement was the causal belief that curriculum goals constituted an internal tool for schools to support pupils' learning. Hence assessment – here in the form of curricula goals – were believed to constitute 'pedagogical tools' which could be used to improve pupils' performance. In Chapter 8 it was shown that this causal belief had been stressed by the previous minister Margrethe Vestager in relation to adopting the existing – less comprehensive – goals. Minister of Education Ulla Tørnæs argued that the new model offered better support to children who have trouble reaching the goals (Ritzaus Bureau 6/11/2002). In the parliamentary debate the Social Democrats cited the settlement paper to illustrate how the goals serve as pedagogical tools in assessing and supporting pupils' knowledge apprehension: 'This will make it possible to assess at an earlier time if a special effort is required to support the pupils' academic development and contribute to the goal that all pupils leave schools with genuine knowledge and skills' (BEH1 L 130, 2003 (Adelskov)).

Both the government and the Social Democrats dismissed that the new goals would lead to more tests. Minister of Education Tørnæs claimed that there was no intention to assess children more even if common national goals for different subjects are adopted (Ritzaus Bureau 14/11/2002). The

Social Democrats also argued that the goals should be used exclusively by parents, pupils and teachers to assess if the teaching has reached its stage objectives (BEH1 L 130, 2003 (Adelskov)).

9.3.3 A new school settlement and a Social Democratic and Social Liberal school separation

The settlement meant that common national goals were adopted for teaching. The difference from the existing legislation was that until then the minister of education had determined end objectives for all primary school subjects which the municipalities were mandated to follow. Now the minister could determine binding stage objectives on certain grades as well. In the production of stage objectives the existing instructive part objectives would as a rule become mandatory (L 130, 2003). Other initiatives were more hours of teaching and minimum standards of hours of teaching.

It came very close to a broad settlement as the Social Liberals and The Socialist People's Party were almost convinced to come on board. The Social Democrats had negotiated intensively with the Social Liberals and The Socialist People's Party and had them onboard until the night before the final settlement. There was also a close coordination with the Danish Union of Teachers, whose president Anders Bondo had tried to persuade The Socialist People's Party and the Social Liberals. However, they decided to opt out in the end (Hansen, 2011). Hence, a new primary school settlement was reached without the Social Liberals but with the Social Democrats. The educational spokesperson for the Social Liberals, Margrethe Vestager, later stated that the settlement was based on a view of schooling and children that was totally unfamiliar to them and characterized by mistrust of teachers and the schools (Sjællands Tidende 28/9/2005). That the Social Democrats and the Social Liberals made settlements without each other was a radical break with the existing political order. They had been in government together for nearly ten years and had cooperated for decades. In government, the Social Liberals had had the position of minister of education and hence their educational policy position had been dominant. Now the Social Democrats would define their own educational policy position for the first time in a decade. The Social Democrats appeared to be more ready than the Social Liberals to invoke centralizing measures in solving the schools' problems.

9.3.4 Conclusion

In the previous sections, two policy changes under the new right wing government were analyzed. The government and the Social Democrats disa-

greed considerably on the desirability of using grades as a tool of quality control. The Social Democrats and the Social Liberals still emphasized internal assessment as their preferred assessment method. Hence the law that made schools' grade averages public was adopted by a narrow majority composed of the government and the Danish People's Party. In contrast the government and the Social Democrats agreed that curriculum goals were an appropriate tool to support learning and the government entered a new school policy settlement with the Social Democrats, which gave the minister more power to determine end objectives as well as selected stage objectives. The fact that the Social Democrats participated in a school settlement without the Social Liberals also constituted quite a change of the school political game.

9.4 Two de-legitimization attempts and a radical change in policy position

The preceding section showed that although the government and the Social Democrats agreed on some assessment matters, the Social Democrats still fiercely opposed more testing of pupils. However, a radical change in causal beliefs was soon to take place. It will be argued that this change was produced via the mechanism of de-legitimization and that this paved the way for adopting extensive national tests.

9.4.1 The de-legitimization of circle pedagogy and its inadvertent effects on equality

In early October 2003, Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen put school ideas at the center of the political agenda in the parliaments' opening speech. The Prime Minister called for a break with decades of 'circle pedagogy' stating, as outlined in the chapters start: 'It is like learning of academic skills has been de-emphasized in favor of sitting in a circle on the floor and asking: "What do you think?"' (Rasmussen, 2003). Fogh Rasmussen used the circle as an image of the enemy of a culture of primary school which makes the pupils' own feelings and presumptions the yardstick of right and wrong and prioritizes the individual pupils' self development over common academic standards (Information 27/1/2005).

He also connected the nuisance of circle pedagogy to its inadvertent consequences for equality. He argued that the school had been too reluctant to put demands on pupils perhaps fearing that it would disadvantage the weakest pupils. However, this had resulted in a betrayal of the children

who were worst of. Overall, it was argued that Danish pupils did worse than pupils in other countries on a number of decisive issues. Later in the opening speech, Fogh touched upon social mobility again. He argued that many years of effort had failed to diminish the negative social mobility and a lot of children do not get a fair chance of a good life. Hence, the government would pursue a new strategy. In contrast to those who in his opinion erroneously believed that more money was the solution, he argued that knowledge and skills were the way to break the social pattern and have a better life.

Recalling the observable implications of the theory, did the above constitute a de-legitimization of the existing causal beliefs that underwrote policy? First of all, a claim of failure was uttered: bad school performance in general and lack of social mobility in particular (DL1). The prime minister blamed this on 'circle pedagogy'. However, he did not blame the Social Democrats directly; only indirectly by arguing that these beliefs had been dominant for decades – that is when the Social Democrats and the Social Liberals held office. Still, the Liberals have also held the position of minister of education and have supported every single piece of school legislation under the last government. Hence, it was perhaps tactically wise not to point fingers (DL2).

Regarding the solution, he did not specifically formulate an alternative causal belief but argued that knowledge must come first across the entire education system and advocated continuous assessment of knowledge attainment. Hence the formulation of an alternative causal belief is missing (DL3). Finally, an expectation has been formulated that de-legitimization will be performed by the opposition parties, but in this case this is clearly rejected as the act was made by the leader of the government – the Prime Minister (DL4). Regarding a potential reaction from the opposition it is unclear what to expect. A causal belief invoking a specific policy solution has not been formulated, nor has tangible blame attribution been attempted. There is thus no particular reason to expect that the opposition should adopt a new causal belief. However, as will be shown later, the Prime Minister's de-legitimization produced a powerful discourse about the causes of lack of social mobility.

9.4.2 National tests enter the agenda

Following up on the Prime Minister's attack on 'circle pedagogy' the Conservative school spokesperson Helle Sjelle on October 8, 2003 demanded more nationwide testing in numerous subjects starting as early as form level 1 (Berlingske Tidende 10/10/2003). This put the Minister of Education in a very difficult situation. The Social Democrats approached her on the parlia-

ment floor and told her they would leave the settlement immediately if this was the government's policy. After having come to an agreement with the Prime Minister she had to turn the Conservatives' proposal down from the parliament rostrum knowing that her ministry already was working on developing tests (Tørnœs, 2011). The minister's refusal of national tests made the Conservative spokesperson argue that she could not see how educational targets could be controlled without a uniform test. Once again there was apparent tension between the two governing parties. It was not that serious after all, but a result of not pushing a settlement partner away (Tørnœs, 2011). However, things were to become even tenser. On April 9, 2004, the government's parliamentary support party the Danish Peoples Party demanded that the Prime Minister replace Minister of Education Tørnœs with a Conservative minister. Educational spokesperson Louise Frevert argued that it was a problem that a minister in a right wing government did not conduct right wing school policy. Further, she claimed that Ulla Tørnœs had been too languid and had conducted a hippie-like education policy reminiscent of the time with Social Liberal ministers of education (Jyllands-Posten 9/4/2004).

On April 16, the minister finally presented the government's proposal which suggested that pupils should take national tests in Danish and math in selected grades beginning in form 2 (reading test in form level 2, a Danish test in form level 4 and a math test in form level 6). Her argument was that reading and math skills are crucial and that 18 pct. pupils who leave school without useful reading abilities must be helped. She wanted to change the school law and tighten up the continuous evaluation of pupils' yield of education (Jyllands-Posten 9/4/2004). According to Ulla Tørnœs the reason for the Liberals' adherence to more centralizing measures was that several international studies showed how the Danish school – the world's most expensive – was not performing satisfactorily. Hence, the Liberal Party had to trade in its belief of local self determination for the national focus on world class education (Tørnœs, 2011). However, the government still had to get this past the Social Democrats, who on several occasions had voiced their explicit disdain of the idea. As recently as 2001, the bourgeois opposition could not gather political support to introduce mandatory national tests as the Social Democrats opposed (Berlingske Tidende 5/5/2001b). As a response to the Liberals' proposal from April 2004, the Social Democrats educational spokes person Carsten Hansen made clear that the government would have great trouble getting a proposal implemented regarding national tests. They refused to support the policy as it would lead to a different teaching culture di-

rected towards tests and not towards diversity and personal development (Fyens Stiftstidende 17/04/2004).

In the meantime two OECD studies came to the government's deliverance. The first argued that the Danish school lacked a culture of assessment. The second revealed that the Danish pupils' performance had not improved and a large group was still performing very poorly.

9.4.3 OECD: the need to improve Denmark's culture of assessment

In the spring of 2003, OECD invited Denmark to participate in its review and Education Minister Ulla Tørnæs accepted. OECD reviews are assessments of countries' educational systems which from 2002 use PISA results to compare countries. The agreement was that the review team should assess strengths and weaknesses of school quality and equality and produce recommendations for improvements. The review team report from May 2004 listed 35 proposals for improvement (KL et al, 2004)). The core theme was to develop a new 'assessment culture'. The report argued that this was the single most important change to facilitate other changes and improve performance. It suggested tests based on the goals for different grades and that the Ministry of Education audit the country's schools (Politiken 20/5/2004b). In an interview the Minister of Education expressed agreement with OECD's review team. She argued that the OECD is right to point to the lack of a culture of assessment. There is too much focus on resources and too little focus on what pupils get out of their education. It is time to focus on pupils' output so we do not only detect that they are functional illiterates when they leave school. The new curricula objectives would make assessment easier and she reiterated her proposed three national tests. She emphasized that it was not about sorting out pupils but about making sure that everybody's on the bandwagon. Since 1993 the teachers have been mandated to ensure the pupils' profit from teaching. However, the minister ascertained that it was treated erratically. Hence the law needed to be clarified to ensure that all pupils reach common national standards (Politiken 20/5/2004a). Here she clearly expressed a belief about assessment where tests constitute a pedagogical tool to help pupils' knowledge attainment.

However, the Social Democrats were still opposed to tests. Their school spokesperson Carsten Hansen argued that the OECD report did not explicitly propose more tests. The Social Democrats did not support tests but agreed to strengthen the culture of assessment in primary school. The Social Democrats were supported by the Danish Union of Teachers and Local Government

Denmark (Jyllands-Posten 19/5/2004). In September 2004, Pernille Blach-Hansen, a Social Democratic left winger, became the party's educational spokesperson (B.T. 7/9/2004). In late 2004 Thomas Adelskov (Social Democrats) wrote: 'More tests do not qualify pupils to become active and informed citizens and it does not raise the academic level' (Vejle Amts Folkeblad 19/11/2004). Hence, the Social Democrats' skepticism towards tests endured.

9.4.4 PISA 2003: Another failure and de-legitimization of resistance against tests

> The PISA investigation was a windfall for me. From my political point of view, it was an incredible gift to have OECD's word that pupils were not performing as well as expected. I, of course, chose to use this ruthlessly (Tørnæs, 2011).

In December 2004, the PISA 2003 results reached Denmark. To call it disappointing is an understatement. There had not been noticeable changes since PISA 2000 and the few changes were in a negative direction. Danish pupils were under average in reading and science and slightly above in math and problem solving (Ritzaus Bureau 6/12/2004). Minister of Education Ulla Tørnæs explained the wretched state of affairs as a result of the prior governments' policies. The current government's policy initiatives had not yet been implemented and were therefore not reflected in PISA 2003 (Pedersen, 2006: 18). However, the bad results did not inspire questions about the underlying diagnosis assuming that there was a problem with the state of academic skills and knowledge: Rather, the dominant logic was that if the 'medicine' did not work, a larger 'dose' was needed. Hence, the Minister of Education once again argued for adopting tests but now in even more subjects to remedy the state of affairs (tests in reading, English, math and science (Berlingske Tidende 6/12/2004). As Larsen & Andersen (2009: 253) have argued, this is in perfect accordance with Hall's theory of how paradigms work. The minister argued that the situation called for immediate action: 'The results in reading are shameful considering that initiatives were launched already in 1994 to rectify the problems' (Ritzaus Bureau 6/12/2004). Another disappointing fact was that the negative social inheritance played a large role for pupils' school performance. Especially children of single providers and bilingual children were affected negatively. Surprisingly, second generation immigrants did worse than first generation immigrants (Politiken 7/12/2004b). The PISA 2003 investigation was argued to show that 17 pct. of pupils finishing primary school were functional illiterates (compared to 18

pct. in PISA 2000). Tørnæs was later criticized for using the term functional illiterates as there is no mentioning of such a concept in the investigation at all (Thejsen, 2006: 60). But the term caught on both in the media and politically. There was a very clear claim of school failure: continuing deficient school performance and a failure to break negative social inheritance in schooling (DL1).

Ulla Tørnæs utilized the disappointing results by drawing on the discourse established by Prime Minister Fogh. Referring to the Social Democratic resistance of national tests, she said: 'I simply can't understand if the Social Democrats won't take part in securing that school leaving pupils have sufficient competences to manage on the labor market (Information 7/12/2004). Next day, the headline of an editorial in B.T. states: 'This is why Fogh will win'. It quoted the Liberals' group meeting where Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen mocked the Social Democrats: 'I refuse to believe that the Social Democrats seriously will oppose initiatives that seek to strengthen the academic level knowing that these initiatives first and foremost will benefit pupils from the poorest background' (B.T. 8/12/2004). There was a clear attempt to de-legitimize the Social Democrats' resistance to make them change their causal beliefs. The Social Democrats were blamed for this problem because they refused to adopt policies that could rectify it (DL2). Further, there is a clear alternative causal belief of national tests as a pedagogical tool which can be used to support the weaker pupils (DL3). The media picked the discourse up at the same time. The editorial in the national center-left newspaper Politiken called the Social Democrats' actions 'a losing battle' and asked: 'what are the Social Democrats thinking?' Further, it was argued that PISA demonstrated a persistent national scandal, namely that the school no longer breaks the negative social inheritance. Still, the editorial claimed, it was not because of a lack of resources. If we want to do something about the poor standards, goals have to be set and monitored and Minister of Education Tørnæs' proposal about national tests was common sense (Politiken 7/12/2004a). Finally, as the act of de-legitimization was conducted by the government party instead of the opposition the observable implication DL4 must be dismissed.

9.4.5 The Social Democratic reaction: suddenly supporting national tests

The de-legitimization of the Social Democrats' resistance to national tests puts them in a very tricky position. One of the reasons for expecting that this de-legitimization should produce effects is that ideologically speaking the

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Social Democrats have had issue ownership of creating equality and furthering social mobility. Hence, when the Liberals argued that the Social Democrats had failed and that the Liberals had the legitimate solutions, the Social Democrats should be forced to react. If the Social Democrats would continue their resistance to tests they would face continuing claims of abandoning their core voters. This would be a very undesirable and untenable situation. Hence, in the following it will be analyzed if the empirical evidence corroborates that the Social Democrats adopted the new causal belief advocated in the de-legitimization attempt.

Immediately after the de-legitimization described above, the Social Democrats commenced a gradual withdrawal from their earlier policy position on national tests. The day after the de-legitimization had been voiced the Social Democrats changed their position by declaring that the primary school should make more use of evaluation. However, they still argued that the government was digging ditches if it only believed that more tests were the solution (Ritzaus Bureau 9/12/2004). A few days later, the Social Democrats primary school spokesperson Pernille Blach Hansen expressed a will to negotiate with the government about the possibility of national tests (Berlingske Tidende 11/12/2004). However, it was pointed out that it was not a favorite idea of the Social Democrats. In January 2005, political spokesperson Frank Jensen finally declared that the Social Democrats would not block national tests (Politiken 15/01/2005). Hence, the Social Democrats had now completed a change in policy position by giving up their prior opposition to national tests (PP1). Still, the change depicted above only reveals a change in policy position and not necessarily a change in causal beliefs. Soon after, a new party leadership expressed causal beliefs that were genuinely positive of national tests. But first another election defeat occurred.

9.4.6 Bertel is back!

In February 2005, it was clear that the Social Democrats had once again lost an election and would not be in government. In the new government, headed by the Liberals and the Conservatives, Bertel Haarder (Liberal Party) returned as minister of education. At his entry Bertel Haarder dethroned the then permanent secretary Henrik Nepper-Christensen, who was moved to another ministry. Instead Bertel Haarder brought with him the permanent secretary Niels Preisler from the Ministry of Integration (Altinget.dk, 10/8/ 2008; Hegelund & Mose, 2006: 182). Nepper had been accused of ideological imbalance as he 'in the most impartial way had advised Ulla Tørnæs to conduct Social Liberal school policy' (Berlingske Tidende 24/8/2005; Ber

lingske Tidende 10/10/2002). However, Ulla Tørnæs denies this (Tørnæs, 2011). Still, the act underscores that politicians have broad authority to choose whose advice and ideas they are inspired by.

Bertel Haarder had earlier had a very strong faith in local democracy, but this had changed. His reform of school boards which gave parents more influence had not had the desired results. Parents did not get involved in the school boards to the extent he had hoped. Both Haarder and Prime Minister Fogh were disappointed and according to Haarder this was probably the reason the Liberals decided to change tools when they returned to office. When you cannot count on parents to do what benefits their children's schooling, the politicians have to take action: 'That local democracy thing turned out not to work. And I still bemoan that fact' (Haarder, 2011).

9.4.7 A new party leadership: genuinely embracing a new causal belief

After the election defeat, the Social Democrats' party leader Mogens Lykketoft resigned and a battle over who was to become the new party leader broke out. In the end two candidates emerged: Frank Jensen, former minister and current political spokesperson and Helle Thorning-Schmidt, former member of the European Parliament and newly elected member of the Danish parliament. The Social Democrats have a history of war between different political wings. Since the last battle over party leadership in 1992, two wings called the Auken and the Nyrup wing had crystallized. The former constitutes the left and the latter the right wing. Generally speaking, Helle Thorning-Schmidt is regarded as belonging to the right wing and Frank Jensen is seen as representing the left wing (Weekendavisen 18/2/2005). The ideational divisions between the wings on school policy, justice, immigration, tax etc. affected their views on whether or not to adopt a confronting or conciliatory opposition line. One of the central left wing figures, Bent Hansen, warned against compromising too much with the right wing government: 'Nobody has been able to see a difference. The Social Liberals have been able to mark differences. We have watered down our own school policy by supporting national tests' (Information 11/2/2005). Hence, the ideational divisions regarding whether to support national tests or not support one of the observable implications (R-DL2). However, on exactly schools the two candidates were very much in agreement and genuinely positive towards assessment and national tests (Antorini, 2011, Hansen, 2011).

The reason that their causal beliefs had converged could be the general performance of the school as well as the persuasion by the right wing. Ac-

cording to leading Social Democrats there had been a growing concern in the party with the unsatisfactory performance of Danish pupils; especially the apparent social class bias in the children's performance was disturbing to them. However the party was insecure about what to do. Many reports had dismissed more money as the solution. Hence, the OECD review report, which advocated a better assessment culture made quite an impression. Still the party was skeptical of tests. Regarding this insecurity MP Carsten Hansen (Social Democrats) says: 'everybody can agree that we should have a good primary school and that all children should learn something. But when it comes to the choice of tools one can be in doubt about what to do and if one should use this or that tool. And in this regard some of us have been per-suaded to go farther than we initially thought' (Hansen, 2011). Hence, it was a powerful discourse when Anders Fogh Rasmussen framed national tests as being able to diminish the negative social inheritance. The reason was that many traditional working class voters were very concerned with their child-ren getting a good education. For them tests and grades were not necessari-ly perceived as punishment but as a useful informative tool which helps them support their children's learning (Antorini, 2001).

In April, a membership ballot awarded Thorning-Schmidt the leadership and with her a break with the Social Democrats' old idea legacy began, which also involved the school issue. Already in the election campaign for party leadership she argued that the party could not become synonymous with weak school politics (Dagbladenes Bureau 8/9/2005). She expressed concern with the inability to dismantle the negative social inheritance in Denmark: 'It is shocking that we still can't break the negative social inherit-ance in Denmark' (Berlingske Tidende 21/4/2005). In an interview shortly af-ter entering her new position she stated that the party supported the adop-tion of national tests and that the party has a strong focus on knowledge and skills. Parents and pupils are entitled to pupil assessments throughout the school so they know that they learn sufficiently (Jyllands-Posten 24/4/2005). It is highly implausible that the de-legitimization of the resistance to national tests had anything to do with Helle Thorning-Schmidt being elected party leader. However, it meant that the opinions she may have had all along be-came more legitimate and that she could appoint an education spokesper-son with the same beliefs which were closer to the government than to the critics in her own party.

9.4.8 New Social Democratic school beliefs but still internal divisions

Also part of this 180 degree turn on school assessment policy was the new education political spokesperson Christine Antorini. Prior to being elected for the Social Democrats she early on expressed grave concerns with the lacking social mobility in Danish society despite massive investments in education: 'The Danish primary school is the world's most expensive in regard to cost per pupil. But we don't have results that match these costs. Another paradox is that the primary school still breeds inequality to the same degree as earlier. It is a terrible truth that the process oriented and creative school where everybody is to feel good is a gift to the middle class which has different values and norms [than the working class])' (Berlingske Tidende 22/4/ 2002). Shortly before being elected she argued again that social mobility was in trouble as a fifth of school leavers would probably be functional illiterates and would not complete a youth education program unless action was taken (Berlingske Tidende 10/8/2004). In her first interview as education spokesperson, she declared that it is extremely important to create a new assessment culture: 'Many people often forget that grades and tests are a good tool for the teacher and that they are motivational for the pupils'. Further, she dismissed only asking for more money whenever a school problem emerges (Ugebrevet A4 23/5/2005). Hence, with Antorini prior skepticism of assessment is definitely deserted and we can conclude that by now the Social Democrats have adopted a new causal belief that national tests constitute 'pedagogical tools' for improving the weakest pupils' performance (R-DL1). Further, this change to a large degree occurred via a change in the party's central figures (R-DL3).

As illustrated, the party was divided on whether or not national tests were positive (R-DL2). Further, the internal ideational divisions regarding the school endured. Christine Antorini was appointed educational spokesperson with a set assignment: She had to enter negotiations with the government and reach a settlement containing national tests. However, there was strong resistance in the Social Democratic group (Fyens Stiftstidende 24/5/2005). The party's internal education committee consisted almost completely of 'Frank'-supporters and all opposed tests. Fortunately Frank Jensen, the defeated party leader candidate, was part of the committee too and he supported Antorini by arguing for the necessity of tests (Antorini, 2011). Still when the settlement had been negotiated, six party members declared that they would vote against the legislation, among them Pernille Blach-Hansen the former educational spokesperson (Politiken 2/3/2006). This is very unusual in Danish

politics as members as a rule vote for the party line. The diverging interpretations of different party members regarding whether or not tests were in the interests of the party underscore how ideas rather than material interest provided directions for actions. There appears to be no unambiguous incentives channeling party members to think similarly. As a consequence of that delegitimization was performed by the government the reaction naturally occurred when the Social Democrats were in opposition, hence refuting the expectation about place in government (R-DL4).

9.4.9 New school settlements: national tests, pupil plans, quality reports

While PISA 2003 was Ulla Tørnæs' windfall as a minister, Christine Antorini was Bertel Haarder's. It was obviously an advantage for a Liberal minister to negotiate with a Social Democrat who supported the policy of national tests and overall shared his beliefs about assessment. In August 2005, the Social Democrats finally agreed to support the introduction of mandatory national tests as long as the results were not published, inhibiting comparison between schools (Ritzaus Bureau 30/8/2005). According to Christine Antorini, it was crucial for the Social Democrats that national tests above all would be internal pedagogical tools to support children's learning and that the Liberals had agreed not to publish the tests as initially proposed. The tests should not be used to compare school performance or expose bad or good schools (Antorini, 2011).

Shortly after the settlement on a new primary school legislation was a reality, introducing among other things mandatory national tests in Danish with focus on reading in form levels 2, 4, 6 and 8 grade; math in form 3 and 6; English in form 7 and natural science subjects like physics/chemistry, biology and geography in 8 form (Sjællands Tidende 28/9/2005). The settlement on national tests also introduced a number of mandatory school leaving exams which were optional before (L 101, 2006). A couple of months later more school policies followed introducing individual student plans and a revised school objective that emphasized knowledge and skills more. Further, a new council for evaluation was established and municipalities were mandated to develop action plans and quality reports for schools. It was also decided that the results of national tests were to be given to the municipal council as a part of its supervisory commitment. They are to make yearly quality reports on performance in the municipality's schools (L 170, 2006).

The argument for introducing student plans drew on the causal belief about assessment as pedagogical tools (L 170, 2006). Surprisingly this causal

belief also applied to the mandatory school leaving exams. School leaving exams are traditionally connected to a causal belief about exams relation to selecting pupils into further education. However, Minister of Education Haarder argued that making voluntary exams mandatory would contribute to lifting the weakest pupils and negate the tendency that they were left to themselves (L 101, 2006; Politiken 26/3/2006). While the arguments for adopting quality reports and a council for evaluation overall is related to a causal belief about controlling school quality, the end purpose was to strengthen the focus on pupils learning (L 170, 2006; Politiken 26/3/2006). The new settlements were adopted by the government, the Danish People's Party and the Social Democrats, cementing the school political alliance established a couple of years before hereby confirming the implication regarding policy change (PC1). The settlement between the ideological opponents runs counter to what the theory of Politics Matters would expect and strengthens the faith in an ideational explanation.

9.4.10 Was the change in policy position tactically motivated?

The previous sections should have made it clear that the Social Democrats radically changed their policy position on national tests (PP1). However, to increase the confidence that this change was prompted by a change in causal belief we have to exclude that there was no evidence indicating purely tactical motivations (PP2). If this can be shown our confidence in the ideational explanation is bolstered significantly. Below I will explore the public agenda, electoral opinions and the incentives provided by the organized interests.

Figure 9.1: Index of articles on reading or math in the Danish primary school, 2000-2010
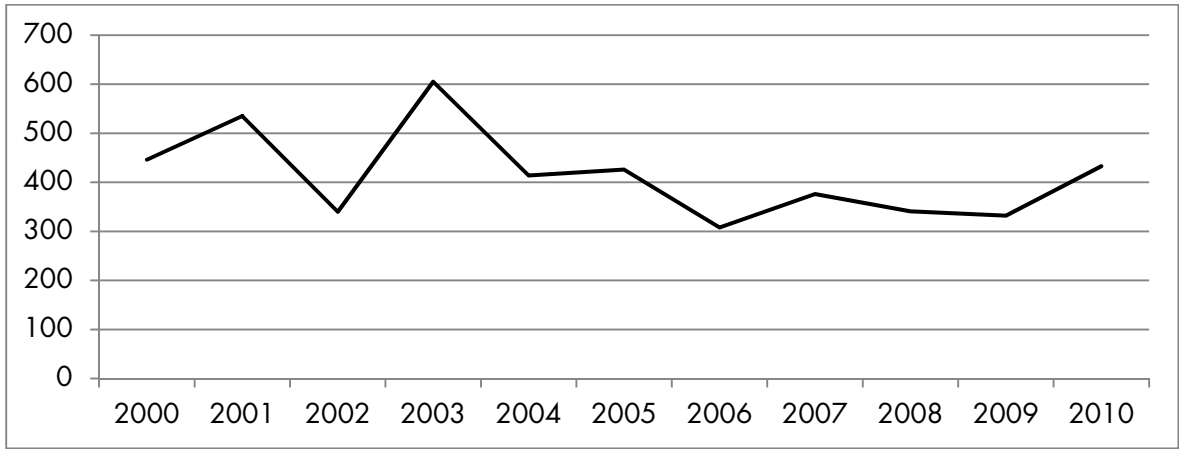
Note: N=4110. Only articles with more than 500 words included. Search commands in Danish were 'folkeskole*' and 'læsning' or 'matematik'. Source: Politiken and Jyllands-Posten via Infomedia.

As was done in the previous chapter, for the preceding decade, I have assessed the development in the public agenda by looking into the media's attention to the school.

Throughout the decade the school received stable attention with a notable fall in 2002 followed by a peak in 2003. However, when the Social Democrats' change in position occurred (2004-2005) the attention was not particularly high and no noticeable changes in attention coincided with the change in position. Hence, this does not yield any expectations as to what the Social Democrats should do. A better indication of whether there were tactical motivations for the change in policy position could be the electorates' attitudes. A frequent objection is that parties' change in position could merely be a reaction to popular beliefs.

There has indeed been a clear development where voters perceive the school to be performing less well. In 1998 the majority found that the public schools were performing satisfactorily. However from 2001 more people found that the schools were not doing very well and in 2005 the majority (54 pct.) found that schools function either poorly or not well. Hence, a perception had emerged that there was a problem.

Table 9.1: The electorate's assessment of the public schools

Do primary schools function well?[a]	1998	2001	2005	Difference: 2005-1998
Excellent + good	48.7	44.7	34.7	% 14
Not good + bad	43.8	47.6	54	+10.2
Don't know	7.4	7.7	11.2	+3.8
Majority bad>good	%4.9	+2.9	+19.3	
N	2001	2026	2264	

a. I would like to ask about how well you think the public sector functions in a number of respects (Excellent, good, not good, bad, don't know).
Source: Danish Election Survey 1998, 2001, 2005.

There had also been a movement over time where voters regarded a right wing government as more competent than a left wing government in managing the school issue. The difference is not striking, however, and a third of the electorate does not find noticeable differences between the wings.

Based on the above, it is fair to argue that the Social Democrats perceived that they needed to do something to conquer the school issue. However, it will be argued that it was not at all evident that it was tactically wise to support national tests.

Table 9.2: The electorate's assessment of the government alternative's ability to secure well functioning schools

Who's best at ensuring …		Right wing government best	No difference, don't know	Social democratic government best	Majority right wing best
Good education in primary schools?	1998	27	47	26	+1
	2001	35	36	29	+6
	2005*	37	31	32	+5

Source: Andersen & Borre, 2003: 165. *The results for the 2005 election were produced by the author analyzing the Danish Election Survey 2005.

One poll indicates that the right wing's demand for a more knowledge focused school was not a popular hit. Lack of learning was in no way perceived to be the biggest problem in schools by the electorate. Only 7 pct. mentioned learning too little as the biggest problem. 32 pct. thought that too many pupils in the class were the biggest problem, while 28 pct. mentioned too much noise in class.

Table 9.3: In your opinion what is the biggest problem in the primary school today?[a]

Biggest problem?	Pct.
Lack of learning	7
Too much noise/unrest in the class	28
Bad teachers	8
Too many pupils per class	32
Bullying	9
Other	9
Don't know	7
N	453

a. Hvad er efter din opfattelse det største problem i folkeskolen i dag?' (Børnene lærer for lidt; For meget uro i klasserne; For dårlige lærere; For mange elever i klasserne; Mobning, Andet, ved ikke). Source: Ugens Gallup, nr. 17, 2003, Skolestart 2003.

In another poll, a majority valued pupils' well-being and social skills (48 pct.) higher than academic skills (43 pct.). 6 pct. mentioned music etc., 3 pct. replied 'don't know' (Ugens Gallup, nr. 21, år 2002).[24] Hence, it is not evident that

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[24]'At the moment it is discussed how the schools different assignment is to be prioritized. Which of the following three statement do you agree with the most?' Statement A: The academic skills should primarily be strengthened. Statement B: the pupil's wellbeing and social skills – for example ability to cooperate and respect of

the Social Democrats should counter problems of knowledge and skills when other issues were valued higher by the electorate.

Although the public did not have knowledge as top priority, did it favor more tests of knowledge anyway? As a matter of fact, it didn't. Up to the adoption of national tests in 2005 there did not seem to be a popular demand. In 2003, a poll asked whether there were too few, too many or an appropriate number of tests in schools.[25] Only 19 pct. felt that there were too few tests, 62 pct. felt that the number was appropriate, and 10 pct. thought there were too many tests (Ugens Gallup, nr. 17, 2003). In 2004 the majority of respondents (62 pct.) opposed yearly tests in primary schools subjects, 32 pct. were positive towards yearly tests (Jyllands-Posten 19/5/2004). Hence, there was little public demand for national tests which could be argued to have made the Social Democrats change position. However, after the introduction of national tests the public became more positive towards them. In August 2006, a majority of 57 pct. agreed with using national tests as adopted by law (totally agree: 18 pct., agree: 39 pct.). Only 25 pct. disagreed (totally disagree: 9 pct., disagree: 16 pct.) (16 pct. neither nor and 2 pct. don't know)[26] (Ugens Gallup, nr. 19, 2006). While simply arguing that the school needs more money has been effectively de-legitimized as a solution, the electorate appeared to think differently. Asked whether the public sector spends too much money on education an overwhelming majority said it spends too little (1998: 43 pct., 2001: 49 pct., 2005: 63 pct.). Only 1-2 pct. said that the public sector spends too much on education (Source: Danish Election Survey 1998, 2001, 2005). Hence one could argue that it had been more strategic for the Social Democrats to keep pursuing their old strategy of arguing for more money for schools; especially when they were in opposition and not directly responsible for finding such funds.

Another factor that talks straight against tactical motivations for changing policy position on national tests is the Social Democrats' core constituency and organized interests. The Danish Union of Teachers' massive scare cam-

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other – should primarily be strengthened. Statement C: the subjects' music, physical education and art – i.e. art and creative skills should primarily be strengthened.

[25] 'Besides end of term examinations and exams in the oldest forms the school increasingly use tests to assess pupils attainment level. Do you think there are too few, too many or an appropriate number of tests in the school?'

[26] Q1: Pupils in the primary school are tested 10 times in the most important subjects during their 9 years of schooling. Parents are told the test results but otherwise the results are confidential. Do you agree or disagree in this use of tests in primary school?

paign against national tests in all Danish schools complicated the Social Democratic support of national tests. Many teachers vote for the Social Democrats and the party has had a very close relationship with their union, so the Social Democrats felt pressured (Antorini, 2011; Jyllands-Posten 29/3/2006). Further, the settlement was adopted despite massive protests from the teachers' union. Late January 2006 the teachers held a rally to protest against the legislation for only the second time in the organization's 132 year history. The leadership urged teachers to go home, mobilize their colleagues and inform about the catastrophic consequences of the reform (Politiken 31/1/2006; Politiken 13/2/2006). Nevertheless, the Social Democrats decided to support national tests despite pressure from the union and despite the risk of losing voters. In conclusion, this section found no evidence that the position change was purely tactical (PP2). It can be strongly corroborated that the policy change was a result of a change in causal beliefs.

9.4.11 Conclusion: assessing the expectations

The preceding analysis uncovered two instances of de-legitimization. The first was performed by Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen (Liberal Party). In the parliament's opening speech he claimed that the school had failed to perform well, especially in regard to the lack of social mobility (DL1). The Prime Minister blamed this on 'circle pedagogy', but he did not explicitly blame the Social Democrats (DL2). Further, regarding the solution he did not specifically formulate an alternative causal belief. Hence the formulation of an alternative causal belief is missing (DL3). This attempt of de-legitimization thus did not seek to produce a specific causal belief in regard to a policy solution. However, the discourse about lack of social mobility was soon utilized in promoting the solution of national tests.

In 2004 in the wake of the results from PISA 2003 claims resurfaced about continuing deficient school performance and failure to break negative social inheritance in schooling (DL1). The Social Democrats were blamed because they refused to adopt policies that could rectify the problem (DL2). Finally, there is a clear alternative causal belief of national tests as a pedagogical tool to support weak pupils (DL3). In reaction to this de-legitimization the Social Democrats gradually retreated from their prior policy position. Shortly after, they had completed a change in policy position by giving up on their prior opposition to national tests (PP1). However, there were internal conflicts in the party about which causal beliefs to adhere to in relation to national tests (R-DL2). Yet, after the election in 2005 a new causal belief about national tests as a pedagogical tool was institutionalized by the new

party leadership and a new school political spokesperson (R-DL1; R-DL3). The Social Democrats entered a school political settlement with the government which introduced national tests as well as pupil plans and mandatory school leaving exams (PC1). The examination of whether the change in policy position could have been prompted by tactical evidence yielded no evidence that this was the case (PP2). Hence, the findings strongly corroborate that a change in causal beliefs prompted by de-legitimization had caused policy to change.

Table 9.4: Observable implications certainty and uniqueness

Uniqueness	Certainty	
	High	Low
High	PP1+PP2, PC1	PP2 (-PP1)
	R-DL1	R-DL2*
Low	PP1 (-PP2)	DL3**, R-DL3**,
		%: DL4, R-DL4

* Medium certainty or uniqueness, ** Medium certainty and uniqueness.

Thus, the empirical evidence reveals a process of de-legitimization which nicely corroborates the theoretical expectations in Chapter 2 as well as the observable implications derived in Chapter 5. However, one aspect distinguishes the empirical findings from the theory. It has been theorized that de-legitimization would as a rule be conducted by the opposition to seek to change the government's causal beliefs. However, this is refuted by the evidence as the de-legitimization was performed by government actors and resulted in new causal beliefs among the Social Democrats, who were in opposition (DL4; R-DL4). Overall these expectations were categorized as 'Straw in the wind' tests as they are low on certainty and uniqueness. Hence, these findings do not repudiate the theory. One could imagine that de-legitimization could be employed by governments primarily after a short time in office where they still can blame the prior government for bad results. In the school sector, however, the results of schooling take quite a while to emerge, as schooling is an elongated process. Hence, the possibilities for blaming are perhaps better here than in many other policy sectors.

9.5 An impossible reform and new government

In the following sections, I will analyze more recent developments in the school political arena. First, I will investigate recent efforts to produce a new school settlement. I will argue that it to a large degree was the government's

and the Social Democrats' diverging causal beliefs that made a new school settlement impossible. The government saw the publication of national test results as a good tool to promote efficiency and competition while the Social Democrats vehemently opposed this. Finally, I will argue that we should not expect significant changes in assessment policy after the change in government in October 2011 when the Social Democrats took over the Ministry of Education.

9.5.1 Pursuing a new school settlement 2010: The manifestation of different assessment beliefs

The new Liberal Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen brought the school to the macro political arena again when he addressed the issue in his televised New Year speech. He emphasized the importance of knowledge and skills and announced that he had invited all school stakeholders: teachers, parents, pupils, educational institutions, business organizations and vocational institutions to a special Marienborg week to launch a 360 degree inspection of the Danish primary school (Politiken 2/1/2010; Berlingske Tidende 26/1/2010). After the Marienborg meeting, which was held late January 2010, the prime minister launched a mobile task force with SFI[27] manager Jørgen Søndergaard as leader. The task force would visit schools all over the country, assess strengths and weaknesses and produce recommendations for a new law (Danske kommuner Online 3/2/2010).

In the wake of his 360 degree inspection of primary schools, Prime Minister Løkke argued for making the results of national tests public. This would imply changing the existing agreement that prohibited publication. Lars Løkke launched the idea on the day the Marienborg week started and he argued that it would create more competition between schools and give parents a better frame of reference when choosing schools (Politiken 31/1/2010b). The Social Democrats claimed that this would be a breach of settlement and strongly opposed such a step. Christine Antorini referred to the Social Democratic belief that tests are a pedagogical tool to argue why it would be impossible to support the proposal to make test results public (Antorini, 2011).

As illustrated in Table 9.5, there is a clear tendency that the later policy changes are related to two distinct idea complexes where the policies either are related to the belief about assessment as pedagogical tool or assessment as quality control. As a large part of the policy changes can be related

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[27] The Danish National Centre for Social Research.

to a causal belief about quality control and has been supported by the Social Democrats one cannot argue that the Social Democrats per definition are against external assessment tools. However, they refuse to use the results of tests or exams of pupils' performance to assess schools externally.

Table 9.5: Different causal beliefs about assessment policies

	Individual level	School level
Internal use	*Pedagogical tool* National tests Pupil plans	*Self evaluation* %
External use	*Admission control* %	*Quality control* Council for evaluation and quality development Municipal quality reports

9.5.2 Cabinet reshufflings but still no school settlement

The proposal to make the results of national tests public was not coordinated with the Minister of Education Bertel Haarder (Liberal Party). Just two weeks before the statement he had denied that test results should be made public. In an answer dated January 12, 2010 in a consultation with the parliament's education committee he had argued that teachers should be able to assess their pupils, knowing that the results would not be passed on. He also made clear that tests should not be used as a competitive element between schools (Politiken, 31/1/2010b; Politiken 17/2/2010).[28] Still, the minister loyally defended the proposal (Politiken 31/1/ 2010a).

In late February 2010, Prime Minister Løkke Rasmussen reshuffled his cabinet. Tina Nedergaard (Liberal) became Minister of Education and Bertel Haarder moved to the Ministry of Interior and Health. Nedergaard was assigned to produce a new school settlement and in December 2010 she presented a proposal: reading boost for pupils in form 2, fewer pupils in special needs education, a six hour school day for the youngest pupils, 500 million for IT in schools and publication of national test results (Jyllands-Posten 9/4/2011). However, reaching agreement proved difficult. Only a year after

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[28] Until Løkke announced his inspection of schools Haarder had an agenda of showing schools more trust and more freedom. After a lot of tightening in the form of tests, pupil plans and more hours of teaching, he felt the time was ripe for peace to work and freedom of methods. It was argued to be his attempt to return to liberal roots after critique about many rules and unnecessary bureaucracy (Politiken, 31/1/2010b).

her inauguration in March 2011, Tina Nedergaard resigned and Troels Lund Poulsen (Liberal) took over a chaotic course of events from Tina Nedergaard. Ever since her major verbal fight with president of the teachers' union Anders Bondo Christensen, televised live on TV 2 News, the school had become a losing issue for the government. The problem grew as negotiations about partnership with school stakeholders and talks with settlement partners went very slow and in periods did not move out of the spot (Politiken 1/7/2011). As new minister, Troels Lund Poulsen tried to push the Social Democrats into serious negotiations by arguing that when it comes to openness about national test results he wouldn't budge an inch. Further, he declared that before he went on summer holiday the issue of a settlement with or without the Social Democrats would be clarified (Politiken 30/3/2011). Shortly after he had to eat his words as he declared that he did not bring any ultimatums to the negotiations. Further, he said that the government might have to budge on some issues. The Social Democrats expressed satisfaction replying that for them it is an ultimate demand that results of national tests won't become public (Jyllands-Posten 9/4/2011). Still, settlements were not reached.

In July 2011, Troels Lund Poulsen declared that the ministry would produce an official league table of all schools' grade average controlled for socio-economic background (Jyllands-Posten 16/7/2011). The left wing together with the Social Democrats declared that they would delete the league tables if they should get the education minister post after an election (Berlingske Tidende 16/7/2011). The minister's argumentation for the ranking is that he hoped municipal councils would study the list and see which schools perform well and which do not so the less good schools can learn. They could compare results from year to year to assess improvements (Berlingske Tidende 15/8/2011).

The above illustrates that there still is a fundamental difference between the Liberals and the Social Democrats as the Social Democrats deny a causal belief where assessment in the form of tests and grades can or should be used to assess the school level. According to the Social Democrats tests are a pedagogical tool that should be used to help the individual pupil.

9.6 2011: New government – new assessment policy?

An election was called for September 15, 2011 and the result was a partisan change of office. By October 3, 2011 a new government was presented composed of the Social Democrats, the Social Liberals and the Socialist

People's Party. Helle Thorning-Schmidt (Social Democrat) became Prime Minister, and Christine Antorini (Social Democrat) Minister of Education. According to the theory of Politics Matters a new partisan government should imply a change in policy. However, in regard to school and in particular assessment policy the new government is not expected to pursue a radically different policy. Between 2001 and 2011 the school legislation has been changed about 30 times. In all important respects the Social Democrats have voted for the changes and have thus supported the right wing governments' policies of tightening, centralizations, tests, and exams (Information 23/8/ 2011).

In an interview before the election the Social Democratic leader Thorning-Schmidt declared that tests were an important part of a new evaluation culture and the teachers should not count on the Social Democrats abolishing national tests and pupil plans if they came into office. She did not doubt that the Social Democrats have taken the right steps towards strengthening the assessment culture in schools although it clashed with the teachers' preferences. She also declared that the schools' most important goal is to induce knowledge so pupils can advance in the education system and attain an education (Folkeskolen 12/5/2011). Also supporting that we should expect to see a similar assessment policy to that of the former government is the new Minister of Education Christine Antorini. By December 2011 the only difference has been that the government has removed the school leaving exam results from the Ministry of Education's webpage (Politiken 10/10/2011). However, the lists are still publicly available as the Liberals have published them on their webpage (Information 11/10/2011).

9.7 Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed school assessment idea changes in the period 2001 to 2011.The first part of the chapter investigated two policy changes adopted shortly after a new right wing government came into office. The two policies were argued to reflect different causal beliefs about assessment which also explains their different appeal to the Social Democrats. The government and the Social Democrats disagreed considerably on the desirability of using grades as a tool of quality control. The Social Democrats and the Social Liberals still emphasized internal assessment as their preferred assessment method. Hence the law that made schools' grade averages public was adopted by a narrow majority composed of the government and the Danish People's Party. In contrast the government and the Social Democrats agreed that curriculum goals were an appropriate tool to support learning.

Hence, the government entered a new school policy settlement with the Social Democrats, adopting new and expanded curriculum objectives. This also served to break up the Social Democrats' and the Social Liberals' joint efforts on school policy.

In the second part of the chapter I analyzed the events leading to the adoption of a number of new assessment policies including national tests and student plans. There were two attempted instances of de-legitimization. The first was performed by Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and featured a claim that the school system had failed to perform well, especially in terms of social mobility. The prime minister blamed this on 'circle pedagogy', but did not explicitly blame the Social Democrats. Further, he did not specifically formulate an alternative causal belief. However, the discourse about lack of social mobility was soon utilized to promote the solution of national tests. In 2004 in the wake of PISA 2003 the government claimed the investigation showed continuing deficient school performance and a failure to break negative social inheritance in schooling. The Social Democrats were blamed because they refused to adopt rectifying policies and there was a clear alternative causal belief of national tests as a pedagogical tool. The act of de-legitimization resulted in a Social Democratic change in causal belief as well as in policy position. However, within the party there were conflicting causal beliefs about national tests and their effect. After the election in 2005 a new favorable causal belief about national tests as a pedagogical tool was institutionalized by the new party leadership and a new school political spokesperson. Consequently, the Social Democrats entered into a school political settlement with the government which introduced national tests as well as pupil plans and mandatory school leaving exams. Concluding, the empirical evidence reveals a process of de-legitimization which seems to corroborate the theoretical expectations in Chapter 2 as well as the observable implications derived in Chapter 5.

In part three of the chapter, I explored the reasons for the recent inability to reach a new school settlement. Regarding the lack of a new school settlement, as shown in the first part of the chapter and in Chapter 8, the Social Democrats were skeptical of using information on pupil performance as a quality control tool. In contrast, the government saw assessment as something which can be used to assess school performance as well as be a pedagogical tool. The government's wish to adopt a reform making the results of national tests public was fruitless in the absence of an attempt to change the Social Democrats' causal beliefs. Further, it was briefly assessed if the recent change in government should imply a new direction in assessment policy. In contrast to what should be expected by a Politics Matters approach it

does not seem that there will be any significant differences between the old right wing and the new center-left government in relation to assessment policy.

Chapter 10:
Comparative summary

This chapter summarizes the dissertation's empirical findings and reviews the support for the theoretical framework. First the research questions will be reiterated and an overall answer will be provided. Second, the dissertation's theoretical framework will be discussed comparatively based on the empirical findings. The comparative discussion will center on the themes of policy failure, parties' position in parliament and the varying pace of the persuasion processes. Third, ideas association with the changes in assessment policy change will be discussed together with rival explanations before a final conclusion.

10.1 How did assessment ideas change?

The dissertation started from an empirical puzzle. In Chapter 1 it was argued that it was surprising that countries like Denmark and Sweden had adopted radical reforms of assessment policies as both countries over time had significantly reduced assessment of pupils' performance. It was argued that at the outset the change in assessment policies seemed to be associated with policy makers gaining new ideas about the purpose and tools of assessment. This brought out this book's overall research question: *how did ideas about school assessment change?* The book has hence studied the *mechanisms* whereby ideas change.

To gain insight into how these new assessment ideas originated, a theoretical framework was developed centered on the concept of persuasion. It has been argued that parties can employ the mechanisms of de-legitimization or legitimization to persuade opponent parties to change ideas and hence make policy change possible. Hence, a rephrased research question was formulated: *To what extent did the performance of de-legitimization or legitimization change assessment ideas?*

The empirical analyses showed that these mechanisms were indeed used to persuade other parties to change assessment ideas in Denmark and Sweden. The dissertation has empirically dealt with several types of persuasion. As depicted in the table below, there were 2 cases of legitimization of causal beliefs, 2 cases of de-legitimization of causal beliefs and finally 2 cases of de-legitimization of problem definition.

Table 10.1: Different types of persuasion performed in the cases

	Legitimization of causal beliefs	De-legitimization of causal beliefs	De-legitimization of problem definition	Total
N	2	2	2	6

Chapter 6 illustrated how legitimization was performed by the center-right government in relation to two policy solutions (case 1 and 2). The government invoked the macro idea of decentralization and the value of equality to legitimize the policies of national tests as well as to reform the relative grade system into an absolute one. In reaction to this the Social Democrats adopted new causal beliefs. The first causal beliefs stated that national tests could be used to assess school performance and hence uphold equal education nationwide. The second causal belief entailed that absolute grades were a more just way to select pupils into upper secondary schools and further education. The result was an assessment policy reform where the Social Democrats supported the policies that had been subject of legitimization.

In Chapter 7, two separate processes of de-legitimization were analyzed. First, it was illustrated how the Liberal Party de-legitimized the existing problem definition (case 3). After an initial denial of the lack of focus on knowledge, the existing minister was replaced. This change in actors institutionalized the new problem definition of knowledge and skills. Second, the Liberals and Conservatives more or less simultaneously sought to de-legitimize the Social Democratic government's causal beliefs of assessment to have earlier grades and tests adopted (case 4). However, the Social Democrats did not change causal beliefs until investigations showed deteriorating results of Swedish pupils' performance and yet another minister had been appointed. Still as the rank and file rejected a new party position on tests and grades, it was not until the party was in opposition that it got a mandate to enter negotiations to decide on policy change. Hence after a protracted process the Social Democratic Party finally adopted reforms of national tests and the grade system together with the center-right government.

Chapter 8 analyzed how the right wing opposition initiated a de-legitimization of the existing problem definition on the backdrop of the disappointing Danish performance in IEA (case 5). It argued that the bad performance was related to the school policy's over-emphasis on personal development rather than knowledge and skills. Hence, a new problem definition of knowledge was promoted. The initial reaction of the center-left government to the claim of failure was to deny it. Still increasing dissatisfaction in the government with the existing minister of education developed as he ap-

peared to work against the transformation of the problem definition. Hence, after an election the minister was replaced with a new minister who institutionalized the new problem definition.

In Chapter 9, another process of de-legitimization of casual beliefs was analyzed (case 6). In the wake of PISA 2003, the government claimed that the investigation showed a continuing deficient school performance and a failure to break negative social inheritance in schooling. Further, the Social Democrats were blamed because they refused to adopt policies that could rectify the problem. In addition there was a clear alternative causal belief in national tests as a pedagogical tool. However, the Social Democrats were still very divided on this issue. Yet in the wake of an election defeat a new causal belief about national tests as a pedagogical tool was institutionalized by the new party leadership. Consequently, the Social Democrats entered a school political settlement with the government, which introduced national tests as well as pupil plans and mandatory school leaving exams.

10.2 Non-cases: absence of persuasion

Overall, while the main focus of the empirical analyses has been on cases where legitimization or de-legitimization indeed was performed, some 'non-cases' have been included as well. These are cases where the government despite declared preferences for assessment policy change did not use de-legitimization or legitimization to persuade the Social Democrats and hence where ideas did not change and: a) policy change did not occur or b) policy change occurred without the Social Democrats' support.

These cases were not as rigorously tested as the cases involving actual de-legitimization or legitimization. Thus it was not assessed whether the lack of persuasion was related to the absence of de-legitimization or legitimization or because of the absence of more strategic incentives. However, the inclusion of cases of persuasion as well as non-cases strengthens the confidence in the analyses. Therefore, it cannot be claimed that policy change always entails idea change. In some cases persuasion is utilized to make ideational veto players change ideas and render policy change possible. In others persuasion is not utilized and does not convince ideational veto players to change ideas and hence policy change does not take place or takes place without the participation of ideational opponents.

Table 10.2: Overview of cases where persuasion was not performed

	Non-case 1 SW 1992-1994	Non-case 2 DK 1992	Non-case 3 DK 2001-2002	Non-case 4 DK 2010-	Non-case 5 DK 2011
Chapter	6	8	9	9	9
Policy preference	Extend grade scale, earlier grading	Extend school leaving exams	Publicize school leaving exam result	Publicize national test results	Publicize league table of school leaving exam result
Party parliamentary position	Government	Government	Government	Government	Government
Majority/minority government	Minority	Minority	Minority	Minority	Minority
Failure	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Change in problem definition/causal belief	No	No	No	No	No
Policy change	Yes (later reversed by SAP)	No	Yes	No	Yes (later reversed by SD)

10.3 Discussion of the theoretical framework: comparative insights

Above an overall answer to the research questions has been provided: assessment ideas appear to have changed due parties' performance of either de-legitimization or legitimization. In the following sections, I will discuss the cases elaborating on some themes which stand out comparatively. These discussions will relate to the two expectations formulated in regard to the processes whereby the two mechanisms work. First, it was stated that the mechanism of *de-legitimization* would be performed by the opposition and – in the event of policy failure – this would lead the government to reshuffle actors and hereby adopt new ideas [$P1_{de\text{-}leg\,/opposition}$]. Second, it was hypothesized that the mechanism of *legitimization* would be performed by the government and – if existing ideas valued by the opposition are used – this would lead to a change of ideas among the existing actors in the opposition [$P2_{leg/government}$].

Table 10.3 categorizes the analyzed cases on a number of dimensions. They have been given a case number to discuss the instances of persuasion separately as some chapters cover more than one event of de-legitimization or legitimization. Finally, the categories have been marked by the initial of the observable implications (derived in Chapter 5) to illustrate whether the evidence corroborates the theory. '%' indicates that this is not the case.

Table 10.3: Overview of cases of legitimization and de-legitimization

	Case 1-2 SW 1992-1994	Case 3 SW 1997-2002	Case 4 SW 1998-2008	Case 5 DK 1994-1998	Case 6 DK 2003-2006
Chapter	6	7	7	8	9
Mechanism (DL1-Dl3; L1-L2)	Legitimization causal beliefs	De-legitimization problem definition	De-legitimization causal beliefs	De-legitimization problem definition	De-legitimization causal beliefs
Performer (DL4; L3)	Government	Opposition	Opposition	Opposition	Government (%)
Recipient (R-DL4; R-L3)	Opposition	Government	Government	Government	Opposition (%)
Actors (R-DL3; R-L2)	Existing	New	New	New	New
Intra-party divisions (R-DL2)	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New causal belief/ Problem definition (R-DL1; R-L1)	New causal belief	New problem definition	New causal belief	New problem definition	New causal belief
Failure (before/after persuasion)	No	No	Yes (after)	Yes (before)	Yes (before)
New policy position (in government/ opposition) (PP1)	Yes (in government)	N/A	Yes (in opposition)	N/A	Yes (in opposition)
Tactical change (PP2)	No	No	No	No	No
Policy change (PC1)	Yes National tests, new grade scale	N/A	Yes New grade scale, earlier national tests and grades	N/A	Yes National tests, mandatory school leaving exams, school council

Below, I will discuss how the analyses confirmed the expectations and how the processes diverged in noteworthy ways. The discussion will center on the themes of policy failure, parties' position in parliament and the varying pace of the persuasion processes.

10.4 Policy failure

One of the focal points of the analyses was the event of policy failure. It is a central argument in the literature that failure is an important spur of ideational and policy innovation as 'decision makers learn, adopt, and implement new ideas when existing public policies fail to meet programmatic or political goals' (Walsh, 2000: 486; see also Checkel, 1997; Hall, 1993; Hemerijck & Van Kersbergen, 1999; McNamara, 1998). However, specifying this expectation I argued that the event of failure is expected to increase the likeliness that de-legitimization results in opposing parties changing their beliefs. In contrast, legitimization does not utilize failure and instead invokes existing ideas or values in a positive way to persuade actors to change their causal beliefs.

The analyses confirmed the expected connection between de-legitimization and failure as well as the lack of connection between legitimization and failure. The empirical evidence showed that de-legitimization and legitimization are indeed two separate mechanisms. Legitimization can stand on its own in inducing policy change. Ideas' influence does not need to always be associated with policy failure. This counters Stiller's (2009, 2010) argument about ideational leadership where de-legitimization is seen as a prerequisite for legitimizing new ideas.

Further, the cases of de-legitimization (case 3-6) added interesting information about the more precise relationship between de-legitimization and policy failure. Both case 4 and case 6 involved de-legitimization of causal beliefs. However, while the de-legitimization in case 4 started before any 'objective' failure, in case 6 de-legitimization occurred in the wake of a failure. In both cases the opponent party's causal beliefs were changed but in case 4 this only happened after policy failure had occurred. This is argued to illustrate that de-legitimization is a necessary but not sufficient factor for causal beliefs to change. The same logic applies to policy failure; i.e. failure is a necessary but not sufficient factor. In case 6 there were many instances of policy failure. However, the change in the Social Democrats' causal beliefs and policy position only occurred after de-legitimization.

Another interesting distinction between de-legitimization and policy failure relates to whether de-legitimization was directed towards causal beliefs or the problem definition. Comparing case 3 and 4 it turned out that in case 3 the Swedish Social Democrats changed problem definition despite the lack of a failure, but in case 4 the Swedish Social Democrats' causal beliefs only changed after failure had occurred. This might indicate that the change in problem definition is easier to accommodate for a party than the change in causal beliefs, which is intimately connected to taking a new policy position. In contrast the change in problem definition is at the outset merely rhetorical.

10.5 Parties' position in parliament

In Chapter 2 it was hypothesized that the two mechanisms of persuasion were related differently to the parliamentary position of parties performing the mechanisms. The point of origin was a division of labor between opposition and government where the opposition holds an attacking position in the public debate where it assigns responsibility for recent developments. The government on the other side has the position of shaping the political solutions to society's problems (Thesen, 2011: 40). Hence, it was assumed that

de-legitimization more often would be initiated by opposition parties. In contrast, legitimization would be initiated by the government to seek to persuade the opposition to take part in policy making. This could be based on the need to have a majority to make policy reforms, but it could also be that broad settlements are seen as desirable and appropriate (Pedersen, 2010: 56).

While the majority of cases complied with the expectation that the government will perform legitimization while the opposition will perform de-legitimization, it appears as if the relation between the different mechanisms of legitimization and de-legitimization is not as unequivocal as initially expected. In one of the cases (case 6), the government clearly performed a de-legitimization of the opposition's causal beliefs. This could be related to that in the school sector the results of schooling take quite a while to emerge as schooling is an elongated process. Hence, the possibilities for blaming are perhaps better here than in many other policy sectors. Overall, it is still expected that de-legitimization will primarily be employed by the opposition. However, it can be speculated that newly elected governments have some leeway in blaming past governments for present problems. In Chapter 9 it was argued that de-legitimization might be employed by governments primarily after a short time in office where they still can blame the prior government for bad results.

Overall, the implications were formulated in relation to the position of the performer and the recipient of legitimization or de-legitimization when they changed causal beliefs. Thus, there are no observable implications regarding parliamentary position of a party when it changed policy position. Still, it can be argued that it is perhaps unexpected that the Swedish Social Democrats in case 4 changed policy position in opposition as the de-legitimization started when they were in government. Further, in both case 4 and 6 where de-legitimization of causal beliefs was performed the Social Democrats exclusively changed policy position in opposition. In case 3 and 5 where de-legitimization of the existing problem definition was performed, the Social Democrats changed their problem definition in government. One could argue that it will be easier for a party to change beliefs when it is in opposition than when it is in government. The reasons could be that opposition parties are less exposed to media scrutiny and their change in position is more likely to go unnoticed. In contrast, a government party's actions are more visible and could be more exposed to claims of incredibility. In a situation of disagreement between the parliament and the rank and file, it is perhaps easier for the party leadership to convince the rank and file of the necessity to change beliefs to be able to get influence and/or increase its chances of

getting into office again. Hence, it should be easier to get a mandate to ne-gotiate new policy solutions when a party is in opposition (Merkel et al, 2008). Thus, one could formulate a hypothesis that radical changes in policy positions – in response to de-legitimization – occur when parties are in oppo-sition.

10.6 The pace whereby ideas change

Another aspect illuminated by comparing the cases is the varying pace with which change in ideas takes place. There appears to be marked differences in which mechanism was applied and whether de-legitimization was cen-tered on problem definition or causal beliefs.

In the above section about policy failure it was indicated that it ap-peared easier to accommodate a change in problem definition than in causal beliefs. This is based on the fact that in case 3 the Swedish Social Democrats changed problem definition faster than they changed causal be-liefs in case 4 and in case 3 the change took place when they were in gov-ernment. In case 4 the process whereby the Social Democrats changed causal beliefs lasted significantly longer and they only changed causal be-liefs after entering opposition. That a change in problem definition occurs faster than a change in causal beliefs is also to some degree supported by case 5.

Further, comparing the cases of de-legitimization and that of legitimiza-tion it is evident that legitimization (case 1-2) prompted a far faster change in causal beliefs than de-legitimization (case 3-6) did. The potential causes were discussed briefly in Chapter 2 namely that changing beliefs in the wake of de-legitimization in contrast to legitimization is more exposing. De-legitimization publicly blames the opponent for its faulty beliefs and chang-ing these beliefs could threat the party's credibility. In contrast to legitimiza-tion the change in causal beliefs is framed as a natural continuation of the party's existing beliefs or values. Further, elongating the de-legitimization process is that it involves a change of actors within the party object to de-legitimization. In contrast in response to legitimization it was just the existing actors who changed beliefs.

Further, the time span between the two cases of de-legitimization of causal beliefs also differed (case 4 and 6). While the outcome of the two cases of de-legitimization of causal beliefs was similar: the Social Democrats changed causal beliefs and ended up supporting assessment legislation they had fiercely opposed, the rate at which this occurred varied markedly. In case 4 the process lasted several years; in case 6 the change in causal be-

liefs was far swifter. The reason is probably a factor already discussed; policy failure. In case 4 the change in causal beliefs only emerged when policy failure became a 'fact' whereas de-legitimization in case 6 was initiated after failure had been established.

Based on the above, three tentative hypotheses can be proposed for future research: First, the process whereby legitimization changes opposing parties' casual beliefs will be faster than the process whereby de-legitimization changes opposing parties' casual beliefs. Second, the process whereby de-legitimization changes opposing parties' problem definition will be faster than the process whereby de-legitimization changes opposing parties' casual beliefs. Third, the event of a policy failure speeds up the process whereby de-legitimization prompts opponent parties to change causal beliefs.

10.7 Assessing the theoretical framework

To conclude, the results' correspondence with the theoretical framework will be briefly assessed. By and large, there was support in all the cases for the theoretical framework as operationalized by the observable implications (see Chapter 5 and Appendix 5 for an elaborate discussion of observable implications). The only aspect of the model that was not unequivocally confirmed related to place in parliament. Case 6 disconfirmed the anticipated connection. In contrast to the derived observable implications de-legitimization was performed by the government, and the recipient – which changed causal beliefs – was the opposition. Still, as argued in Chapter 5, the observable implications regarding place in parliament (DL4, R-DL4) are low on certainty and uniqueness. Thus, these implications do not directly relate to the verification or falsification of ideas' influence but could add interesting knowledge about the political circumstances in which persuasion takes place.

However, to throw a critical glance at the theoretical framework a couple of points can be brought up about the limited number of legitimization attempts and the varying length of persuasion processes. First, the cases analyzed only feature two attempts of legitimization; both performed by the same parties and in the same period. Hence, it would have been desirable to have had more cases of legitimization to assess the theoretical framework and contribute to our understanding of the working of this mechanism.

Second, the varying time span between the performance of de-legitimization and legitimization poses a challenge. Legitimization prompts change in casual beliefs quite swiftly and it can be difficult to separate the phases of the process distinctly from each other. Hence a process taking place over a certain time span could be beneficial. However, the lengthy process where-

by de-legitimization resulted in policy change in case 4 is not unproblematic. The elongated process increases the risk that some unknown intermediate variable has confounded the expected connection. In addition, related to the issue about length of processes are the expectations about whether idea change takes place among existing actors or with the entrance of new actors with new beliefs. However, it is hard to judge the causality of the change in actors in the party. Did parties reshuffle actors after de-legitimization of their causal belief to make the change more credible or alternatively because the factions with the more legitimate beliefs attained more powerful positions making the process lengthy? Or was it that de-legitimization took place over a longer period than legitimization – for some random reason or another – making it natural that the positions at some time were reshuffled within the party?

Overall though, the theoretical framework is assessed to have been confirmed. However, in the next chapter I will discuss how future research could provide more opportunities to test the framework and hence strengthen the confidence in the predictions. Below, I will discuss the evidence in relation to ideas influence on the assessment policy changes as well as the most likely rival explanations and argue why a change in ideas appears to be the most adequate explanation.

10.8 Why did assessment policy change?

In general it is claimed that the analyses strengthened the confidence in that the changes in assessment policies were associated with new causal beliefs about specific assessment tools. However, because of the case study design and the lack of variation in policy change, I cannot make any final conclusions regarding ideas role in policy change. Still by making an argument about how other plausible causes cannot account for the changes I can make a case for why it is hard to imagine the changes without taking account of ideas. A majority of the school assessment changes seemed to be a result of parties adopting new causal beliefs where specific policies were seen as furthering a) assessment as a pedagogical tool or b) assessment as quality control of schools. To exemplify, it is hard to imagine national test being adopted in Sweden in the early 1990s hadn't the government created a new causal belief about national tests securing an equal quality of education in a decentralized school system. Further, the Danish social democrats would probably not have supported national tests hadn't the government created a causal belief where national tests were a mean to support the learning of the weakest pupils.

In general, to render it likely that ideas influenced policy, two arguments are required (Parsons, 2007: 109): First the proximate causal role of pre-existing ideational elements must be demonstrated. In this relation it must be rendered probable that the ideational elements do not just reduce to other immediate conditions. The second step is to show how ideas have their own distinct dynamic that is autonomous from overarching objective conditions. This implies that to make sure that the ideational explanation best explains the outcome, alternative explanations must be controlled for. In this way the analysis is bolstered against the claim of spuriosity; that the seeming influence of ideas is related to the lacking exclusion of alternative factors. Below, the rival explanations to the ideational one proposed in the dissertation will be discussed. An ideational explanation's polar opposite is structural explanations. Structural explanations picture people reacting in regular, direct ways to their material surroundings. Such logic explains variation in action by showing that people are positioned differently in the material landscape or over time, by pointing to exogenous changes in the material landscape which hence orient people towards new actions (Parsons, 2007: 51). The politics matters approach and most variants of rational institutionalism are examples of structural explanations. These explanations including the observable implications formulated in Chapter 5 about partisanships potential cause of the changes (PC1) and tactical position change (PP2) will be addressed below.

10.8.1 Politics matters: ideological policies

Politics matters argues that the content of policy will reflect a party's ideology, which is a function of its constituents' group interests (Tufte, 1978; Hibbs, 1987, 1992). The premise is that parties are representatives of class of society's interests and hence pursue policies in their constituents' interests (Schmidt, 1996). The expectation is that socialist governments will intervene more extensively to modify market outcomes and redistribute wealth, whereas conservative governments will develop less interventionist policies and rely on market mechanisms to maximize economic growth and protect individual liberties (Boix, 1998: 4). Critical here is the left-right dimension which in its simplest form is seen as a one-dimensional space of competition based on more and less government intervention in the economy (Downs, 1957: 100-130). This approach claims that ideas do not as such change and will be expected to be more or less stable. In contrast, the causal mechanism producing change in policy is partisan incumbency of government. In this framework parties are motivated by ideology, which is understood in materi-

al terms. However, the theory of politics matters has large problems identifying how abstract ideological principles should convert into specific policy expectations. The expectations in the literature are often very crude like: '(T)he Right spends less, the social democrats are more generous' (Castles, 1982: 71).

How could a politics matters explanation falsify the ideational claims made here? First of all, if a policy change is ideological in more or less objectively benefiting a party's constituency then ideas probably are not the cause of policy change. Second, if a policy change coincides with a change in office and the policy is adopted by an ideologically narrow coalition, the credibility of ideational explanations is impaired. Specifically, proponents of politics matters could argue that the change in assessment ideas is irrelevant to understand the assessment policy changes in Denmark and Sweden. Instead they could argue that the majority of the changes have been adopted by right wing governments hence supporting a partisan interpretation of policy changes.

10.8.2 Why politics is not only ideological

Still, as has been argued, the explanations in politics matters fail to provide an answer for a number of reasons. First of all, the changes were not a result of a mere shift of partisan incumbency of government. In a multiparty context like the Swedish and Danish where minority governments are the rule, the assessment changes have only been possible because of the Social Democrats' unforeseen u-turn in both countries. Although a lot of the changes were adopted under right wing governments, the changes were supported by the social democratic parties. In both countries consensus is highly valued (Lindbom, 2011: 95-96,; Steinmo, 1989; Klemmensen, 2005; Christiansen, 2008) and school policy is characterized by broad political settlements (Lindbom, 1995: 86; Aasen, 2003: 114). For example, in the period 2001 to 2011 the Danish right wing minority government had the possibility to enact school policies as it saw it fit since it was backed by a loyal parliamentary support party, the Danish People's Party. Nonetheless the government made a great effort to get the Social Democrats on board in school settlements. In Sweden, the center-right government had majority in its first period of reign (2006-2010). In contrast to Denmark this was reflected in a more reluctant attitude towards negotiating and compromising with the Social Democrats. This attitude changed after the government lost its majority in an election in 2010. The above relates somewhat to the field of application for the theory. One could perhaps argue that the framework will be more appli-

cable to analyzing the political game under minority governments. However, generally seen the cases illustrate that the Swedish and Danish governments needed the participation of broad ideological coalitions to assemble a parliamentary majority and because broad settlements were seen as normatively desirable. Further, the fact that the policy changes were adopted by broad ideological majorities significantly weakens Politics Matters as a theoretical explanation of the assessment changes.

Second, it is impossible to understand the exact content of the changes without referring to new assessment ideas. While the support for grades and tests is not new among a lot of right wing parties, a number of the policies they have proposed are indeed new such as national tests, external evaluation agencies. For example until recently, the Danish Liberal Party dismissed measures like national tests as they saw them as too interfering in local school matters. Further, office has fluctuated between the left and right wing and has provided the right wing several opportunities to adopt assessment changes if that was what it wanted. Still, the changes only occurred when the right wing adopted new causal beliefs about assessment.

Finally, as already argued, the theory of politics matters has large problems identifying how abstract ideological principles should convert into specific policy expectations. The premise of politics matters is that ideology should channel the party to respond. However, not all policy questions can be answered by parties by glancing at their ideology. Thus, what is a social democratic assessment policy? It is clear that the Social Democrats have traditionally been very skeptical of assessment in the form of grades and examinations. However, are these assessment-skeptical causal beliefs a result of the Social Democrats' more or less objective interest? I doubt that this is the case. Just as one could argue that the grade-free school is in the working class children's interest one could argue exactly the opposite. This is evident in the history of the social democratic parties where competing educational beliefs held that grades were beneficial for working class children while others held that they were damaging. There are plenty of arguments against grades being detrimental to the interests of the working class. In a school were pupils gain attention and reward through their verbal and rhetorical skills the middle class and well educated parents and children win. In a school where it pays to perform and receive proof of this through tests and grades even working class children can assert themselves. Some have also argued that the almost grade free school could have caused the equalization of recruitment to further education to stagnate since the 1960s (Larsson, 2001: 161; Frykman, 1998: 39). This supports the arguments that the causal beliefs do not represent a material interest but are truly interpretative filters.

10.8.3 Rational institutionalism: were parties vote-seeking?

Perhaps a bit surprisingly, rational institutionalists have also been engaged in the discussion about ideas (see the edited book *Ideas & Foreign Policy* (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993)). However, here the basic notion of ideas is instrumental: 'There is nothing intrinsic in ideas themselves which give them their power, but their utility in helping actors achieve their desired ends' (Garret & Weingast, 1993: 178). In this way ideas are either signaling devices designed to increase information flows, or they are synonymous with institutions (Blyth, 1997: 243). Hence, if ideas change the cause is an underlying change in the actors' environment not ideational mechanisms. The motivation of actors or parties according to rational institutionalism is based on the rational actor model, which has the following assumptions about actors (Dunleavy, 1991: 3): People have well-formed preferences and their preference orderings are transitive or logically consistent. Further, people are maximizers who seek the biggest possible benefits and the lowest costs in their decisions and they are basically egoistic, self-regarding and instrumental in their behavior, choosing how to act on the basis of the consequences for their personal welfare. Relating this vision of parties with the general party motivation model one would expect that parties definitely are more office or vote seeking than policy seeking.

How could rational explanations falsify the ideational claims made here? If the change in assessment causal beliefs or policy positions was prompted by a change in public opinion, which suddenly becomes favorable to a policy, the confidence in ideas as explanation is seriously weakened. Rather, it would appear that vote-seeking behavior by parties explains a change in ideas and policy. Another rational explanation could be that the apparent change in ideas and the subsequent change in policy are a result of pressure from a governing partner with different interests. Hence, the change is caused by a party's office-seeking behavior attempting to keep the coalition together to not lose the benefits of office.

While evidence in some cases proved hard to find on specific policy solutions in most of the cases there were no clear incentives for whether the Social Democrats should support or oppose specific assessment changes. However, in one case (case 4) where the incentive to support earlier grades was quite clear the Social Democrats were still extremely divided on the issue and a large group fought to prevent the change. The empirical findings – or perhaps lack hereof – illustrate the biggest objection against this model; that actors do not always know how to maximize their interests. Hence, the problem with this model is that it requires that actors are perfectly informed

and that actors' preferences are fixed exogenously and are not affected by political decision processes (Dunleavy, 1991: 4). However, parties do not always know what will ensure their incumbency and they can indeed be influenced to see their preferences differently in the political process.

10.8.4 Intra party conflicts: emphasizing ideas' centrality

The aspect about party divisions is central to the ideational argument posed in this dissertation. Parsons argues that: '(...) where organizations or groups are strongly divided – and if those divisions do not trace to some demonstrable pattern of different incentives and constraints within the group – we know objective signals at the level of the group are not dictating clear strategies' (Parsons, 2011: 130). Hence, finding evidence of party divisions on policy issues can strongly indicate that ideas matter more than interest in the specific case.

In general, what was clear in all cases was how divided the Social Democratic parties in Denmark and Sweden were on assessment. There was no clear plan of action regarding how to issue assessment policies catering their ideologically defined constituents. This seriously impairs Politics Matter as an explanation as this framework would expect the ideology to inform causal beliefs which should be homogenous within parties. Likewise, rational approaches would expect material incentives to channel party members to react uniformly and hence express similar causal beliefs. Further, impairing Politics Matter is the fact that parties were extremely divided regarding how to best specify their interest. In many cases the incentives facing parties were ambiguous and even in more clear-cut cases the parties argued internally about the path to take.

However, in one aspect it could be argued that the party divisions could be related to more or less material incentives. In the Swedish case (case 3-4) it was clear that there was a big division between the party leadership and the file-and-ranks. The party literature argues that there can be important differences in parliamentary members' and the rank and file's perceived interests. The common perception is that MPs are more prone to accept political compromise and coalition formation than party members outside of parliament, who are more preoccupied with ideology and less likely to accept political compromises with other political parties (Duverger, 1964[1951]: 134; Laver & Schofield, 1990: 24; Strøm, 1990: 577-579; Katz & Mair, 1992: 4-5). Pedersen (2010: 33-34) summarizes the suggested reasons for these differences. First of all, only MPs typically get a share of the benefits of office in the form of prestige, salary etc. (Strøm, 1990: 577). Secondly, MPs may become

estranged from their support base and come to share preferences with the political elite to which they now belong (Michels, 1966[1911]: 108-109). Finally, they are socialized into the parliament culture where compromise and negotiation are acknowledged and appreciated as necessary (Katz, 2001). The first reason is purely material whereas the latter two relate more to ideational or normative reasons for different beliefs. Overall, one could formulate a hypothesis that the parties' members of parliament and especially the party leadership will be more inclined to react to ideational legitimization or de-legitimization by changing their beliefs than the rank and file.

Overall, the rival explanations cannot explain why assessment policies changed in Denmark or Sweden. I will, however, concede that there is a partisan aspect to the policy changes in that a significant amount of changes were adopted under right wing governments. In absence of the right wing's de-legitimization or legitimization the Social Democrats would probably not have pursued a new assessment policy. Still, the change of ideas was a result of ideational persuasion and cannot be explained by ideology. Further, the fact that the left wing today shares assessment beliefs with the right wing and pursues the same assessment policies – or states that it will if it regains office like in Sweden – significantly reduces politics matters' applicability as an explanation in the current case.

10.9 Conclusion

The dissertation's analytical quest was launched when the following research question was posed: *How did ideas about assessment in Denmark and Sweden change?* Thus, the collected evidence has been used to decide how ideas about school assessment changed in Denmark and Sweden. A theoretical framework was developed which emphasized that parties by employing mechanisms of de-legitimization and legitimization could persuade other parties to change beliefs. Hence, it has been argued that a lot of the change in assessment ideas was prompted by actors' performance of ideational persuasion. In addition the theoretical framework was elaborated by specifying which actors would perform ideational persuasion and how actors exposed to persuasion would react. These expectations were to a large degree confirmed too.

The conclusions about the mechanisms whereby new assessment beliefs in the Danish and Swedish cases took place cannot readily be generalized to other cases involving school assessment idea changes. This is related to the method applied: process tracing. According to Beach & Pedersen (2010: 6), the method cannot stand alone and to generalize the findings of a single

case study to the broader population of a given phenomenon, comparative and statistical methods that build upon correlation-based logics must be employed. Hence, it is not intended to generalize the specific findings to other countries. The purpose is merely descriptive inference in answering how ideas about school assessment have changed in Denmark and Sweden. However, in the subsequent chapter I will discuss the potential causal inference of the theoretical framework.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

This chapter has two purposes. The primary purpose is to present the contributions of the dissertation. Overall, the dissertation has mainly contributed to the theoretical literature on ideas. However, it will be argued that another important contribution to the idea literature is empirical and methodological. In addition, a secondary goal has been to contribute to the emerging literature on education policy. The second purpose of the chapter is to briefly assess the applicability of the theoretical framework to other cases. In this connection, future research directions will be indicated.

11.1 Contribution to the theoretical idea literature

A major contribution of this dissertation has been to advance the theories about how ideas change and policy change is rendered possible. One of the weak points of the literature has been to move beyond the simple ascertainment that ideas matter to more precise theorizing about how they matter (Berman, 1998; Campbell, 2002, 2008). The dissertation has argued that to gain a better understanding of the causal relation between ideas and policy change, we need to look into how ideas change and subsequently influence policy.

I have built on the concept of persuasion as an alternative understanding of how idea and policy change can be induced. While persuasion as a concept has been taken under treatment by proponents of discursive institutionalism (Béland 2009; Blyth 2007; Mandelkern & Shalev, 2010; Schmidt 2009) the specific mechanisms inducing change have been underdeveloped and a united framework incorporating different forms of persuasion has until now been missing. Hence, I introduced two distinct mechanisms of persuasion, de-legitimization and legitimization, that can be used by parties to persuade other parties to change ideas and hence facilitate policy change. De-legitimization is one of the processes whereby political parties can persuade other parties to change causal beliefs or problem definitions and involves undermining the legitimacy of existing causal beliefs or problem definitions. Further legitimization invokes existing ideas or values in a positive way and is also essential in persuading actors to change their causal beliefs or problem definitions. The concept of de-legitimization is the most developed of the two mechanisms as its influence has been noted most prominently by Blyth

(2002). I developed the mechanism of legitimization as an analytical concept by utilizing insights from the framing and social movement literature. Others have indicated that the concept of persuasion involves more dimensions. However they wrongly confuse de-legitimization and legitimization and see them as interrelated phenomena (Stiller 2009; 2010). Hence, presenting – and testing – the two mechanisms of persuasion, de-legitimization and legitimization, has been this dissertations main theoretical contribution.

Further, I have argued that the idea literature in some aspects has been plagued by a de-politicized view of policy change, often focusing on instrumental problem solving and on actors like bureaucrats and experts (Hall, 1989, 1993; Heclo, 1974; Sabatier, 1993). In contrast this dissertation has focused on political parties and developed an understanding of their role in imparting new ideas. Parties have been argued to be the key arbiters in making a break with the past; they ultimately decide who they take advice from and are the ones who vote policy changes through parliament. Further via the focus on parties the conditions whereby persuasion takes place has been theorized. I will not reiterate the full arguments but merely summarize that it has been hypothesized that de-legitimization primarily would be initiated by opposition parties and legitimization by the government. Further, it was argued that the two mechanisms would prompt different within party reactions within the party exposed to the mechanisms. It was expected that de-legitimization will result in change in ideas via a change in actors with different beliefs rather than by existing actors changing beliefs. In contrast, legitimization was hypothesized to result in a change of ideas among the existing actors in the opponent party. The above theorization has rooted the framework in an institutional setting[29]. Overall the framework has developed a theory about which actors will seek to persuade other actors to change ideas, how they will do it and under what conditions it is likely to result in new ideas and how.

In a final comment to the dissertation's theoretical contribution, I will return to a theme embarked on in Chapter 2 where I quoted Hall, who urged us to note that: 'it is not necessary to deny that politics involves a struggle for power and advantage in order to recognize that the movement of ideas plays a role, with some impact of its own, in the process of policymaking' (Hall, 1993: 292). With the current framework I claim to have acknowledged this point. The certain way to make ideational explanations redundant is to argue that ideas only apply when it can be proved that actors were driven

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[29] Other examples which theorize ideas and institutions include Schmidt (2002, 2002, 2008) who makes an argument about discourse and political systems.

solely by a logic of appropriateness not considering their perceived interests. The consequence of this reasoning is that ideas become a type of explanation invoked to explain the residual other explanations cannot account for. Rather it is argued that the idea literature should maintain that ideas constitute equal competitive explanations, which have a value in the many situations where one can show that the actors' structural or institutional environment was not channeling unambiguous incentives regarding how to best specify his or her interests in a given situation. Further, as shown in this dissertation, the performance of persuasion can by itself serve to blur the incentives. The dissertation has thus shown one way to recognize both interests as well as ideas while allowing ideas to take center stage

11.2 Empirical and methodological contribution

Above the theoretical contribution of the dissertation has been emphasized but another perhaps equally important contribution has been the development of the theory into a testable framework which has been applied in empirical tests of when persuasion transforms ideas and induces policy change. One could say that this is a negligible contribution. However, a frequent claim is that ideational claims do not constitute explanations (Parsons, 2007: 105). Hence, by developing a framework which allows for testing ideational claims against competing explanations the robustness of the theoretical claims are markedly strengthened.

An aspect which at the outset is theoretical also has significance for the empirical analyses. The theoretical framework centered on how ideas change and subsequently influence policy instead of merely focusing on how ideas influence policy. Ideational analyses are sometimes accused of approximating tautology as describing ideas is often difficult without referring to the actions they might explain (Parsons, 2007: 116). By focusing on the causes of idea change I was able to take a step back in the causal chain increasing the distance from the actual behavior that I sought to explain – policy change. Further, an often invoked criticism of ideas is that they are merely epiphenomenal of interests. Some argue that ideas are only the result of interests and have no independent impact on political behavior (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994: 191). Focusing on how ideas change allowed me empirically to analyze if the change in ideas coincided with material changes in actors' environment leading their preferences to change for other reasons than ideational ones.

A further step which has advanced the testing of the framework is the derivation of observable implications of the theory. Hence, observable impli-

cations were derived for each phase of the analytical model to allow me to systematically investigate whether new causal beliefs about assessment resulted in change in assessment policies due to either the mechanism of delegitimization or legitimization. In addition to further fortifying the validity of the study the strength of the theoretical predictions was determined by distinguishing between certain and unique predictions (Van Evera, 1997). This act has significantly advanced the robustness of the dissertation's explanations as it allows the claims to be more transparently tested against competing explanations.

Finally, the empirical studies in the dissertation stand out from most other studies of ideas as they are empirically based on multiple cases instead of the normal single or comparative case study (Bhatia & Coleman, 2003; Blyth, 2002, 2003; Carstensen, 2011; Cox, 1998; Hall, 1993; Mandelkern & Shalev, 2010). Testing the framework in multiple cases allows for more opportunities to verify or falsify the expectations. Further, it becomes clearer which aspects of the model need more testing to be able to make causal inferences about the overall model.

11.3 Contribution to education literature

Even though the primary theoretical contribution has been to the idea literature, a secondary contribution of this dissertation has been to the education literature. According to Busemeyer and Trampusch (2011: 413), the study of education has long been a neglected subject in political science and comparative public policy research. Recently the scholarly interest has been increasing. Comparative public policy is 'The study of how, why, and to what effect different governments pursue particular courses of action or inaction' (Heidenheimer et al., 1990: 3). In regard to education this means attempts to explain which political, institutional or socio-economic factors determine the educational policy output rather than explain the effects of education policy on social or economic outcomes (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2011: 415). However, a lot of educational work has tended to focus on the latter. There has also been an increasing number of quantitative studies about education policy (Castles 1982; Boix 1997, 1998, Busemeyer 2007), but they focus almost exclusively on educational spending. As important as these studies might be, education policy certainly is about more than expenditure levels. Hence, analyses of change in policy content are needed too. Quite few studies compare education policy output from a more qualitative perspective (Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011: 418), but qualitative research tends to focus on describing rather than explaining the differences between education

systems. This includes research belonging to traditions of comparative education science and sociology.

Although school assessment has recently become a rather 'hot' topic, public policy analyses of assessment policy change are largely missing. A large part of the existing literature in this field deals with the professional and didactic aspects of the assessment instruments (Allerup, Jansen & Weng, 2011, Lundahl 2011, 2009, 2006; Lundahl & Folke-Fichtelius 2010; Lysne, 2006; Mølgaard, 2006; Petersen & Thrane 2011). Other scholars analyze school policy changes more descriptively or normatively (Andersen et al, 2009; Dahler-Larsen, 2006; Larsson 2001; Ljunghill & Svensson, 2006; Nordenbo, 2011; Roman 2008; Thejsen, 2006; Telhaug et al, 2006; Windinge, 2006; Aasen, 2003). A notable exception to the didactic or descriptive analyses of assessment changes is Mehta's (2006) analysis of the rise of accountability policies in American educational policy. Further, there are public policy analyses of other types of school reforms than assessment policy. Klitgaard (2009) has investigated the conditions for school reforms integrating an agenda setting approach with institutional theory, and he has analyzed the politics of introducing vouchers in the US and Sweden (Klitgaard, 2010). Lindbom (1995) has analyzed the differential parental influence in Swedish and Danish compulsory schools based on the countries' institutional legacies. Wiborg (2009) has sought to explain the uneven development of comprehensive schooling in Scandinavia, Germany and England stressing ideological factors. Still, analyses of the change in assessment policy – especially in a Nordic context – are in short supply. Thus, by providing a systematic qualitative analysis of the assessment ideas argued to be connected to the assessment reforms this dissertation has contributed to a neglected field in the education literature.

11.4 Applicability of the argument – a question about causal inference

This book has contributed to the literature on ideas by developing and testing a framework about parties as ideational actors and the mechanisms whereby they seek to persuade opposing parties to change beliefs. Overall, I have emphasized two mechanisms whereby parties can persuade opposing parties to change beliefs: One is de-legitimization, which involves undermining the legitimacy of the parties existing ideas; the other is ideational legitimization. An implicit assumption of the framework of persuasion is the exis-

tence of obstacles to policy change. The purpose of persuasion is ultimately to eliminate this obstacle and induce policy change.

So to what degree can the theoretical argument be applied in other cases? In Chapter 10 it was acknowledged that the dissertation's conclusions about the process whereby new assessment beliefs surfaced in the Danish and Swedish cases cannot readily be generalized to other cases involving assessment idea changes. Still, the dissertation's ambition is – besides the descriptive inference – to draw some sort of causal inference about the mechanisms whereby parties can transform others parties' ideas and hence induce policy change. Fortunately one of the strengths of process tracing is that it provides a strong basis for causal inference if it can establish an uninterrupted causal path linking the putative causes to the observed effects (George & Bennett, 2005: 222).

However, the framework rests on an implicit premise about parties needing the participation of other parties to enact policy – either to have a majority or because broad settlements are normatively seen as desirable. Hence, one could argue that the Danish and Swedish cases are most likely cases for the influence of persuasion because the political system renders it quite possible that persuasion will be initiated to convince potential settlement parties. This would imply that the causal inference about the causal mechanisms of ideas is conditioned to similar cases of Denmark and Sweden, i.e. cases of similar settings of multiparty systems, minority governments and/or traditions for consensual policy making.

Still, I would argue that this is not necessarily the case. There are plenty of reasons to believe that persuasion could take place in different institutional and political settings. Even if a government has a majority to conduct its policies singlehandedly it might want other parties to participate in policymaking for other reasons such as e.g. blame sharing. Vivien A. Schmidt has discussed different types of discourse intended for persuasion, which are applicable in different institutional settings. Schmidt developed a typology distinguishing between coordinative discourse and communicative discourse. Coordinative discourse is directed towards the individuals and groups at the center of policy construction who form the bases for collective action. Communicative discourse is used in the mass process of public persuasion in the political sphere (Schmidt, 2002: 230-239). Further, she proposes that in single actor systems, where power is concentrated in the executive, governments which have the capacity to impose reform seek acceptance from the public through a communicative discourse. In multi-actor systems, where power and representation is more dispersed, the discourse is more coordinative to achieve consensus among affected interests (Schmidt 2002: 172). However, I

argue that even in single actor systems persuasion can be performed to convince the opposition party to partake in policy making either to share blame or avoid future abortion of the government's policies. The government could seek to persuade the opposition either directly or through the media and electorate. In addition, in single actor systems persuasion can also be performed to win the electorate's approval of hitherto unpopular policies to soften electoral repercussion.

Another important issue concerns types of states; i.e. whether persuasion is performed in unitary or federal states. In the current framework it is ceteris paribus assumed that policy makers are indeed able to undertake reform. However, as argued by Klitgaard (2009: 222) central governments in unitary states are normally able to decide what has to be done and then implement their preferred policy (Pierson, 1995: 451). In contrast, federal systems are more constrained in pursuing policy reform as authorities on all levels seek to control policy (Immergut, 1992; Bonoli, 2001). While the present framework is developed to understand how parties can perform persuasion and make partisan veto players change their policy position, one could just as easily imagine persuasion directed towards institutional veto players to overcome deadlock (see e.g. Bhatia & Coleman, 2003; Stiller, 2010 for persuasion in federal systems). It is no inherent truth that persuasion should only apply for partisan veto players; persuasion may be a tool to overcome institutional as well as partisan obstacles.

Concluding, the theoretical framework should in principle be applicable to investigations of why ideas changed and led to policy changes in different political systems. However, more work is still needed to test the framework in more diverse settings.

11.5 Future research implications

The dissertation's research question was driven by a real world puzzle. I wanted to understand why two assessment skeptical countries like Denmark and Sweden suddenly changed their assessment beliefs and policies. The cases were therefore not selected specifically to test the ideational framework developed here. Future research projects selecting cases intentionally to test the claims about ideas in the literature could thus advance the state of the literature significantly.

In continuation of the previous discussion such a project could with advantage focus on ideational persuasion in different institutional and political settings. The analyses in this dissertation have concentrated on policy change in similar political systems to be able to hold a number of variables

constant and to investigate the processes whereby ideas and policy are changed. However, future research might consider investigating the influence of ideas in different political and institutional settings like two party systems and/or federal states.

Another interesting line of research concerns the relationship between ideas and political parties, for example analyzing the inclination to change causal beliefs by studying the relationship between party leadership or MPs and the rank and file. As mentioned these actors may differ in terms of openness to new ideas. In addition to the reasons offered in Chapter 10, the leadership and parliamentarians are the ones facing punishment if they fail to address the problems deemed important by the electorate. Hence the urgency to find new solutions and hence be open to new causal beliefs is more acute. This project could investigate whether the different party members' propensity to change causal beliefs varies and why. Thus, if the party leadership or MPs change causal beliefs more frequently is this related to material rewards connected to office or to parliamentary norms of cooperation and consensus? Another issue is parties' propensity to change causal beliefs in government versus in opposition. As stated in Chapter 10 there appeared to be a pattern that parties were less inclined to change causal beliefs in government than in opposition.

Finally, another interesting line of research could analyze the relationship between different forms of persuasion. The empirical analyses were dominated by cases of de-legitimization, so a study including more cases of legitimization could contribute significantly to our understanding of the workings of this mechanism. As legitimization prompts change in casual beliefs quite swiftly it is desirable to have data that allows one to distinguish the phases of the process. Hence a process taking place over a longer time span could be beneficial. Investigating more recent processes might also yield more detailed insight into the decision-making process. An alternative could be a decision making process of a certain maturity and where archival material has been made public. Further, juxtaposing the effects of de-legitimization and legitimization would be interesting. Are there differences in the magnitude of change in causal beliefs and policies based on the performance of the two different mechanisms of persuasion? This dissertation has suggested that the two mechanisms of persuasion should be considered to have equal potential influence on ideas and policy, and future more hypothetic-deductive research could elaborate this insight. Further, in two of the analyzed cases de-legitimization of causal beliefs and large assessment changes were preceded by de-legitimization of the problem definition. This ignites the question whether major changes only can occur after trans-

forming policy sectors overarching problem definitions. Hence, while the dissetation has provided valuable answers to many theoretical questions about ideas and policy change, still a number of intriguing questions are open for answers providing fruitful future research projects.

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Selected results of international investigations of school performance

Table A1.1: IEA 1990-1991: Reading literacy

| | 9 year olds (form 3) | 14 year olds (form 8) |
	Mean (rank)	Mean (rank)
Finland	569 (1)	560 (1)
USA	547 (2)	535 (6)
Sweden	539 (3)	546 (3)
France	531 (4)	549 (2)
Italy	529 (5)	515 (14)
New Zealand	528 (6)	545 (4)
Norway	524 (7)	516 (13)
Iceland	518 (8)	536 (5)
Hong Kong	517 (9)	535 (6)
Singapore	515 (10)	534 (7)
Switzerland	511 (11)	536 (5)
Ireland	509 (12)	511 (16)
Belgium/Fr	507 (13)	481 (20)
Greece	504 (14)	509 (17)
Spain	504 (14)	490 (19)
Germany/W	503 (15)	522 (12)
Canada/BC	500 (16)	522 (12)
Germany/E	499 (17)	526 (9)
Hungary	499 (17)	536 (5)
Slovenia	498 (18)	532 (8)
Netherlands	485 (19)	514 (15)
Cyprus	481 (20)	497 (18)
Portugal	478 (21)	523 (11)
Denmark	475 (22)	525 (10)
Trinidad/Tobago	451 (23)	479 (21)
Indonesia	394 (24)	-
Venezuela	383 (25)	417 (24)

Source: Elley (1992): How in the World do Students Read? IEA study of Reading Literacy. Displaying results from 26 of 32 countries.

Table A1.2: PISA 2000: 15 year olds reading, mathematical and scientific literacy

	Reading literacy Mean (rank)	Mathematical literacy Mean (rank)	Scientific literacy Mean (rank)
Finland	546 (1)	536 (4)	538 (3)
Canada	534 (2)	533 (5)	529 (5)
New Zealand	529 (3)	537 (3)	528 (6)
Australia	528 (4)	533 (5)	528 (7)
Ireland	527 (5)	503 (13)	513 (9)
Korea	525 (6)	547 (2)	552 (1)
United Kingdom	523 (7)	529 (7)	532 (4)
Japan	522 (8)	557 (1)	550 (2)
Sweden	516 (9)	510 (12)	512 (10)
Austria	507 (10)	515 (10)	519 (8)
Belgium	507 (10)	520 (8)	496 (14)
Iceland	507 (10)	514 (11)	496 (14)
Norway	505 (11)	499 (14)	500 (12)
France	505 (11)	517 (9)	500 (12)
United States	504 (12)	493 (16)	499 (13)
Denmark	497 (13)	514 (11)	481(18)
Switzerland	494 (14)	529 (6)	496 (14)
Spain	493 (15)	476 (19)	491 (15)
Czech Republic	492 (16)	498 (15)	511 (11)
Italy	487 (17)	457 (22)	478 (19)
Germany	484 (18)	490 (17)	487 (16)
Liechtenstein	483 (19)	514 (11)	476 (20)
Hungary	480 (20)	488 (18)	496 (14)

Source: OECD (2001): *Knowledge and Skills for Life*. First results from PISA 2000. Displaying results for 22 of 32 participating countries.

Table A1.3: PISA 2003: 15 year olds performance in math, reading and science

	Mathematics scale Mean (rank)	Reading scale Mean (rank)	Science scale Mean (rank)
Hong Kong-China	550 (1)	510 (9)	539 (2)
Finland	544 (2)	543 (1)	548 (1)
Korea	542 (3)	534 (2)	538 (3)
Netherlands	538 (4)	513 (8)	524 (5)
Liechtenstein	536 (5)	525 (4)	525 (4)
Japan	534 (6)	498 (13)	548 (1)
Canada	532 (7)	528 (3)	519 (8)
Belgium	529 (8)	507 (10)	509 (11)
Macao-China	527 (9)	498 (13)	525 (4)
Switzerland	527 (9)	499 (12)	513 (9)
Australia	524 (10)	525 (4)	525 (4)
New Zealand	523 (11)	522 (5)	521 (7)
Czech Republic	516 (12)	489 (19)	523 (6)
Iceland	515 (13)	492 (17)	495 (17)
Denmark	514 (14)	492 (17)	475 (25)
France	511 (15)	496 (15)	511 (10)
Sweden	509 (16)	514 (7)	506 (12)
Austria	506 (17)	491 (18)	491 (18)
Germany	503 (18)	491 (18)	502 (15)
Ireland	503 (18)	515 (6)	505 (13)
Slovak Republic	498 (19)	469 (26)	495 (17)
Norway	495 (20)	500 (11)	484 (22)
Luxembourg	493 (21)	479 (22)	483 (23)
Poland	490 (22)	497 (14)	498 (16)
Hungary	490 (22)	482 (20)	503 (14)
Spain	485 (23)	481 (21)	487 (20)
Latvia	483 (24)	491 (18)	489 (19)
United States	483 (24)	495 (16)	491 (18)

Source: OECD (2004): Learning for Tomorrow's World. First results from PISA 2003. Displaying results for 28 of 49 participating countries

Appendix 2:
Appendix to Chapter 5

Government and ministers of education in Sweden 1950-2011

Table A2.1: Overview of reigning Swedish governments and ministers of education 1950-2011

Government	Parties	Period	Name*	Minister's inauguration **
(Fredrik) Reinfeldt	M,C FP, KD	6 Oct 2006-	Jan Björklund (FP)	2007-
			Lars Leijonborg (FP)	2006-2007
			Jan Björklund (FP) (Minister of schools)	2006-2007
(Göran) Persson	SAP	22 Mar 1996-	Leif Pagrotsky (SAP)	2004-2006
			Thomas Östros (SAP)	1998-2004
			Carl Tham (SAP)	1994-1998
			Ibrahim Baylan (SAP) (Minister of schools)	2004-2006
			Lena Hallengren (SAP) (Minister of preschool and youth)	2002-2006
			Ingegerd Wärnersson (SAP) (Minister of schools)	1998-2002
			Ylva Johansson (SAP) (Minister of schools)	1994-1998
(Ingvar) Carlsson III	SAP	7 Oct 1994-	Carl Tham (SAP)	1994-1998
			Ylva Johansson (SAP) (Minister of schools)	1994-1998
(Carl) Bildt	M, FP, C, KD	4 Oct 1991-	Per Unckel (M)	1991-1994
			Beatric Ask (M) (Minister of schools)	1991-1994
(Ingvar) Carlsson II	SAP	27 Feb 1990-	Bengt Göransson (SAP)	1989-1991
			Göran Persson (SAP) (Minister of schools)	1989-1991
(Ingvar) Carlsson I	SAP	13 Mar 1986-	Bengt Göransson (SAP)	1989-1991
			Lennart Bodström (SAP)	1985-1989
			Bengt Göransson (SAP) (Minister of schools)	1982-1989
			Göran Persson (SAP) (Minister of schools)	1989-1991
(Olof) Palme II	SAP	8 Oct 1982-	Lennart Bodström (SAP)	1985-1989
			Lena Hjelm-Wallén (SAP)	1982-1985

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Government	Parties	Period	Name*	Minister's inauguration **
			Bengt Göransson (SAP) (Minister of culture and schools)	1982-1989
(Thorbjörn) Fälldin II	C, FP	5 May 1981	Jan-Erik Wikström (FP)	1976-1982
			Ulla Tillander (C) (Minister of schools)	1981-1982
(Thorbjörn) Fälldin II	C, M, FP	12 Oct 1979-	Jan-Erik Wikström (FP)	1976-1982
			Britt Mogård (M) (Minister of schools)	1979-1981
(Ola) Ullsten	FP	18 Oct 1978-	Jan-Erik Wikström (FP)	1976-1982
			Birgit Rodhe (FP) (Minister of schools)	1978-1979
(Thorbjörn) Fälldin I	C, M, FP	8 Oct 1976-	Jan-Erik Wikström (FP)	1976-1982
			Britt Mogård (M) (Minister of schools)	1976-1978
(Olof) Palme ***	SAP	1 Jan 1975-	Lena Hjelm-Wallén (SAP) (Minister of schools)	1974-1976
			Bertil Zachrisson	-1976
(Olof) Palme I	SAP	14 Oct 1969-	Lena Hjelm-Wallén (SAP) (Minister of schools)	1974-1976
			Bertil Zachrisson (SAP)	1973-1976
			Ingvar Carlsson (SAP)	1969-1973
(Tage) Erlander III	SAP	31 Oct 1957-	Ragnar Edenman (SAP)	1957-1967
			Olof Palme (SAP)	1967-1969
(Tage) Erlander II	SAP, C	1 Oct	Hildur Nygren (SAP)	1951-1951
			Ivar Persson (C)	1951-
(Tage) Erlander I	SAP	11 Oct 1946-	Josef Weijne (SAP)	+

Source: Sveriges regeringar under 100 år, http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/2460/a/ 14591; Sveriges regeringar sedan 1971 http://www.riksdagen.se/templates/R_Page____1542.aspx; Lindensjö & Lundgren (2000:1998-199).

* Unless otherwise stated the category refers to minister of education.

**I have not found the exact dates of the minister's inauguration like in the Danish cases.

***The first government under 'the 1974 form of government'.

Appendix 3:
Appendix to Chapter 5

Government and ministers of education in Denmark 1950-2011

Table A3.1: Overview of reigning governments and education ministers 1950-2011

Government	Parties	Period of reign	Name	Minister's inauguration
Helle Thorning-Schmidt	SD, RV, SF	3 Oct 2011-	Christine Antorini (SD)	3 Oct 2011-
Lars Løkke Rasmussen	V, KF	5 Apr 2009-	Troels Lund Poulsen (V)	8 Mar 2011-
			Tina Nedergaard (V)	23 Feb 2010-
Anders Fogh Rasmussen III	V, KF	23 Nov 2007-	Bertel Haarder (V)	
Anders Fogh Rasmussen II	V, KF	18 Feb 2005-	Bertel Haarder (V)	18 Feb 2005-
Anders Fogh Rasmussen I	V, KF	27 Nov 2001-	Ulla Tørnæs (V)	27 Nov 2001-
Poul Nyrup Rasmussen IV	SD, RV	23 Mar 1998-	Margrethe Vestager (RV)	23 Mar 1998-
Poul Nyrup Rasmussen III	SD, RV	30 Dec 1996-	Ole Vig Jensen (RV)	
Poul Nyrup Rasmussen II	SD, CD, RV	27 Sep 1994-	Ole Vig Jensen (RV)	
Poul Nyrup Rasmussen I	SD, CD, RV, KrF	25 Jan 1993-	Ole Vig Jensen (RV)	25 Jan 1993-
Poul Schlüter IV	KF, V	18 Dec 1990-	Bertel Haarder (V)	
Poul Schlüter III	KF, V, RV	3 June 1988-	Bertel Haarder (V)	
Poul Schlüter II	KF, V, CD, KrF	10 Sep1987-	Bertel Haarder (V)	
Poul Schlüter I	KF, V, CD, KrF	10 Sep 1982-	Bertel Haarder (V)	10 Sep 1982-
Anker Jørgensen V	SD	30 Dec 1981-	Dorte Bennedsen (SD)	
Anker Jørgensen IV	SD	26 Oc 1979-	Dorte Bennedsen (SD)	
Anker Jørgensen III	SD, V	30 Aug 1978-	Dorte Bennedsen (SD)	5 Jan 1979-
			Knud Heinesen (SD)	22 Dec 1978-
Anker Jørgensen II	SD	13 Feb 1975-	Ritt Bjerregaard (SD)	13 Feb 1975-
Poul Hartling	V	19 Dec 1973-	Tove Nielsen (V)	19 Dec 1973-
Anker Jørgensen I	SD	5 Oct 1972-	Ritt Bjerregaard (SD)	27 Sep 1973-
Jens Otto Krag III	SD	11 Oct 1971-	Knud Heinesen (SD)	11 Oct 1971-
Hilmer Baunsgaard	RV, KF, V	2 Feb 1968-	Helge Larsen (RV)	2 Feb 1968-
Jens Otto Krag II	SD	26 Sep 1964-	K.B. Andersen (SD)	26 Sep 1964-
Jens Otto Krag I	SD, RV	3 Sep 1962-		

Government	Parties	Period of reign	Name	Minister's inauguration
Viggo Kampmann II	SD, RV	18 Nov 1960-	K. Helveg Petersen (RV)	7 Sep 1961-
Viggo Kampmann I	SD, RV, RF	21 Feb 1960-		
H.C. Hansen II	SD, RV, RF	28 May 1957	Jørgen Jørgensen (RV)	28 May 1957-
H.C. Hansen I	SD	1 Feb 1955-		
Hans Hedtoft II	SD	30 Sep 1953-	Julius Bomholt (SD)	30 Sep 1953-
Erik Eriksen	V, KF	30 Oct 1950-	Flemming Hvidberg (KF)	30 Oct 1950-
Hans Hedtoft I	SD	30 Nov 1947	Julius Bomholt (S)	11 Feb 1950-

Source: Danmarkshistorien.dk (uploaded 20.12.2011). Danske regeringer 1953-1968: http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/danske-regeringer-1953-1968/; Danske regeringer 1968-1973 http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/danske-regeringer-1968-1973/; Danske regeringer 1973-1982: http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/danske-regeringer-1973-1982/; Danske regeringer 1982-1993: http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/danske-regeringer-1982-1993/; Danske regeringer 1993-2001; http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/danske-regeringer-1993-2001/; Danske regeringer 2001-2011: http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/danske-regeringer-2001/

Appendix 4:
Appendix to Chapter 5

Interview guide

Briefing

The interview is part of my PhD dissertation about school policy reforms in Denmark and Sweden from approx. 1990 to 2011. The project is motivated by an empirical interest in why countries with a long history of opposition to formal evaluations in schools suddenly make radical changes regarding national tests, final examination, grades, student plans etc. The dissertation is to a large extent based on written sources such as official documents, ministerial reports, party material, legislation and parliamentary debates. These sources only partially describe what happened in the political decision making processes that preceded the school reforms. I therefore need to know more about the actors' own knowledge about and perception of the reform processes.

Theoretical question/purpose	Operational question
Affiliation with school policy	What is your affiliation with the school area?
	Why did you become involved in the sector?
	Appointment to position in Folketinget/Riksdagen?
	Administrative appointment?
Describe reforms uncover the form processes and their characteristics	During your period as X (position related to the school area) a number of school policy reforms have been implemented
	If we start with the reform of X, can you describe what happened? (Process preceding the reform/discussion/content of reform)
	Who initiated the reform?
	Was the process characterized by conflict/consensus?
	What constituted the biggest change compared to earlier?
	What about the reform of X, can you describe what happened?
	Which reform do you think is the most important?
Interests/reform intents Clarify the organization's/ party's goals Clarify the significance of mechanisms	If actor X (the party or the organization of which the interviewee is member) could have decided the content of the reform without consideration of others, what would the reforms have looked like?
	What is the background of these wishes? Ideology/attitude? Voter considerations?
	Do you think you would have had the same reform wishes 10-15 years earlier? Why? Why not?

Theoretical question/purpose	Operational question
	New attitudes?
	New actors?
	Internal resistance?
	How did e.g. actor X's (other parties') actions affect your view on reforms?
	Did it make you reevaluate your wishes for evaluation policies?
	How did studies of students' academic level like IEA 1991, TIMSS 1995, PISA 2000, 2003 affect your reform wishes?
Assessment of the causes of reforms	In your opinion, what was the government's motive for the school reforms?
	Ideology?
	Voter considerations?
	New attitudes towards evaluation?
	New actors?
	Wish for a higher academic level?
	The country's competitiveness?
	Do you think such a reform would have been possible, e.g., 10-15 years earlier?
	Why? Why not?
Ideas about assessment	What is actor X's (the party or organization of which the interviewee is member) view on the purpose of assessment?
	Does your view differ from actor X's (other parties') view on assessment?
	Has the view on assessment changed internally in X (the party or organization of which the interviewee is member) over time?
	Why/why not?
	You can roughly argue that there are four different views of what evaluations of students/schools can be used for:
	Pedagogical tool
	School self-evaluation
	Admission control to higher education
	Quality control of schools
	How do these views on assessment relate to what you have described?
Differences in government policies	Why do you think the policies passed under different governments differ?
	Why was reform X not introduced under the previous government?
	Will a new government pursue a significantly different evaluation policy?
Conclusion	Do you want to add anything?
	Who should I talk to if I want to know more about this topic?

Appendix 5:
Appendix to Chapter 5

Scoring sheet of observable implication

Table A5.1: Observable implications and their certainty and uniqueness

Observable implication	Certainty	Uniqueness
Mechanism of persuasion: de-legitimization		
DL1: Claims of school failure	High	Low
DL2: Associate failure with a specific causal belief or problem definition held by the social democrats?	High	Low
DL3: Create an alternative causal belief or problem definition	Medium	Medium
DL4: De-legitimization performed by the opposition	Low	Low
Reaction de-legitimization		
R-DL 1: Revise their causal beliefs or problem definitions	High	High
R-DL 2: Internal division in the social democratic party	Medium	High
R-DL 3: Change in idea through a change in central social democratic party members	Medium	Medium
R-DL 4: Social democrats in government	Low	Low
Mechanism of persuasion: legitimization		
L1: Conservatives and/or liberals promoted a new assessment policy or problem definition by invoking existing ideas	High	Low
L2: Formulation of a new causal belief or problem definition	High	Medium
L3: Legitimization performed by the conservatives and/or liberals when they were in government?	Low	Low
Reaction legitimization		
RL1: Social democrats adopted the causal beliefs or problem definition advocated in the legitimization attempt	High	High
RL2: The change in causal beliefs or problem definition took place among existing actors in the party	Medium	Medium
RL3: The social democrats were in opposition	Low	Low
Policy position		
PP1: The social democrats expressed a new policy position on assessment policy	High	Low
PP2: Absence of evidence that position change was purely tactical (A change in opinion polls unambiguously supporting the policy, pressure from governing partner)?	Low	High
Policy change		
PC1: The social democrats entered into school political compromise with the conservatives and liberals adopting new assessment policies	High	High

English summary

Chapter 1 presents the problem to be examined in this dissertation. During the past decades reforms of schools assessment policies have been prominent. These changes are argued to be particularly puzzling in a Scandinavian context. In countries like Denmark and Sweden the instances of grade awarding and tests and exams have been reduced and pushed to the older forms. Recently, however, both Denmark and Sweden have significantly reformed their assessment policies by adopting national tests, student plans, external assessment institutes and new grade scales. Overall, the change appears to have been brought about by a change in beliefs about the purposes of assessment. Assessment is now seen a pedagogical tool that can help more pupils get a higher education. Further, assessment is also seen as a tool to evaluate the schools' quality on a system level. This brings out this book's overall research question: *How did ideas about school assessment change?* The main argument is that political parties can utilize ideational mechanisms of de-legitimization and legitimization to persuade other political parties to change their ideas. The dissertation provides a longitudinal multiple case study of the process of school assessment idea changes in Denmark and Sweden.

Chapter 2 develops a theoretical framework for studying parties as ideational actors. The chapter conceptualizes ideas and the mechanisms whereby political parties seek to persuade opposing parties to change causal beliefs and hence ultimately policy. Two mechanisms of persuasion called de-legitimization and legitimization are presented. Further, expectations are formulated about the process whereby persuasion takes place.

Chapter 3 conceptualizes the school policy sector and the policy field - school assessment policy – where the process of idea change took place. The characteristics of the countries school policy sector is discussed including the comprehensive schools system and the consensual policy making process. It is discussed what assessment policy is and a definition is provided. A typology of assessment policy is developed which outlines the different tools available to policy makers. Finally, the assessment policy development in recent decades is mapped for both Denmark and Sweden.

Chapter 4 conceptualizes the dependent variable of assessment beliefs. First, the causal beliefs of parties blocking assessment reforms will be investigated: that is the Social Democratic parties in Denmark and Sweden. It will be explored how the social democratic skepticism towards assessment developed. The second part of the chapter deals with more general percep-

tions of assessment and develops a typology of causal beliefs about assessment.

Chapter 5 presents the design and methodology of the dissertation. The design is a multiple case study of the process of attempts to change assessment ideas in Denmark and Sweden from 1990 to 2011. A qualitative process tracing analysis is chosen to analyze the empirical evidence and observable implications of the theoretical framework are derived. The data sources are determined for each step of the process tracing model. Finally, the validity and generalizability of the analyses are discussed.

Chapter 6 analyzes how a new grade scale and national tests were adopted in Sweden in the early 1990s. It is argued that the Social Democrats' diverging support for different assessment policies can be attributed to the varying performance of legitimization by the right wing government. By invoking the macro ideas of decentralization and equality the government created new causal beliefs and effectively legitimized the related policy solutions of national tests and absolute grades. Hence, the Social Democrats came to believe 1) that national tests could be used to assess equality in school performance and 2) that absolute grades can be used to secure a more just selection into further education.

Chapter 7 demonstrates how a new, more extensive grade scale, earlier grade awarding and more and earlier national tests were adopted in Sweden in the last decade. The Conservatives and especially the Liberals simultaneously de-legitimized the existing social democratic problem definition as well as the social democratic causal beliefs about assessment. They claimed that a) one had generally failed to focus on knowledge and skills in school and b) that the lack of early tests and grades was detrimental to working class children whose problems were not detected in time. As a consequence, the Social Democrats over time changed beliefs about assessment and eventually saw tests and grades as pedagogical tools t5hat could help the pupil in contrast to being merely tools of selection.

Chapter 8 analyzes how the disappointing Danish performance in IEA led the right wing opposition to de-legitimize the center-left government's problem definition. They argued that the bad performance was related to the over-emphasis in school policy on personal development rather than knowledge and skills. Hence, a new problem definition of knowledge was promoted which the center-left government adopted. Further, it is explored whether the assessment policy changes of national curriculum goals and a national evaluation institute were associated with new causal beliefs.

Chapter 9 analyzes how national tests, quality reports and pupil plans were adopted in Denmark in the new millennium. In 2001 a new right wing

government entered office. It claimed that PISA 2003 showed continuing deficient school performance and a failure to break negative social inheritance in schooling. Further, the Social Democrats were blamed for this problem by refusing to adopt policies which could rectify this. In addition there was a clear alternative causal belief of national tests as a pedagogical tool. There was however still large internal division in the Social Democratic Party on this issue. Yet in the wake of an election defeat a new causal belief about national tests as a pedagogical tool was institutionalized by the new party leadership.

Chapter 10 summarizes the empirical findings and places them in a comparative setting. The research questions are reiterated and an overall answer is provided. In addition, the support for the theoretical framework is reviewed and rival explanations are discussed. Chapter 11 presents the contributions of the dissertation. The dissertation primarily contributes to the theoretical literature on ideas, but another important contribution to the idea literature is empirical and methodological. In addition, a secondary goal has been to contribute to the emerging literature on education policy. Finally, future research directions are indicated.

Dansk resume

Kapitel 1 præsenterer afhandlingens overordnede problemstilling. Udgangspunktet er, at mange lande de sidste årtier har vedtaget omfattende reformer omkring evaluering i skoler. Disse ændringer forekommer især overraskende i en skandinavisk kontekst, hvor lande som Danmark og Sverige tidligere har reduceret antallet af test og karaktertilfælde samt skubbet test og karaktergivning til de ældste klasser i grundskolen. Alligevel har både Danmark og Sverige på det seneste ændret deres evalueringspolitikker betydeligt ved at indføre nationale test, eksterne evalueringsinstitutter og nye karakterskalaer. Ændringerne synes uvægerligt forbundet med ændrede forestillinger omkring evaluering. Evaluering ses nu både som et pædagogisk redskab til at hjælpe den enkelte elev samt som et redskab til at vurdere skolens kvalitet. Dette fører mig til afhandlingens overordnede problemformulering: Hvordan kan man forklare de store ændringer i ideer omkring evaluering i Danmark og Sverige? Afhandlingen tilvejebringer et multipel case studie af processen hvorved ideer omkring evaluering har forandret sig i Danmark og Sverige. Hovedargumentet er, at partier kan anvende idemekanismerne delegitimering og legitimering til at overtale andre politiske partier til at ændre deres ideer og derved i sidste ende få sine egne ideer implementeret som policy.

I kapitel 2 udvikles et teoretisk ramme for analysen af partier som ideaktører. I kapitlet konceptualiseres de ideer og mekanismer, hvormed partier forsøger at overbevise politiske modstandere til at ændre ideer i form af kausale forestillinger og herved gøre policy forandringer mulige. Derudover præsenteres to overbevisningsmekanismer kaldet 'delegitimering' og 'legitimering', og forventninger til den proces, hvorved overbevisning finder sted, formuleres.

Kapitel 3 præsenterer det policy felt som afhandlingen operer i: evalueringspolicy. Det diskuteres, hvad evalueringspolicy er, og en definition fremsættes. En typologi over evalueringspolicy fremstilles, som skitserer de forskellige evalueringsredskaber, som politikere kan lovgive om. Typologien sondrer mellem, hvorvidt evalueringen bruges internt eller eksternt, og hvorvidt den enkelte elev eller skoleniveauet evalueres. Afslutningsvis beskrives udviklingen i evalueringspolicy i Danmark og Sverige.

I kapitel 4 diskuteres den afhængige variabel: ideer omkring evaluering. Indledningsvis undersøges de kausale forestillinger omkring evaluering hos de aktører, som har blokeret evalueringsreformer: dvs. de socialdemokratiske partier i Danmark og Sverige. Det undersøges, hvordan de evalueringskritiske

kausale forestillinger er udviklet inden for partierne. Dernæst diskuteres mere generelle forestillinger omkring formålet med evaluering, samtidig med at en typologi over disse overordnede evalueringsformål udvikles.

Kapitel 5 fremstiller afhandlingens forskningsdesign og metode. Forskningsdesignet er et *multiple case study* af forskellige forsøg på at ændre evalueringspolitikken i Danmark og Sverige fra 1990-2011. En kvalitativ *process tracing* analyse er valgt til at analysere det empiriske materiale og observerbare implikationer udledes på baggrund af den teoretiske ramme. Derudover diskuteres afhandlingens datakilder for hver fase af *process tracing* modellen. Endelig diskuteres kort analysernes validitet og generaliserbarhed.

I kapitel 6 analyseres, hvordan en ny karakterskala og nationale tests blev indført i Sverige i starten af 1990'erne. Der argumenteres for, at Socialdemokraternes varierende støtte til forskellige reformforslag kan henføres til regeringens uens brug af legitimeringsmekanismen. Ved at påberåbe makroideen omkring decentralisering og værdien omkring lighed skabte regeringen nye kausale forestillinger og legitimerede med succes policyløsningerne nationale test og absolutte karakterer. Således indtog socialdemokraterne den position, at 1) nationale tests kan anvendes til at evaluere ligheden i skolerne, og at 2) absolutte karakterer kan anvendes til at sikre en mere retfærdig udvælgelse til videre uddannelse.

Kapitel 7 viser, hvordan en ny mere og mere omfattende karakterskala, tidligere karaktergivning og flere og tidligere nationale tests blev vedtaget i Sverige i forrige årti. Det vises, at de konservative og især de liberale udførte en sideløbende delegitimering af den eksisterende socialdemokratiske problemdefinition samt den socialdemokratiske kausale forestilling omkring evaluering. Højrefløjen hævdede, a) at man havde forsømt at fokusere på faglighed og færdigheder i skolen, og b) at manglen på tidlige test og karakterer var skadelig for arbejderklassens børn, hvis problemer ikke blev opdaget i tide. Over tid resulterede delegitimeringen i, at socialdemokraterne både skiftede syn på problemdefinitionen samt begyndte at se test og karakterer som pædagogiske redskaber, som kunne hjælpe eleverne og ikke længere kun være redskaber til udvælgelse.

I kapitel 8 analyseres, hvordan den skuffende danske præstation i IEA undersøgelsen fik højreopposition i Folketinget til at delegitimere regeringens problemdefinition. Oppositionen hævdede, at den dårlige præstation var relateret til skolens overdrevne fokus på personlig udvikling frem for faglighed og færdigheder. Således søgte de at fremme en alternativ problemdefinition centreret omkring faglighed, som regeringen efterhånden overtog. Videre undersøges det, hvorvidt de nye evalueringspolicies såsom et natio-

nalt evalueringsinstitut og undervisningsmål var relateret til nye kausale forestillinger omkring evaluering.

I kapitel 9 undersøges, hvordan nationale tests, kvalitetsrapporter og elevplaner blev vedtaget i Danmark i det nye årtusinde. I 2001 kom en ny højrefløjsregering til magten. I kølvandet af PISA 2003 hævdede regeringen, at undersøgelsen viste en vedvarende utilstrækkelig skole præstation og et svigt i forhold til at bryde den sociale arv i skolen. Socialdemokraterne fik skylden for de uheldige resultater, i og med de nægtede at støtte policies, der kunne afhjælpe problemet. Regeringen formulerede ligeledes en klar alternativ kausal forestilling om evaluering såsom nationale tests som et pædagogisk redskab. Internt i Socialdemokratiet var der stor splittelse omkring evalueringsemnet. Efter endnu et socialdemokratisk valgnederlag blev en ny partileder valgt, og den nye kausale forestilling omkring evaluering som et pædagogisk redskab institutionaliseret.

Kapitel 10 opsummerer afhandlingens empiriske resultater og diskuterer dem komparativt. Problemformuleringen gentages, og et overordnet svar gives. Derudover vurderes støtten til den teoretiske ramme, og konkurrerende forklaringer diskuteres. Kapitel 11 fremstiller afhandlingens bidrag. Afhandlingen bidrager først og fremmest til den teoretiske litteratur om ideer, men et tilsvarende vigtigt bidrag er empirisk og metodisk. Derudover har et sekundært mål været at bidrage til den spirende litteratur om uddannelsespolicy. Endelig udstikkes fremtidige forskningsretninger.