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# Professional norms guiding school principals' pedagogical leadership

Principals'  
pedagogical  
leadership

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to identify and analyze the professional norms surrounding school development, with a special emphasis on school principals' pedagogical leadership.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A norm perspective is used to identify possible links between legal norms, professional norms, and actions. The findings are based on answers given by 974 school principals in a web-based questionnaire. The design of the study and the findings are structured around three questions used to identify professional norms: what tasks principals prioritize as pedagogical leaders, where the external expectations on principals are derived from, and with whom school principals communicate regarding issues related to their pedagogical leadership.

**Findings** – The most evident professional norms identified in this study are that principals should: be present and close to the teaching and learning processes; involve teachers in quality development; enhance the development of formative assessments; engage in teacher development; develop the internal organization of the school to promote learning.

**Originality/value** – The norm perspective and the findings of this study could be used by principals, principal trainers, and researchers to reflect on pedagogical leadership in different contexts. A challenge for principals is to become aware of the professional norms that guide them, and to close the gap between their "desirable" norms and their actions. Action alternatives and professional norms become visible through discussions emanating from questions about what leaders do, how they do so and why they do what they do, which is a way to strengthen both the profession and the individual principals.

**Keywords** External expectations, Pedagogical leadership, Professional norms, School principals

**Paper type** Research paper

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the professional norms regarding school development, with a special emphasis on school principals' pedagogical leadership. A norm perspective is used to identify possible links between legal norms, professional norms, and actions.

A number of researchers have stressed the role of principals in educational development and classroom learning (Leithwood and Day, 2008; Pashiardis, 2014; Pont *et al.*, 2008). This study focuses on principals' pedagogical leadership, a concept used in relation to school development, especially in the Nordic countries. Over the last several decades, school principals in Sweden, as well as in many other countries, received increasing responsibilities. In Sweden, education is highly decentralized, and most of the responsibility rests with local municipalities. A majority of the education budget is financed by local taxes, and approximately half of the municipal budget is spent on education. At the same time, there have been many national reforms aiming for higher results, including a new education act, new curricula, new grading system, and the introduction of teacher certification.

Research shows that there are strong external expectations on school leaders that derive from different directions; teachers, student, parents, superintendents, politicians, media, etc. (Leo, 2013). One of the challenges for school leaders is to combine the strong



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expectations from national policies with the requirements from the local school organizer at their own school. Accountability has become a central issue of educational reform in Sweden, as well as in many other countries. This leads to questions about what role accountability plays in principals' leadership, in relation to possible links between legal norms, professional norms and what principals do as pedagogical leaders. Swedish principals have, in the Education Act 2010:800 (Swedish Code of Statutes, 2010), a new and possibly powerful tool to support their leadership:

Management of the education

Principal and pre-school director

9 § The educational work of a school unit [pre-school unit] should be led and coordinated by a principal [pre-school director]. They will work in particular to develop the education [...].

§ 10 The principal and preschool director decide on the internal organization of their unit [...].

The first section aims directly at the task of developing the education, while the second section is more indirect. It gives principals the power to decide on the internal organization of the unit, which includes the power of delegation. The two sections could empower the schools' leadership; however, they can also create a special tension between different interests – local vs national – concerning the governing of schools.

One result of the new national policy in Sweden was the introduction of mandatory training for all new school principals. According to the Education Act 2010:800 (Chapter 2, § 12), the training should begin as soon as possible after the principal has taken up the position and be completed within four years. This study targets school principals who were enrolled in, or had just completed, the national training in the 2012/2013 academic year. The paper is based on the answers from 1,300 school principals.

This paper is also inspired by pragmatic realism (Pawson, 2006) and structured accordingly, in that theories about pedagogical leadership and norms serve as points of departure. Then, the method and data sources are described, followed by the results and analysis. In the presentation of the results, the theoretical background is tested, together with the praxis revealed in the data; additionally, new, "practical" theories – which are linked with the analysis and interpretation of the data – are introduced, depending on the results of the study. The final conclusion summarizes some current examples of the professional norms guiding pedagogical leadership.

### **Pedagogical leadership**

A basic question in developing schools is how we can bring about change that will result in higher levels of student performance, enhanced social development and improved levels of civility in schools. Sergiovanni (1998) argued that pedagogical leadership should be the focus:

Provide *pedagogical leadership* that invests in capacity building by developing social and academic capital for students and intellectual and professional capital for teachers. Support this leadership by making capital available to enhance student learning and development, teacher learning and classroom effectiveness (p 38).

Pedagogical leadership adds value by developing various forms of human capital. It is about developing social capital by creating caring communities. Social capital is needed to support learning; when there is a lack of social capital, students could develop norms, and sub-groups that work against academic performance. Academic capital is developed when teaching and learning are the basis for school decisions regarding organization, staff,

time, money, and other resources. Pedagogical leaders develop intellectual capital in their school by making them into inquiring communities, while professional capital is created through reciprocal responsibilities that add value to teachers and students alike (Sergiovanni, 1998).

In Sweden, the School Commission of 1946 (Swedish Government Official Reports, 1948) stated that the principal's most important task is to lead pedagogical work and to guide and inspire teachers to develop schools in alignment with the society's democratization process. However, it was also said that individual teachers have the right to design the teaching in their classroom. This has, of course, created challenges for both principals and teachers, and there is still an ongoing debate concerning what pedagogical leadership is, with several definitions. Most definitions are linked to both transformational and instructional leadership. In school leadership research, the terms "transformational leadership" and "instructional leadership" are used in the context of research on school improvement and successful principals. Transformational leadership focuses on schools' development, which means, for example, to build a vision for the school, set goals, provide intellectual stimulation and individual support, show concrete examples of good performance, have high expectations, create a culture of school improvement and incorporate everybody's influence into decisions about the school (Leithwood *et al.*, 2002). Instructional leadership has many similarities with transformational leadership, but with a sharper focus on what happens in the classroom. The leader works closely with teachers and students to discuss and evaluate teaching, and ensures that instructional time is protected and that a favorable climate for learning exists (Hallinger, 2005). Successful principals use both "transformational" and "instructional leadership," and Day and Leithwood (2007) indicate four success factors for these principals, as identified in the International Successful School Principal Project: defining the vision, values and direction; improving conditions for teaching and learning; restructuring the organization, redesigning roles and responsibilities; and enhancing teaching and learning.

In research and Swedish government reports, the term "pedagogical leadership" is widely used when referring to principals' school leadership. Principals' role in school improvement can be linked to a pedagogical leadership that is often described from a holistic point of view, in which pedagogical leadership consists of the leadership and development process. One question that arises is who has the preferential right to interpret the definition of pedagogical leadership. Is it the school authorities, researchers or principals themselves – and locally or through their unions? The National Agency of Education made the definition used by the Schools Inspectorate (2010, 2012) in quality audits of the principals' leadership. The school authorities' definition is clearly linked to national objectives and results, and to the principal and all employees in the organization having knowledge and understanding of the connection between effort and results. Pupils' learning and development are at the heart of pedagogical leadership.

Based on the quality audit, the Schools Inspectorate highlighted a number of weaknesses and areas of development in the pedagogical leadership in the schools. They judged, after the second audit, that 20 percent of the principals needed to consistently reinforce pedagogical leadership (Schools Inspectorate, 2012, p. 1). The Swedish Association of School Principals and Directors of Education claimed that it was not fair just to audit the principals and not take local conditions into account. The Association raised questions like; do principals have the people and resources available to be able to exercise leadership according to national standards?

The Association responded with a definition of pedagogical leadership where the prerequisites are central.

Törnsén and Årlestig (2014) constructed a Swedish model for pedagogical leadership based on the national curriculum, their own research, and factors of successful principals identified in the International Successful School Principal Project (Day and Leithwood, 2007). They argued that pedagogical leadership can be summarized in three main parts: creating conditions for learning and teaching, leading learning and teaching, and linking the everyday work of teaching and learning with organizational goals and results. The three elements are linked to the management of goals, processes, and results. The elements interact with each other and form a whole for the leadership. Törnsén and Årlestig give concrete examples of what pedagogical leadership can contain. Goal orientation is about pedagogical leaders creating conditions for learning and teaching with a starting point in the school's mission and goals for students' learning. In this model, the principal has special goals and a vision for the school, high expectations on students and teachers, and they work to develop the school's internal organization. Process orientation means that pedagogical leaders lead learning and teaching through classroom visits, supervision and feedback, or discussions about teaching methods, didactics, and relationships. Result orientation means that the pedagogical leader connects the school and pupils' results with the daily tasks of learning and teaching. Principals need to analyze the results, investigate what explains the results, and work on improvement. With these perspectives on pedagogical leadership, this paper examines what principals give priority to in their leadership. Perhaps a pattern of actions is revealed that could indicate some professional norms?

### **A norm perspective**

Norms play an important role in human interaction. They reduce uncertainty about how to act in different situations, they set standards and specify what appropriate behavior is, and there are different expectations on different people (e.g. students, teachers, and principals) in the organization (Giddens, 1989).

One of the functions of a norm is that it reduces complexity, but at the same time, we sometimes end up in situations where competing norms guide our conduct. What is it that makes us follow one norm or the other? According to Elster (1992), self-interest and instrumental rationality becomes important; what happens when norms are activated is a very complex issue. Another factor that contributes to the difficulty of studying norms is that people are not aware they are following norms because those norms are internalized. Rommetveit (1955) describes the internalization of a norm as a subtle change that occurs when persistent social pressure is gradually perceived as an obligation on the self; it as an aspect of socialization (p. 56). In this study, socialization is also seen as a process of professionalization where principals establish new norms according to changes in the educational system. It is also important to point out that strong norm systems can promote or impede development and change processes (Elster, 1992). It could be argued that principals should be norm followers and at the same time change agents, to establish new norms to develop their schools.

The concept "norm" is used in many different ways. In this study, a sociology-of-law-based definition of the concept of norms is used; norms are action instructions that are socially reproduced and represent the individual's perception of the expectations surrounding their own behavior (Hydén and Svensson, 2008).

Norms are action instructions, imperatives, and thus directing actions, which is the essence of norms. In the norm perspective used in this study, legal norms from national

policy documents are imperatives supposed to initiate various actions, and a pattern of similar actions is an indication of the existence of a professional norm.

The norms addressed by the sociology of law perspective are those that occur in a social context. They are reproduced, have social connections and social impacts, and are communicated in a social community (Wickenberg, 1999). The action instructions must be communicated and disseminated in a social community to live up to this essential attribute. In this study, the focus is on the professional norms that guide principals' pedagogical leadership in schools. Professional norms are generated in a professional system. The professional norms of teachers are reproduced in teacher training programs, in texts for teachers, in meetings with other teachers, and so on. Principals' norms are generated in a similar way, through their training, mentoring, and in discussions with other principals (Lio, 2013).

External expectations and social pressure play a major role in norm-setting; for example, collective expectations influence individuals to engage in correct or culturally desirable behavior (Durkheim, 1895/1982; Rommetveit, 1955). According to the theory of planned behavior, the strength of norms can be measured by studying perceived social pressure that an individual experiences (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen, 1991). The method and questions in this study are designed according to these three aspects to identify norms: to find out what principals do, the origin of external expectations, and who principals are communicating with as pedagogical leaders.

### Methods and data sources

A web-based questionnaire was sent to 4,071 school leaders who were enrolled in, or just completed, the "National School Leadership Training Program" with a response rate of 57 percent. This is considered reasonably high since more than 600 questionnaires failed to reach the principal via e-mail, possibly because of a change of position. The questionnaire consisted of 37 questions in total, answered by 1,940 school leaders, principals, and pre-school directors. The answers were processed and coded with SPSS. This paper is based on the answers from 974 school principals from elementary schools and upper secondary schools with the following three questions, designed to identify professional norms regarding pedagogical leadership:

- (1) To what extent do you think the following actors/policy documents express expectations that you should be a pedagogical leader? The scale was from 1 (very low expectations) to 6 (very high expectations).
- (2) Pedagogical leadership could be defined in many different ways. Please write three tasks that you will give special priority as a pedagogical leader during the coming school year.
- (3) How often, during the last year, have you been in communication with the following actors (pupils, teachers, other staff, parents, school principals/colleagues at your school, school principals/colleagues at other schools, school board, superintendent) on issues related to your pedagogical leadership?

### Expectations to establish norms

The Education Act and the curriculum create expectations and include legal norms that specify what principals should do as managers and leaders for their schools. General advice from The National Agency of Education and reports from the Schools Inspectorate create external pressure as they often express what principals should do

as pedagogical leaders. At the same time, there are also expectations deriving from students, teachers, superintendents, parents, other school leaders, politicians, media, and so on.

Table I shows the distribution of answers to the following question: “How do you perceive the expectations from the actors or documents available below, that you as a principal should be a pedagogical leader?” A score of 1 corresponds to a very low level of expectation, and 6 to a very high level of expectation. The table is sorted in descending order, with the highest average on top.

The results show that principals, in general, experience very strong pressure and expectations from different directions. An important question is whether it is the same kind of expectation from different directions or if there is a cross-pressure due to different expectations from the state, school boards, superintendents, staff, and so on.

One of the reasons that principals are central to various national initiatives is that research points to the importance of school leaders for school improvement and student performance (Leithwood and Day, 2008; Johansson, 2011). Research also shows that principals are a strong link in the chain between the state, local school authorities, politicians, and teachers. Principals are loyal to the mission and requirements from the state, and at the same time they are experiencing low demands from local school authorities, boards, and school owners. This means that there could be confusion in the governing chain of schools, and that there is a need to clarify the rights and responsibilities of teachers, principals, and others in the school system (Nihlfors and Johansson, 2013).

One consequence of ambiguity may be that the expectations that principals experience are contradictory. There are different expectations from different directions of what principals should do and prioritize as pedagogical leaders.

*Juridification, accountability, and pedagogical leadership*

Principals experience the strongest pressure of expectations from the Education Act, the Schools Inspectorate, and the National Agency of Education. This indicates that the governing of schools from the state seems to be strong, and also that legal norms from the Education Act and other regulations have important implications for principals’ in leading teaching and learning processes. The legal regulation of schools during the 2000s has

**Table I.**  
External  
expectations on  
principals’  
pedagogical  
leadership

<i>(n = 974)</i>			Average (1-6)
1	The curriculum		5.6
2	Education Act		5.5
3	The Schools Inspectorate		5.5
4	The National Agency for Education		5.5
5	Teachers		5.3
6	The superintendent		5.1
7	Government/politicians at national level		5.0
8	Local policy documents		4.9
9	Responsible committee or board		4.8
10	School principals/colleagues at your school/your area		4.8
11	Parents		4.5
12	School principals/colleagues at other schools		4.3
13	Other staff		3.9
14	Students		3.7

increased, and there are several examples of a juridification of the educational system. The concept of juridification is used when more and more areas of life become legally regulated in society, when the power in society increasingly shifts toward lawyers, or when social problems are defined as legal problems (Brännström, 2009).

An example of increased juridification of schools is the Schools Inspectorate, employing a high proportion of lawyers, which was formed in 2008 and took over the state's oversight of schools from the National Agency of Education. In the Education Act 2010:800, there were extended legal regulations in several areas. Principals' responsibility was highlighted and regulated further. It also meant that opportunities for guardians and students to appeal decisions to the Board of Appeal for Education were introduced. The Board of Appeal for Education is an authority similar to a court of law, empowered to hear appeals of certain decisions relating to the school system. Principals' decisions on remedial action programs and placement in special education or individual education are examples of decisions that can be appealed. This gives as a kind of legal expansion, a juridification, where the law comes into more areas than before. The Board of Appeal for Education focuses on the legal aspects and not on educational or economic aspects. If there is a juridification to the problems in schools, there is also a risk of a juridification to the solutions of the problems. Principals could be more focused on "doing things right," than on "doing the right things."

The principals involved in this study are all participating in, or have recently completed, the national principal training program. This program is mandatory for new principals and hence will also be a part of the national governing of schools. "Legislation on schools and the role of exercising the functions of an authority" is one of three courses and thus also contributes to a juridification of principal training.

One consequence of the juridification of schools could be that professional autonomy of teachers and principals decreases. The basic idea of increased legal regulation is of course that there should be better education for the students, that each student's rights should be at the center, and this should be combined with local school development in a decentralized system. The implication for principals is that they need to be aware of how juridification affects their pedagogical leadership: is it enough to be a norm follower? And what norms for pedagogical leadership should be followed?

In the Education Act and the curriculum, there are many legal norms directed to principals on what they should do. The outcome of this study shows that the state has succeeded in establishing clear pressure with expectations that the governing documents should be implemented. Principals shall, for example, lead, coordinate, and work to develop education (Education Act 2010:800, Chapter 2, § 9). According to the curriculum for compulsory school 2011 and curriculum for upper secondary school 2011, principals shall, as pedagogical leaders and managers for teachers, plan, monitor, evaluate, and develop education in relation to national goals. These legal norms are not well defined with a special purpose. They should be interpreted locally, possibly converted to professional norms, and lead to actions.

Together with the expectations of national policy and national authorities and juridification follow demands of accountability. Accountability means having to answer for one's actions, and particularly the results of those actions (Møller, 2009). Accountability is also an important dimension of professionalism, and principals must answer questions about not only what has happened within their responsibility, but also how and why it happened. A risk with increased accountability is that it can lead to uncertainty about what principals should or may do in different situations. This shows a need for specific professional norms that support school leadership.



Demands for increased accountability can lead to tensions between different levels in the school system, especially when responsibility and authority do not go hand in hand in the management and governance of schools. Principals have a responsibility and a right to design the internal organization of their schools as stated in the Education Act. But do they also have the power and resources to make the changes they think are necessary, given by the local school authorities, and superintendents?

According to Elmore (2005), school leaders form their conceptions of accountability from three sources: individual beliefs and values about what they can and should do; individual responsibility, collective norms, and values that define the organization in which individuals work; and collective expectations and formal mechanisms by which teachers account for what they do. Schools are more effective when collective expectations are important to everyone, and the organization does not just consist of a collection of individuals. School leaders play an important role in balancing individual responsibility towards collective expectations and norms. Elmore's (2005) studies also show that many schools lack the knowledge of how individuals should respond to the increasing demands of accountability. The alignment of individual values with collective expectations, reinforced by the processes of accountability, results in internal accountability. "As internal accountability develops, schools become more effective as organizations rather than as groups of individuals" (Elmore, 2005, p. 136). Møller (2009) points at risks associated with accountability. If there are high levels of regulation or standardization, the local context could be lost; it is not enough to establish policy for accountability unless it is also combined with school improvement (Møller, 2009). One way for principals to manage accountability in everyday life can be to stop and ask: where are we in our development? Where are we heading? And, what are my responsibilities as a pedagogical leader?

The study shows that expectations from superintendents and from the responsible committee or board are weaker than those from the state, but they are still relatively strong (Table I). Nihlfors and Johansson (2013) note, in a study on how national policy meet local structures, that the task of the school is clearly described in law and regulation, and principals perceive this as their "job description," while few principals have a job description from their school board or superintendent. This indicates that principals believe they have a great independence from the school board and the superintendent. The principals see the superintendent's main mission as providing support and coordination when needed. The principals find the mission given by national authorities as clear, and the mission given by local authorities, boards, and superintendents as often unclear or incomplete (Nihlfors and Johansson, 2013).

External expectations from teachers are also strong (Table I). One consequence is that it can be good for principals to recognize from where they perceive expectations; this affects their actions greatly. Expectations from students are weaker in relation to other variables in the study. This might mean that the needs of staff have priority over the needs of students.

A major concern in the Swedish school system today is that the performance of students is gradually falling (e.g. National Agency of Education, 2013). We see a strive for a combination of accountability leadership and pedagogical leadership. One view is to look upon this as an implementation problem; if only the principals do what they should do according to national policy, and follow the norms, results would increase. Another view is to look for local solutions and build on the local context. From this point of view, principals need to be change agents. Most likely, a combination

of different perspectives is required, and principals need to be both norm followers and change agents who lead and change norms, or establish new norms in schools. So, what actions do principals want to prioritize when they exercise pedagogical leadership?

**Principals’ priorities in pedagogical leadership**

Norms are, as previously described, action directives and an expression of what we should do. A step in the search for principal’s professional norms is to find out what they do by the following question: “Pedagogical Leadership is defined in many different ways. Enter the three tasks that you will prioritize as a pedagogical leader the coming academic year.”

The question does not provide answers on what principals actually do; it aims to provide a picture of what actions school leaders think are desirable and important in pedagogical leadership. The results were sorted by type of school, with elementary school principals and secondary school principals grouped together. For each group, words and combinations of words were counted. This provides a snapshot of what principals believe they should prioritize in their pedagogical leadership. The categories, presented in Table II, are also the result of the professional language the principals used in their answers. The categories reveal patterns of behavior and show that many principals want to prioritize the same things in their pedagogical leadership; this is one way to identify professional norms.

The three largest categories in the analysis of the principals’ responses are: presence, to visit classrooms, to be close to the teaching and learning processes; quality development, including quality monitoring, analyzes and evaluation of results; assessment of students, including formative assessment and grading of students. The ranking varies a bit depending on which type of school the principal is responsible.

Principals should be close to teachers and students and make classroom visits. That is a clear professional norm. Few principals use the term “observation,” and it leads to thoughts about the power of words. Is the desired presence about occasional visits, or is it part of pedagogical leadership and systematic quality work where direct interaction with students and teachers is at the center?

	Elementary schools, Grades 1-9 ( <i>n</i> = 603)		Upper secondary schools ( <i>n</i> = 371)	
	Rank	<i>n</i>	Rank	<i>n</i>
Presence (classroom visits, observations, physical presence close to teaching, and learning)	1	168	3	95
Quality development (systematic quality development, monitoring, analysis, and evaluation of results)	2	149	1	127
Assessment of students (formative assessment and grading of students)	3	125	2	106
Dialogues with teachers (pedagogical discussions, appraisals)	4	72	4	53
Teacher development (develop competence, peer learning)	5	61	6	33
Organizational development (develop internal organization, designs to promote learning)	5	61	8	27
Support to students with needs and special needs	7	47	5	34
Student participation	8	46	7	31
Improve the learning environment	9	33	9	21
Leadership in the classroom (promote teacher leadership)	10	24	(11)	11
Values (to work with the core values of the democratic society)	(11)	21	10	15

**Table II.**  
Principals’ priorities  
in pedagogical  
leadership

The governing documents do not directly indicate that principals should make classroom visits, but the responsibility has been strengthened by the Education Act and the curriculum. Expectations of principals to lead school improvement are clear. It seems like the need for principals to come closer to teaching and learning in classrooms has increased, and this could be a reason that presence is a strong category in the survey.

Previous research shows that this is a norm that often does not lead to action (Ärlestig, 2008; Leo, 2010). One reason is that principals believe that they do not have the time and opportunity because they are forced to prioritize other tasks. Other reasons may be a lack of clear purpose, they have too little knowledge of why they should be close to teaching or how they could conduct observation or supervision (Leo, 2010). The Schools Inspectorate's (2010) quality audit of principals' leadership shows that most principals do not have direct contact with teaching and teachers' work in classrooms. Visits by school principals, according to teachers in the investigation, are often initiated by teachers who are experiencing discipline problems and when the principal is needed as an authority. Teachers also report that principals sometimes make spontaneous visits to "look in" on teachers; these visits are not perceived as part of pedagogical leadership. We can conclude that there is a large gap between norms and actions. Principals believe that they should be close to teaching, but most of them rarely make visits or observations in which learning occurs. The strongest expectations seem to come from the principals themselves. They want to be close to teaching and learning, and they want to enter the domain of teachers in the classrooms.

School principals, from elementary level to upper secondary school, describe that they want to prioritize quality development. The words in this category are related to systematic quality work, analysis, and monitoring of results. It seems that the national requirements related to quality work and driven by objectives and results has had an effect, at least to establish a professional norm that systematic quality assurance should be a priority in pedagogical leadership. As early as 1997, the first regulation governing schools' quality work was enacted. One reason for the legal regulation was that the National Agency for Education pinpointed recurrent shortcomings in municipal work on monitoring and evaluation of the schools in a decentralized school system. Now, the Education Act regulates the systematic quality work enhanced with general advice from the National Agency of Education (2013), and still, the Schools Inspectorate (2013) shows in a report on school's quality work that there are flaws in most of the inspected schools. Principals' responsibilities are clearly regulated. They shall ensure that quality work is planned, monitored, and becomes part of school development with the participation of teachers, other staff, and pupils (Education Act 2010:800, Chapter 4, § 4). The results of several inspections suggest that the systematic quality of work has not become an integral part of pedagogical leadership for most principals.

The regulation of quality work has been perceived by many professionals more like a bureaucratization than as a school improvement. Quality work is seen as an imposition "from above" that takes important time away from teaching; teachers and principals want to start with their own everyday problems (Scherp, 2011; Håkansson, 2013). The national authorities have spent much time and effort to explain why schools should focus on quality assurance, and there have been a few good examples of how to have a locally based school improvement perspective in this work. In successful schools, the principal's role in the management of quality work is crucial to student outcomes (Ärlestig, 2011). The principal's knowledge of methods and the intentions behind the policy documents play a big role.

Why do principals in the study prioritize quality work in their pedagogical leadership? Maybe it is because they want to do the right things according to national policy. Maybe quality work has become part of school development in everyday life. Possibly it is a combination of both; in this case, new professional norms are affected both by governing documents and local development needs. Again, we see a gap between the norm, that principals should lead the systematic quality work in the school, and the actions. The results of this study show that principals want to give priority to quality work, but research and reports show that this is an area that needs improvement, especially when it comes to analyzing results in schools.

The third category of principals "top three" in the table above contains words connected to *assessment of students* such as: grading and assessment, formative assessment, and assessment for learning. The words have strong links with the former category 'quality work,' but they constituted a very clear cluster and were sorted into a separate category. The concepts of grading and assessment are used together in the open responses in the questionnaire which is a reflection of the implementation of new grading scales and the introduction of grades in earlier grades, now starting from Grade 6. But the interesting thing is that the concepts of formative assessment and assessment for learning are used to a greater extent. Formative assessment and assessment for learning are often used interchangeably. Principals, and teachers, all over the country are developing methods for formative assessment and assessment for learning influenced by the work of Black and Wiliam (1998a, b) and Wiliam (2011). Black and Wiliam presented "examples in evidence" that illustrated a number of features of effective formative assessment. One important feature they identified was that, to be effective, formative assessment had to be integrated into classroom practice, requiring a fundamental reorganization of classroom operations.

The core of assessment for learning is to enhance student ownership of learning, and this study shows that principals take this as a major task in their pedagogical leadership. However, different stakeholders have special interests in relation to assessments of student knowledge. There are both administrative and educational needs requiring the principal to monitor and evaluate student performance from both national and local school authorities in the municipalities. At the same time, there is a need for monitoring and evaluation in the school, on the basis of teachers' summative and formative assessment work of the student's learning (Lundahl, 2011). Lundahl argues that principals need to be specialists in balancing between administrative and educational needs – the assessment of and for learning. A starting point for success is that principals learn to assess: to use self-assessment to see where the school is in relation to the goals and visions. With this approach, the principals could be present, close to the learning experience, and the increasing demands on principals' assessment skills would also be an expression of increased accountability in an "accountability leadership." It is not enough to answer questions about what has happened within the responsibility, but also how and why it happened.

Most of the categories in Table II above could easily be related to basic practices in pedagogical leadership (Sergiovanni, 1998; Törnsén and Årlestig, 2014). The principals in the study state that they want to give priority to teacher development through dialogues and peer learning. They want to develop their organizations to promote learning. Above all, there is a strong will to be close to the teaching and learning processes through classroom visits and to be a part of the work with formative assessment of the students' learning. The systematic quality development, regulated in the Education Act and general advice, could perhaps be used as an umbrella to cover the principals' responsibility – and accountability – for quality development and quality monitoring.

**Communication to establish and reproduce professional norms**

Communication is required to establish and disseminate norms. We see, hear, and perhaps read how others are doing and it affects our behavior. One question in the survey was about who the principals communicate with in issues related to the pedagogical leadership, and how often they communicate with their stakeholders. The results show that the majority of school leaders are well placed to establish and disseminate specific professional norms when they discuss with other school leaders on issues related to their pedagogical leadership every week. However, about one out of ten principals were in a position where they rarely or never discussed with other principals on matters regarding the pedagogical leadership. Most of the communication took place, as expected, with teachers. There are high expectations that principals should be active in various discussions. Research shows that communication at school is a difficult challenge and that there is a lack of awareness among principals about what good communication involves (Törnsén, 2009). According to Årlestig (2008), “organizational communication blindness” interferes with the conversations in which principals engage.

Perhaps there is a need for school principals to engage in a “professional learning community” (Bredeson, 2003). In this study, professional norms regarding pedagogical leadership have been identified as well as the gap between norms and action. I would argue that the main problem in establishing and disseminating special professional norms guiding principals’ leadership is the lack of arenas for principals to meet and discuss issues related to their role in school improvement. Teacher learning communities are formed all over the country to change classroom practice to enhance student ownership of learning. There is perhaps a need for school principal learning communities for the same reason. When principals meet other principals, special professional norms to support pedagogical leadership could be established and disseminated. Common questions in a school principal learning community, based on this study, could be; what is my role as a pedagogical leader, how do I act as a leader, and why – all these questions discussed in relation to “presence in the classrooms,” “systematic quality work,” “assessment of students,” and so on.

**Discussion and concluding remarks**

The norm perspective and the findings in this study could be used by principals, principal trainers, and researchers to reflect on what desirable pedagogical leadership is in different contexts. In this study, principals were shown to want to give priority to actions aiming at creating conditions for learning and teaching, leading learning and teaching, and linking the everyday work of teaching and learning with organizational goals and results (cf. Törnsén and Årlestig, 2014). Doing this, the principals are guided by some professional norms regarding pedagogical leadership. The most evident in this study are that principals should:

- be present and close to the teaching and learning processes;
- be engaged and involve teachers and others in quality development;
- enhance development of formative assessment and assessment for learning;
- engage in teacher development through pedagogical discussions, peer learning, etc.; and
- develop the internal organization of the school to promote learning.

According to the results of the study, the current professional norms guiding principals' pedagogical leadership have a stronger focus on developing academic capital, while the building of social capital is in the background (cf. Sergiovanni, 1998). One explanation could be found in the discourse; in the societal, political discussion communicated through media with a strong emphasis on improving students' academic results. The strong link between pedagogical leadership and democratization, based on writings of the school committee of 1946, is not that evident in the material. Academic capital is developed when teaching and learning are the basis for school decisions regarding organization, and this is highly prioritized by the principals in this study. A risk, in Sweden as well as in other countries, might be that too strong of a focus on academic capital and accountability in schools could put issues about social justice, students' rights, and participation, etc. in the background. Therefore, a key question, and a challenge, for principals, principal trainers, and researchers seem to be how to develop academic and social capital at the same time.

The principals in this study also engaged staff in systematic quality work; that could be a way to increase the intellectual capital of the school, in making the school into an inquiring community. The involvement of teachers is a first step, but perhaps it is not enough? Several quality audits by the Schools Inspectorate point to the lack of involvement of students and parents in the systematic quality work. One way for principals to study, understand, and develop the intellectual capital of the school is to be close to the teaching and learning processes. Again, the professional norm; the principals' desire to be close to teachers and students were strong, and the problem with this norm is that it rarely leads to action. Principals must ask themselves about their priorities as managers and leaders.

Currently, principals put much effort into developing formative assessment in their schools, a strategy where reciprocal responsibilities of teachers and students could create professional capital. The concept of formative assessment has the potential of serving as an arena for discussions where principals could get close to the teaching and learning processes in their school, a way to strengthen pedagogical leadership.

Pedagogical leadership also needs to have a place in the governing chain in order for accountability and authority to go hand in hand. In this way, the national expectations could be combined with expectations from the local authorities, committees, boards, superintendents, and teachers. From a leadership perspective, it is possible to see this as a pedagogical leadership where accountability becomes an integral part. It then could become a pedagogical leadership where legal norms and juridification are used as support for principals.

This study identified possible gaps between norms and actions, which is crucial. Norms are "behind" actions, and in this case there could be professional norms that rarely lead to action for some principals. The first challenge for the principals is to become aware of the professional norms that guide them. The second challenge is to close the gap between their "desirable" norms and actions. One way to close the gap between norms and actions could be to strengthen the communicative dimension of norm setting by forming school principal learning communities. Through discussions emanating from questions about what leaders do, how they do it, and why, action alternatives and professional norms could become visible; this is a way to strengthen both the profession and the individual principal. Finally, this study is focused on identifying norms, and not on finding change agents or "norm breakers"

needed to find new paths in school improvement. One aspect of pedagogical leadership is to follow norms in search of “best practice.” Another is to be a change agent, look for “next practice,” and lead school development in new directions enforcing social and academic capital for students and professional and intellectual capital for teachers at the same time.

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